

# ADICLUS

## European Arts and Disability Cluster

# European Arts and Disability Cluster Position Paper

**How the European Union can and must act to reduce discrimination against artists, cultural workers and audiences with disabilities**

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Designing a fully accessible Creative Europe programme, and one in which beneficiaries are held to account for project accessibility must start now.

# 1. Introduction and Legal Basis

ADICCLUS is the European membership network devoted to developing and advocating for professional opportunities for artists and cultural workers with disabilities. We have members in 24 countries.

ADICCLUS members believe that there are fundamental inequalities in the European cultural sector which prevent equal access to the arts for people with disabilities as artists, as cultural workers and as audiences.

People with disabilities and Deaf people experience many significant and structural barriers to equal participation in the arts including physical, educational, logistical, knowledge, and financial barriers.

These barriers are often replicated unknowingly by arts institutions and associations. They are also replicated by arts funders and policymakers.

The European cultural sector is fundamentally ableist.

It is our aim to draw attention to the marginalisation of people with disabilities from the European cultural sector, and to insist that change is needed urgently.

Change is a legal obligation.

- All EU Member States have signed and ratified the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (UNCRPD). Article 30 of the UNCRPD states *"States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life"*.\*
- All EU Member States must abide by [Article 26 of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights](#): *"The Union recognises and respects the right of*

*persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community."*

- The [European Union Regulation 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021](#) establishing the Creative Europe Programme 2021-2027, states in Article 20 *"In order to contribute to an inclusive society, the Programme should promote and increase cultural participation across the Union, in particular with regard to people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged backgrounds."*

Despite this, ADICLUS notes Europe-wide discrimination and marginalisation of artists, cultural workers and audiences with disabilities.

As we note in our recommendations, evidence needs to be gathered to show the extent of this marginalisation. However, we can already categorically state that marginalisation exists. As Europe's network of individuals and institutions supporting artists and cultural workers who have a disability, we have unique insight.

People with disabilities are estimated at between 20% and 25% of the population (statistics from Eurostat and Council of the European Union, respectively).

**As Citizens of Europe, and taxpayers in Europe, people with disabilities have an equal right to benefit from cultural activities funded by European taxpayers as all citizens. Barriers to access exist in arts education (for students), in arts employment (for artists and cultural workers, and also in attendance (for audiences and visitors).**

## **2.ADICLUS observations on contemporary cultural discourse**

ADICLUS notes that in the last two years two key themes have dominated European cultural discourse:

- Art & Health / Art & Wellbeing
- Working Conditions of Artists

### **Observation 1: Art & Health / Art & Wellbeing**

The Cluster rejects the incorporation of the Arts & Disability / Cultural Accessibility discourse into an Arts & Health discourse (or an Arts & Wellbeing discourse). The subject of cultural rights of people with disabilities is not the same thematic as a

cultural sector that supports better health outcomes. These are different topics.

There are, of course, valuable artistic practices which aim to support better health outcomes or better well-being. Sometimes, artists and cultural workers with disabilities are involved in delivering these activities.

However, for too long, artists with disabilities have had their work automatically considered therapeutic or participatory in nature. It has often been assumed that the aim of work by all artists with disabilities has been therapeutic outcomes or better health outcomes. This is not the case. The purpose of the majority of artistic practices of artists and cultural workers with disabilities is to further the intrinsic artistic value of the work.

Incorporation into an Art & Health thematic threatens the hard-won establishment of artists with disabilities as excellent and innovative professional artists that contribute to artistic practice. It also draws attention away from the fundamental inequalities of the mainstream European cultural sector.

We encourage a cultural discourse which asserts the cultural rights of people with disabilities as a separate and pressing topic.

### **Observation 2: Working Conditions of Artists**

The Cluster agrees wholeheartedly with the drive to improve working conditions for artists.

Lack of accessibility for artists and cultural workers with disabilities are, in fact, examples of inadequate working conditions in general.

However, we note that in the discussion about Working Conditions, accessibility of working environments are rarely discussed because disabled artists and cultural workers are not considered in wider European cultural discourse. With working conditions being one of the key reasons for the absence of disabled arts workers in the cultural sector, this feels an urgent lack to address.

However, once again, we point out that even if including accessible working conditions within the discourse on working conditions for artists, it remains vital that the topic of the cultural rights of people with disabilities is a distinct and urgent issue.

**In summary, we demand that emphasis remains on the widespread exclusion of people with disabilities from Europe's publicly-funded cultural sector, and that concrete and targeted actions are carried out to remedy this.**

### **3. Dialogue between European Union institutions and Artists and Cultural Workers with disabilities**

#### **A structured dialogue between European Union institutions and Europe's artists and cultural workers with disabilities must be established**

Artists and cultural workers with disabilities are largely absent from European cultural networks and platforms. Those networks and platforms need to be encouraged to actively seek to represent voices of professionals with disabilities.

In the meantime, a structured dialogue is needed between European Union institutions and artists and cultural workers with disabilities.

We encourage all relevant EU institutions, including DGEAC, EACEA, European Parliament's CULT Committee, and the Council of the European Union's Committee on Cultural Affairs to immediately establish processes of structured dialogue with our sector.

As a membership network that spans Europe, we remain open to collaboration.

Our recommendation is that an "Open Method of Coordination group on Arts and Disability" should be established".

Such an OMC group would explore:

- The lack of access to cultural education faced by artists with disabilities.
- The barriers experienced by artists and cultural workers with disabilities across the EU.
- The lack of access to cultural experiences by audiences with disabilities.
- How to improve the Creative Europe programme's addressing of cultural accessibility.
- How to measure participation of people with disabilities within cultural audiences and cultural workforce.
- The challenges faced by cultural workers with disabilities in the different Member States, whose short-term employment contracts in the arts or receipt of fees can endanger annual disability benefits.

## 4. The Cultural Compass

**The Cultural Compass to be developed by Commissioner Glenn Micallef must position cultural rights at its heart**

The Cultural Compass promises to be a game changer in the European Cultural Sector.

The European Arts & Disability sector already meets many of the aims of the Cultural Compass:

- Disability Arts is a rich cultural movement in Europe - part of Europe's unique cultural heritage.
- Communities such as Europe's Sign Language users develop and express cultural heritage through the arts. As minority European languages and minority cultures, these must be celebrated and preserved.
- Europe has the potential to be global reputation as a leader in Disability Arts. The current unique generation of European artists with disabilities should form part of European cultural diplomacy - expressing the values of the European Union.

Establishing the rights to culture of European Citizens with disabilities, as audiences, as artists and as cultural workers, must be at the heart of the programme.

Securing the cultural rights of people with disabilities must be specifically mentioned. History has taught us that people with disabilities are overlooked in the cultural sector unless specific commitments are made.

## 5. Recommendations for the current Creative Europe Programme ('21-'27)

ADICLUS has previously welcomed some of the changes instituted within the current Creative Europe programme.

- The inclusion of people with disabilities as part of a cross-cutting priority within Creative Europe ("Inclusion, Diversity and Gender Equality") has been well-received and has resulted in an increase in applications focusing on the work of disabled artists.
- Excellent progress has been made with two major initiatives aimed at smaller organisations and individual artists – both supporting more artists with disabilities than the centralised programmes: Perform Europe & Culture Moves

Europe. Supporting smaller organisations through these calls is more likely to support the Disability Arts sector, which largely consists of individuals and micro-organisations.

- ADICLUS has welcomed the decision to lower the co-financing rate for Small-Scale Cooperation Projects. This has been invaluable to disabled-led and disability-focused organisations, which tend to have fewer internal resources or less access to regular national funding than 'mainstream' companies.

**However, we believe that many additional steps are needed in order to ensure that projects funded by Creative Europe are truly open to artists, cultural workers and audiences with disabilities.**

### **Recommendation 1: Accessibility Costs must have a dedicated budget line in all Creative Europe funding actions**

Access Costs related to the proposed activities are still not allocated as a dedicated budget line in Platforms / Networks / Cooperation Projects. This needs to be rectified as a matter of urgency.

This will make it easier to include these costs in applications for projects dedicated to work with participants with disabilities. However, this will also signal to all applicants that they should be considering the prospect of participants with disabilities in their programmes. Erasmus+ allows for this, as does Culture Moves Europe and Perform Europe. These innovations should now be introduced across all Creative Europe actions, including Platforms, Networks and Cooperation Projects.

### **Recommendation 2: Accessibility Costs should not be considered within action funding ceilings**

Currently, Creative Europe projects which plan to actively include participant artists and cultural workers with disabilities are penalised.

Budget allocated on Access Costs is considered within the main project budget. Budget allocated for Access Costs therefore means there is a corresponding reduction in budget for the core artistic or collaborative activity. The result is that applicant organisations are actively discouraged from including Access Costs (vital to the participation of people with disabilities).

We recommend that over-and-above the core project actions, a separate budget for Access Costs should be available to those projects that plan accessibility from the start of the project.

Culture Moves Europe already operates this additional-funds policy with positive outcomes. A pilot should be immediately introduced to trial this mechanism in Cooperation Projects.

**Recommendation 3: A dedicated action within Creative Europe is needed to support knowledge exchange and development around cultural accessibility**

The 2021 report, [Time To Act](#), showed that lack of knowledge in the cultural sector of concrete ways to improve accessibility for audiences, artists and cultural workers with disabilities was the second largest cause of lack of action by cultural organisations (after lack of money).

48% of cultural professionals surveyed said they were “Not At All Confident” or “Not very Confident” that their programmes would be accessible to artists with disabilities.

The report highlighted the importance of international exchange regarding accessible practices, with one respondent stating: *“The European dimension opens the door to a meaningful exchange of good examples and information, which allows practices to evolve beyond the limitations of national frameworks.”*

The 2023 report [Time To Act: Two Years On](#) identified serious geographic asymmetries in knowledge levels – with knowledge levels in Northern and Western Europe far higher than levels in Southern or Eastern Member States. This knowledge asymmetry results in even worse opportunities for the cultural participation of people with disabilities in some regions of Europe.

A dedicated action is needed to support knowledge development and to enable trans-national knowledge transfer amongst cultural professionals.

**Recommendation 4: Creative Europe needs to improve and disaggregate the data it receives from funded projects, in order to measure the current participation of artists and cultural workers with disabilities with the European Union’s own programmes**

In order to measure the progress made by the Creative Europe programme towards its cross-cutting priority on inclusion and diversity, Creative Europe must improve the way that participation in funded programmes is measured. The Cluster notes the excellent work done on Gender Diversity, in part achieved through rigorous measurement of Gender balance.

The Creative Europe programme must measure the numbers of artists and cultural workers with disabilities participating in funded programmes - in order to benchmark and set improvement targets.



**Recommendation 5: A dedicated action is needed to measure participation (and lack of participation) in cultural life across Europe by people with disabilities as artists, as cultural workers, and as audiences. A pilot should be introduced immediately**

No data exists on this topic. Eurostat and Eurobarometer do not measure this. Very few Member States have this information at National level (Ireland, Norway).

Without Europe-wide evidence, National and European policymakers are prevented from developing targeted policies, and the lack of statistics makes them even more reluctant to act.

A dedicated pilot action should be commissioned immediately, with the aim of rolling out a full research action before the end of this 2021-2027 Creative Europe programme – establishing a baseline for the 2028-2034 programme.

ADICLUS acknowledges the challenges of measuring this data. We note that in some Member States it is difficult to gather data on a number of equalities statistics. We note that GDPR legislation contributes to a challenging data collection landscape.

Nevertheless, we note our members' experiences across the EU of successful data collection with regards to disability participation (as audiences, artists and cultural workers), and we note developments at Eurostat in successfully measuring disability across the EU.

Given the complexity of this task, but also given its necessity, we recommend a dedicated action is implemented to allow cultural participation (and lack of cultural participation) of people with disabilities to be measured.

Statistics gathered will support future actions of the Creative Europe programme, as well as policy dialogue across the Union. The research, to include qualitative as well as quantitative data, will also support knowledge exchange and highlighting of best practice.

**Recommendation 6: A dedicated action is needed to increase audiences / visitors with disabilities to performances, exhibitions and cultural heritage**

Despite a lack of data at a European level, the European Arts & Disability Clusters asserts that people with disabilities are under-represented amongst cultural audiences. We know this from our combined experience and practice.

Access to cultural activities is limited, as evidenced by the 2021 [Time To Act](#) report. (For example, only 19% of venues have accessible website, 13% accessible communication materials, 12% accessible booking processes).

The introduction of a general Cross-Cutting priority on inclusion in Creative Europe is not action enough to address this balance.

A dedicated action to increase audience participation of people with disabilities within Creative Europe is necessary.

**Recommendation 7: A dedicated action within Creative Europe is needed to support and celebrate Europe's Sign Language cultures as European language minorities**

The European Union's commitment to language diversity must include a commitment to artists that work through national sign languages.

Transnational cooperation between Deaf cultures is particularly expensive (interpreter costs), so dedicated actions are needed to support transnational exchange between Deaf artists and arts professionals.

A dedicated action is needed:

- to protect national sign language cultures as unique European minority cultures and examples of Europe's Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- to support mobility of and cooperation between Deaf artists across Europe
- to support circulation of works and interpretation between national sign languages.

## **6. Recommendations for the next Creative Europe Programme ('28-'34)**

**Creative Europe should require all applicants to develop an action plan on accessibility during the application process.**

- Action plans should include both accessibility for audiences with disabilities and also accessibility for participants with disabilities.
- Action plans should be assessed in dialogue with project budgets to ensure appropriate budgets are allocated for the proposed plans.
- Action Plans should be evaluated as part of the assessment process by assessors trained in the topic.

Creative Europe country citizens with disabilities have an equal right to benefit from the result of public investment in the cultural sector, and they should not be excluded from benefiting from project outputs.

We believe that no project should be funded which does not offer at least basic

accessibility to audiences and visitors, and at least the possibility of participation by artists and cultural workers with disabilities.

As noted above, ADICLUS has welcomed reference to people with disabilities in the Cross-Cutting priorities of Creative Europe. However, it is our experience that even projects with well-developed "commitments" to accessibility do not deliver the promised accessibility in practice. Our members regularly experience Creative Europe-supported programmes which have poor accessibility for audiences, artists and cultural professionals with disabilities. By far the majority of Creative Europe-supported projects have no plan to offer accessibility for participating artists or cultural workers with disabilities.

In the next Creative Europe programme, we want to see instituted a mechanism in which applicants are asked to apply with a dedicated action plan regarding accessibility. This action plan will respond to the specific situation of the beneficiaries and of the project. Therefore, Creative Europe is not prescribing the mechanisms employed, but only insisting that a mechanism for offering accessible processes and outputs is created.

We believe that adequate assessment of such Action Plans can only take place if considered alongside the project budget. Costs must be allocated to support the Action Plan.

In order to assess the Action Plans, assessors should be provided with training to support their decision-making. The use of external experts is also encouraged.

We believe this system of Action Plans will also be useful in other areas of the Cross-cutting priorities, such as Gender Equity, Diversity and Environmental Sustainability.

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\*United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

**Article 30: Rights to Cultural Life**

*1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities:*

- *Enjoy access to cultural materials in accessible formats;*
- *Enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats;*

- *Enjoy access to places for cultural performances or services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services, and, as far as possible, enjoy access to monuments and sites of national cultural importance.*

*2: States Parties shall take appropriate measures to enable persons with disabilities to have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society. (...)*

*4: Persons with disabilities shall be entitled, on an equal basis with others, to recognition and support of their specific cultural and linguistic identity, including sign languages and deaf culture.*

and also;

### **Article 27 Work and employment**

*1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities....*

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ADICLUS, the European Arts and Disability Cluster, is coordinated through the Europe Beyond Access project – a large-scale Creative Europe cooperation project co-financed by the European Union.

ADICLUS, the European Arts and Disability Cluster has 41 members in 24 countries. They are: Tanja Erhart (Austria); European Disability Forum (Belgium); Art Office Foundation (Bulgaria); Ipogia Skini (Cyprus); Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen (Finland); Onda (L'Office national de diffusion artistique), Théâtre National de Bretagne (France); InForm – Platform for Inclusive Minds (Georgia); EUCREA e.V., Kampnagel - Internationales Zentrum für schönere Künste, Kate Brehme, Making a Difference, Un-Label (Germany); Betina Panagiotara, Demy Papathanassiou, liminal, Maria Koliopoulou, Medie Megas, Onassis Stegi (Greece); Baltazar Theatre Foundation (Hungary); List án landamæra / Art without Borders (Iceland); Blue Teapot Theatre Company, Project Arts Centre (Ireland); Oriente Occidente Impresa Sociale Ets, Jonathan Meth (Italy); Holland Dance Festival, PodiumINC, Theater Babel Rotterdam (Netherlands); Aidan Moesby (Norway); Filip Pawlak, ZAMEK Culture Centre (Poland); Acesso Cultura | Access Culture, Culturgest – Fundação Caixa Geral de Depósitos, Terra Amarela (Portugal); Asociatia Solidart – Basca Theater (Romania), Saša Asentić (Serbia); 21distritos Psico Ballet Maite León Foundation, Mercat de les Flors (Spain); Laith Fathulla, Moomsteatern Riksteatern Crea, ShareMusic & Performing Arts, Skånes Dansteater (Sweden)

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