

ENCATC POLICY BRIEF

November 2026

Policy learning on the status and working conditions of artists and cultural & creative professionals

Co-funded by the European Union

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The central challenge

The status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals have gained prominence in European and international cultural policy. Fair remuneration, social protection, artistic freedom and sustainable cultural careers increasingly feature in policy discussions. The European Commission's *Culture Compass for Europe* places the empowerment of artists and cultural professionals among its strategic directions, while the Joint Declaration *Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe*, signed by the European Parliament, Council and Commission in June 2026, reinforces political commitments to culture.

These developments create opportunities for policy action. The proposed EU Artists' Charter, currently under development through stakeholder consultation, is particularly relevant. Yet greater recognition, new policy frameworks and stronger commitments do not, by themselves, demonstrate that working conditions have improved.

> The central policy question is how commitments can become accessible protections, fairer professional opportunities and sustainable cultural careers, and how their effects can be assessed.

This ENCATC Policy Brief draws on a sustained process[1] of dialogue and research in 2026, including five Member Talks, a Think Tank, the ENCATC Congress in Nice[2] and selected papers from the published Congress Proceedings[3]. It identifies lessons for European policy development while drawing on situated perspectives from other world regions.

1 The forthcoming *ENCATC Insight Report on Artists and Cultural and Creative Professionals at the Centre: Rethinking Work, Policy, and Cultural Ecosystems*, provides the detailed analytical and research basis for this ENCATC Policy Brief.
2 https://encatc.org/en/events/encatc-congress-2026/
3 https://encatc.org/media/9350-congress-proceedings_02112026.pdf

1. What the evidence and dialogue reveal

Recognition does not necessarily translate into protection

Legal status, professional definitions and policy frameworks influence which cultural workers are visible and eligible for support. But they may exclude people with intermittent, freelance, hybrid or collective working arrangements.

Research presented at the ENCATC Congress illustrates why formalisation cannot be treated as a sufficient measure of progress. A Romanian study (Zbranca et al., 2026) reported greater contractual formalisation among respondents alongside persistent difficulties concerning bargaining power and economic security. Nordic research (Hirvi-Ijäs et al., 2026) demonstrated how differing definitions of professional artists shape the populations counted and recognised by policy. Other contributions highlighted the administrative barriers that may accompany formal recognition.

> The relevant test is not simply whether a framework exists, but who can access its protections, under what conditions and with what consequences.

Fair work depends on the wider cultural ecosystem

Cultural working conditions are shaped by more than individual contracts and remuneration rates. Unpaid preparation, irregular employment, care responsibilities, professional networks, funding cycles and unequal access to opportunities all influence whether careers can be sustained.

Congress research and discussions also highlighted the role of cultural organisations and infrastructures, including small venues, professional associations, collectives, educational institutions and publicly supported programmes (Järvinen, 2026; Simjanovska, 2026; Pinto de Faria, 2026).

Fair work standards are essential. However, introducing requirements without considering organisational resources can create implementation difficulties, particularly for smaller institutions and emerging practitioners.

> Fair remuneration, adequate funding and organisational capacity need to be considered together, without making limited resources an excuse for inadequate working conditions.

Professional voice, autonomy and artistic freedom are connected

Artists work alongside cultural managers, producers, technicians, educators, curators, intermediaries and other professionals whose contributions and working conditions are not always adequately represented in cultural policy.

Professional associations, unions, collectives and networks can help workers articulate standards and participate in decisions. However, collective representation takes different forms and cannot be assumed to reach all cultural occupations (e.g. Zapata, 2026).

The ENCATC discussions also connected artistic freedom with economic and institutional circumstances. Political interference, funding dependency, weak bargaining power and limited professional alternatives may constrain the ability to work freely, even where formal safeguards exist.

> Policies should therefore recognise cultural workers as participants in shaping their working conditions, not only as beneficiaries of support measures.

Policy measures need to be assessed through their actual effects

Government reporting, sectoral statistics, research and professional testimony provide different forms of knowledge. Each is valuable, but none offers a complete picture of cultural working conditions.

A recurring lesson from the ENCATC programme is the need to distinguish three stages: the adoption of a policy, its implementation and accessibility, and changes experienced by the workers it seeks to support.

This distinction matters for European policy initiatives, international mobility programmes, technological transitions and public funding arrangements. It also requires attention to unintended consequences and to practitioners who remain outside established professional categories.

> Policy learning must extend beyond producing evidence to creating opportunities for institutions to reconsider their decisions in response to it.

2. Six directions for European policy development

The following recommendations identify complementary responsibilities for EU institutions, Member States, public funders, professional organisations and educational and research institutions. They are intended to inform policy design and consultation, rather than prescribe a single model for different countries and cultural occupations.

1. Translate professional recognition into accessible protection

As the European Commission develops the proposed EU Artists' Charter, its consultation should consider how principles concerning fair working conditions can respond to diverse professional arrangements.

Relevant considerations include eligibility for protection, intermittent and multi-activity careers, social security, contractual rights, accessible remedies and the administrative burdens facing independent workers.

EU cooperation can support comparison, dialogue and guidance, while recognising the distinct responsibilities of Member States in labour and social protection.

> PRIORITY FOR POLICY DESIGN
> Assess frameworks against effective access to rights and protections, not solely their formal adoption.

2. Recognise the wider cultural workforce and strengthen collective voice

Cultural workforce policies should recognise the range of professionals who sustain cultural activity, without assuming identical occupational needs.

Relevant authorities should review professional classifications, consultation processes and workforce information to identify omissions and better accommodate hybrid and collective practices.

Professional associations, unions, networks and other representative structures should have meaningful opportunities to participate in developing standards and policies. Cultural management and arts education can contribute to professional knowledge and rights literacy, but cannot substitute for effective labour protections.

PRIORITY FOR POLICY DESIGN

Include occupational diversity and meaningful worker participation in policy development and review.

3. Align fair work requirements with funding and organisational capacity

Public funding and commissioning arrangements should support realistic remuneration, transparent contractual standards and recognition of preparation and other work that may otherwise remain unpaid.

Implementation should take account of organisational size, funding duration and administrative capacity. Predictable support and shared infrastructures can strengthen professional continuity, while project funding remains important for experimentation.

Consultation with workers and organisations can help identify appropriate requirements and assess possible effects on employment opportunities, especially for emerging practitioners.

PRIORITY FOR POLICY DESIGN

Consider fair work standards, funding conditions, compliance and organisational support as connected responsibilities.

4. Make cultural mobility more equitable and professionally meaningful

International cultural mobility should be assessed through its accessibility, professional relevance, reciprocity and longer term value, rather than participation numbers alone.

Programmes should consider visa and administrative requirements, care and preparation costs, geographical inequalities and the professional priorities of participants. Support for intra-regional cooperation and local professional infrastructures can complement international travel opportunities.

Environmental expectations also need to account for differing transport infrastructures and resources across regions.

PRIORITY FOR POLICY DESIGN

Involve practitioners in mobility programme design and assess whether support leads to sustained relationships and opportunities.

5. Support fair digital, AI and environmental workforce transitions

Digital, AI and environmental strategies should examine how change affects professional rights, remuneration, creative judgement, skills and the distribution of costs.

The proposed EU AI Strategy for the cultural and creative sectors offers an opportunity to address workforce considerations alongside technological innovation, including authorship, copyright, performers' likenesses and institutional responsibilities.

Workers should participate in relevant governance decisions. Critical education and skills development are important, but responsibility for adapting to technological and environmental change should not fall exclusively on individuals.

> PRIORITY FOR POLICY DESIGN
> Combine workforce participation, appropriate protections and organisational resources with skills and innovation policies.

6. Build evidence, feedback and accountability into implementation

European and national cultural policy systems should distinguish between policy announcements, implementation, access and observed changes in working conditions.

Statistical and administrative evidence should be complemented by longitudinal, qualitative and participatory research, particularly where intermittent, informal and emerging forms of cultural work remain insufficiently visible.

The cultural data, reporting and structured dialogue initiatives envisaged within the Culture Compass offer opportunities to strengthen this approach, provided they support meaningful participation and the use of findings in policy decisions.

> PRIORITY FOR POLICY DESIGN
> Establish mechanisms for reviewing implementation, identifying exclusions and adapting measures in response to evidence and professional experience.

3. Implications for the current European policy agenda

The Culture Compass and the June 2026 Joint Declaration provide an important political framework. The challenge now is to connect that framework with the design of specific instruments and the responsibilities of those implementing them.

For the **proposed EU Artists' Charter**, ENCATC's policy learning points towards professional diversity, effective access to protection, collective voice and the relationship between employment standards and cultural funding.

For **artistic freedom**, it suggests examining economic insecurity, institutional dependency and bargaining power alongside legal safeguards and monitoring arrangements.

For the **proposed EU AI Strategy for the cultural and creative sectors**, it highlights workers' rights, creative judgement, unequal adaptation costs and participation in technological governance.

For **European cultural evidence and stakeholder dialogue**, it reinforces the need to connect policy monitoring with professional realities, independent research and mechanisms for reviewing implementation.

These are connected considerations, not separate policy challenges. Improving working conditions requires cooperation across cultural, employment, social protection, education, digital and other relevant policy fields, with responsibilities appropriate to different levels of governance.

4. About this policy brief and its evidence base

This ENCATC Policy Brief draws on a policy learning process developed during 2026, bringing research, professional experience and institutional perspectives into dialogue around the status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals.

The principal sources comprise:

- **Five ENCATC Member Talks and a Think Tank[4] (March–July 2026):** Discussions involving researchers, cultural professionals, policymakers and representatives of professional and international networks, addressing European policy developments and situated perspectives from the Americas, Africa and Asia.
- **ENCATC Congress 2026[5] (Nice, 23–25 September):** The opening keynote, plenary discussions, Global Conversation and European policy discussions examining cultural labour, professional recognition, working conditions and policy implementation.
- **Selected Congress research:** A thematic review of 17 full papers published in the *2026 ENCATC Congress Proceedings*[6], selected for their relevance to questions emerging from the programme and their capacity to deepen, qualify or challenge the findings from the discussions. The selection incorporates different geographical contexts, professional groups and methodological approaches.

These materials have different evidential status. Research findings are considered in relation to their methods and contexts; discussions provide situated professional and institutional perspectives; and policy commitments are distinguished from evidence of implementation and outcomes.

The synthesis does not constitute a systematic literature review, representative survey or independent evaluation of the initiatives discussed. The recommendations are evidence-informed directions for policy consideration, rather than claims of consensus among contributors or proof of the effectiveness of particular interventions.

ENCATC's contribution lies in connecting cultural management and policy research, education, professional knowledge and international dialogue, and in supporting opportunities for institutions to question assumptions and learn from experience.

Further documentation: This Policy Brief will be followed by the ENCATC Insight Report, *Artists and Cultural & Creative Professionals at the Centre: Rethinking Work, Policy, and Cultural Ecosystems*, which presents the detailed evidence notes, thematic research synthesis and full references underpinning the policy recommendations.

> The measure of progress is not simply stronger recognition or more ambitious commitments, but what changes in practice, for whom, and with what consequences.

4 https://encatc.org/en/events/past-events/
5 https://encatc.org/en/events/encatc-congress-2026/
6 https://encatc.org/media/9350-congress-proceedings_02112026.pdf

ENCATC CULTURAL POLICY TRACKER SERIES

How ENCATC developed this policy learning process

Artists and Cultural & Creative Professionals at the Centre: Rethinking Work, Policy and Cultural Ecosystems

1 2025 policy learning foundations

A **Culture Compass consultation**
Member consultation and contributions to ENCATC's input for a new Culture Compass for Europe.

B **MONDIACULT 2025 work**
Six thematic Focus Groups and the Insight Report "Shaping Regenerative Futures Together: MONDIACULT 2025 and Beyond".

Foundational policy engagement and collective reflection.

2 March–July 2026 preparatory dialogue

Five ENCATC Member Talks and one **European Think Tank** brought research, professional experience and policy perspectives into dialogue.

20 Mar 2026	**ENCATC Member Talk:** Discussing UNESCO's Re|Shaping Policies for Creativity report
30 Apr 2026	**ENCATC Member Talk:** Creative Work in Europe: Challenges, Inequalities, and New Perspectives
7 May 2026	**ENCATC Think Tank:** The Status and Working Conditions of Artists and Cultural & Creative Professionals in Europe In partnership with the Compendium Association: Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends; with the participation of PEARLE* Live Performance Europe.
21 May 2026	**ENCATC Member Talk:** The Status and Working Conditions of Artists and Cultural & Creative Professionals in the Americas In partnership with AAAE; with the participation of La Red.
25 Jun 2026	**ENCATC Member Talk:** The Status and Working Conditions of Artists and Cultural & Creative Professionals: Focus on Africa and Mobility In partnership with On the Move.
9 Jul 2026	**ENCATC Member Talk:** The Status and Working Conditions of Artists and Cultural & Creative Professionals in Asia In partnership with ASEF; with the participation of KACES and IFACCA.

Preparatory dialogue for the Congress.

3 ENCATC Congress, Nice · 23–25 September 2026

A **Congress dialogue and policy perspectives**

- Keynote: **Pierre-Michel Menger** — "Researching Creative Work: Achievements and Challenges"
- Opening plenary: "Researching Creative Work? Achievements and Challenges"
- Global Conversation on the Status of Artists and Creators
- Address by **Catherine Magnant**: "Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe: A New Direction for EU Cultural Policy"
- Round table: "Investing in Cultural Research: Evidence, Impact and Europe's Future"

B **Published research used in this report**
Selected papers from the 2026 ENCATC Congress Proceedings, providing empirical, comparative and conceptual contributions that deepen, qualify and sometimes challenge interpretations emerging from the discussions.

Congress dialogue and research evidence brought into a common analytical process.

4 November 2026 synthesis and continuation

A **ENCATC Insight Report**
Policy Learning Synthesis and Recommendations
Evidence Notes and Research Synthesis

→

B **ENCATC Policy Debate, Brussels**
13 November 2026 — Continuing discussion with European policy and professional audiences.

From evidence and dialogue to continuing policy learning.

Source: Introduction and chronology in the ENCATC Insight Report master manuscript, v5, 29 October 2026.

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Alisha Lynch (2026). Painting Over the Cracks: Street Art Labour, Structural Precarity, and the Contradictions of Creative City Governance in Berlin. pp. 205–217

Diana Andreeva-Popyordanova (2026). Rethinking the Legal Status of Artists in Bulgaria: Towards a New Framework for Decent Work in the Cultural and Creative Sectors. pp. 279–286

Inês Pinto de Faria (2026). Artist Collectives as Communities of Practice: Professionalisation, Collective Infrastructure and Pathways to International Cooperation. pp. 144–151

Julien Fauqueux Albanese (2026). Beauty Influencers as Cultural Professionals? Rethinking the Boundaries of Cultural and Creative Industries in Platform Capitalism. pp. 476-485

Kai Lehikoinen and Sarah Rowles (2026). Tensions in the discourses of professionalism in the arts: How can higher arts education support students in navigating these complexities? pp. 167–174

Kristina Kuznetsova-Bogdanovish and Virgo Sillamaa (2026). Encouraging individual knowledge management practices as a way of professional empowerment for creatives. Perspectives from the internationalisation experiences of Estonian musicians. pp. 370–378

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IMPRINT AND DISCLAIMER

Extract from the ENCATC Cultural Policy Tracker, Issue N°14, November 2026

Addressed to policymakers, international and European institutions, researchers, and cultural stakeholders at all levels of governance, the ENCATC Tracker draws on the expertise of the ENCATC network and its international partners to provide policy analysis, facts and figures, comparative case studies, innovative practices, and research-based recommendations. By examining emerging challenges and policy responses across regions worldwide, the publication seeks to inform strategic policy debates, foster international knowledge exchange, and support the development of inclusive, resilient, and forward-looking cultural policies worldwide.

The contributors to the ENCATC Tracker are leading academics, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from international or European organisations and/or institutions.

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