

## Information on the current Situation in Austria

*Austrian Working Group on Cultural Diversity*

April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Starting 10<sup>th</sup> of March the Austrian government introduced as one of its first measures to prevent the spread of COVID-10 a limitation for the number of participants for events (100 persons for indoor events, 500 persons for outdoor events).

As of Monday the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, the Austrian government extended the measures adopted to minimise the adverse effects of the COVID-19, limiting the freedom of movement to a minimal: Leaving one's house is only permitted for work activities that can't be delayed or carried out from home, to make urgent purchases of food and to aid people in urgent need. In practice this means that as of Monday 16<sup>th</sup> all cultural events were prohibited as well as cultural work, which cannot be conducted alone (or with the people in the same household). These measures put cultural actors and, in particular, independent workers and associations under enormous pressure, regarding already existent precarious working and living conditions.

On 13<sup>th</sup> of March vice chancellor Kogler and state secretary Lunacek invited cultural actors from civil society, including interest groups as well as cultural organisations, to discuss the current challenges at a round table.

Following the discussions, various measures, both measures specifically targeting artists and cultural workers as well as general support measures, have been implemented by state actors. The [Hardship Fund](#) with a volume of initially one billion euros is a rapid first aid support from the federal government for emergency situations due to the corona crisis. The fund aims at supporting all those self-employed without turnover in covering their living expenses. The money is a one-time grant and does not have to be paid back. Within the artist social security fund (KSVF), next to the existing support fund, a new [COVID19-fund](#) of five million euros has been established. Also, the reduction and deferral of taxes and social security contributions aims at supporting in the current situation.

Concerning cultural organisations and non-profit-organisations in general, negotiations are still ongoing on a possible support scheme to enable them to survive the crisis – as their revenues have disappeared whilst costs for venues, staff, etc. continue.

Another measure is the [short-time working](#) model, allowing the temporary reduction of normal working hours and wages, due to economic difficulties. Its purpose is to temporarily reduce labour costs for (cultural and creative) organisations and companies, better enabling them to keep their employees. Adapting this model, employees reduce their working hours by up to 90% and still receive the majority of their previous wages (net guarantee) by government support.

Furthermore, collecting societies have established support funds available to their members, such as:

- [Bridge fund by "Bildrecht"](#) (500.000 Euro), the Austrian copyright society for fine arts, architecture, photography, graphics, illustration, design, choreography and performance.

- [Culture Catastrophe Fund](#) (1 million) for Musicians by AKM & austro mechna and [OESTIG](#)
- [Catastrophe fund](#) (250.000 Euro) by collecting society for audio-visual media
- [Special Fund by literar mechna](#) (1 million)
- [Emergency Clause](#) within the Guidelines of the SKE-fond, by collecting society for filmmakers
- [Support programme](#) for music labels by LSG

The umbrella foundation of philanthropy in Austria has launched the initiative “foundations help artists”, aiming at helping all those who fall through the state safety nets already provided or for whom it is insufficient, in a quick and unbureaucratic manner.

Civil society organisations, such as IG Kultur Österreich, IG Freie Theaterarbeit among others have – next to their great efforts in providing information for the cultural sector and negotiating with state actors – launched a mapping of the impact of the measures on the arts and culture sector. Collected data can form a first basis for measuring the current emergency and subsequently also being able to evaluate the effectiveness of the support measures. For example, a broadcast by the advocacy group Freie Theaterarbeit states that performances have largely been cancelled without a postponement date (75%). A survey by IG Kultur shows that already three weeks since the start of the ban of all cultural events more than 10% of all cultural organization are already insolvent, and 10% of all employees have lost their jobs.

The civil society organisation KUPF OÖ, together with IG Kultur, has launched the [#norefundforculture campaign](#), asking the public to refrain from ticket refunds if they can afford it.

### **Austrian Working Group on Cultural Diversity**

The Austrian Working Group on Cultural Diversity (ARGE) was established in 2004, during the process of drafting the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, within the Austrian Commission for UNESCO (NatCom).

As a platform for dialogue on cultural diversity, ARGE encourages the active participation of civil society and supports the exchange of information and consultation between all relevant actors and levels. The Austrian Commission for UNESCO is supporting this process of implementation of the Convention as a national contact point.

ARGE is coordinated by the Austrian Commission for UNESCO, which is also responsible for the synthesis of the organization’s work. ARGE elects a President and a Vice-President from among its members. The preparation of the written opinion on the draft texts proposed by UNESCO and of any document is carried out by an editorial team trained by ARGE.