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Creative Pulse: A survey on the status and working conditions of artists and CCS sector professionals in Europe

Survey report

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Foreword

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Creative Pulse: A survey on the status and working conditions of artists and CCS professionals could not have appeared at a more opportune time. The disconnect between the declared high value ascribed to culture and the low level of support given to cultural creators in Europe was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the scourge has passed, creatives from every conceivable sector are still struggling to achieve labour equality and a modicum of social security. The sharp contrast between the positive associations of Europe as an international cultural powerhouse and the dire state-of-the-art with regard to cultural workers' employment has set off alarm bells at the highest echelons of European decision making.

With an eye to provide aid and abetment for creatives across the EU, Creative Pulse addresses issues given credence by the principal EU institutions, from the European Parliament's small steps toward a Status for the Artist to the European Council's priorities set forth in its Work Plan for Culture (2023-2026). The survey provides answers to fundamental information needs and fills an information gap: relevant data collection on CCS professionals has been spartan to date. Examining both status and working conditions, Creative Pulse is particularly valuable in that it gives voice to cultural workers and an impressive range of cultural stakeholders. By opening the space of deliberation to include declarations from over 1500 stakeholders across all Member States, the survey shows us that to meet aspirations and answer to basic needs, creatives must stand firmly on centre stage.

While several member states have undertaken national reports concerning the status of CCS workers, notably Ireland, Spain and Belgium, Creative Pulse's cross-border initiative is groundbreaking. Thanks to the quality of the data and accompanying insights, European institutions and Member States will be able to move forward toward solutions to address systemic flaws and promote better employment conditions for an oft-forgotten category of workers. An enhanced recognition for the work that creatives engage in will contribute to a sustainable model for a European cultural community of recognized and respected workers.

As a researcher who has spent years uncovering vulnerabilities in a particular creative sector fraught by crisis, I scrutinized inaccurate employment attributions, shaky fair practice application and discrimination-related employment vulnerabilities (age, gender, race), and problems related to market forces (the glut of creatives-shrinking employment opportunities). The fact that working creatives suffer from inaccurate employment classifications across the Member States greatly exacerbates employment vulnerability. A muddle of employment categories (self-employed; false self-employed; freelance; partially employed) applied to the legal status of creatives more often than not places them in incorrect, yes, vulnerable categories beyond the reach of social security and fair pay.

Creative Pulse foregrounds not only pay differentials and poor working conditions but also brings to the fore other vulnerabilities faced by creatives: insidious forms of discrimination (including gender pay gaps), the trials and tribulations of juggling multiple jobs, and the ever-present disbalance between contracted creatives and freelancers. To my mind, one of the most surprising and distressing findings was that almost half of those queried reported an increase in limitations to their freedom of expression within the last five years; the creative pulse stymied not only by poor employment conditions but alarmingly, the fear of artistic

repression. Creative Pulse emphasizes the need to revitalize and rethink current movements for change aimed at solidifying the position of cultural workers.

A long and whole-hearted round of applause to Creative Pulse for a survey that taps into the strength of the ‘makers’ to offer powerful information that can and will influence tools to recovery for Europe’s cultural workers who still find themselves at the bottom of the employment ladder. Paying lip service to the idea of Europe’s cultural ‘might’ can only be ‘right’ when cultural workers gain the equality, social protection (including workable pension schemes) they deserve. Sir Herbert Read infamously noted, *“the worth of a civilization is not valued in the terms of its material wealth or military power, but by the quality and achievements of its representative individuals - its philosophers, its poets and its artists.”* It is high time to pass on ‘material wealth’ to those whose representation is invaluable.

