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ON  
THE  
MOVE

# Time to Act

**How lack of knowledge in  
the cultural sector creates  
barriers for disabled  
artists and audiences**

**Final report November 2021**

**A research report authored by On the Move, commissioned by the British Council.**



Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union



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## CONTENTS AT A GLANCE

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** A 3-page summary describing the report, outlining key areas covered by the research, and briefly explaining the methodology.

**KEY FINDINGS** 14 pages describing the key findings from the research, summarising challenges and solutions identified during the research process, and sharing headline data from the transnational survey.

**FULL REPORT** The full *Time To Act* report, which includes all of the information in the Executive Summary and Key Findings, but with more detail, case studies and statistics.

**Time to Act** is commissioned by the British Council, within the context of Europe Beyond Access – the world’s largest transnational Arts & Disability project.

Co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union, Europe Beyond Access supports disabled artists to break the glass ceilings of the contemporary theatre and dance sectors.

The core partners of the project are the British Council, Holland Dance Festival (The Netherlands), Kampnagel (Germany), Onassis Stegi (Greece), Oriente Occidente (Italy), Per.Art (Serbia), and Skånes Dansteater (Sweden).

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*The European Commission’s support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Time to Act* is the first ever transnational study which robustly evidences that cultural professionals in the performing arts across Europe lack the knowledge and experience needed to support equal access to the cultural sector for disabled artists, disabled arts professionals, and disabled audiences.

Based on a large-scale open survey covering 42 countries, a series of in-depth interviews, and an analysis of existing literature, reports and guidance, *Time to Act* explores the barriers that prevent cultural professionals from learning about and presenting artistic works by professional disabled artists, identifies gaps in their knowledge and confidence, and asks who should be doing more to support equal access. Commissioned by the British Council, the report has been produced by the mobility information network On the Move with input from expert European networks such as Trans Europe Halles and IN SITU, and with feedback from public presentations including a webinar in June 2021 hosted by Acesso Cultura (Portugal) and a live event at the IETM Plenary Meeting Lyon in October 2021 (France).

One of its clearest findings is that professionals in the performing arts need better knowledge of work by disabled artists. More than half of survey respondents rated their current knowledge as poor or very poor. Around 1 in 6 had not seen any productions by disabled artists over a two-year period. Unsurprisingly, lack of knowledge was given as one of their largest obstacles to supporting and programming more work by disabled artists. As things stand, 48% of respondents were not very confident or not at all confident in the accessibility of artistic programmes for disabled artists.

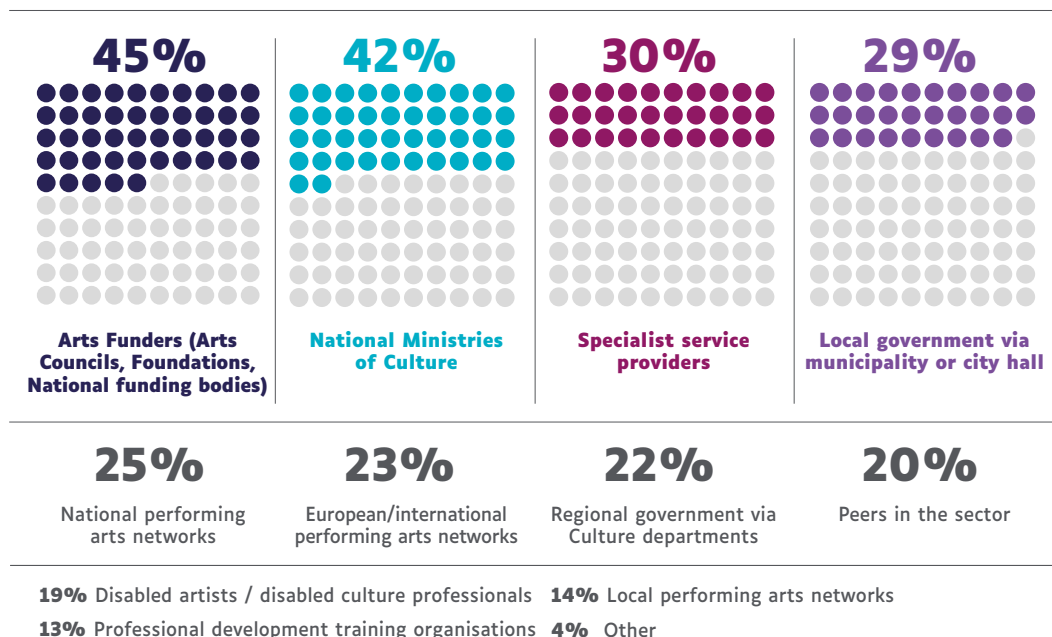
The report shows greater engagement around access for disabled audiences, with a lower figure of 39% not very confident or not at all confident in the accessibility of artistic programmes for disabled audiences. However, there are still major gaps in provision – particularly around online access. Only 19% of venues and festivals surveyed had an accessible website, and only 12% an accessible booking process. The research also found that while some mainstream organisations emphasised they were open to everyone – well connected within the arts sector, and able to identify access needs – disabled artists and companies themselves often felt their specific needs were not well understood.

How then to improve knowledge and build capacity? An extensive literature of reports, checklists, and toolkits is already available to guide cultural professionals in providing greater access – but these are not widely circulated, partly because they are often focused on a single country, or available in only one language. In the absence of more structured forms of guidance and training, disabled artists themselves are often used as informal sources of advice, though are seldom paid for it.

Overall, there is a huge need for more guidance and increased understanding if the cultural sector is to achieve equal access. This need was evident among those who participated in the *Time to Act* research – as well as those who didn't. Many professionals approached for this report did not feel confident answering questions on the topic of disability, suggesting that they lacked the knowledge to voice an informed opinion while at the same time insisting on the importance of the research itself and of accessibility more broadly.

When asked to name their existing sources of information on accessibility, governmental bodies such as ministries of culture and national arts councils were rarely quoted – with the notable exception of public bodies in the UK. Funders themselves also reported poor knowledge of work by disabled artists in the *Time to Act* survey, and had low confidence in the accessibility of their own programmes for disabled artists. This is in stark contrast to the fact that cultural professionals expect national arts councils and cultural ministries to take the lead in providing support: 45% of survey respondents selected arts funders as among the three stakeholders within the sector they thought should be doing the most, and 42% national ministries of culture.

Who should be doing the most to provide guidance, training, and best practice resources?



This report was prepared during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the last 18 months have increased online and remote working, and seen a broader turn towards digital approaches that may provide a path to greater access, participants in *Time to Act's* research repeatedly raised concerns that ongoing health risks impact disabled people disproportionately, that tighter resources could push inclusion strategies off the agenda for funders and others in the cultural field, and that disabled people 'will disappear once again from the public space'.

Ensuring this does not happen is a priority and responsibility for the whole of the cultural sector. Securing the progress of the past while working towards an equal future means advocating for better funding and regulation, taking a transnational approach to sharing knowledge, and placing universal inclusion and accessibility at the centre of work for all arts organisations and venues. The cultural sector is poised for change, and knows it's needed. It's time to act.

# KEY FINDINGS

## BACKGROUND

This report presents the main findings of a study commissioned by the British Council to On the Move, the international cultural mobility network, addressing the level of knowledge and experience held by European cultural operators in relation to disabled artists and their works. The study was conducted in 2020 and 2021 through an analysis of relevant literature, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey.<sup>1</sup>

The main findings presented hereafter are structured in three major areas, namely:

- **Knowledge**, including information, training, resources and guidance, allowing better understanding of disability, how it affects cultural practice, existing work by disabled artists, and needs experienced by disabled artists and audiences.
- **Experience**, including existing practices related to better embedding disabled artists in artistic projects and programmes and improving the accessibility of these for disabled audiences.
- **Solutions**, including best practices, recommendations or prototypes of solutions that could lead to further practical change.

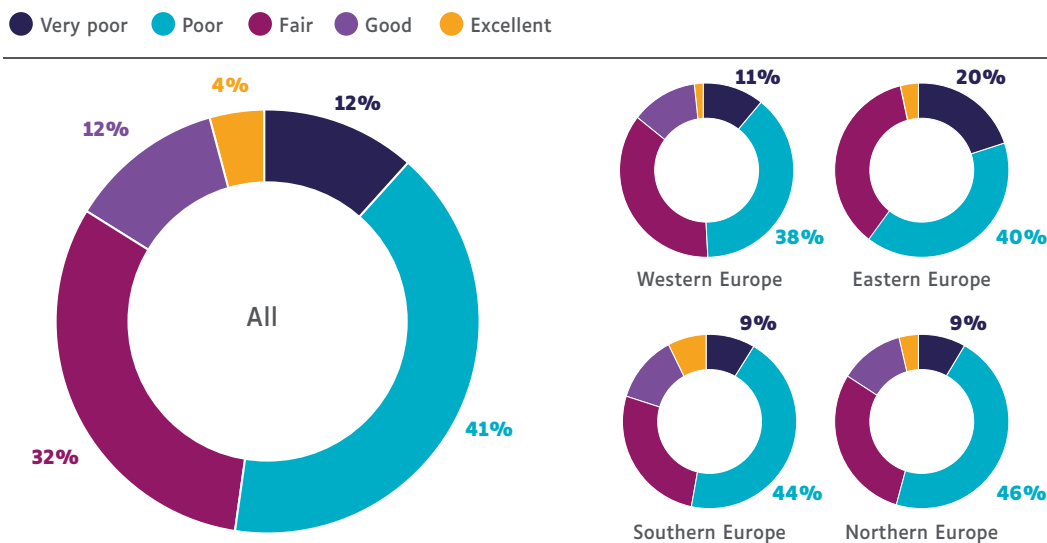
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1 For further information about the goals of the report and the methodology of the project, please refer to the full report (p. 21).

## KNOWLEDGE

- Limited knowledge of work by disabled artists.** When asked how familiar they are with the works of European disabled artists, only 16% of respondents to the online survey reported Good or Excellent knowledge. More than half (52%) rated their knowledge as either Poor or Very Poor.

Performing Arts professionals' knowledge of artistic work by disabled artists



- Variable numbers of productions seen.** 83% of respondents had seen work by disabled artists in the last two years. 50% had seen between 1 and 3 productions, and 13% had seen 7 or more. The survey's disabled respondents were more likely to have seen productions by disabled artists than were the non-disabled respondents (and twice as likely to have seen 7 or more). Meanwhile, 17% of respondents had not seen any productions in the last two years. This final figure was higher in Eastern Europe (23%) than other regions, with Northern Europe (12%) scoring lowest.
- Difficulties in identifying and accessing reliable information sources.** When answering the questionnaire or interviews, most respondents found it difficult to provide examples of information that helped them navigate accessibility issues. They often complained about a lack of available resources.
- Disabled artists and professionals, peer arts organisations and specialised services arise as key information sources.** 49% of survey respondents identify disabled artists and disabled culture professionals as their trusted sources when they have questions or needs as regards supporting or programming work by disabled artists. 45% mention peer



arts organisations, and 32% specialised service providers. Indeed, a few specialised agencies and services (e.g. Arts & Disability Ireland; Culture for All, Finland; Acesso Cultura, Portugal; Pro Infirmis, Geneva, Switzerland; Servicestelle Inklusion im Kulturbereich, Dresden, Germany) and some grassroots initiatives (tanzbar Bremen, Germany; the Without Walls Access Guide, UK) are identified as key information points. The information from governmental bodies is rarely quoted, with the notable exception of public bodies in the United Kingdom.

- **National asymmetries in the availability of information.** The difficulties identified by interviewees and survey respondents as regards the accessibility of information seem to confirm findings from the literature review, which suggest that substantial literature on arts and disability exists in a few countries (e.g. the United Kingdom, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland) but is less easily available elsewhere. Limited availability of information on arts and disability has been noted before by European networks and EU bodies.<sup>2</sup>
  
- **European networks and programmes facilitate access to knowledge and to experiencing work, balancing out existing asymmetries.** European and international performing arts networks are mentioned by 32% of respondents as their trusted sources when looking for information on work by disabled artists. This figure is higher than for national performing arts networks (22%). A similar pattern exists when asking about trusted sources when aiming to engage with disabled audiences. The literature review also found that European and international arts networks and EU-funded projects have led to broader opportunities for accessing work by disabled artists within the European cultural sector, including in countries where these opportunities were previously rare.

## **EXPERIENCE**

- **Only 28% of venues and festivals regularly present or support work by disabled artists.** Venues and festivals that took part in the survey were asked whether they support or present work by disabled artists on a regular basis. Responses show that 28% of them present or support at least one production per year. Among these, less than 6% present four or more productions per year. An additional 53% of all festivals and venues surveyed present work by disabled artists but on an irregular basis (i.e. less than one production per year), whereas 15% do not present work of this kind.

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2 See e.g. European Blind Union (2012). *EBU Access to Culture Survey 2012: Mapping current levels of accessibility to cultural venues and activities in Europe*. Paris, EBU; and Pasikowska-Schnass, M. (2019). *Access to cultural life for people with disabilities. Brussels and Strasbourg, European Parliament Research Service (EPRS)*; available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI%282019%29644200](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI%282019%29644200)

- **31% of all arts organisations do not look for new work by disabled artists.** Asked where they looked for new work by disabled artists, respondents identified direct contact with companies, tour bookers and agents as the main source (37% across all respondents; 49% among venues and festivals), with international peers and European or international performing arts networks coming second (36%). The latter figure again confirms the important role played by international networks in this area. Other sources include national peers and networks (28%) and online and offline media (27%). Meanwhile, 31% of respondents indicated they do not look for new work by disabled artists.
- **Disabled people are keen to attend arts activities, particularly when their needs are taken into account.** Research conducted in Ireland may challenge some expectations about attendance among disabled people: 86% of them had attended at least one arts event (including cinema) in the previous year (79% if cinema is not included). Indeed, these figures were higher than those from a similar survey covering the overall population (64% had attended at least one arts event – including arthouse cinema but not mainstream cinema).<sup>3</sup> Physical access, health issues, economic aspects, distance to venues, personal isolation and problems with online booking of events have been identified as major obstacles in several European countries.<sup>4</sup>
- **Most venues and festivals have adopted some measures to improve physical access.** Step-free access from street to auditorium, office and backstage spaces was the most frequently mentioned measure to improve access to venues and festivals (57%), followed by wheelchair-accessible toilets (52%). 34% also provide extra funding to access requirements more broadly, 31% have wheelchair-accessible toilets with hoist, and 21% have accessible adult changing rooms in office or backstage areas.
- **Access measures are less frequent in artistic programming and decision-making.** Among the measures that may be adopted by venues and festivals to improve access, only 17% of respondents indicated that they have dedicated calls for disabled artists or curators, and only 13% involve disabled arts professionals on selection panels and commissioning teams. 8% consider alternative ways to answer open calls, and 7% allow extra time for disabled artists when answering open calls.

3 Maitland, H. (2017). *Audiences-in-waiting?* Dublin, Arts & Disability Ireland. Available at <https://adiarts.ie/assets/uploads/2018/01/Audiences-in-Waiting-survey-bulletin-final.pdf>

4 See e.g. Fundación Eguía-Careaga Fundazioa (2016). *Informe 2016 sobre la aplicación de la Estrategia Integral Española de Cultura para todos*. Madrid, Real Patronato sobre Discapacidad, available at <https://www.cedd.net/es/publicaciones/Record/539365>; Kantar Media (2016). *The Arts in Irish Life: 2016 Research Update*. Dublin, Arts Council of Ireland, available at [http://www.artscouncil.ie/Publications/All/The-Arts-in-Irish-Life\\_-2016-update/](http://www.artscouncil.ie/Publications/All/The-Arts-in-Irish-Life_-2016-update/); Maitland, H. (2017). *Audiences-in-waiting? How do people with disabilities engage with culture?* Dublin, Arts & Disability Ireland, available at <http://adiarts.ie/assets/uploads/2017/11/Audiences-in-Waiting-survey-report-final.pdf>; and *Attitude is Everything (2018). State of Access Report 2018: Ticketing Without Barriers. Examining the access booking experience for Deaf and disabled music fans*. London, Attitude is Everything, available at [http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/uploads/general/State\\_of\\_Access\\_Report\\_2018.pdf](http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/uploads/general/State_of_Access_Report_2018.pdf)

- **There is a need to understand the needs of disabled artists better, and to integrate them in planning.** Literature on the performing arts and disability provides guidance on how to ensure that disabled artists' needs are taken into consideration when planning an event, including in terms of mobility, accommodation and costs, as well as in the need for staff to be aware of existing needs and having a patient, encouraging and adaptable attitude.<sup>5</sup> However, both the survey and interviews showed that much progress is still needed in this respect. 48% of the respondents to the online survey expressed lack of confidence in the accessibility of their artistic programmes for disabled artists. Some interviewees also argued that 'Production methods need to be adapted: more time, more space and more resources, which is in conflict with normative ways of producing stage work.'<sup>6</sup> 'Allowing more time for disabled artists to work in your venue – many of us cannot work very long days of 12+ hours, and need more rest than our peers may do. Giving us very tight get in, tech rehearsal, and get out times can make it impossible for us to accept a performance offer, knowing that we'll have to struggle through with fatigue and adverse effects to our wellbeing'.<sup>7</sup>



*Mixed Doubles / Fine Lines by Roser López Espinosa, featuring Madeleine Månsson and Anna Borràs Picó  
©Photo by Tilo Stengel*

- **A wide range of measures have been adopted to foster access for audiences, but to varying degrees.** When asked about the initiatives for audience access taken by organisations, wheelchair accessible toilets came first (72%), followed by free or discounted tickets for personal assistants (48%), discounted tickets for disabled audiences (44%), sign language interpreters (42%), and audio description (31%). Meanwhile, only 24% have front of house staff trained in disability awareness, 19% have an accessible

5 See e.g. Festival.Org (2020). *Outdoor Arts Festivals and Events: Access Guide. To support festivals and events in finding inclusive practices when working with D/deaf and disabled audiences and artists*. Manchester, Without Walls, available at <https://www.withoutwalls.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Without-Walls-Outdoor-Arts-Festivals-and-Events-Access-Guide-2020.pdf>.

6 Disabled producer and artist, theatre venue, Poland - public discussion, 23 October 2021.

7 Anonymous contributor, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

website, 16% have a dedicated contact point for access queries, 13% provide accessible communication and marketing materials, and 12% have an accessible booking process.

- **Access measures tend to focus on audiences first, artists later.** Both the evidence above and answers to open questions in the survey show that most arts organisations give priority to ensuring access for disabled audiences, with disabled artists coming second. This confirms findings of the literature review, according to which venues have often been made accessible to audiences but not artists, as seen in backstage areas and dressing rooms.<sup>8</sup> Some authors suggest this may be connected to the prevailing notion, at least in some countries, of disabled people as 'passive' recipients of culture, rather than 'active' participants.<sup>9</sup>
- **Less than half of venues and festivals have a strategy to engage with disabled audiences.** 33% of venues and festivals do not engage with disabled audiences on a regular basis, whereas 24% do so but do not have a specific strategy in this area. Meanwhile, 42% of respondents have a specific strategy to engage with disabled audiences.
- **Employing disabled people and having dedicated staff or budget are drivers for change within organisations.** Generally, the organisations that employ disabled staff, that have staff responsible for accessibility, or that have a dedicated budget tend to be more confident than the average respondents that their artistic programmes are accessible to disabled artists. A similar pattern emerged when asking about engagement with disabled audiences. Responses to open questions confirmed that having one or more disabled staff members had served to raise awareness of specific issues and opened up internal conversations, leading to more inclusive practices: 'Our programme [...] focusing on accessibility was started by a disabled employee. The programme started in 2018, and since then we have been able to cater to audiences with disabilities much better (specifically people who are deaf or hard of hearing, people who have a visual impairment, people who might need more relaxed performances and people who have trouble with mobility).'<sup>10</sup>
- **Perceptions on the improvements made may be overconfident.** A large proportion of survey respondents believe that artistic programmes and venues have become more accessible in recent years. For example, 58%

8 See e.g. Karhunen, M. (2020). "Disabled artists, gatekeepers and new standards." #StopHatredNow seminar, 11 May 2020, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R33pV9kAS28&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R33pV9kAS28&feature=emb_title).

9 See e.g. Panagiotara, B. (c. 2019). *Dance & Disability. A research on inclusive dance education & training in Greece, Netherlands, Sweden & the UK*. Several locations, Onassis Stegi, Holland Dance Festival, Skanes Dansteater and Stopgap Dance Company. Available at [https://www.academia.edu/38655040/Dance\\_and\\_Disability\\_A\\_research\\_on\\_inclusive\\_dance\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_in\\_Greece\\_Netherlands\\_Sweden\\_and\\_the\\_UK](https://www.academia.edu/38655040/Dance_and_Disability_A_research_on_inclusive_dance_education_and_training_in_Greece_Netherlands_Sweden_and_the_UK)

10 Non-disabled project leader of accessibility programme, festival, The Netherlands – answer to the online survey 2020.

of respondents from venues and festivals argued that their organisations had become more accessible for disabled artists in the last 5 years, although the figure was lower for organisations without a budget dedicated to accessibility (46%). Similarly, 58% of venues and festivals believed accessibility for disabled audiences had improved in their organisations (41% for those without a dedicated budget). This contrasts with some of the evidence about actual practices – e.g. the fact that only 28% of venues and festivals regularly present or support work by disabled artists, 87% of organisations do not provide accessible marketing materials, and only 12% offer an accessible booking process. Therefore, there may be some overconfidence, not backed by evidence, on the actual improvements in accessibility for both artists and audiences.

- **Improving accessibility makes sense from a range of perspectives – including rights, cultural diversity and business.** Existing literature often emphasises that access and participation in cultural life are part of human rights – and that, therefore, governments and public cultural institutions should in particular ‘ensure a cultural offer that is accessible to everyone, with specific measures for certain population groups, such as children and young people, the elderly, disabled people or migrants’.<sup>11</sup> Further to this, the literature review, interviews and the online survey have found a range of arguments that call for a ‘cultural change’ within the arts sector, which should become more inclusive and diverse and see disability as a form of enrichment that broadens possibilities of expression,<sup>12</sup> ultimately looking at disability in a ‘non-normative, non-ableist’ way.<sup>13</sup> Some artists and organisations interviewed identified an increasing interest among audiences in diverse work, including by disabled artists, and saw this as an opportunity (‘Social issues which are generating interest now, like gender diversity and inclusiveness, all of this is reflected in artistic projects and in audiences’ interests. There are many issues which used to be hidden, left at home, just as disabled kids used to be left at home and are now integrated in schools, and the same happens in the arts’).<sup>14</sup> However, this is far from a common or well-established trend. Finally, it has been argued that making arts attendance accessible to disabled people ‘makes good business sense’ – research in Ireland suggests the national cultural sector could earn an additional €7 million if half of the disabled people who regularly attended (before Covid-19) did so just one more time per year and brought a friend or family member with them.<sup>15</sup>

11 European Parliament (2018). Resolution of 14 June 2018 on structural and financial barriers in the access to culture (2017/2255(INI)). European Parliament. P8\_TA(2018)0262, para 55, available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0262\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0262_EN.html)

12 See e.g. Tanja Erhart, in Marsh, K. and J. Burrows, Eds. (2017). *Permission to Stare: Arts and Disability*. Brussels, IETM and British Council. Available at <https://www.ietm.org/en/resources/fresh-perspectives/fresh-perspectives-7-permission-to-stare-arts-and-disability>

13 Karhunen (2020).

14 Non-disabled venue and festival programmer, Spain – online interview, 28 September 2021.

15 Maitland, H. (2017). *Audiences-in-waiting?* Dublin, Arts & Disability Ireland.

- Lack of funding and knowledge stand as major obstacles.** When asked about the obstacles that prevent their organisations, or the cultural field at large, from supporting work by disabled artists, 51% of arts organisations identified lack of funding as the main factor (the figure was 53% among venues and festivals, and only 23% among funders). Lack of knowledge of work by disabled artists in their country (39%) or in Europe and internationally (32%), insufficient work made by disabled artists (28%), lack of official inclusive guidelines from local, regional or national governments (24%), and lack of knowledge on how to meet access requirements (21%) were also mentioned. A similar pattern emerged when asking about obstacles to further engagement with disabled audiences: lack of funding (57%), lack of appropriate communication tools, such as an accessible website and marketing materials (48%), lack of contacts and networks to reach out to disabled audiences (38%), lack of human resources (37%), and lack of knowledge on how to meet access requirements (24%) emerged as major obstacles. A further 27% also pointed to lack of interest in engaging more with disabled audiences.

## **HOW COVID-19 THREATENS PROGRESS MADE**

The study has identified a general concern that the current Covid-19 pandemic will have a lasting effect on accessibility. In the online survey, respondents underlined the vulnerability of disabled people but also a general lack of consideration in emergency measures taken by public authorities in regard to this population and their specific needs and challenges.

Recent research in the United Kingdom suggests **77% of disabled audiences consider themselves to be 'vulnerable to Coronavirus', whereas only 28% of non-disabled audiences do.** This may be connected to the fact that, according to data from the UK's Office for National Statistics, disabled people accounted for over one third of deaths related to Covid-19 between March and May 2020.<sup>16</sup>

While the online streaming of performing arts pieces during the crisis has allowed disabled audiences to access cultural activities that they would not otherwise have been able to engage with ('I think this pandemic has shown us new ways of connecting with audiences. It has opened new ways of presenting artistic content that can help us develop new ways of accommodating special needs.'<sup>17</sup>) and this could pave the way for the future ('Don't lose this progress,

16 Miller, A. (2020). "Slump in disabled audiences' confidence presents major problem for the arts sector". Birmingham, Indigo Cultural Consulting Ltd. Available at <https://www.indigo-ltd.com/blog/act-2-confidence-of-disabled-audiences>

17 Non-disabled artistic director, dance festival, Germany – answer to the online survey 2020.

meet these online access needs post-coronavirus.<sup>18</sup>), going back to standard venues poses particular challenges for disabled audiences. In a survey conducted in 2020, 26% of disabled people said they would not consider returning to venues until a vaccine or treatment for Covid-19 was available – twice the figure among non-disabled respondents. Fewer disabled people would consider attending an outdoor event (44%) than the overall population (51%).<sup>19</sup>

These figures suggest that **the Covid-19 crisis has 'magnified the inequalities facing disabled audiences** and compromises cultural participation and engagement'.<sup>20</sup> Replies to the online survey indicated that increasing economic difficulties would make it more difficult to maintain accessibility standards and projects, and would particularly weaken grassroots initiatives concerned with accessibility: 'Battling the pandemic consumes scarce resources and shifts focus away from other priorities, namely access.'<sup>21</sup> 'The pandemic has set a lot of good work back.'<sup>22</sup> It has been estimated that reduced attendance from disabled people could mean the loss of 12% of total arts audiences, with **significant economic impacts for organisations in this field.**<sup>23</sup>

This perspective echoes initial evidence about the impact of the pandemic in employment in the cultural sector. A range of studies internationally have pointed to how Covid-19 is badly affecting activity and employment across culture. Research conducted in the United Kingdom suggests that **the impact is higher for disabled artists and cultural professionals than for non-disabled ones.**<sup>24</sup>

Overall, this evidence on the impact of Covid-19 on disabled audiences and disabled creative professionals suggests the **need to adopt particularly inclusive measures.**<sup>25</sup>

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18 Disabled curator, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020

19 'Miller, A. (2020). Slump in disabled audiences' confidence presents major problem for the arts sector. Birmingham, Indigo Cultural Consulting Ltd.'

20 Miller (2020).

21 Non-disabled executive board member, theatre venue, Portugal – answer to the online survey 2020.

22 Anonymous non-disabled contributor – answer to the online survey 2020.

23 Miller (2020).

24 O'Brien, D.; et al. (2021), "The impact of Covid-19 on jobs in the cultural sector – part 2". Leeds, Centre for Cultural Value. Available at <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CVIresources/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-jobs-in-the-cultural-sector-part-2/>

25 Ramps on the Moon, Attitude is Everything, What Next? Paraorchestra and WeShallNotBeRemoved (2020). *Working Safely through Covid-19: Seven Inclusive Principles for Arts & Cultural Organisation*. London, several publishers. Available at <http://www.attitudeiseverything.org.uk/resources/seven-inclusive-principles-for-arts-and-cultural-organisations>

## **SOLUTIONS**

- **Policy frameworks and support arise as key enabling factors.** In line with obstacles identified above, the analysis suggests that the existence of cultural policies addressing disability and access and providing a dedicated budget has been instrumental in enabling progress, as shown in countries like the United Kingdom. This arises as the leading factor in catalysing change at the sector level. All-encompassing approaches to accessibility and inclusion, benefitting society as a whole, can ultimately be relevant to both disabled audiences and disabled artists.
- **Involving disabled people in decision-making and having dedicated staff and budgets within organisations.** In line with the 'nothing about us without us' principle, it is essential to engage and consult with disabled people in the design and implementation of programmes and projects that aim to address them or foster their attendance:<sup>26</sup> 'Always involve disabled artists as experts. Most venues, programmes etc are led by non disabled people who have no lived experience of what it means to be disabled and what would make a programme or venue accessible. The involvement of disabled people is, therefore, absolutely necessary to create interesting offers for disabled people that they can trust.'<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, evidence collected in this report shows that organisations that have either specific staff with a mandate for disability issues and/or dedicated budget lines to foster accessibility and inclusion are better placed to make progress in this field.
- **Embracing diversity, including at the 'gatekeeping' level.** 'Gatekeepers', including curators, producers, programmers and educational institutions, have a key role in enabling accessibility and inclusion. More attention should be paid to their practices, as well as to ensuring that gatekeepers become more diverse internally, ultimately resembling more the overall make-up of the population:<sup>28</sup> 'As a performing arts organisation, you should have a less homogeneous group of people around you... [So that] as an artist you don't feel like the exception, you are not the 'freak', or the 'flag' that a progressive organisation has put in place. You need more time, and care, and production resources adequate to your needs, but also the sensation of not being alone, that you don't represent the exception, but that the organisation has been designed to create a fabric that is actually inclusive of many different bodies, means and cultures.'<sup>29</sup>

26 See e.g. OMC Working Group of EU Member States' Experts on Better Access to and Wider Participation in Culture (2012).

27 Non-disabled producer, dance venue, Germany – answer to the online survey 2020.

28 See e.g. Fischer, D. (2016). *Other Abilities, Evolving Aesthetics? Report from the IETM Valencia Plenary Meeting, 3-6 November 2016*. Brussels, IETM, available at <https://www.ietm.org/en/resources/reports/other-abilities-evolving-aesthetics>; Marsh and Burrows (2017); and Karhunen (2020).

29 Non-disabled festival manager and advisor on disability issues, Italy – online interview, 21 October 2021.

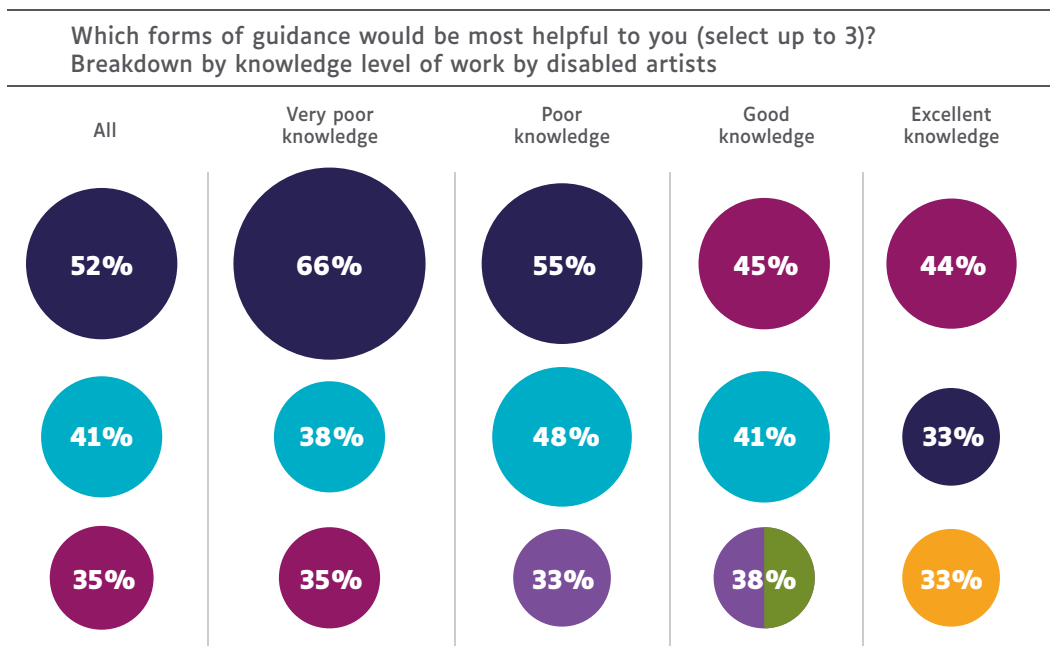


- **Other changes to make organisations more accessible and inclusive.** Further to the elements outlined above, other necessary changes within performing arts organisations include ensuring physical accessibility for both disabled artists and audiences where this has not been tackled yet, strengthening in-house information, training and capacity-building in areas related to access and inclusion, integrating work by disabled artists in programming and making it more visible, and adapting communication both towards audiences and artists (e.g. ensuring that open calls are published and disseminated in accessible formats and that they effectively reach the targeted groups).
- **Examples of good practice and relevant experiences are available.** Over the last decade, a set of guides, manuals and similar publications on arts and disability have collected practical information on how to increase accessibility and inclusion.<sup>30</sup> Developing all-encompassing approaches to inclusion, which incorporate disabled people but are also positive for broader sections of the population, involving disabled people in decision-making and management, ensuring physical accessibility, providing in-house information, training and capacity-building, adapting communication and marketing, integrating accessibility in the design and presentation of productions (e.g. audio descriptions, touch tours, tactile model boxes, etc.), and establishing partnerships with specialised and facilitating organisations are some of the solutions proposed.
- **Making knowledge and practical guidance more easily accessible is critical.** The literature review has identified a significant, diverse range of toolkits, guides and other materials providing practical guidance for arts organisations willing to be more accessible for disabled artists and audiences. However, these materials appear to exist only in some countries and languages, and may not be well-known by many organisations in the field. Indeed, venues surveyed suggested that they would need guidance on

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30 See e.g. Acesso Cultura (2020). The cultural participation of people with disabilities or impairments: how to create an accessibility plan. A publication supported by Polo Cultural | Gaivotas Boavista. <https://accessculture-portugal.org/accessibility-plan/>; Cemaforre (2009). *Accessibilité et spectacle vivant. Guide pratique*. Paris, Ministère de la culture et de la communication et Centre national de ressources pour l'accessibilité des loisirs et de la culture (Cemaforre), available at <https://www.culture.gouv.fr/Sites-thematiques/Developpement-culturel/Culture-et-handicap/Guides-pratiques/Accessibilite-et-spectacle-vivant.-Guide-pratique-2008>; Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 Capital Europea de la Cultura and Elkartu - Gipuzkoako Gutxitasun Fisikoa duten Pertsonen Federazio Koordinatzailea (c. 2016). *Kultur ekimen irisgarri eta inklusiboak diseinatzeko eta antolatzeko gidaliburua / Guía para diseñar y organizar eventos culturales accesibles e inclusivos*. Donostia - San Sebastián, Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 Capital Europea de la Cultura, available at [https://elkartu.org/pdf/guia\\_eventos\\_accesibles\\_inclusivos\\_online\\_16-12-2016.pdf](https://elkartu.org/pdf/guia_eventos_accesibles_inclusivos_online_16-12-2016.pdf); Festival.Org (2020). *Outdoor Arts Festivals and Events: Access Guide. To support festivals and events in finding inclusive practices when working with D/deaf and disabled audiences and artists*. Manchester, Without Walls, available at <https://www.withoutwalls.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Without-Walls-Outdoor-Arts-Festivals-and-Events-Access-Guide-2020.pdf>; Giraud, C. and N. Miles-Wilden (2018). *Demystifying Access. A guide for producers and performance makers: how to create better access for audiences to the performing arts*. London, Unlimited / Shape Arts / Arts Admin, available at <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/demystifying-access-a-resource-pack-for-the-performing-arts/>; Quinten, S., L. Reuter and A. Almpanis (2020). *Creability Practical Guide. Creative and Artistic Tools for Inclusive Cultural Work*. Cologne, Un-Label e.V., available at <https://un-label.eu/en/the-new-creability-practical-guide-creative-and-artistic-tools-for-inclusive-cultural-work-is-published/>; Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts (c. 2015). *Ensuring your venues and events are open to all. A brief Access Guide*, Shape Arts, available at <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/accessible-venues/>

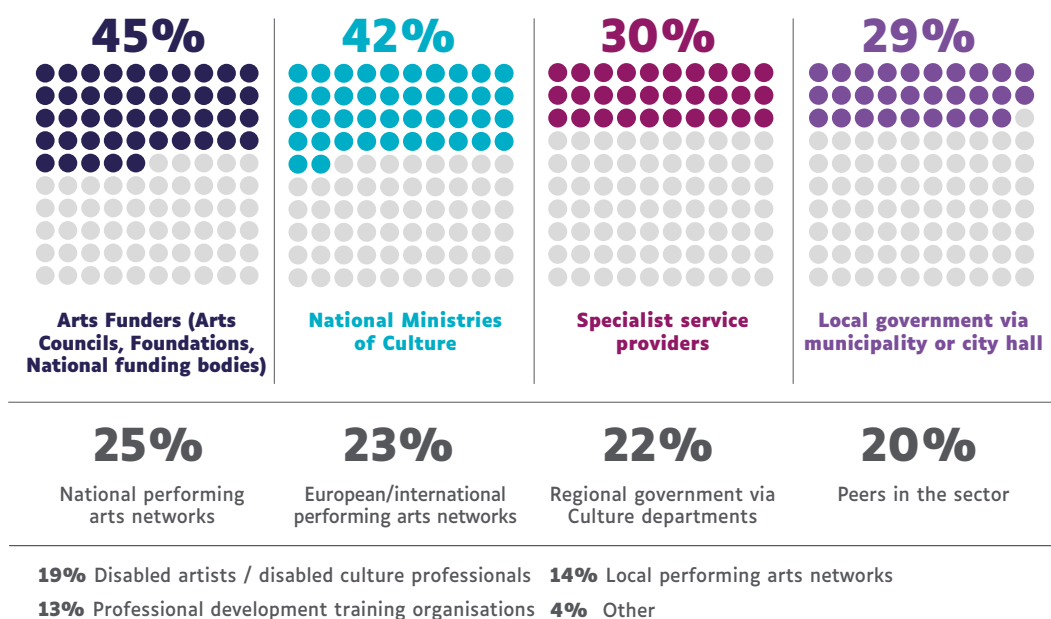
designing accessible, inclusive artistic projects (52%), developing disabled audiences (41%), international mobility and collaboration with disabled artists and professionals (34%), and creating accessible workplaces (36%). Interestingly, several of these figures are even higher among funders: 64% of them identify a need for guidance on developing disabled audiences, as well as on facilitating international collaboration with disabled artists, 57% require guidance on designing accessible, inclusive artistic projects, and 43% need guidance on making online exchanges between arts professionals accessible to disabled participants.



- Guidance on designing artistic projects which provide equal opportunity to disabled artists and arts professionals
- Guidance on developing disabled audiences
- Guidance on creating accessible cultural workplaces for arts professionals and ensuring accessible recruitment processes
- Guidance on international mobility/collaboration with disabled artists and arts professionals
- Guidance on making online exchanges between arts professionals accessible to disabled participants with physical, sensory or intellectual disability
- Guidance on developing an accessible website

- **There is a demand for arts funders and national ministries to engage more in this field.** When asked who should be doing the most to provide guidance, training and best practice resources, survey respondents gave the top spots to arts funders (45%) and national ministries (42%). Venue and festival respondents were more likely to say that local governments and municipalities should also be engaged in providing resources (36%), while artists and professionals put greater emphasis on the role of disabled artists and culture professionals themselves (28%).

Who should be doing the most to provide guidance, training, and best practice resources?



## FOLLOW-UP

Evidence collected in this report points to the following:

- There are still **major gaps in the accessibility of performing arts activities and organisations** for disabled artists and audiences. **Action in this field is needed**, and should cover the availability of knowledge (data, good practices, networks) and the provision of support to make organisations and venues more accessible and inclusive.
- Progress made in several countries points to the **critical role of specific policies and dedicated budgets**, supporting measures that foster accessibility for artists and for audiences within all types of organisation in the cultural sector.
- There is also a demand from organisations in the sector for support and guidance in this field, and an **expectation that governments and funders will take the lead**. In particular, there exists a demand for guidance on designing artistic projects which provide equal opportunities to disabled artists and arts professionals, developing disabled audiences, facilitating international mobility and collaboration with disabled artists and arts professionals, and creating accessible cultural workplaces for arts professionals and ensuring accessible recruitment processes.

- **Covid-19 threatens to magnify pre-existing inequalities and to limit opportunities for both disabled artists and audiences.** Addressing this risk, and ensuring that disability is taken into account in public responses to the crisis, is an issue of rights, as well as of economic sustainability for the sector.
- In the last few years, **specialised organisations in arts and disability, and European networks and programmes have contributed** to fostering knowledge and good practice exchange. Support for these initiatives is necessary.
- Because knowledge and good practice in this area exists, but is not evenly spread across the EU nor sufficiently well-known, **EU institutions, including the Council of Ministers of Culture, could support the exchange of knowledge and the adoption of common guidelines** to foster access and inclusion for disabled people.

Following the launch of this report on 3 December 2021, the British Council and On the Move are planning a series of Time to Act presentations, aimed particularly at policymakers and funders at a national level in Europe.

The report itself will also be disseminated through various social media channels and in accessible formats, with translations of the Executive Summary first made available in French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Spanish and Serbian.

In the longer term, the OTM research team will work on a **third and final report**, rescheduled to the second half of 2023 when the Europe Beyond Access project will be finalised.

# FULL REPORT

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# 1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

**The British Council has commissioned On the Move (OTM), the international cultural mobility network,<sup>31</sup> to lead a study into the level of knowledge and experience held by European cultural operators in relation to disabled artists and their works. The study also looked at the level of their knowledge concerning ways to make performing arts programmes accessible for disabled artists and disabled audiences.**

The study is part of the large-scale cooperation project Europe Beyond Access.<sup>32</sup> Co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union, this initiative aims to support disabled artists to break the glass ceilings of the contemporary theatre and dance sectors. The core partners of the project are British Council (operating for this project in the UK and Poland), Onassis Stegi (Greece), Holland Dance Festival (The Netherlands), Kampnagel (Germany), Per.Art (Serbia), Skånes Dansteater (Sweden), and Oriente Occidente (Italy). Dissemination associates are IETM, ONDA (France), EUCREA (Germany), Aceso Cultura (Portugal), Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego / Theatre Institut (Poland), and ISPA.

Between September 2018 and June 2023, the seven organisations are implementing an ambitious 5-year €4m work programme in order to:

- Support disabled artists to internationalise their artistic innovations and their careers;
- Develop a network of leading mainstream organisations with a commitment to present and commission at the highest level;

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<sup>31</sup> More information here: [www.on-the-move.org](http://www.on-the-move.org)

<sup>32</sup> More information here: [www.europebeyondaccess.com](http://www.europebeyondaccess.com)

- Build European audiences interested in high-quality innovative work by Europe's disabled artists;
- Develop tools and understanding in the wider performing arts market;
- Collaborate with many of the world's leading arts networks to champion excellent artistic works, and to educate arts professionals.

Initially focusing on 'Evaluating barriers to the international mobility of disabled artists: exploring the knowledge base, engagement and perceptions of disabled artists by wider European Arts Professionals', the purpose of this study has been broadened to understand in more detail the barriers which exist in Europe's performing arts sector, and to identify key areas where knowledge could be increased, and practices improved.

The initial rationale of the British Council was to produce two reports (one in November 2020 and the second in February 2022) to create a baseline of evidence that could then be compared and referenced against end-of-project data.

*Mixed Doubles / Feeling Good by Diego Tortelli,  
featuring Cristian Cucco and Annemieke Mooij.  
© Photo by Andreas Simopoulos*



The global Covid-19 pandemic hit at the beginning of the research process, with devastating consequences for the lives of millions of men and women in Europe and across the world, as well as for fragile cultural ecosystems that have been trying to cope with unprecedented measures to limit or stop all activities. It of course impacted heavily the very conduct of this research.

In close dialogue with the British Council, the OTM research team reworked all aspects of the original plan in March 2020 in order to adapt to the many restrictions the global pandemic caused as well as to delve into three focus areas, Knowledge, Experience and Solutions:

- We understand **Knowledge** to be accessible through information, training, resources (including details of best practices) and initial guidance, whether online or offline, and whether offered through organisations or other professionals at local, national, European and/or international levels.
- We understand **Experience** to be acquired through work-related activities and specific funding support at local, national, European and/or international levels. Both forms of Knowledge and Experience are understood in relation to better embedding disabled artists in artistic projects and programmes and improving the accessibility of these for disabled audiences. Both forms of Knowledge and Experience are also connected to the four Europe Beyond Access activity formats: artistic exchanges, audience development and engagement, public performances and commissions, capacity building.
- The **Solutions** component was added to ensure that the research is directed toward practical change, and to give the reports maximum value as tools for advocacy. Solutions could be highlighted through existing practices, policies and strategies, but also through recommendations and suggestions frequently proposed by the field (through surveys, interviews, group discussions, recent reports, etc.) or prototypes of solutions that are currently tested in local, national and transnational projects.

A discussion round in early December 2020 between OTM and the British Council led to the decision to produce three main reports:

- *Time to Act*, a first report in April 2021, presenting an initial set of findings based on existing online literature and the results of the online survey.<sup>33</sup>
- A second report to be launched on 3 of December 2021 (this report), expanding the initial report with an analysis based on interviews in a set of priority countries.
- A third report in the second half of 2023 taking into account the lessons learned from the Europe Beyond Access project.

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33 <https://www.disabilityartsinternational.org/resources/time-to-act-how-lack-of-knowledge-in-the-cultural-sector-creates-barriers-for-disabled-artists-and-audiences/>



# 2.

# METHODOLOGY

Following the objectives of the research and the rationale provided by the British Council, here are the key research areas that were investigated:

- To what extent have individuals and organisations in the European cultural sector experienced work by disabled artists?
- What is their level of knowledge concerning ways to make artistic programmes accessible to disabled artists?
- What is their level of knowledge about ways to make arts events and venues accessible to disabled audiences?
- What percentage of Europe's arts professionals feel confident that arts programmes which they manage are fully accessible to disabled people?
- What proportion of arts promoters, producers, and creative decision-makers in Europe have seen an example of work by disabled artists in the last year / 2 years / 5 years?
- Which organisations do Europe's arts professionals look to for information about making art more accessible to disabled people? National and international networks; arts funders; leading arts organisations; international bodies; transnational arts funders?

## **DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY USED**

The research team used the description of 'disability' appearing in the introduction on the term provided in the guide 'Promoting Inclusion, A British Council guide to disability equality'<sup>34</sup> and the reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006), which states: 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical,

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34 See <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/guide-disability-equality.pdf>

mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'

The research team acknowledges that terminology around Disability, Inclusion and Access is used differently in different cultural, national and political contexts. Terminology is also rapidly evolving. Even in the English language, preferred terminology differs between the UK (for example 'disabled people') and Ireland ('people with disabilities'). This report uses the preferred terminology used in the country of the report commissioner, the British Council, UK. Where quoting from research subjects who responded in English (whether using their first language or not), this report uses the terminology chosen by the research subject. Where the researchers have translated the response from a language other than English, UK terminology has been chosen.

## **GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE**

The research focused on Creative Europe countries – including the United Kingdom, as Brexit does not affect UK coordinators and/or partners of Creative Europe projects funded under the 2014-2020 cycle.<sup>35</sup> At the suggestion of the British Council, Switzerland was also included in the list of countries focused on. A total of 42 countries were therefore covered, including 41 in Europe and one in North Africa (Tunisia).<sup>36</sup>

## **SOURCES OF DATA AND RELATED METHODOLOGIES**<sup>37</sup>

The research team, consisting of OTM staff and expert contributors, has answered the key research questions by gathering and collecting relevant and up-to-date data for analysis within the different sections of this report. The main sources were:

- Desk research and a literature review related to disabled artists / culture professionals in the fields of dance/theatre and disabled audiences in the 41 Creative Europe countries and Switzerland. This desk research focused on digging into existing data, as well as on comparing recent findings with older reports in order to analyse the changing characteristics and potential

35 See <http://www.creativeeuropeuk.eu/news/update-creative-europe-and-outcome-eu-referendum>

36 See <https://ec.europa.eu/culture/funding-creative-europe/about-the-creative-europe-programme>

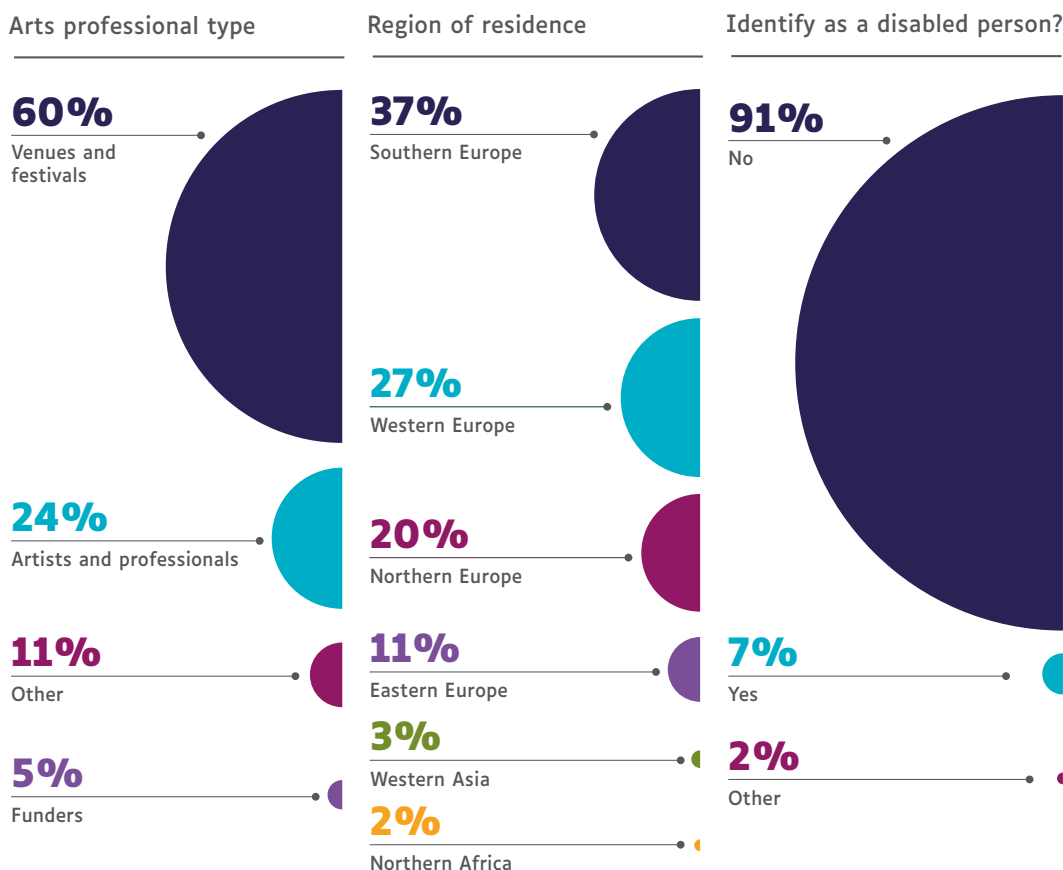
37 OTM mostly refers to three methodologies: Logframe or Logical frame; Case studies and the methodology of the Most Significant change. Reference toolkit for On the Move: [https://encc.eu/sites/default/files/2019-04/encc\\_evaluation\\_journey\\_-\\_a\\_toolkit\\_for\\_cultural\\_operators.pdf](https://encc.eu/sites/default/files/2019-04/encc_evaluation_journey_-_a_toolkit_for_cultural_operators.pdf)

evolution of accessibility issues, current policies, and funding sources (at national, cross-regional, and EU levels). It looked particularly at:

- Reports and documents at EU level related to cultural mobility, including the different reports produced by the OMC (Open Method of Coordination) working groups of the European Agenda for Culture.
  - Surveys and documents on accessibility issues from various sources (funding organisations, independent membership associations, European cultural networks, local, regional and national governments, etc.).
  - Statistical reports and qualitative data established at European level (e.g. by Eurostat or within EU-funded cooperation projects).
  - Information collected on OTM's website originating from various funding organisations (public, private or mixed) at national, European and international levels.
  - Articles, testimonies, evaluation reports, portals and other resources pertaining to accessibility issues.
- An open online survey, running from July 2020 till the end of October 2020, offered in three languages (English, French and Spanish with written feedback also possible in German and Italian), and disseminated through OTM's network (50+ members), Facebook and Twitter pages (32,000+ followers), and newsletters in 5 languages EN / ES / IT / FR / DE (4,800+ subscribers). The support of the British Council, Disability Arts International, and the Europe Beyond Access partners were very valuable during this dissemination phase. The survey gathered answers from 298 respondents based in 35 eligible countries and was open to:
    - Venues & Festivals: professionals working as a staff member of a venue or a festival, e.g. as artistic director, programmer, curator, general manager, chief executive, creative producer, cultural project manager, etc.
    - Artists & Culture Professionals: professionals working as a performing artist or active in the performing arts field as e.g. a tour booker, an agent, a producer, an author, a dramaturg, a translator, a journalist, a critic, a PR, or an administrator.
    - Agencies & Funding Bodies: professionals working as a staff member of a local / regional / national / European institution, a local / regional / national / European institution agency, an Arts Council, a Foundation, or a funding body, including those supporting export and mobility programmes.

- **Other Organisations:** professionals working for a network, a union, a federation, a resource centre, an information point, a university, a research centre, etc.

Time To Act: Survey respondents



- Semi-structured interviews and / or exchanges with representatives of 12 European and international networks and platforms in the fields of theatre, dance and cultural policy.<sup>38</sup> These interviews had three aims: to raise awareness of the project and the online survey; to collect relevant information on Knowledge and Experience within each network and among members who are part of disability-related projects; and to collect evidence on specific areas (funding, training, etc.) where further action is needed.

38 Interviews: Circostrada, Europa Cantat, European Theatre Convention, Aerowaves, Trans Europe Halles. Exchanges with networks / platforms including with answers sent through the survey: IN SITU, European Dancehouse Network, European Festival Association, Assitej. Exchanges: Res Artis, International Federation of Actors, European Network of Cultural Centres.

- Public presentations of the preliminary report *Time to Act* hosted online or physically between April and October 2021. The 7 public discussions gathering 200+ European stakeholders allowed researchers to collect input and feedback on the first findings, bring nuance to the survey results according to European contexts, and strengthen solutions and policy recommendations.<sup>39</sup>
  
- Semi-structured interviews with performing arts organisations (venues and festivals) as well as disabled programmers and artists or companies involving disabled people. 14 interviews were conducted online in September and October 2021, with a focus on exploring Knowledge, Experience and Solutions around the accessibility of performing arts venues and festivals for disabled artists, as well as relevant policies and programmes in this area. After the presentation of the report's initial findings, discussions with the British Council led to selecting a set of priority countries, which were seen as a priority because they provided good representative examples, because there were Europe Beyond Access partners based there, or because the country was insufficiently covered by the online survey.<sup>40</sup> In each country, a sample of 'mainstream' performing arts organisations (i.e. established venues and festivals, generally in the public sector, with no specific mandate for disability), 'independent' venues and festivals, and artists or companies with a particular focus on disability issues, was established in discussion with Europe Beyond Access partners and through the research team's own knowledge of the field. A questionnaire was designed to support semi-structured interviews.

The survey, interviews, and general communication of the research were made as accessible as possible – for instance by providing translations, by letting respondents write in their native language, and by offering the possibility of answering by video or in writing.

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39 List of the public events organised:

- 1) Launch of the Initial findings of the Time to Act's report on 27 April 2021 (organised by the British Council);
- 2) Presentation of Time to Act's initial findings to representatives of the European Commission and the EA-CEA-European Education and Culture Executive Agency on 4 June 2021 (facilitated by the British Council);
- 3) Presentation of Time to Act's initial findings on 8 June 2021 to Europe Beyond Access partners (organised by the British Council);
- 4) Presentation of Time to Act's initial findings on 17 June 2021 (hosted by Acesso Cultura, Portugal);
- 5) Presentation of Time to Act's initial findings on 22 June 2021 (hosted by ONDA, France in partnership with British Council, France);
- 6) Presentation of the Initial findings at IETM Atelier in Avignon on 11 July 2021 (hosted by IETM);
- 7) Discussion-panel around Time to Act's initial findings at IETM Plenary Meeting in Lyon, France on 23 October 2021.

40 The countries where interviews were conducted were France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Spain.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The data collected through the research process, leading to the present report, provides solid evidence for recommendations related to improving knowledge around accessibility and building up greater experience in the field.

These recommendations target:

- Policymakers / funders at national, European and international levels;
- Cultural organisations and culture professionals at national, European and international levels.

Beyond transversal measures, they aim to bring about a firmer individual and institutional understanding of the general obstacles/challenges funders face in securing better accessibility for disabled artists and disabled audiences (in terms of support, training, funding schemes, etc.).

The data collected up to this point, and the feedback on both the first report and this report, will be used as a baseline for the next research phase.

## CHALLENGES

All challenges met during the research originated from the global pandemic and its many repercussions on the culture field at European and international levels. OTM, together with the British Council, tried to find concrete solutions – particularly for the data collection process – in order to take into consideration the challenges met by our target groups. Several tasks had to be delayed and rescheduled from spring to summer and autumn 2020. A constant and productive dialogue, as well as a flexible and responsive approach to the work, allowed OTM to constantly adapt the research methodology and coordination effort in real-time.

However, the research faced a number of limitations, in particular in relation to collecting primary and secondary data:

- **Limited literature available:** Analysis of existing literature on the topics addressed by this report has uncovered some gaps in coverage, as well as asymmetries among individual countries. While substantial literature exists in some countries – particularly the UK, but also France, Ireland and Germany – less evidence has been found for other countries. This may have been affected by the research team's linguistic skills or by documents being

unavailable online, as well as by the fact that research and knowledge-sharing on disability and the performing arts has developed more strongly in some countries than others. This last point has been confirmed by the interviews with organisations, artists and practitioners, which show that in some countries there seems to be less relevant research and practical guidance available to foster accessibility. Factors such as political will and organisational leadership, as shall be seen later, may also be relevant.

- **Availability of stakeholders:** The four target groups listed above were under a lot of pressure, coping with emergency or 'force majeure' measures that had been put into place at very short notice, with designing and implementing contingency plans, with working remotely... or pausing all operations as a result of the impact of Covid-19. Professionals were not always available to answer our messages, calls, or the online survey and understandably were not in a position to make this a priority. The funders' feedback was also limited in terms of the number of answers and the areas of Europe covered. In the set of interviews conducted in October 2021, some target groups (including disabled artists and companies involving disabled artists, as well as independent organisations) were generally more available for interviews than others (in particular, mainstream or established performing arts organisations with no specific mandate on disability).
- **Length of the online questionnaire:** The many sub-topics to investigate, including practices related both to supporting disabled artists and to welcoming disabled audiences, meant the survey was long and divided into separate paths. Only around 30% of respondents completed the entire questionnaire.
- **Difficulty to ensure diversity:** Despite numerous efforts from the research team to reach out to stakeholders across the 42 countries, aided by Europe Beyond Access partners, some performing arts sub-sectors, as well as some European regions, are under-represented. OTM has not always been able to counterbalance under- or over-representation in terms of resources analysed, the profiles of organisations, or the typology of professionals. However, the selection of interviewees in the latest phase has aimed to cover countries that were seen as underrepresented in previous phases.

These challenges should not take away from the quality of the survey's answers, however, as, beyond the pandemic context, problems of geographic representation and data collection are familiar in such large-scale exercises. The survey and research process as a whole also benefits from being combined with interviews, and with the extensive feedback provided during presentations of the preliminary *Time to Act* report.

# 3.

# KNOWLEDGE

**This section examines the knowledge that exists, within performing arts organisations and among professionals, regarding how to make their practices more inclusive and accessible to disabled artists and audiences. Knowledge may be accessible through information, training, resources (including details of best practices) and initial guidance, whether online or offline, and whether offered through organisations or other professionals at local, national, European and/or international levels.**

In general terms, many of the documents identified in the desk research have a 'practical' nature, including toolkits and practical guides aimed at making artistic programmes accessible to disabled artists and making events and venues accessible to disabled audiences. Publications addressing the experience of performing arts professionals in accessing work by disabled artists are less frequent, as will be described below. More generally, existing information tends to be qualitative rather than quantitative.

The aforementioned data gaps confirm the findings of several documents addressing the policy dimension of arts and disability. The European Parliament's 2018 resolution on the 'Structural and financial barriers in the access to culture' stressed the need to gather information on the participation of disabled people in cultural activities.<sup>41</sup> An information briefing for the Parliament published the next year also regretted that, despite the fact that the EU and all of its member states have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which commits them to collecting appropriate information and statistical and research data on rights related to disability, 'there is still a lack of data on the subject, particularly on access to culture'.<sup>42</sup> In 2012, the European Blind Union warned about the fact that progress in cultural accessibility was not being monitored at European and national levels, and this remains a concern to this day, as stated in the cultural agenda published recently by the European Arts & Disability Cluster: 'Europe-wide data [on disabled audiences, arts professionals, and artists] is not available as this has never been researched'.<sup>43</sup>

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41 Structural and financial barriers in the access to culture, European Parliament (2018), para 11. Available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0262\\_EN.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0262_EN.html)

42 Pasikowska-Schnass, M. (2019). Access to cultural life for people with disabilities. Brussels and Strasbourg, European Parliament Research Service (EPRS), p. 2.

43 European Arts & Disability Cluster (2020). Disabled artists in the mainstream: a new cultural agenda for Europe, from the first European Arts & Disability Cluster Meeting, p. 4.



Despite the aforementioned national differences and information gaps, over the years the development of a range of EU-funded projects on culture and disability bringing together partners in several countries has contributed to the emergence of a common language and greater sharing of experiences. The adoption of some European regulations has also contributed to the emergence of a common framework – e.g. the inclusion of full access to cultural activities among the rights related to participation in society in the European Disability Strategy, including a commitment from the Commission to improving accessibility of cultural organisations, activities and events, and supporting national efforts in this respect.<sup>44</sup> However, other standards have given a limited place to access to culture – e.g. the 2019 European Accessibility Act sets out rules on a wide range of products and services, including audiovisual media services as well as e-ticketing and e-commerce (which may facilitate access to culture), but fails to address other aspects of culture.<sup>45</sup>

Among several issues, the online survey developed in the context of this report aimed at assessing the level of knowledge and awareness of accessibility issues among stakeholders in this field. Some of these aspects were further explored in the interviews with organisations and artists. On this basis, the research team could observe several points of interest:

- Many in the sector did not feel confident answering questions on the topic of disability, declaring they were not knowledgeable enough or didn't have enough solid practices in their organisation to provide information or voice an informed opinion.
- They would nevertheless very often insist on the importance of the research itself and / or accessibility as a central issue in the culture field, and frequently pointed to emerging work, or plans to conduct work, to increase accessibility of venues, festivals and organisations.
- They would often suggest connecting with specialised stakeholders who could provide, in their eyes, a more accurate picture of the situation in their context or in their artistic field.
- Many said they were well aware that they were not (pro)active enough in regard to accessibility issues, despite a firm belief that the topic was very relevant (in regard to audience engagement, creative practice, political agenda, etc.).

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44 European Commission (2010). European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Brussels, European Commission.

45 Pasikowska-Schnass (2019).

- These comments came from professionals active in various disciplines, in different organisations, and across European contexts, which demonstrates a general feeling that accessibility is difficult to grasp, that disability is probably understood in a wide variety of ways, and that the cultural field has not yet embarked on the accessibility journey.

Originally made on the basis of initial consultations and the online survey, these findings have generally been confirmed through the interviews conducted in the latest phase of research. At the same time, these interviews have shown some national differences, related to factors such as existing legislation and social awareness of disability issues, which will be explored later.

The progressive development of several EU-funded projects on arts and disability,<sup>46</sup> as well as the attention paid to the issue by some European and international arts networks, including through seminars, conferences and presentations,<sup>47</sup> have led to a broadening of the opportunities for accessing work by disabled artists within the European cultural sector – although, as the evidence from the survey and interviews above suggests, this may only have reached particular segments of the cultural sector.

As suggested by Polish producer and artist Filip Pawlak, '[before] Europe Beyond Access, my contact with other disabled artists' work was negligible. Most of the available activities were in the framework of art therapy instead of professional and high-quality artistic activity [...]

**'International mobility, the circulation of artists, the popularisation of disabled artists' work at European level are the only options to combat the exclusion of disabled artists. Tools at the country level are insufficient.'<sup>48</sup>**

European action may therefore open up opportunities for experiencing work by disabled artists, and for balancing activity across the EU, particularly with respect to countries where performances by disabled artists are presented less frequently. Specific initiatives such as the projects and publications mentioned

46 See e.g. Mittler, S. and L. Reuter, Eds. (2017b). *Un-Label: New Grounds for Inclusive Performing Arts*. Cologne, Sommertheater Pustebblume e.V; European Arts & Disability Cluster (2020). *Disabled artists in the mainstream: a new cultural agenda for Europe, from the first European Arts & Disability Cluster Meeting. E. B. A. B. C. H. Festival*; Mannix, S. (c. 2015). *Unlimited Access: Celebrating Remarkable Work by Disabled Artists in Europe. External Evaluation*. Several locations, British Council, Onassis Cultural Centre, Vo'Arte and Croatian Institute for Movement and Dance; Moomsteatern, Compagnie de l'Oiseau Mouche and Mind the Gap (c. 2017). *Crossing the Line, Crossing the Line*; and Panagiotara, B. (c. 2019). *Dance & Disability. A research on inclusive dance education & training in Greece, Netherlands, Sweden & the UK*. Several locations, Onassis Stegi, Holland Dance Festival, Skanes Dansteater and Stopgap Dance Company.

47 See e.g. Fischer, D. (2016). *Other Abilities, Evolving Aesthetics?* Report from the IETM Valencia Plenary Meeting, 3-6 November 2016. Brussels, IETM; Marsh, K. and J. Burrows, Eds. (2017). *Permission to Stare: Arts and Disability*. Brussels, IETM and British Council; and Prandelli, M. (2019). *Loud Silences: Language, accessibility and cultural hegemony*. Report from the IETM Milan Satellite Meeting, 2-5 May 2019. Brussels, IETM.

48 Quoted in European Arts & Disability Cluster (2020), p. 10.

above, which aim to increase the visibility of and advocate for the field of arts and disability at both national and European level, are therefore significant contributors in this area.

While there has been increasing attention on and opportunities to experience work by disabled artists, studies don't present data on the extent to which these opportunities are being taken up by professionals in the sector, outside of those who take part in the relevant projects directly. We have not been able to find literature presenting evidence of the number, or the proportion, of professionals who have accessed work by disabled artists. While it could be assumed that professionals active in European networks such as IETM, or based in countries or cities where arts and disability organisations are more active, are likely to have encountered more work by disabled artists, there is limited evidence to confirm this in the existing literature.



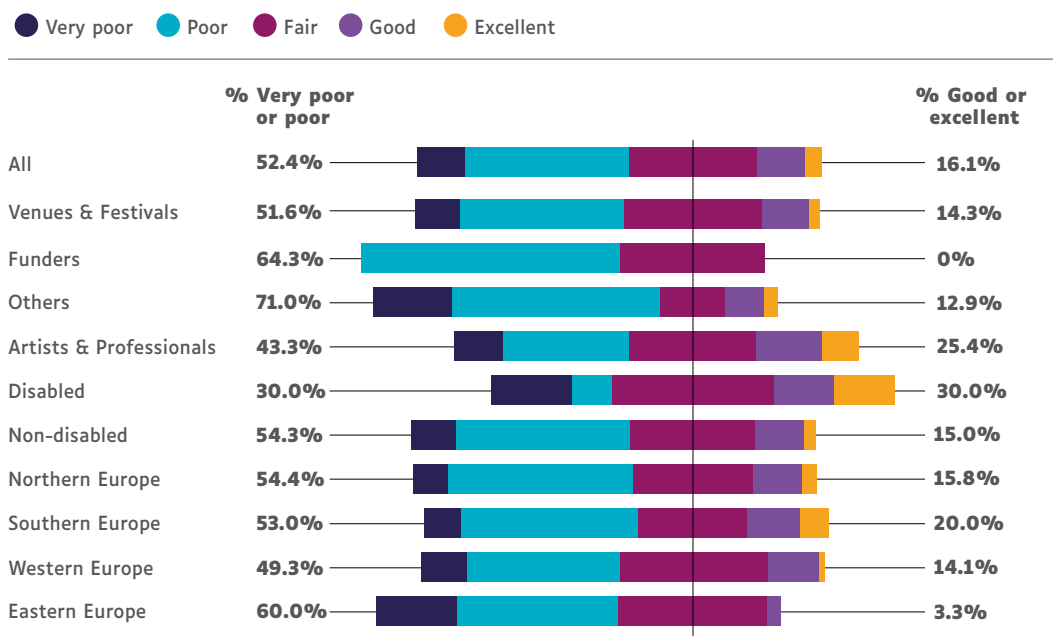
*Mixed Doubles / Re-Call by Venetsiana Kalampaliki,  
featuring Irini Kourouvani and Vivi Christodouloupoulou  
© Photo by Andreas Simopoulos*

In the survey conducted as part of this research, when asked how familiar respondents considered themselves with the works of European disabled artists, only 16.2% of respondents reported Good or Excellent knowledge of work by European disabled artists. More than half (52.4%) rated their knowledge as either Poor or Very Poor.

While differences between the four survey paths are not dramatic, the Other Organisations' respondents (universities, unions, networks, etc.) rated their knowledge the lowest (average of 2.3 when Poor=1, Excellent=5) and Artists and Professionals rated theirs the highest (average of 2.8). Respondents who identified themselves as disabled rated their knowledge higher than those who indicated they were not disabled (average of 3.0 vs 2.5).

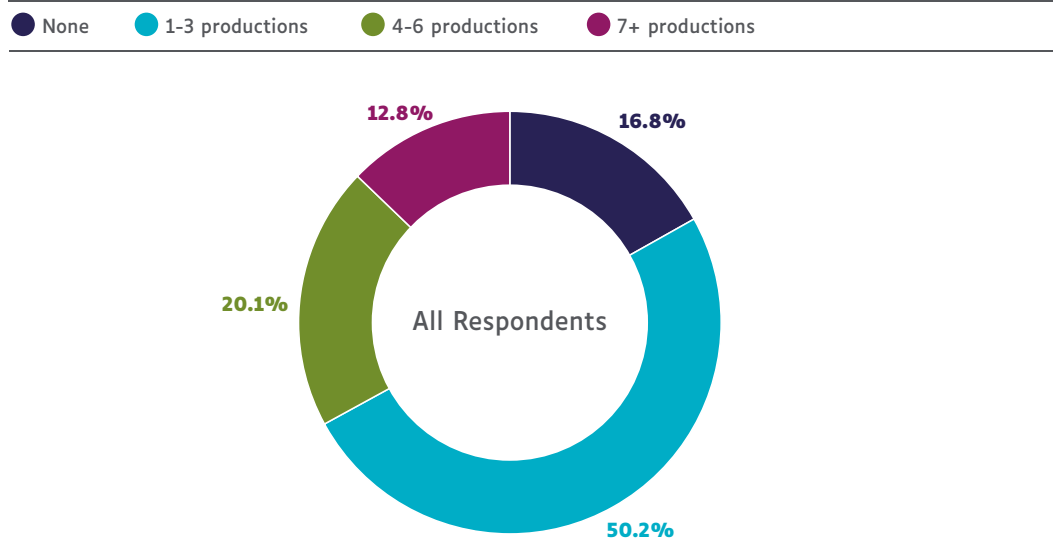
Among Venues & Festivals, higher than average knowledge also correlated with factors including having dedicated staff in charge of accessibility, employing disabled members of staff, having a dedicated budget for adopting accessibility policies, and regularly welcoming disabled artists and audiences:

Variations in levels of knowledge of work by European disabled artists



When asked about the number of productions seen in the last two years, over three-quarters of respondents had seen work by disabled artists in the last two years, with around half having seen 1-3 performances. The number of respondents to have seen 7+ productions was smaller, but disabled respondents were more than twice as likely to have seen 7+ performances than non-disabled respondents.

Number of productions by disabled artists seen in the last two years



Approximately 1 in 6 respondents had not seen any productions by disabled artists in the last two years.

When the results are broken down by path, the largest share for all categories is for 1-3 productions:

Variations in number of productions by disabled artists seen in the last two years

	All respondents	Venues & Festivals	Agencies & Funding Bodies	Other Organisations	Artists & Culture Professionals
None	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>22.6%</b>	<b>20.9%</b>
1-3	<b>50.2%</b>	<b>54.7%</b>	<b>57.1%</b>	<b>38.7%</b>	<b>43.3%</b>
4-6	<b>20.1%</b>	<b>19.3%</b>	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>25.8%</b>	<b>19.4%</b>
7+	<b>12.8%</b>	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>

	Disabled	Non-disabled
None	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>16.6%</b>
1-3	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>50.6%</b>
4-6	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>20.6%</b>
7+	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>12.1%</b>

	Northern Europe <sup>49</sup>	Southern Europe	Western Europe	Eastern Europe
None	<b>12.3%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>23.3%</b>
1-3	<b>50.9%</b>	<b>55.0%</b>	<b>42.3%</b>	<b>56.7%</b>
4-6	<b>26.3%</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>29.6%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>
7+	<b>10.5%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>

When answering the questionnaire or interviews, most respondents mentioned difficulties in pointing to specific information that has helped them navigate accessibility issues. They often complained about the lack of resources available and, when mentioning key information sources at all, tended to list agencies or services available in their own country<sup>50</sup> like Arts & Disability Ireland, Culture for All (Finland), Acesso Cultura Portugal, Fachstelle Kultur inklusiv (Service Culture inclusive, Servizio Cultura inclusiva) of Pro Infirmis (throughout Switzerland) and city-led initiative like Servicestelle Inklusion im Kulturbereich (Dresden, Germany); and several grassroots initiatives led by festivals, platforms or artistic companies themselves like tanzbar\_bremen (Germany), or the Without Walls Access Guide (UK).

Information from governmental bodies is rarely quoted, with the notable exception of public bodies in the UK. Overall, the access to knowledge is limited and certainly information is not circulated widely or transnationally.

49 European regions follow the United Nations geoscheme: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49>

50 Respondents also quoted for example OHAC ([www.accessconsultancy.ie](http://www.accessconsultancy.ie)), Al Di Qua Artists – Alternative Disability Quality Artists (<https://ilcampoinnocente.blogspot.com>), That's Life ([www.thatslife.ie](http://www.thatslife.ie)), the Un-Label project (<https://un-label.eu>), IBK-Kubia (<https://ibk-kubia.de/>), EUCREA ([www.eucreea.de](http://www.eucreea.de)), tanzbar\_bremen (<https://tanzbarbremen.de/>), MAC Georgia (<https://macgeorgia.org/en/>), Culture Without Barriers Foundation – Fundacja Kultury bez Barier (<https://kulturabezbarrier.org>), Accès Culture (<https://accesculture.org>), Graeae (<https://graeae.org>), Teatr 21 (<https://teatr21.pl/publikacje>), and Per Art (<https://www.facebook.com/per.art.arts.inclusion/>).

This report's survey included specific questions on identifying sources of information – coming from individuals or organisations – in regard to supporting / programming works by disabled artists and welcoming disabled audiences. When asked to choose up to 3 sources of advice they rely on for engaging disabled artists, respondents showed a preference for seeking advice from sector peers, from disabled artists and culture professionals themselves, and from specialist service providers. European or international networks were indicated to be more important than national / local ones.

What individual(s) or organisation(s) do you currently look to if you have a question or a need in relation to supporting / programming work by disabled artists?

	All Respondents	Venues & Festivals	Agencies & Funding Bodies
Disabled artists / disabled culture professionals	<b>48.8%</b>	<b>48.7%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
Peer arts organisations (i.e. other venues and festivals)	<b>45.0%</b>	<b>44.3%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
European / International performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>31.8%</b>	<b>31.3%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>
Specialist service providers (e.g. information centres, dedicated agencies...)	<b>31.8%</b>	<b>32.2%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>
Other forms of (international) best practice guidance (e.g. past or current cultural projects, studies and surveys, consultants, federations, unions...)	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>21.7%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>
Local performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>42.9%</b>
National performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>21.7%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>
None	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>	<b>0%</b>
Other	<b>10.1%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>

Respondents also mention other sources of information, mainly local organisations gathering and supporting disabled people from other fields (e.g. health and well-being, sports, education, social associations) and their staff or volunteers (e.g. care takers, teachers, educators).

In interviews, the artistic directors of venues and festivals would sometimes openly admit that they had limited knowledge of disability arts.

**'Today we are more capable of finding artists with participative or environmentally friendly practices than we are disabled artists'.<sup>51</sup>**

51 Non-disabled artistic and executive director, France – online interview, 7 October 2021.

At the same time, evidence drawn from the literature review suggests that in recent years information about how to make artistic programmes accessible to disabled artists has been increasingly available, as exemplified by a number of toolkits, good practice guides, and related documents.<sup>52</sup> The availability of documents is a factor in specialised knowledge, although ideally it should be accompanied by effective use and implementation of relevant recommendations and tips. As mentioned earlier, significant cross-country differences in availability and knowledge of documents are likely to reflect substantial asymmetries in the levels of knowledge among cultural professionals as well. This suggests that there could be potential benefits to translating, adapting and disseminating existing toolkits and other practical tools, which provide valuable information. Interviews with organisations and artists confirm that, in several countries, European exchanges have provided good opportunities to foster awareness about disability and accessibility, at least in some countries. This cross-border knowledge exchange could be made more permanent by taking advantage of existing publications.

Artistic leaders interviewed in the last phase of the research also valued the European dimension highly in existing or planned resources. As one put it:

**'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.'**<sup>53</sup>

However, while there is literature exploring how arts events can be made accessible to disabled audiences, in many countries less attention has been paid to making artistic programmes accessible to disabled artists. This is reflected in the fact that venues have often been made accessible to audiences but not to those working as artists, as seen in a lack of accessible facilities in backstage and dressing rooms.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, national or regional legislation often establishes that public venues should be accessible for audiences but is less detailed as regards accessibility for artists. This may be connected to the prevailing notion, at least in some countries, of disabled people as 'passive' recipients of culture, rather than 'active' participants.<sup>55</sup>

52 See e.g. Cemaforre (2009). *Accessibilité et spectacle vivant. Guide pratique*. Paris, Ministère de la culture et de la communication et Centre national de ressources pour l'accessibilité des loisirs et de la culture (Cemaforre); Mittler and Reuter (2017); and Festival.Org (2020). *Outdoor Arts Festivals and Events: Access Guide. To support festivals and events in finding inclusive practices when working with D/deaf and disabled audiences and artists*. Manchester, Without Walls.

53 Non-disabled artistic and executive director, France – online interview, 7 October 2021.

54 Karhunen, M. (2020). 'Disabled artists, gatekeepers and new standards.' #StopHatredNow seminar, 11 May 2020, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R33pV9kAS28&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R33pV9kAS28&feature=emb_title)

55 Panagiotara (c. 2019).

Many interviewed artists and public discussion participants insisted, however, that 'even if laws exist, they are not implemented'<sup>56</sup> and physical access to cultural venues was far from having been achieved across Europe. Professionals repeatedly demanded that public funding be attached to strict monitoring on access requirements.

In this report's online survey, a question regarding where respondents seek advice for engaging disabled audiences indicated that specialist service providers were important sources, behind disabled artists themselves and peers in the sector.

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What individual(s) or organisation(s) do you currently look to if you have a question or a need in relation to engaging with disabled audiences?

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	All Respondents	Venues & Festivals	Artists & Culture Professionals	Other Organisations	Agencies & Funding Bodies
Peer arts organisations (i.e. other venues and festivals)	<b>45.3%</b>	<b>44.7%</b>	<b>51.9%</b>	<b>39.1%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>
Disabled artists / disabled culture professionals	<b>40.7%</b>	<b>35.8%</b>	<b>53.7%</b>	<b>43.5%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>
Specialist service providers (e.g. information centres, dedicated agencies...)	<b>40.2%</b>	<b>42.3%</b>	<b>29.6%</b>	<b>47.8%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
European / International performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>23.6%</b>	<b>20.4%</b>	<b>26.1%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>
National performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>20.6%</b>	<b>18.7%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>21.7%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>
Local performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>20.1%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>26.1%</b>	<b>35.7%</b>
Other forms of (international) best practice guidance (e.g. past or current cultural projects, studies and surveys, consultants, federations, unions...)	<b>17.8%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>	<b>11.1%</b>	<b>30.4%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>
Other	<b>8.9%</b>	<b>8.1%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>	<b>17.4%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>
None	<b>7.9%</b>	<b>4.9%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>8.7%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>

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<sup>56</sup> Disabled artist, Romania – online interview, 8 October 2021.



Again here, respondents mention local health and well-being, education, sports, social associations not active in the arts field as such. In their comments, particularly Festivals & Venues, they insist on reaching out to disabled people, from artists to internal collaborators and audience members with a lived experience.

Interviews and public discussions confirmed that cultural professionals have a very good level of knowledge in relation to welcoming disabled audiences, at least in some countries. Even if physical disabilities are more likely to be addressed, venues and festivals are often familiar with or have in place a number of measures (from hearing loops to audio descriptions, step-free access, or marketing materials for visually impaired people). However, they often mention the costs related to adopting such initiatives, which sometimes prevent them from implementing them across their artistic programmes. In some EU member states and in some European countries outside the EU there seems to be less emphasis on making venues accessible overall.

# 4.

# EXPERIENCE

Eurostat shows that the EU 27 has more than 42 million disabled people aged 15–64 (in the EU 27 in 2012), equivalent to 12.8% of the population in that age range.<sup>57</sup> That figure rises rapidly when you extend the definition of disability to those who acquire it in later life, becoming 1 in 5 people (19%) in the European population.<sup>58</sup>

Across Europe, disabled audiences, arts professionals, and artists all report significant barriers to full participation in culture.

**This section deals with the question of experience: experience of seeing work by disabled artists, experience of embedding disabled artists in programming, and experience of engaging disabled audiences. Its observations are mostly taken from the results of this report's online survey, complemented by an analysis of existing literature and discussions with European and international cultural stakeholders.**

In order to give some context to this section, institutional respondents to the open survey were asked whether they had members of staff in their organisation who were responsible for developing accessibility policies and / or practices, as well as whether they had any dedicated budget to implement these.

In the case of Venues & Festivals respondents, 51.9% had a member of staff with responsibility for developing accessibility policies and / or practices, while for respondents on the Funders track this figure was 85.7%. Around a third of Venues & Festivals indicated they had a dedicated budget for adopting and implementing accessibility policies.

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57 Eurostat (2015). 'Disability statistics - prevalence and demographics'. Luxembourg: Eurostat <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/34409.pdf>

58 According to the Papworth Trust as well as the European Parliament.

## **ENGAGING WITH DISABLED ARTISTS**

This subsection refers first to the results of the survey and then to existing literature, complemented with findings from the public discussions and interviews where relevant.

Experiencing work by disabled artists is first a question of becoming aware of it. Questioned about where they, or the heads of their organisations, discovered new work by disabled artists, respondents' answers differed quite strongly by path. For Venues & Festivals, direct contact with companies / artists was the most favoured option, at 48.6%. For respondents on both the Artists & Professionals and Other Organisations paths, around half indicated that they did not look for work by disabled artists at all. For Venues & Festivals this figure was much lower, at 18.7%.

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Which of the following do you / artistic leaders in your organisation use to look for new work by disabled artists?

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	All Respondents	Venues & Festivals	Artists & Culture Professionals	Other Organisations
Direct contact with companies, tour bookers and agents	<b>36.9%</b>	<b>48.6%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>
International peers and European / international performing arts networks	<b>35.8%</b>	<b>31.8%</b>	<b>39.7%</b>	<b>45.5%</b>
None of the above – they don't look for new work by disabled artists	<b>31.0%</b>	<b>18.7%</b>	<b>46.6%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
National peers and national performing arts networks	<b>28.3%</b>	<b>24.3%</b>	<b>31.0%</b>	<b>40.9%</b>
Online and offline media (e.g. magazines, websites, online directories...)	<b>27.3%</b>	<b>21.5%</b>	<b>37.9%</b>	<b>27.3%</b>
Dedicated showcases	<b>23.5%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>32.8%</b>	<b>50.0%</b>
Open calls	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>
Regional and national fairs and festivals	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>21.5%</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>
Other	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>13.1%</b>	<b>6.9%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>

Among those who did search for work, peers (both national and international) were an important source of information across all paths, as was online and offline media (especially for Artists & Professionals and Other Organisations). In any case, a typical respondent made use of several different channels to discover work.

When detailing other ways to scout for artistic work than the ones proposed in the questionnaire, some respondents specified the international networks they were following (e.g. ASSITEJ-International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People, IIAN-International inclusive Arts Network). It is worth mentioning that respondents from the Artists & Culture Professionals and Other Organisations paths often mentioned social media as a place to discover new work by disabled artists. Some respondents from the Venues & Festivals path also declared their artistic leaders were not specifically looking for work by disabled artists but scouting for work transversally ('They usually look for work in international performing arts festivals / events. But they don't specifically search for disabled artists.'<sup>59</sup>; 'The artistic leaders aren't looking for work yet or at least not on a regular basis. That is where our team comes in.'<sup>60</sup>). Also, several of them made it clear this was not their focus when scouting for work ('Being disabled is not a criteria on which we select, but it's not a dealbreaker either.'<sup>61</sup>; 'In our organisation we look for artistic quality no matter the artists'<sup>62</sup>)



Marc Brew and Bora Kim perform 공.호. Zero: Restriction, Body and Time. Photo © Susan Hay

Interviews conducted with venues, festivals and artists suggests that the visibility of work by disabled artists may differ significantly across countries: whereas in some there has been progress over the years and work by disabled artists has gained some visibility in mainstream or specialised performing arts markets, in other countries there is very limited visibility for such work, and fewer productions by disabled artists and companies, due to structural weaknesses such as a lack of adapted facilities for creation and production or an absence of institutional support.

59 Non-disabled communication manager, outdoor arts centre, Portugal – answer to the online survey 2020.

60 Non-disabled project leader accessibility programme, festival, The Netherlands – answer to the online survey 2020.

61 Non-disabled artistic coordinator, regional centre, Belgium – answer to the online survey 2020.

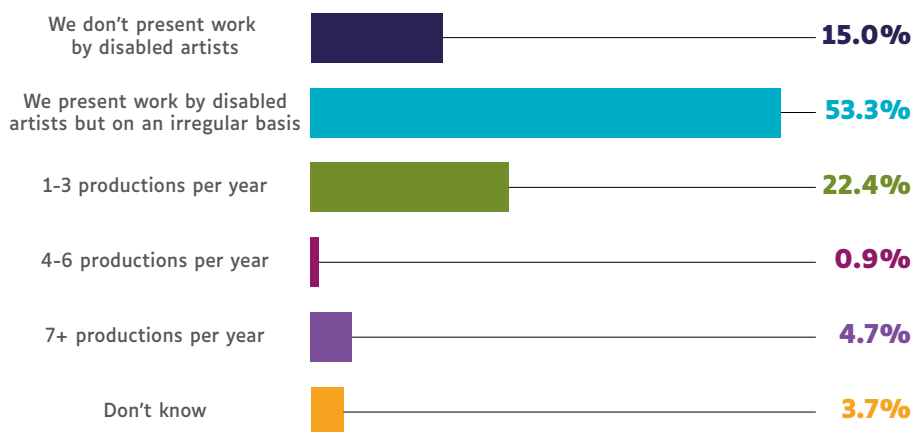
62 Non-disabled cultural manager, theatre, Bulgaria – answer to the online survey 2020.

Venues & Festivals were additionally asked whether they presented work by disabled artists regularly, the steps they'd taken to improve access for artists, and how confident they were of the accessibility of their artistic programmes.

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Does your organisation support/present work by disabled artists on a regular basis?

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81.3% of respondents from the Venues & Festivals path indicated they present work by disabled artists. However, 53.3% of respondents only presented such work on an irregular / occasional basis. Less than 6% of the Venues & Festivals surveyed presented four or more productions per year. Some of the artists and companies interviewed for this report also suggested that where work by disabled artists has been integrated into the programming of mainstream venues or festivals, this is often done through a quota system, with a small, relatively stable number of shows presented each season: 'The idea that integrated dance is something strange tends to prevail, and in order to include it in standard programmes public authorities have turned it into a quota. It should not be the case, but it is.'<sup>63</sup> Other voices in public presentations suggested that quotas might be a necessary (and temporary) step to encourage change and increase the offer.

During interviews, several 'mainstream' programmers (especially those based in Western Europe) shared that they had recently begun presenting work by or with disabled artists as a result of their desire to address transversal societal issues in their curation and to represent diversity on stage. Often, these artists were from the same country as the interviewee. Some also mentioned that being part of European cooperation projects had allowed them to discover artistic works made by disabled artists and to invite them to perform. Programmers insisted on the artistic quality of these projects, and on the fact that they fit the themes and vision of the host organisation and were not labelled as disability arts. Disabled artists, in contrast, often feel 'mainstream' stages are closed for them. An Italian deaf choreographer, for

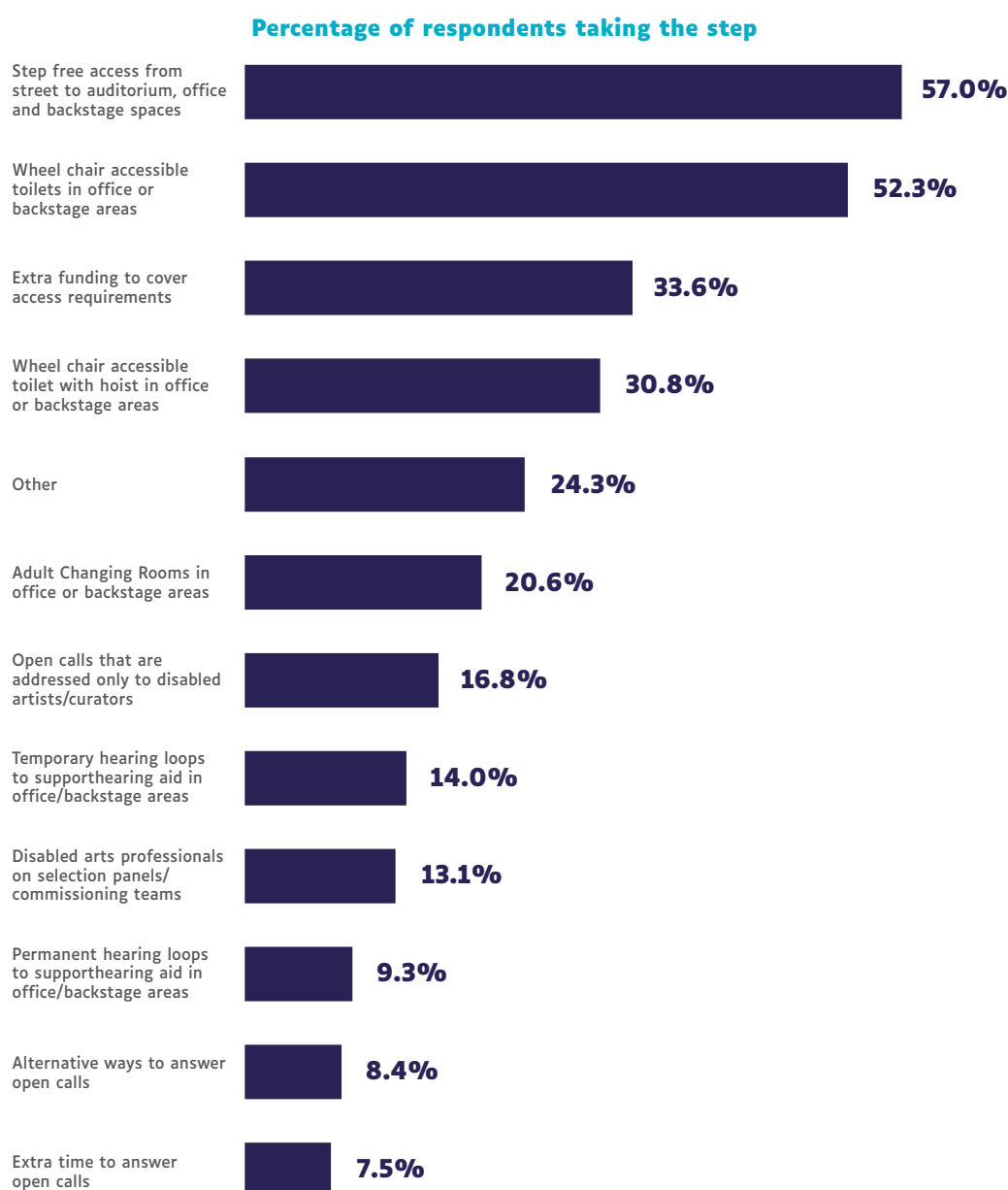
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63 Non-disabled manager, integrated dance company and disability festival, Spain – phone interview, 8 October 2021.

example, mentioned that they have never seen the work of another disabled artist in the European festivals where they have presented their work: 'I have the feeling they are not invited to festivals or artistic programmes along with able artists.'<sup>64</sup>

Asked what steps they had taken to improve access for disabled artists, Venues & Festivals were more likely to have made improvements to building infrastructure, such as providing step free access and wheelchair accessible toilets. However, around a third also indicated that they provided extra funding to cover access requirements more broadly.

What steps has your organisation taken to improve access?

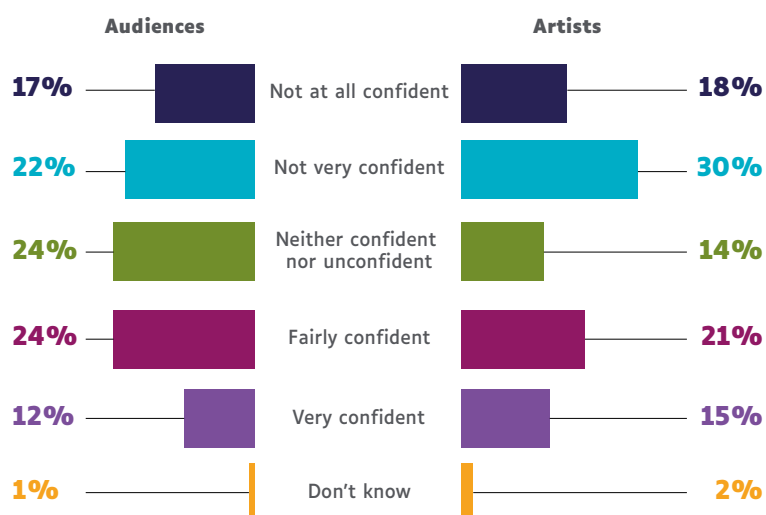


64 Deaf choreographer, artistic company, Italy/France – written interview, 15 October 2021.

Survey respondents very often used the category Other to indicate they were not proposing any of the measures listed ('We didn't take any steps to improve access.'<sup>65</sup>; 'We haven't yet worked on that.'<sup>66</sup>; 'No specific measures are deployed in our activities or methodologies but we encourage diversity.'<sup>67</sup>) However, some detailed initiatives that were building-specific or related to providing an accessible experience (e.g. hearing loops, sign language).

Respondents were also invited to give comments with their answers. Their remarks indicate that, when it comes to accessibility initiatives, they concentrate first on audiences ('we focus more on accessibility for disabled audiences'; 'We don't have specific programmes for disabled artists or curators, they can be hosted as other people following the quality of their work as artists')<sup>68</sup> and on physical access ('We moved into our own studio at a leading arts venue and worked with the arts venue staff to ensure inclusive practice was implemented throughout').<sup>69</sup>

Comparison of confidence: Making programmes accessible for disabled audiences vs making accessible for disabled artists



In public discussions and interviews, physical access often came up as a barrier to hosting disabled artists, as many work spaces (residency centres that provide accommodation, studios, rehearsal spaces, etc.) are not adequately equipped, and venues are often dependent on public investment to conduct work, or on special authorisation when it comes to listed heritage buildings. Beyond building-specific issues, disabled artists mentioned other needs in relation to producing and distributing artistic work (from longer production processes to sign language translation). This report will come back to them later.

65 Non-disabled communication and grant manager, theatre, Tunisia – answer to the online survey 2020.

66 Non-disabled director, dance venue, Slovenia – answer to the online survey 2020.

67 Non-disabled general manager, outdoor arts centre, Tunisia – answer to the online survey 2020.

68 Non-disabled artistic director, festival, The Netherlands, and able artistic director, dance centre, Italy – answers to the online survey 2020.

69 Non-disabled artistic director, theatre company, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

Comments from the survey underline that having one or more disabled staff members within an organisation raises awareness of specific issues and opens up internal conversations in a way that can translate to more inclusive practices. Of course, some respondents had a remarkable level of awareness and a lot of experience of integrating and mainstreaming accessibility issues across their activities:

- 'In the last two years our team has been enriched with two positions reserved for people with physical or mental discomfort, in collaboration with a specific office of the provincial administration, dedicated to inclusion and integration.'<sup>70</sup>
- 'Our programme [...] focusing on accessibility was started by a disabled employee. The programme started in 2018, and since then we have been able to cater to audiences with disabilities much better (specifically people who are deaf or hard of hearing, people who have a visual impairment, people who might need more relaxed performances and people who have trouble with mobility). Again, we definitely look to programme disabled artists, but in The Netherlands it's not even evident yet that disabled people are able to come to theatre in the first place. We're definitely not there yet.'<sup>71</sup>

Similar views were echoed spontaneously in some of the conducted interviews, where interviewees argued that positive changes had often been led by disabled members of staff, or staff who were particularly concerned about disability issues or who suggested that one way to foster change would be to employ disabled people as part of a core team or as associate artists on a temporary basis. At the same time, in public discussions some voiced their concern<sup>72</sup> in relation to organisations reaching out to disabled artists for all this information, as if their status made them specialists on disability arts issues, or when this expertise was not recognised and remunerated, and were wondering if other organisations should be providing such guidance.

A majority of survey respondents said they didn't yet commission work by disabled artists, or that they had never worked with disabled artistic directors, programmers or curators. Most respondents in the Venues & Festivals category were candid about their limitations, but again we notice some outstanding examples, like this one:

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70 Non-disabled artistic director, dance festival, Italy – answer to the online survey 2020.

71 Non-disabled project leader accessibility programme, festival, The Netherlands – answer to the online survey 2020.

72 For example disabled dance artist and cultural anthropologist Tanja Erhart (Austria / United Kingdom) points out: 'it is not inherently a disabled staff member or a disabled artist's job, just because they are disabled, to share and bring in their lived experiences to raise awareness or give information about access. This is extra labour, social, emotional, political, economical.' See <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=503737997430597>



'Since 2017 [we have been] fundraising specifically to programme work by disabled artists. The programme strand [...] brings 6 national and international guest performances to the venue. The project [...] is a four-year partnership project with 7 other dance organisations in Berlin to bring forward a structural change within the Berlin dance sector by supporting training through workshops, research labs, residencies, paid dance training, co-production and more. [...] both initiatives are now led by one disabled and one non-disabled project leader (the non-disabled one being myself). Both have pushed the presence of disabled artists [...] immensely. We have a research board of five international disabled artists and a pool of local disabled artists that we employ as paid experts and advisers to help us raise the level of our venue's accessibility – as a building but also on the level of communication / marketing and the access options we offer for our programme (audio description, sign language interpretation, a pick up service for visually impaired audience members, etc). All staff members receive disability awareness training specifically for their departments, although this is a fairly new development and still in progress. From autumn 2020 we aim to set up a working group with one member of each department that meets monthly to discuss all matters around access.

**'In the last three years the accessibility of the venue has risen noticeably. However, we continue to learn every day, still need to improve lots of processes and communication, and still only have one disabled staff member. We consider it a long way ahead of us until we can properly call ourselves as an organisation, and our building, accessible.'**<sup>73</sup>

Reflecting discussions happening in several fora, some respondents emphasised that, beyond disability, artistic quality is always paramount: 'The festival always hosts some shows performed by disabled artists or companies. The shows are chosen on the basis of the quality of the choreography and the performers. The communication does not indicate the disability of the artists, unless this is an explicit request from them. The affirmative actions of the festival are in fact constant in different contexts (gender gap, disability, ethnicity), but not declared in any stigmatising form.'<sup>74</sup> This view was echoed in public discussions and in the interviews conducted with both 'mainstream' organisations and disabled artists, who emphasised the need to assess work on the basis of artistic quality criteria ('I don't make disabled people dance, I make dance'; 'I am a dancer and it's not my wheelchair which does the art work').<sup>75</sup> In some countries,

73 Non-disabled producer, venue, Germany – answer to the online survey 2020.

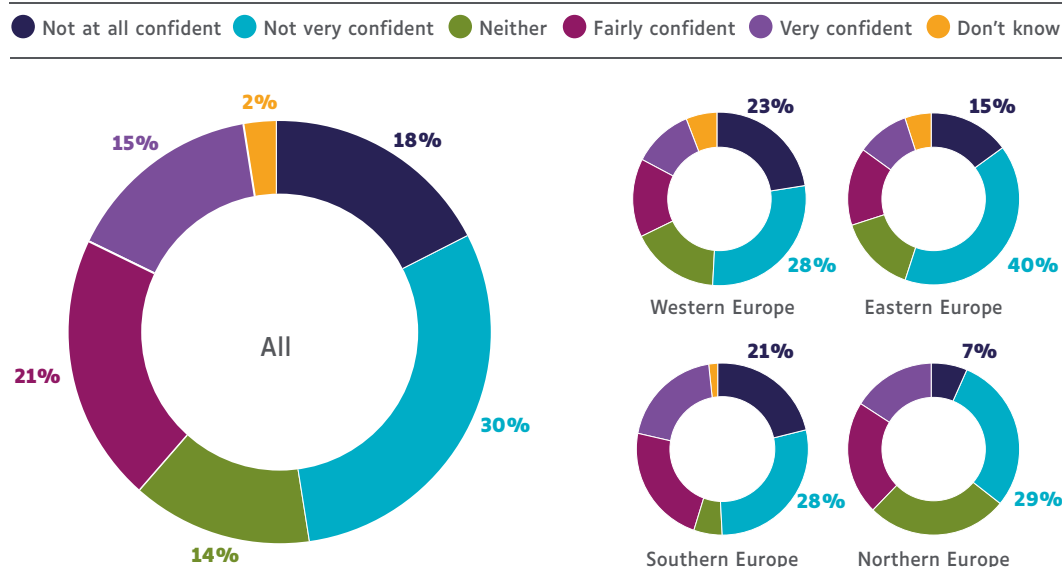
74 Non-disabled artistic director, dance festival, Italy – answer to the online survey 2020.

75 Disabled choreographer, artistic company, France – public discussion, 23 October 2021.

interviewees expressed concern about the perception that productions involving disabled participants were sometimes included as a form of 'charity' rather than on the basis of their artistic merit ('I have never identified myself as disabled even though I am. First for me it was important to improve myself as an artist and to be recognised for that').<sup>76</sup>

In spite of these variations in experience, overall a majority of Venues & Festivals respondents were either fairly or very confident that their artistic programmes are accessible to disabled artists. Unsurprisingly, the survey results show higher levels of confidence correlating with factors such as having staff members responsible for accessibility, employing disabled staff, and having a dedicated budget for implementing accessibility policies. Interestingly, information obtained through the survey often also seemed to show that 'mainstream' venues and festivals believed more progress had been achieved in accessibility and inclusion than did disabled artists and companies. In some cases, mainstream organisations emphasised that they were open to everyone and well connected to the arts sector, and therefore could identify existing needs, including among disabled artists and companies, whereas the disabled artists and companies themselves felt their specific needs were not well understood.

How confident are you that the artistic programmes of your organisation / venues and festivals in Europe are accessible to disabled artists?



The high level of confidence among respondents raises a number of questions, especially when considering the feedback of disabled practitioners. Interviews and public discussions provided an opportunity to dig deeper into this high level of self-evaluated awareness. In these conversations it was particularly the case that some artistic leaders of venues and festivals do not accurately measure the accessibility of their website, promotional materials, technical riders, etc. – and indeed the conversations were an opportunity for them to realise they could do more. Currently, few venues or festivals publish open calls in accessible formats,

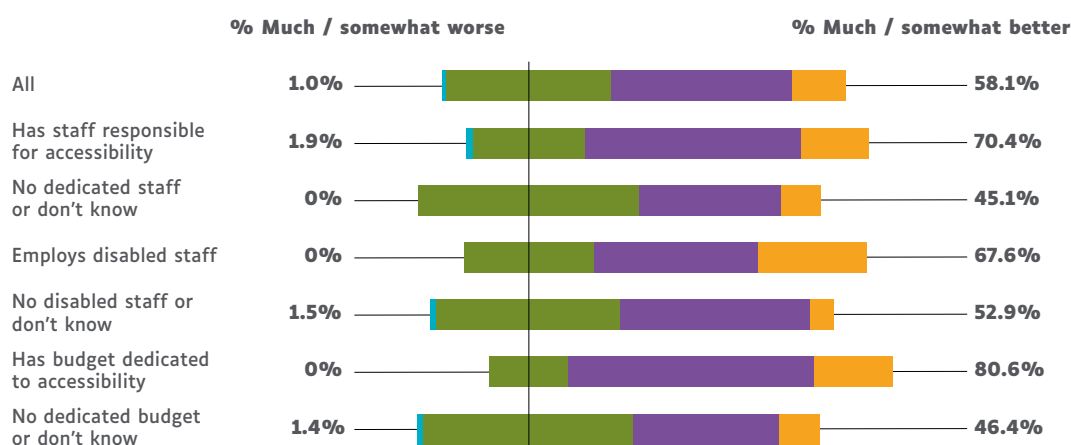
76 Deaf choreographer, artistic company, Italy/France – written interview, 15 October 2021.

and artistic leaders / curators interviewed understood that the ways they get to know work (for instance through recommendations from peers and artists) might be a barrier preventing disabled artists from accessing the opportunities they offer ('We don't publish open calls. I believe in human encounters and have personal networks through which to be introduced to deaf and disabled artists.').<sup>77</sup>

Asked whether accessibility for disabled artists had gotten better or worse in their organisation over the last 5 years, a majority felt accessibility had become somewhat or much better. Only 1% indicated it had become worse:

In the last 5 years has accessibility for disabled artists become better or worse in your organisation?

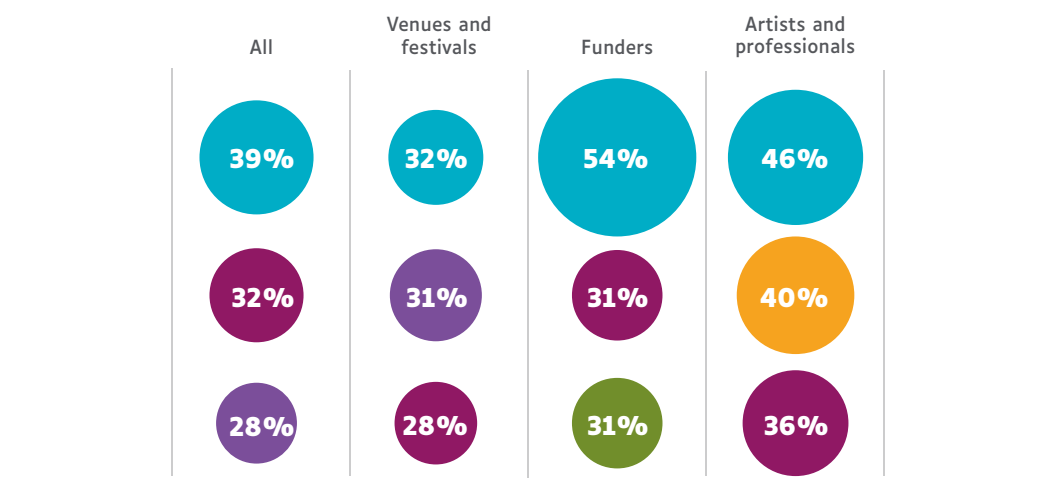
● Much worse   ● Somewhat worse   ● Stayed about the same   ● Somewhat better   ● Much better



Survey respondents on all paths were asked which obstacles were preventing their own organisation, or the field at large, from supporting work by disabled artists. At 50.6%, lack of funding was the most commonly indicated obstacle (except for respondents on the Agencies & Funding Bodies path, who rated it significantly lower). The two next highest ranked obstacles were lack of knowledge of work by disabled artists in the respondent's own country (38.8%) and lack of knowledge of such work in Europe and internationally (32%). Artists & Professionals felt that lack of knowledge on how to meet access requirements was a significant obstacle for the field (40%), while for Venues & Festivals themselves this was a much less common choice (13.5%).

77 Non-disabled artistic and executive director, performing arts venue, France – online interview, 18 October 2021.

What are the 3 main obstacles preventing your organisation / the artistic programmes of European venues and festivals from supporting work by disabled artists?



- Lack of knowledge of work by disabled artists in your country
- Lack of knowledge of work by disabled artists in Europe/internationally
- Lack of work made by disabled artists
- Lack of official inclusive guidelines (from local, regional or national governments or agencies)
- Lack of knowledge on how to meet access requirements



*Rose la Rose by Carolin Jüngst & Lisa Rykena, featuring Amelia Lander-Cavallo and Tian Rotteveel © Photo by Jonas Fischer*

	All Respondents	Venues & Festivals	Artists & Culture Professionals	Agencies & Funding Bodies	Other Organisations
Lack of funding to develop accessibility for disabled artists	<b>50.6%</b>	<b>53.1%</b>	<b>54.0%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>47.4%</b>
Lack of knowledge of work by disabled artists in my country	<b>38.8%</b>	<b>32.3%</b>	<b>46.0%</b>	<b>53.8%</b>	<b>42.1%</b>
Lack of knowledge of work by disabled artists in Europe / internationally	<b>32.0%</b>	<b>28.1%</b>	<b>36.0%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>42.1%</b>
Lack of work made by disabled artists	<b>27.5%</b>	<b>31.3%</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	-	<b>31.6%</b>
Lack of official inclusive guidelines (from local, regional or national governments or agencies)	<b>24.2%</b>	<b>22.9%</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>21.1%</b>
Lack of knowledge on how to meet access requirements	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>13.5%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	-	<b>21.1%</b>
Lack of training for staff	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>17.7%</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>42.1%</b>
Lack of audience interest for work by disabled artists	<b>16.9%</b>	<b>17.7%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	-	<b>15.8%</b>
Low quality of work made by disabled artists	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>6.0%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>10.5%</b>
Other	<b>11.8%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>10.5%</b>
Lack of interest within your organisation in work by disabled artists	<b>9.0%</b>	<b>9.4%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>5.3%</b>
No mandate from board / government	<b>2.2%</b>	-	-	<b>30.8%</b>	-
lack of disability experts in panels / juries	<b>1.7%</b>	-	-	<b>23.1%</b>	-
Lack of demand from the field	<b>0.6%</b>	-	-	<b>7.7%</b>	-

Survey respondents often used the Other category to insist on the lack of human and financial resources that the Venues & Festivals were facing to properly work on access issues in a consistent manner, from covering additional costs (especially when working internationally) to providing support across the year rather than a project basis. Some respondents pointed out the limitations of festivals in providing continuous work, as well as juggling with constraints such as using different venues or working with different local partners having their own agendas and limitations. A couple of comments directly pointed out the lack of proper payment for disabled artists due to a general lack of funding, as well as a lack of fair recognition of the work and in some cases harmful national policies (e.g. a situation where a disabled person can lose an allowance due to taking on paid work).

Survey respondents from the Artists & Culture Professionals path indicated in Other that the appreciation of artistic quality was also an issue ('Our main problem is the lack of knowledge or acceptance of the disability art as such'<sup>78</sup>; 'Venues and programmers limited vision'<sup>79</sup>; 'There is also a divide between work of high artistic quality and work of high access quality, where the quality of the work is based on the experience of making work by the members of a community. Both are very valuable, but these are issues that affect programming.'<sup>80</sup>)

Interviews with organisations and artists frequently returned to a lack of funding, clear policy guidelines, and knowledge of how to meet access requirements in venues and festivals. Another recurring element was broader reflections on the limited awareness of disability issues in society, and on how broad societal change was necessary, including in the education system, to transform views around disability: 'First of all, we need education about disability itself. We need to work on basic knowledge, on breaking prejudices. People need to understand that disabled people are disabled not by their own impairments, but by a society that is not accessible and is full of prejudice.'<sup>81</sup>

In the face of national differences, it is interesting to pay attention to the enabling factors and key actors that have contributed to making arts and disability more prominent in some arts scenes. According to the literature review, existing research suggests that the following aspects and agents are particularly significant:

- **Policy frameworks and support:** a comparative report on dance and disability conducted by Betina Panagiotara in four European countries highlighted the role played by the formal adoption of public cultural policies related to inclusion and accessibility, which can contribute to

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78 Non-disabled artistic director, integrated dance company, Georgia – answer to the online survey 2020.

79 Artistic director, theatre company, Ireland – answer to the online survey 2020.

80 Non-disabled board member, dance organisation, Spain – answer to the online survey 2020.

81 Disabled festival director and disability rights advocate, Serbia – written interview, 18 October 2021.

the emergence of arts and disability as a policy issue and lead to change within the sector: 'cultural policy is core to the development, visibility, and sustainability of dance and disability'.<sup>82</sup> Kate Marsh and Jonathan Burrows have also observed, based on the UK experience, how the development and progression of art that includes and is made by people with disability is dependent on policies and political framework for support'.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, Arts & Disability Ireland has highlighted the impact of its partnership with the Arts Council of Ireland in terms of training, mentoring and the broadening of work opportunities for disabled artists.<sup>84</sup> These ideas are in line with findings from the online survey and interviews, where lack of funding has been identified as the main obstacle to the adoption of measures for programming work by disabled artists and fostering accessibility for disabled audiences.

- **Support from private foundations:** the aforementioned research by Betina Panagiotara also stressed the leading role of some grassroots initiatives and private organisations, such as foundations (e.g. the Onassis Stegi foundation in Greece), in fostering progress, including through engagement in international projects that lead to knowledge exchange and peer-learning.
  
- **Curators, producers, programmers and educational institutions as 'gatekeepers':** in addition to public authorities and other funding bodies, curators, producers and programmers have a significant role in '[educating] the general public, [encouraging] them to keep an open mind and enjoy the arts without any bias [...] [by taking] chances on new companies and new styles of performance, including artists with different abilities'.<sup>85</sup> In order to achieve this, it has been proposed that it is necessary to take measures aimed at 'educating' gatekeepers so that they are familiar with disability issues and can take into account diverse abilities.<sup>86</sup>
  
- In the longer term, **educational institutions** can also contribute to a more level playing field for disabled artists, through the development of inclusive pedagogical approaches in their educational curricula, the introduction of inclusive dance methodologies for teachers, and the organisation of educational activities.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, lack of access to training stands as a significant obstacle for disabled artists, as highlighted both by the literature review and some of the conducted interviews.<sup>88</sup>

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82 Panagiotara (c. 2019), p. 62

83 Marsh and Burrows (2017), p. 27.

84 Arts & Disability Ireland (2017). *Leading Change in Arts and Culture: Strategic Plan 2017-2021*. Dublin, Arts & Disability Ireland.

85 Marsh and Burrows (2017), pp. 29-30.

86 Karhunen (2020).

87 Panagiotara (c. 2019).

88 See e.g. Nadja Dias, quoted in Fischer (2016), and Annie Hanauer, quoted in Marsh and Burrows (2017).

- Further to changing practices among curators, producers, programmers and educational institutions, Marsh and Burrows have suggested it would also be necessary to make gatekeepers more diverse themselves, so as to ensure they better resemble the overall make-up of the population.<sup>89</sup> The need to make performing arts organisations more diverse, as a way to foster an understanding of the specific needs of disabled artists and make them feel less different, also emerged in some interviews ('As a performing arts organisation, you should have a less homogeneous group of people around you... [So that] as an artist you don't feel like the exception, you are not the 'freak', or the 'flag' that a progressive organisation has put in place. You need more time, and care, and production resources adequate to your needs, but also the sensation of not being alone, that you don't represent the exception, but that the organisation has been designed to create a fabric that is actually inclusive of many different bodies, means and cultures.').<sup>90</sup>
- Active engagement of disability-led companies and other arts and disability stakeholders:** arguably, it is very often the active engagement of disability-led companies, as well as inclusive or integrated companies and other organisations active in the arts and disability sector, that have made inroads towards rendering the arts sector more accessible to disabled artists. In some countries, specialised organisations and grassroots initiatives (e.g. Shape Arts in the UK, Arts & Disability Ireland, Cemaforre in France, EUCREA and Culture for All in Finland, Al Di Qua in Italy, etc.) have been instrumental in providing awareness-raising, training, mentorship, showcasing, and other forms of support. While their role is essential, some interviewees also suggested that:

**'Long-term progress should rely less on the goodwill and efforts of engaged individuals and organisations, including some who operate on a voluntary basis, and more on structural change fostered by public authorities.'**<sup>91</sup>

- The role of mediators and network brokers:** partly related to the latter category are organisations and professionals who have worked to make it easier for different stakeholders within arts and disability to connect with each other, as well as the broader arts sector. Indeed, the need for specialised profiles and organisations facilitating collaboration emerges as a significant factor. Organisations involved in European cooperation projects have translators and other specialist staff to support the needs of disabled artists.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, organisations such as the British Council and networks

89 Marsh and Burrows (2017)

90 Non-disabled festival manager and advisor on disability issues, Italy – online interview, 21 October 2021.

91 Non-disabled manager, integrated dance company, Greece – online interview, 7 October 2021.

92 Moomsteatern, Compagnie de l'Oiseau Mouche et al. (c. 2017).



such as IETM have contributed to enabling cross-border collaboration and networking in Europe.

- **Early planning of disabled artists' needs:** at a more operational level, existing literature provides guidance on how to ensure that disabled artists' needs are taken into consideration when planning an event, including in terms of mobility, accommodation, costs, etc. Related to this is the need to make all staff aware of access requirements and the necessity of being patient, encouraging and adaptable.<sup>93</sup> Limited awareness of disability issues and of how standard procedures need to be adapted to the specific needs of disabled artists, including e.g. in terms of time and accessible spaces, also emerged as an important issue for several interviewees:

**'Production methods need to be adapted: more time, more space and more resources, which is in conflict with normative ways of producing stage work.'**<sup>94</sup>

'Allowing more time for disabled artists to work in your venue – many of us cannot work very long days of 12+ hours, and need more rest than our peers may do. Giving us very tight get in, tech rehearsal, and get out times can make it impossible for us to accept a performance offer, knowing that we'll have to struggle through with fatigue and adverse effects to our wellbeing').<sup>95</sup>

- **Reaching mainstream audiences:** similarly, a range of techniques have been identified in order to make audiences more interested in and open to accessing work by disabled artists, including opening access to rehearsals, conducting artist-led workshops in schools before or after a performance, and organising practical workshops and talks with venues to involve audiences and explain the work and aims of arts companies.<sup>96</sup>

The contribution of these factors and agents can ultimately foster, and in turn can be facilitated by, what may be called a 'cultural change' as regards disability, inclusion and rights – namely, the understanding that addressing disability is a responsibility of the broader arts sector rather than of only a few specialised organisations, which also relates to guaranteeing human rights for everyone. This was summarised by producer Jo Verrent at a conference in Galway in 2016 as follows: 'This isn't something that is just about disabled artists working in isolation, this is about a community, the cultural community, really moving forward together to embed this kind of practice within everybody's work...'<sup>97</sup>

93 Festival.org (2020).

94 Disabled producer and artist, theatre venue, Poland - public discussion, 23 October 2021.

95 Anonymous contributor, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

96 Moomsteatern, Compagnie de l'Oiseau Mouche et al. (c. 2017).

97 Quoted in Arts & Disability Ireland (2017), p. 16.

This may be seen as an aspirational horizon, which should ideally, in the years to come, inspire arts organisations and professionals to be inclusive for disabled artists. As outlined above, some interviewees connected this 'cultural change' to broader society, referring to the need for more inclusive approaches to be adopted both in the cultural sector and elsewhere, and the importance of younger generations being brought up with a more inclusive perspective ('people with disabilities have a wide range of abilities [...] that can inform our ways of being, our sensitivities'<sup>98</sup>).

Each in their own way – disability-led and inclusive and integrated companies, the specialised organisations outlined above and those that have taken part in European projects on arts and disability – are contributing to bringing about this 'cultural change', through awareness-raising, advocacy and support for professional development. Their efforts can be connected to the fostering of a more inclusive and diverse cultural sector, which sees disability, in the words of artist Tanja Erhart, as 'an addition to my possibilities of expression'<sup>99</sup> and looks at disability itself in a 'non-normative, non-ableist' way.<sup>100</sup> Some artists and organisations interviewed in the context of this research identified an increasing interest among audiences in diverse work, including by disabled artists, and saw this as an opportunity ('Social issues which are generating interest now, like gender diversity and inclusiveness, all of this is reflected in artistic projects and in audiences' interests. There are many issues which used to be hidden, left at home, just as disabled kids used to be left at home and are now integrated in schools, and the same happens in the arts').<sup>101</sup> However, this is far from a common or well-established trend.

A set of 'Seven Inclusive Principles for Arts & Cultural Organisations' developed by a platform of UK-based institutions active in the field of arts and disability in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic also indicates its aim to 'support the industry to make decisions inclusively, to go beyond compliance and celebrate diversity'.<sup>102</sup> Ultimately, this should also result in moving towards more inclusive artistic programmes, in which work by disabled artists is presented as part of standard programmes rather than in specific or segregated spaces ('It is necessary to address this issue transversally to avoid stigmatisation and make sure inclusion is the norm.:'; '[There is a] lack of recognition of the artistic high quality of work. Unfortunately, you are often still not taken seriously if you work inclusively.').<sup>103</sup>

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98 Non-disabled choreographer and performer, who has worked with disabled artists, Greece – online interview, 6 October 2021.

99 In Marsh and Burrows (2017), p. 22.

100 Karhunen (2020).

101 Non-disabled venue and festival programmer, Spain – online interview, 28 September 2021.

102 Ramps on the Moon, Attitude is Everything, What Next? Paraorchestra and WeShallNotBeRemoved (2020). Working Safely through Covid-19: Seven Inclusive Principles for Arts & Cultural Organisation. A. i. E. Ramps on the Moon, What Next? Paraorchestra, and WeShallNotBeRemoved. London.

103 Non-disabled artistic and executive director, cultural centre, France – online interview, 7 October 2021. Non-disabled creative producer, performing arts company, Germany – answer to the online survey 2020.

## **EDUCATION AND EXPOSURE**

One Polish theatre teacher interviewed for this research gave an accurate depiction of the situation in arts education across Europe, describing how selection committees, the teaching community, and future institutional employers all have high expectations for the versatility and virtuosity of future artists: young applicants to education programmes have to demonstrate various skills from clarity of speech to movement abilities that disabled young people would have difficulties showcasing. Both the training offered and expectations for what a stage actor actually is are seen as incompatible with any form of disability or impairment. The interviewee said that out of approximately 1,200 candidates participating in the selection process to enter their theatre academy, they cannot remember any disabled students. This very fact, confirmed in other interviews and through public discussions, shows that in many countries disabled young people do not even consider entering training, becoming a creative worker, and making a career in the arts. No disabled student has ever been selected for one of the 20 places available at that academy. This experience reflects widespread traditional approaches, perceptions and expectations towards stage acting, though some interviewees did have examples of theatre direction training which had welcomed disabled students.

The impossibility of accessing formal education has direct consequences on employability, as in many European countries national repertory theatres and ensembles only recruit graduates from higher education theatre schools. The situation is similar in the independent scene, and all disabled artists spoken with for this research pleaded for access to vocational and lifelong education:

- 'Generally in my experience a disabled person is discouraged from entering a professional artistic career. More out of fear than discrimination. I think that from the start, on the contrary, we have to open up this perspective and 'launch ' the person into the artistic world as we would a non-disabled person.'<sup>104</sup>
- 'I am not able to follow an artistic training programme as they are not provided in accessible formats. Equal opportunity starts with education.'<sup>105</sup>
- 'I think artists who have a disability are generally not encouraged to pursue an artistic career, or to mix and match with other artists. Hence the absence of disabled artists at festivals or in theatres. The reason is to avoid shocking or discouraging them. It is a kind of 'protection '<sup>106</sup>

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104 Deaf choreographer, artistic company, Italy/France – written interview, 15 October 2021.

105 Disabled artist, Romania – online interview, 8 October 2021.

106 Deaf choreographer, artistic company, Italy/France – written interview, 15 October 2021.

- 'Barriers to progress, mentoring and development bring a lack of career mobility or progression for disabled artists.'<sup>107</sup>

**'If artistic professional courses (secondary and university level) stay restricted to non-disabled students, it will remain very difficult for disabled people to aspire to becoming professional artists.'**<sup>108</sup>

Despite these challenges, the Polish interviewee finally arrived at an optimistic perspective with the example of the Kraków-based actor Krzysztof Globisz: 'When he was one of the most merited artists of his generation, he had a stroke that left him disabled. Later, a special show was devised for him (*The Whale*), dealing with his new disability, employing him, and trying to find new kinds of expression. It is the most visible example of the situation I have tried to describe: entering professional work as an actor has been difficult if not impossible for disabled people. However, if you are already in and you become disabled, you can very much count on the solidarity of your colleagues and peer institutions who will try to keep you busy and professionally active.'<sup>109</sup> This case, alongside other examples in Europe, demonstrates that even traditional theatre institutions are able to adapt and adopt more inclusive practices.

In other conversations, many professionals made a clear link between engaging with disabled audiences and exposing them to artistic work (whether from disabled artists or not), and fostering the desire of disabled people to become artists. In many countries, however, the idea that arts and culture is not a career for disabled people is deeply ingrained in society.

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107 Disabled artist and producer, freelance, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

108 Non-disabled musician and artists director, community arts centre, Portugal – answer to the online survey 2020.

109 Able head of literature and theatre teacher, Poland – online interview, 11 October 2021.

## **ENGAGING WITH DISABLED AUDIENCES**

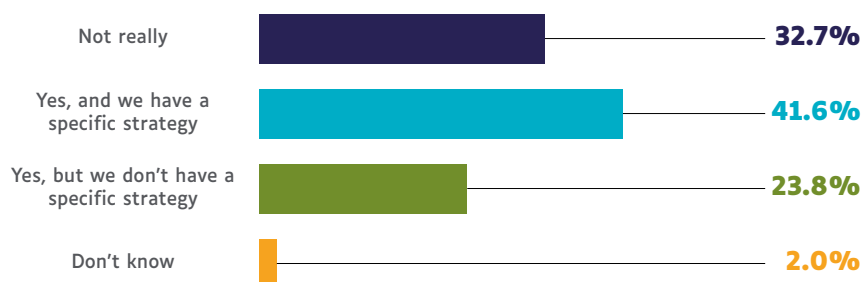
This subsection refers first to the results of the survey and then to the existing literature on the subject. As in the previous section on engaging with disabled artists, the survey examined engagement with disabled audiences and concentrated on the experiences of Venues & Festivals.

65.4% of Venues & Festivals indicated they engage with disabled audiences on a regular basis, and most of these had a specific strategy for their engagement. However, 32.7% do not engage with disabled audiences on a regular basis and 23.8% do but do not have a specific strategy:

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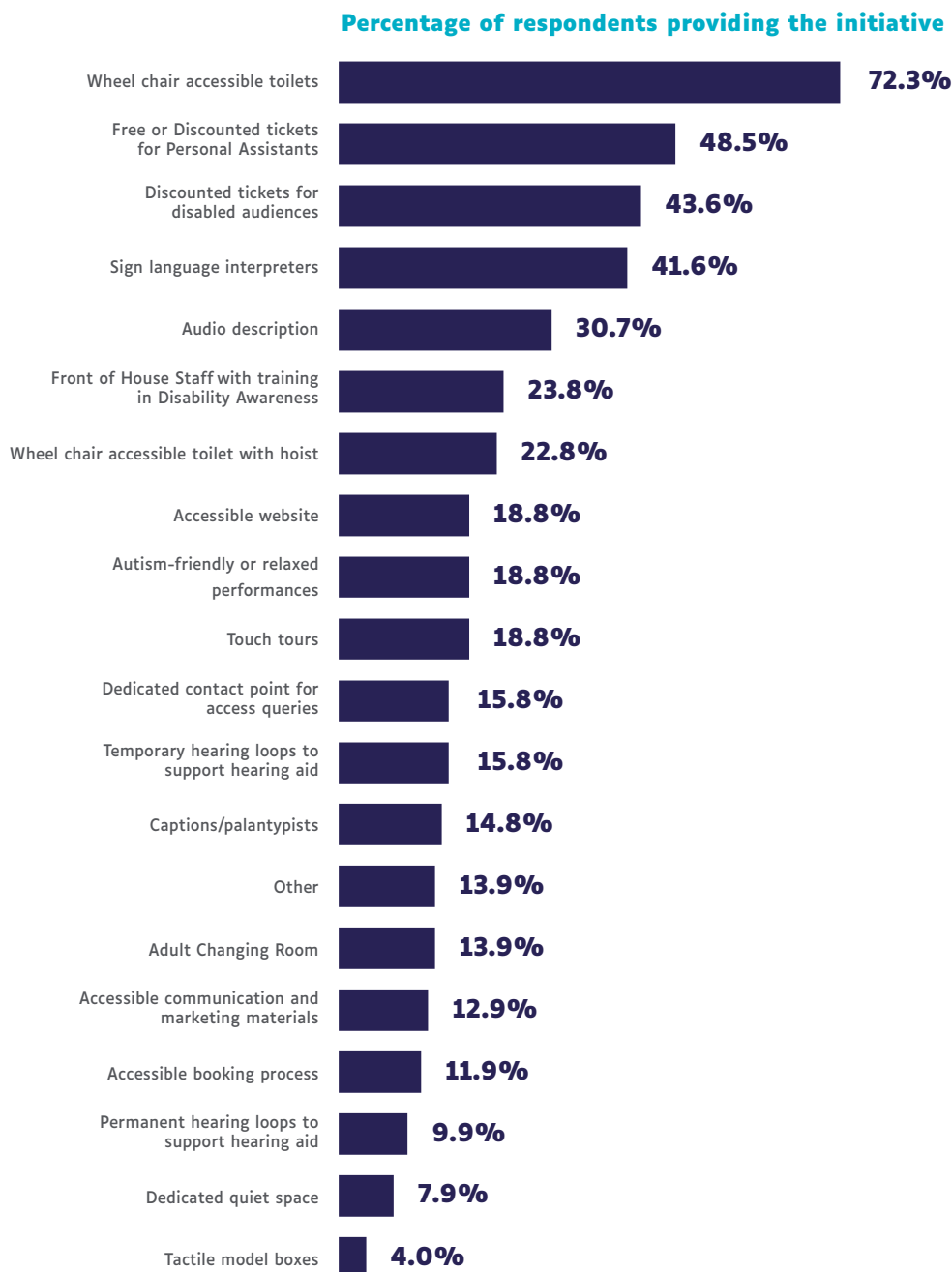
Does your organisation engage with disabled audiences on a regular basis?

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Questioned on which initiatives they had taken to improve accessibility for disabled audiences, respondents indicated adoption of a broad array of measures. Asked to tick any of 20 possible initiatives – from audio described performances to touch tours – the majority indicated they provided 3 or more, with around a quarter offering 7 or more.

Which initiatives does your organisation provide for audiences?



Survey respondents sometimes used the Other answer when they were not providing any of the elements proposed, which is quite rare and mostly happens when event organisers work with several venues they don't directly manage (and were unsure about the measures these spaces were offering) or when organising outdoor arts and site-specific events. Some submitted details of measures (e.g. free ticketing for interpreters, easy reading language).

Venues & Festivals respondents were also invited to comment and give more details on how they welcome disabled audiences. Their responses show that some have quite an advanced practice, with dedicated staff members working to develop support measures or actions in regard to communications and

marketing. Generally, it seems any accessibility spending is included as part of the overall communications budget. Very few mentioned a dedicated budget but instead spoke of expenditure as part of their yearly operating costs. However, the responses did highlight that in some countries specific funding is available to ensure the implementation of policies.

Going through the comments from venues and festivals, we can see a genuine desire to be more inclusive. For example: 'We, as a festival, are doing our best each year to make our theatre more accessible to disabled people. Each year, we choose one or two performances that we translate into sign language. Also, each year our programmers select one or two performances dealing with the topic of disabled people, or performances created and performed by disabled people, and when there is an opportunity [...] we make sure that the theatre venues are accessible for disabled people. Also, we are in contact with different expert organisations and we do our best to cooperate with them during the festival and during our activities that include disabled people.'<sup>110</sup>

These venues and festivals support and present national or international artists and create frames where interaction with disabled audiences can happen – from dedicated performances to (participative) workshops. However, beyond providing accessibility services for some of the shows presented in their programme or season (sign translation, audio description, subtitles, etc.), there are rarely systematic measures taken for all shows presented.

One European respondent pointed out that when registering on FestivalFinder.eu organisers have to state if they provide 'support for disabled people' and out of 2,283 festivals registered, 1,097 of them said that they do (48%).

In terms of commitments and recent achievements, performing arts venues and festivals often mentioned that they consult with expert organisations at local or international level in order to assess their practice, audit their spaces, and develop more accessible practices.

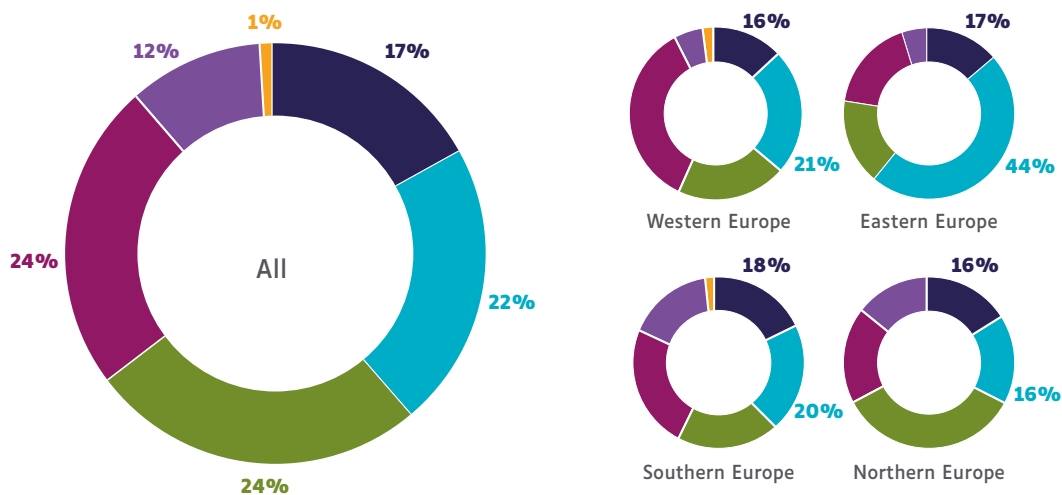
In the context of all these measures, Venues & Festivals survey respondents showed high confidence of the accessibility of their programmes for disabled audiences. As with the measure for disabled artists, this confidence rises markedly when the respondent has a dedicated budget for accessibility, employs disabled staff, or has staff members responsible for implementing accessibility policies.

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110 Non-disabled executive producer, festival, Bosnia and Herzegovina – answer to the online survey 2020.

How confident are you that the artistic programmes of your organisation / venues and festivals in Europe are accessible to disabled audiences?

● Not at all confident ● Not very confident ● Neither ● Fairly confident ● Very confident ● Don't know



This high level of confidence has to be placed in context, however, as comments from interviewees and participants in the public discussions showed concrete limitations in relation to issues such as the low quantity of performances accessible across artistic programmes. Very few of the interviewees gave an explanation of why they choose to make one performance accessible and not another. A French programmer explained that 'besides the heavy financial costs of adopting inclusive measures such as sign language, we see that non-disabled artists do not always think about it or are not willing to adapt their work'.<sup>111</sup> Researchers also observed for example a lack of structured attempts to collect opinions from disabled people themselves on what they would like to access.

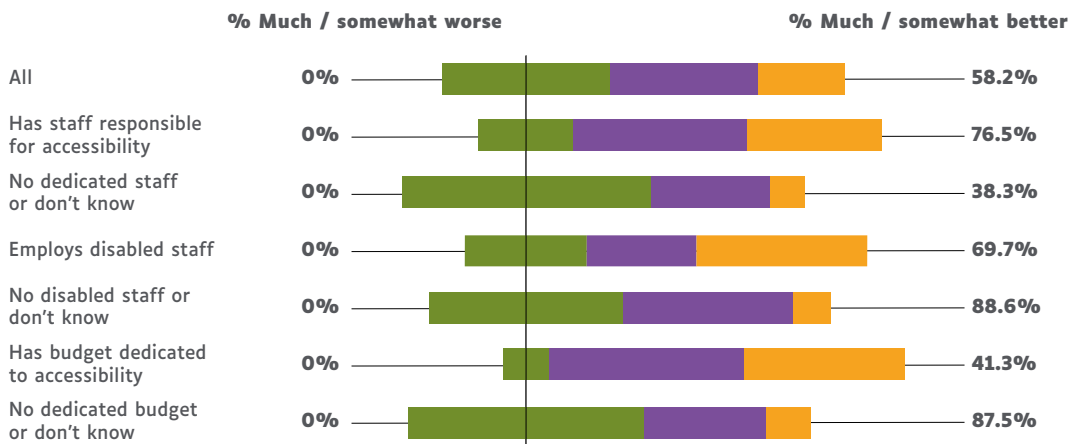
Asked whether accessibility for disabled audiences had gotten better or worse in their organisation over the last 5 years, no respondents felt it had become worse. A majority felt it had improved, and among Venues & Festivals with a dedicated budget for accessibility the figure was 88.6%.

111 Non-disabled artistic and executive director, cultural centre, France – online interview, 7 October 2021.



In the last 5 years has accessibility for disabled audiences become better or worse in your organisation?

● Much worse   ● Somewhat worse   ● Stayed about the same   ● Somewhat better   ● Much better

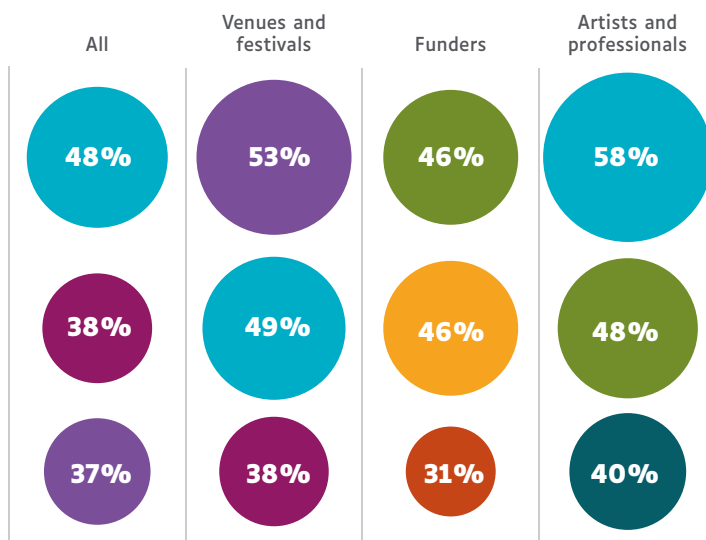


In interviews and public discussions, venues and festivals spoke of numerous initiatives they had implemented, especially in terms of PR and arts education. There was often a strong relationship with disability associations, charities or specialised care centres to organise visits and participation, host conversations, etc. One interviewee said that when it comes to raising awareness and changing perceptions 'being seated close to a disabled audience member is an important first step'.<sup>112</sup>

Survey respondents on all paths were asked to indicate which were the greatest obstacles for their organisation or the field at large in respect of engaging disabled audiences. Lack of funding was once again at the top of the list (57.3%), followed by lack of tools (accessible websites, marketing materials, etc.) to reach out to disabled audiences (48.3%). Lack of contacts / networks appears to be a significant obstacle, with 37.6% of all respondents picking this option as one of their top 3, and 68.4% of all respondents in the Other Organisations. For Venues & Festivals respondents, a lack of human resources was a commonly indicated obstacle (53.1%). Lack of interest in the work of disabled artists was not indicated as an obstacle for many Venues & Festivals (8.3%), but was thought to be a significant obstacle within the field by Artists & Professionals and Other Organisations (48% and 52.6%).

112 Non-disabled stage director, curator and artist, Romania – online interview, 8 October 2021.

What are the 3 main obstacles preventing your organisation / European venues and festivals from engaging more with disabled audiences?



- Lack of tools to reach out to disabled audiences (e.g. accessible website, accessible marketing...)
- Lack of contacts and networks to reach out to disabled audiences
- Lack of human resources
- Lack of interest
- No mandate from board/government
- Lack of knowledge on how to meet access requirements
- Lack of disability experts in panels/juries



*Un Peep Show per Cenerentola by Paola Guerra and Antonio Viganò, featuring performers from La Ribalta Theater  
© Photo by Sarah Melchiori*

	All Respondents	Venues & Festivals	Artists & Culture Professionals	Agencies & Funding Bodies	Other Organisations
Lack of funding to develop accessibility for disabled audiences	<b>57.3%</b>	<b>69.8%</b>	<b>46.0%</b>	<b>23.1%</b>	<b>47.4%</b>
Lack of tools to reach out to disabled audiences (e.g. accessible website, accessible marketing...)	<b>48.3%</b>	<b>49.0%</b>	<b>58.0%</b>	-	<b>52.6%</b>
Lack of contacts and networks to reach out to disabled audiences	<b>37.6%</b>	<b>37.5%</b>	<b>36.0%</b>	-	<b>68.4.7%</b>
Lack of human resources	<b>36.5%</b>	<b>53.1%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	-	<b>21.1%</b>
Lack of knowledge on how to meet access requirements	<b>27.0%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>48.0%</b>	<b>46.2%</b>	<b>52.6%</b>
Lack of interest	<b>23.6%</b>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	-	<b>36.8%</b>
No mandate from board / government	-	-	-	<b>46.2%</b>	-
Lack of disability experts in panels / juries	-	-	-	<b>30.8%</b>	-
Lack of official inclusive guidelines (from local, regional or national governments)	-	-	-	<b>30.8%</b>	-
Lack of quality projects focusing on disabled audiences	-	-	-	<b>30.8%</b>	-
Lack of training for institution's staff	-	-	-	<b>30.8%</b>	-
Lack of demand from the field	-	-	-	<b>7.7%</b>	-
Other	<b>10.7%</b>	<b>12.5%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>5.3%</b>

Among other obstacles given by respondents, site-specific work was highlighted for constraints linked both to transportation to performances and the difficulty of putting in place accessibility measures when projects take place in abandoned industrial sites, rural settings, or historic buildings.

Among the documents identified in the literature review, issues related to the accessibility of arts events and venues for disabled audiences are addressed more frequently than those relating to the programming of work by disabled artists. It is also the area in which documentation and research is available for more countries. This may be connected to the existence of legislation which requires accessibility of public spaces and events for disabled people, as well as the priority given to them as recipients of culture rather than as creators of work, as the latter designation has generally only been addressed more recently and in select countries.

Literature in this area often includes quantitative data, addressing **obstacles, challenges and practices related to accessibility for disabled people**. Some relevant findings are summarised below:

- **How frequently do disabled audiences attend arts events?** A survey<sup>113</sup> conducted in Ireland in 2017 challenges some expectations about attendance among disabled people: 86% of them had attended at least one arts event (including cinema trips) in the previous year (79% if cinema is not included), figures higher than those from a similar survey covering the overall population (64% had attended – the figure included arthouse cinema but not mainstream cinema). Overall this may challenge some established assumptions as regards disabled people’s interest in and actual attendance of arts events.
- **What barriers exist?** Several surveys have helped to identify barriers and obstacles that prevent disabled people from accessing arts events. Although national conditions vary, factors including accessibility, health, cost and other economic aspects, social isolation, and difficulties in online booking arise as relevant barriers that would need to be taken into account when adopting measures to facilitate accessibility and attendance. Results from some surveys are presented hereafter:
  - In Ireland, factors related to physical access (33%), health (29%), cost (25%), lack of support, including social isolation and having no one to go with (22%), and transport (15%) were most frequently mentioned as barriers to going out, with some people mentioning several of these factors at once.<sup>114</sup> Other research in Ireland has also identified health, cost and transport as particular barriers for disabled people, with significantly higher indexes than the average population.<sup>115</sup>

113 Maitland, H. (2017a). Audiences-in-waiting? Dublin, Arts & Disability Ireland.

114 Maitland, H. (2017b). Audiences-in-waiting? How do people with disabilities engage with culture? Dublin, Arts & Disability Ireland.

115 Kantar Media (2016). The Arts in Irish Life: 2016 Research Update. Dublin, Arts Council of Ireland.

- A similar study conducted in Spain in 2012 identified economic factors (43%), health (42%), the inability to perform basic activities (31%), distance to venues (26%), lack of self-confidence, lack of trust in others or no-one to go with (20%), lack of information (20%), being too busy (18%), lack of suitable transport (17%), and accessibility issues related to entering or moving around venues (17%) as key obstacles. 91% of disabled people identified some barriers to attending leisure or cultural activities, as opposed to 70% of non-disabled people.<sup>116</sup>
- In the UK, research on online booking for music events found that 82% of disabled users had experienced problems, 79% had been put off buying gig tickets due to such problems, and 73% had felt discriminated against when trying to book tickets. However, two thirds of those surveyed thought online booking conditions had improved or stayed the same over the last few years, and only 9% thought they had worsened.<sup>117</sup>
- As regards the policy level and the responsibility of public institutions, a survey conducted by the European Blind Union in 2012 found that 82% of its member organisations thought the cultural rights of blind and partially sighted people were being poorly or very poorly implemented. 65% stated that key accessibility features were missing in cultural places, but 65% also rated the impact of cultural accessibility on the quality of life of disabled people highly.<sup>118</sup> A working group of EU member state representatives addressing ways to enhance access and participation in culture referred to the importance of removing physical barriers for people with disabilities, but also identified other hindrances that may apply both to disabled people and the overall population, including financial barriers, physical distance, and cultural and social barriers (e.g. feeling that the cultural offer is 'not for the likes of us'). In light of these findings, some good practices from across the EU were also identified.<sup>119</sup>

Indeed, literature in this field often makes it evident that while specific measures for disabled audiences are necessary, some obstacles are shared by other groups in society, and measures towards full inclusion and accessibility would therefore be beneficial to everyone.

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116 Fundación Eguía-Careaga Fundazioa (2016). Informe 2016 sobre la aplicación de la Estrategia Integral Española de Cultura para todos. Madrid, Real Patronato sobre Discapacidad.

117 While this refers to the online booking of music events, it could be seen as relevant to other sectors such as the performing arts as well. Cf. Attitude is Everything (2018). State of Access Report 2018: Ticketing Without Barriers. Examining the access booking experience for Deaf and disabled music fans. London, Attitude is Everything.

118 European Blind Union (2012). EBU Access to Culture Survey 2012: Mapping current levels of accessibility to cultural venues and activities in Europe. Paris, EBU.

119 OMC Working Group of EU Member States' Experts on Better Access to and Wider Participation in Culture (2012). A Report on Policies and Good Practices in the Public Arts and in Cultural Institutions to Promote Better Access to and Wider Participation in Culture. Luxembourg, EU.

## **EXPERIENCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Recent research in the UK suggests 77% of disabled audiences consider themselves 'vulnerable to Coronavirus', whereas only 28% of non-disabled audiences do. This may be connected to the fact that, according to data from the UK's Office for National Statistics, disabled people accounted for over one third of deaths related to Covid-19 between March and May 2020,<sup>120</sup> and suggests a need to adopt particularly inclusive measures.<sup>121</sup> 41% of disabled audiences surveyed argued they would consider returning to venues once social distancing and appropriate hygiene measures were in place, whereas 26% said they would not consider returning to venues until a vaccine or treatment for Covid-19 was available – the latter figure being twice as high as for non-disabled respondents. Fewer disabled people would consider attending any outdoor event (44%) than the overall population (51%). These figures suggest that the Covid-19 crisis has 'magnified the inequalities facing disabled audiences and compromised cultural participation and engagement'.<sup>122</sup>

There is a general concern that the current Covid-19 pandemic will have a lasting effect on accessibility issues. In the online survey, respondents underlined the vulnerability of disabled people but also a general lack of consideration in the emergency measures taken by public authorities in regard to this population and its specific needs and challenges.

On the one hand, several respondents pointed out that the online streaming of performing arts pieces has allowed disabled audiences to access cultural offers they wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to engage with ('I think this pandemic has shown us new ways of connecting with audiences. It has opened new ways of presenting artistic content that can help us develop new ways of accommodating special needs. This will affect our strategies in the coming years.').<sup>123</sup> Both funders and presenters acknowledge that digital creation or distribution offers new opportunities to reach wider audiences, and many online tools were tested that could be adopted in the future. To quote one culture professional: 'Don't lose this progress, meet these online access needs post-coronavirus'.<sup>124</sup>

However, many inequalities remain, especially when addressing different disabilities. For example, several media outlets covered the worrying situation of

120 Miller, A. (2020). Slump in disabled audiences' confidence presents major problem for the arts sector. Birmingham, Indigo Cultural Consulting Ltd.

121 Ramps on the Moon, Attitude is Everything et al. (2020).

122 Miller (2020).

123 Non-disabled artistic director, dance festival, Germany – answer to the online survey 2020.

124 Disabled curator, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020

people on the autism spectrum during lockdowns and curfews. For people with visual impairment, going outside and keeping distance is hard and many are reluctant to visit cultural venues if they are open at all. Similar barriers appear for disabled people in relation to physical distance and safety regulations like wearing masks. Several respondents observe that disabled people 'will disappear once again from the public space'.<sup>125</sup>

This perspective echoes initial evidence about the impact of the pandemic on employment in the cultural sector. A range of studies internationally have pointed to how Covid-19 is badly affecting activity and employment across culture. Research conducted in the UK suggests that the impact is higher for disabled artists and cultural professionals than for non-disabled ones, and there has been a larger increase in the proportion of disabled workers on zero hours contracts compared with non-disabled workers. While the trend is similar in the overall labour force and in all economic sectors, it appears that reductions in working hours in the creative industries are more marked than in other sectors.<sup>126</sup>

On the other hand, there is also a shared concern that accessibility will no longer be a priority in many European contexts, and that inclusion strategies will no longer be on the agenda of funders, venues and festivals, and culture workers in general.

Respondents gave several explanations for this concern:

- The fragile situation that many players are dealing with, and the potential lack of financial capacity to maintain accessibility standards or projects going forwards:

**'Battling the pandemic consumes scarce resources and shifts focus away from other priorities, namely access.'**<sup>127</sup>

- A lack of willingness in the performing arts field in general to commit to more inclusive practices in the aftermath of the current crisis ('I think that difficult moments like Covid-19 are very bad for disabled artists because festivals and their programmes don't pay a lot of attention to them. In our organisation we barely talked about accessibility and disabled artists during the pandemic...').<sup>128</sup>

125 Non-disabled artistic director, festival, Switzerland – answer to the online survey 2020.

126 O'Brien, D., G. Owen, M. Taylor and S. McAndrew (2021). 'The impact of Covid-19 on jobs in the cultural sector – part 2.' <https://www.culturehive.co.uk/CVIresources/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-jobs-in-the-cultural-sector-part-2/>

127 Non-disabled executive board member, theatre venue, Portugal – answer to the online survey 2020.

128 Non-disabled artistic director, fair, Spain – answer to the online survey 2020.

- A lack of willingness among funders who have focused more on saving infrastructure and maintaining creative jobs. ('Within the publicly funded sector, lead funding agencies must retain their commitment to broadening reach, engagement and involvement, and actively hold organisations to account. Individual and sectoral activism will be essential in ensuring that happens.').<sup>129</sup>
- The concrete risk of the exclusion and further marginalisation of disabled audiences and artists who are particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus ('Disabled people will remain vulnerable until there is a vaccine'; 'The worry, I would imagine, for some disabled people is the possibility that they may be more vulnerable during a pandemic.').<sup>130</sup>
- The sudden halt to grassroots initiatives that took a lot of time and resources to put in place ('The pandemic has set a lot of good work back.').<sup>131</sup>

In relation to disabled artists, many respondents acknowledge the difficulties they face during the crisis but also the opportunities that have emerged, especially in regard to accessing online training, conferences and seminars, networking with peers from their country and internationally, and accessing discussions that were previously not always accessible ('Of course the pandemic created barriers in the performing arts, but it was also the discovery of new opportunities. I personally created a model of an inclusive dance distance lesson as part of my research during the pandemic period and approbated it. I am currently successfully conducting inclusive dance online trainings as well.').<sup>132</sup> Moreover, several professionals point to better access to and circulation of professional information in regard to inclusion ('I believe these unprecedented times have made visible more than ever an existing lack of information and knowledge and at the same time an existing network of organisations working on it.').<sup>133</sup>

Several artists and culture professionals pointed out that disabled creators might be impacted in the long term by the crisis and pleaded for recovery plans that would adopt specific measures ('Covid recovery plans need to include a specific focus on the impact on the disabled community and arts professionals with disabilities').<sup>134</sup>

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129 Non-disabled artistic director, dance festival, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

130 Non-disabled board member, umbrella organisation, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.  
Non-disabled freelance writer, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

131 Anonymous non-disabled contributor – answer to the online survey 2020.

132 Non-disabled dance lecturer, university, Georgia – answer to the online survey 2020.

133 Non-disabled artistic director, outdoor festival, Italy – answer to the online survey 2020.

134 Non-disabled administrator, disabled-led arts charity, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.



When asked about perspectives regarding what might happen after the crisis, respondents had mixed feelings and didn't hesitate to express their doubts and fears:

- 'I am afraid that nothing will actually change after the COVID-19 pandemic.'<sup>135</sup>
- 'To me it looks like it is going to be even worse than before. We're not organised, or not nearly enough yet, and we're always forgotten, so with a general crisis we'll lose more. This moment might be "unique" but nothing much will change in terms of mentalities. The issues of disability will not be the main focus while rebuilding the economy of culture.'<sup>136</sup>
- 'The current situation has, however, shed light on the precariousness of the culture sector as a whole, and the inequality affecting disabled persons.'<sup>137</sup>

Acknowledging the complexity of a still unfolding situation, many expressed their hopes, in particular when it comes to rethinking practices and making use of lessons learned:

- 'I think it is a great moment to explore and continue on this path. Find ways to involve disabled artists, and make a real offer to the disabled audiences.'<sup>138</sup>
- 'I hope that the increased awareness of the vulnerability of particular risk-group-people and extra care for audience needs will continue and develop into awareness and extra care for disabled audiences and practitioners.'<sup>139</sup>
- 'My hope is that the arts community, to call it that, will retain the commitment to equality and diversity that it has articulated over recent months. That expression has been genuine, but the danger will be if too many organisations, for a possible multitude of reasons, slip back from that position, or are slow to implement promised action. Within the publicly funded sector, lead funding agencies must retain their commitment to broadening reach, engagement and involvement, and actively hold organisations to account. Individual and sectoral activism will be essential in ensuring that happens.'<sup>140</sup>

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135 Non-disabled curator and museum educator, exhibition hall, Serbia – answer to the online survey 2020.

136 Non-disabled choreographer, artistic company, France – answer to the online survey 2020.

137 Non-disabled executive board member, theatre venue, Portugal – answer to the online survey 2020.

138 Playwright, theatre company, Romania – answer to the online survey 2020.

139 Non-disabled producer, dance production centre, Sweden – answer to the online survey 2020.

140 Non-disabled artistic director, dance festival, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

- 'I think this pandemic has shown us a new way of connecting with audiences that have restricted access. It has opened new ways of presenting artistic content that can help us to develop new ways of accommodating special needs. This will affect our strategies for the coming years.'<sup>141</sup>
- 'I hope Covid makes us think about the barriers even more and gives us knowledge about vulnerability and cooperation. And I hope new forms of art make it more possible for people from different backgrounds to join the field.'<sup>142</sup>

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141 Non-disabled artistic director, dance festival, Germany – answer to the online survey 2020.

142 Non-disabled producer, performance venue, Finland – answer to the online survey 2020.

# 5.

# SOLUTIONS &

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**This section examines existing practices, policies and strategies, as well as recommendations and suggestions proposed by the field (through surveys, interviews, group discussions, recent reports, etc.) or prototypes of solutions that are currently tested in local, national and transnational projects, with a view to improving accessibility and inclusion of disabled artists and audiences in the performing arts.**

When examining the **rationales for policies and measures in the field of accessibility**, the literature review found that a rights-based approach often prevails, as in the European Parliament's recalling that access and participation in cultural life are part of human rights, and its call for member states and public cultural institutions to 'ensure a cultural offer that is accessible to everyone, with specific measures for certain population groups, such as children and young people, the elderly, disabled people or migrants, among others'.<sup>143</sup> The same resolution asked for further action to improve access to cultural infrastructures, the removal of barriers, and the facilitation of transport and access to cultural institutions for disabled people and people with reduced mobility.

In a similar vein, connections have been established with legislation on equality and non-discrimination.<sup>144</sup> Somehow related to this is the call to combat 'ableism' – that is, 'the behaviour which unintentionally excludes or actively discriminates against disabled people and is most commonly manifested in poor physical access or not putting in place sufficient support mechanisms to enable disabled people to succeed'.<sup>145</sup> Reflections in this area have suggested that it is also necessary to reconsider some other standard terms and the weight they carry, including what is meant by 'inclusion': 'Ableism intersects with many other forms of systemic exclusion, of stigmatic categorization, especially when we make an effort to imagine a new world, more expanded,

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143 European Parliament (2018). Resolution of 14 June 2018 on structural and financial barriers in the access to culture (2017/2255(INI)). European Parliament. P8\_TA(2018)0262, para 55.

144 See e.g. Fertier, A. (2011). Guide des MDPH pour l'accès à la culture. Guide d'accompagnement méthodologique pour les Maisons départementales des personnes handicapées. Orléans / Paris, Pole culture MDPH 45 / Cemaforre.

145 Ramps on the Moon, Attitude is Everything et al. (2020), p. 3.

more ample, where voices, able and non-able, of Western and non-Western ancestries, cis- and queer, coexist. I think of the term 'inclusion' and how it can contain a lot of violence, when implemented in ways that stress the negation and the renunciation necessary by the person which is being included, it implies a fundamental unevenness, and superiority of the category that includes. It implies that you can have a place in the world only if you accept the stigma that is assigned to your body.<sup>146</sup>

Further to the references to international human rights standards (e.g. the Universal Declaration on Human Rights),<sup>147</sup> several publications refer to the rights and commitments recognised in national legislation. Among the documents identified in this literature review are some covering the specific contexts of France,<sup>148</sup> Portugal,<sup>149</sup> Spain,<sup>150</sup> and the UK, including its countries.<sup>151</sup>

Other texts have emphasised economic arguments to ensure accessibility for disabled audiences. Examining data from Ireland, Heather Maitland argued that making arts attendance accessible to disabled people 'makes good business sense', as the cultural sector could earn an additional €7 million if half of the disabled people who currently attend did so one more time and brought a friend or family member with them.<sup>152</sup> On a less positive note, in the light of Covid-19 Andrew Miller has warned that the slump in disabled people's confidence is a major problem for the arts sector, which risks losing up to 12% of its audience.<sup>153</sup>

As regards the **impact of measures adopted**, as outlined earlier there is generally an understanding that the adoption of policies on arts and disability has had significant impact in fostering change in this area. However, detailed evaluation often presents a more nuanced view on developments. In Spain, an assessment of the national government's 'Culture for all' strategy found that public support had led to a significant increase in the physical accessibility of venues (e.g. accessible toilets, dedicated spaces for disabled audiences,

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146 Interview of deaf dance artist Laura Simi by Martina Raponi, *RevistaMúsica*, v. 20 n. 1, Universidade de São Paulo, July 2020: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/revistamusica/article/download/170779/161969/420139>

147 According to Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 'everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits'. Cultural rights are, therefore, inseparable from human rights, as recognized in Article 5 of the 2001 UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity, and can be defined as the right of access to, participation in and enjoyment of culture.

148 See e.g. Cemaforre (2009). *Accessibilité et spectacle vivant. Guide pratique*. Paris, Ministère de la culture et de la communication et Centre national de ressources pour l'accessibilité des loisirs et de la culture (Cemaforre); and Fertier (2011).

149 *Acesso Cultura* (2020). *A participação cultural de pessoas com deficiência ou incapacidade. Como criar um plano de acessibilidade*. Lisbon, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa.

150 *Fundación Eguía-Careaga Fundazioa* (2016).

151 Giraud, C. and N. Miles-Wilden (2018). *Demystifying Access. A guide for producers and performance makers: how to create better access for audiences to the performing arts*. London, Unlimited / Shape Arts / Arts Admin; and *Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts* (c. 2015). *Ensuring your venues and events are open to all. A brief Access Guide*, Shape Arts.

152 Maitland (2017a), pp. 2-3.

153 Miller (2020).

ramps, adapted lifts, etc.), with more modest results in other areas, including accessible communication and professional training.<sup>154</sup> In Finland, an evaluation of national measures to support accessibility in culture for disabled people found that subsidies had helped to maintain and develop disability communities' own cultural activities, as well as to increase the number of accessible arts and culture services. Yet although accessibility had progressed overall, there were geographic imbalances and a perception that some minority groups could not benefit equally from accessibility measures.<sup>155</sup>

In looking for solutions, respondents to the survey were also asked which forms of guidance would be the most helpful for their organisation or the local cultural sector. Guidance on 'designing artistic projects which provide equal opportunity to disabled artists and arts professionals' was rated the highest priority, with around half of all respondents picking this as one of their top 3 most important areas. Guidance on developing disabled audiences, on creating accessible workplaces, and on facilitating international mobility / collaboration were also near the top of the list.



*Frock by and featuring Stopgap Dance Company  
© Photo by Angela Onorati*

154 Fundación Eguía-Careaga Fundazioa (2016).

155 Lahtinen, E., S. Sokka and O. Jakonen (2017). YHDENVERTAINEN KULTTUURI! Selvitys vammaisyhteisöjen kulttuuritoimintaan ja kulttuurin saavutettavuuden edistämiseen myönnettävistä valtionavustuksista. Helsinki, Cupore.

Which of the following kinds of guidance would be most helpful for your organisation / your local cultural sector? Pick the 3 most important areas.

	All Respondents	Venues & Festivals	Artists & Professionals	Agencies & Funding Bodies	Other Organisations
Guidance on designing artistic projects which provide equal opportunity to disabled artists and arts professionals	<b>51.6%</b>	<b>46.5%</b>	<b>56.9%</b>	<b>57.1%</b>	<b>63.6%</b>
Guidance on developing disabled audiences	<b>41.3%</b>	<b>46.5%</b>	<b>34.5%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>13.6%</b>
Guidance on creating accessible cultural workplaces for arts professionals and ensuring accessible recruitment processes	<b>35.4%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>51.7%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>50%</b>
Guidance on international mobility / collaboration with disabled artists and arts professionals	<b>33.6%</b>	<b>34.1%</b>	<b>29.3%</b>	<b>64.3%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>
Guidance on making online exchanges between arts professionals accessible to disabled participants with physical, sensory or intellectual disability	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>42.9%</b>	<b>27.3%</b>
Guidance on developing an accessible website	<b>18.8%</b>	<b>20.9%</b>	<b>13.8%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>
Guidance on making dance performances accessible to disabled audiences	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>21.7%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	-	<b>4.5%</b>
Guidance on creating autism-friendly and relaxed performances	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>13.6%</b>
Guidance on casting disabled dancers / performers	<b>15.2%</b>	<b>15.5%</b>	<b>13.8%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>
Guidance on casting disabled actors	<b>8.1%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>5.2%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>18.2%</b>
Other	<b>8.1%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>8.6%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>9.1%</b>

Invited to detail other forms of guidance, event organisers frequently mentioned that auditing their buildings had been a useful step, as had reaching out to disabled audience members as 'test groups'. Respondents also mentioned organisations and resources unrelated to the arts as equally important information sources.

When asked who should be doing the most to provide guidance, training and best practice resources, survey respondents on all paths gave the top spots to arts funders and national ministries (44.5% and 42%). Respondents on the Venues & Festivals path were more likely to say that local governments and municipalities should also be engaged in providing resources (35.9%), while Artists and Culture Professionals put greater emphasis on the role of disabled artists and culture professionals themselves (28%). In the interviews, responsibility was also generally placed on public institutions, particularly national governments.



*Mixed Doubles by Grootens, Kalampaliki, Tortelli, & Espinosa.  
Photo © Simone Cargnoni*

Which organisations do you think should be doing the most to provide guidance, training and best practice resources? (Pick up to three.)

	All Respondents	Venues & Festivals	Artists & Culture Professionals	Agencies & Funding Bodies	Other Organisations
Arts Funders (Arts Councils, Foundations, National funding bodies)	<b>44.3%</b>	<b>40.2%</b>	<b>54.0%</b>	<b>61.5%</b>	<b>33.0%</b>
National Ministries of Culture	<b>41.8%</b>	<b>42.7%</b>	<b>34.0%</b>	<b>53.8%</b>	<b>47.6%</b>
Specialist service providers (e.g. information centres, dedicated agencies...)	<b>29.9%</b>	<b>32.5%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>38.5%</b>	<b>33.3%</b>
Local government via municipality or city hall	<b>28.4%</b>	<b>35.9%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>
National performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>24.4%</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>
European / international performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>22.4%</b>	<b>23.9%</b>	<b>20.0%</b>	<b>30.8%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>
Regional government via Culture departments	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>26.5%</b>	<b>12.0%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>19%</b>
Peer arts organisations (i.e. other venues and festivals)	<b>19.4%</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>18.0%</b>	<b>46.2%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>
Disabled artists / disabled culture professionals	<b>19.4%</b>	<b>16.2%</b>	<b>28.0%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>19%</b>
Local performing arts networks (e.g. for dance, theatre, circus, outdoor arts...)	<b>13.9%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>28.0%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>14.3%</b>
Professional development training organisations	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>10.3%</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>23.8%</b>
Other	<b>4%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>

Survey respondents used the Other option to suggest unions should play a role in providing guidance as well as disability organisations outside the culture sector. Again, some respondents, particularly those from the Artists & Culture Professionals path, insisted to hire disabled people to lead such process.



So, **what measures should be adopted?** Several publications, including toolkits, good practice guides and other documents, present extensive evidence of what kinds of measures may be adopted to ensure accessibility. While measures in this field often address disabled audiences primarily, some of them are also applicable to disabled artists or particularly meant for them. In the following, a summary of some of the main findings and recommendations will be presented:

- **Fostering all-encompassing approaches to accessibility and inclusion** which aim to be universal rather than targeting specific groups. In line with the 'social model' of disability, which places emphasis on how society 'disables' some people by establishing barriers (rather than identifying one's body as a problem),<sup>156</sup> as well as with a rights-based approach, several recent publications aim to develop all-inclusive approaches to accessibility and inclusion, which by incorporating disabled people would bring positive changes for broader sections of the population. These approaches can ultimately be relevant to both disabled audiences and disabled artists. Examples of this could include the five fields of action developed by Switzerland's Pro Infirmis to assess the accessibility and inclusive nature of cultural institutions, which are provided a label depending on their performance vis-à-vis artistic programming (e.g. the artistic content of programming and education), contextual access (e.g. accessibility of cultural content without hindrance), architectural access, work opportunities, and communication.<sup>157</sup>
- Also resulting from an EU-funded project, the Creability Practical Guide (Quinten, Reuter et al. 2020) provides guidance on designing inclusive participatory arts activities. The guide refers to 'participants' in general, somehow bridging a gap between audiences and artists, and can be a step towards making events and venues more inclusive. Similar approaches are visible in several other publications.<sup>158</sup> Ultimately, the goal of work in this area should be to ensure that venues, festivals and other organisations are completely accessible: 'We would like to make sure that one day disabled audience members don't have to tell us that they are and ask for services but instead to propose these services no matter what. This would also help to send an 'inclusion message' to a broader audience.'<sup>159</sup>
- **Involving disabled people in decision-making and management:** in line with the 'nothing about us without us' principle, many publications highlight the importance of engaging and consulting with disabled people

156 Conroy, C. (2019). Models of disability. IntegrART Symposium 2019. Zurich; and Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts (c. 2015).

157 Described in Mittler, S. and L. Reuter, Eds. (2017a). Innovation Diversity: New Approaches of Cultural Encounter in Europe. Cologne, Sommertheater Pustebelume e.V., pp. 112-113.

158 Quinten, S., L. Reuter and A. Almpanis (2020). Creability Practical Guide. Creative and Artistic Tools for Inclusive Cultural Work. Cologne, Un-Label e.V.

159 Non-disabled artistic and executive director, cultural centre, France - online interview, 7 October 2021.

in the design and implementation of programmes and projects that aim to address them or foster their attendance.<sup>160</sup> As Unlimited's *Demystifying Access* guide suggests, '[the] best people to help you in making your work accessible are those that experience barriers themselves'.<sup>161</sup> This can be done through phone calls, emails, meetings, etc.

- Work along these lines may also be termed 'co-production with disabled people' and apply to a range of areas of work, including when organisations develop operating plans or undertake Equality Impact Assessments before making decisions.<sup>162</sup> The same principle could apply to measures undertaken to facilitate the inclusion and accessibility of disabled artists, as also suggested in responses to the survey and interviews: 'Always involve disabled artists as experts. Most venues, programmes etc are led by non disabled people who have no lived experience of what it means to be disabled and what would make a programme or venue accessible. The involvement of disabled people is, therefore, absolutely necessary to create interesting offers for disabled people that they can trust.'<sup>163</sup> 'Include disabled people in decision making process, ensure all access requirements can be met.'<sup>164</sup>
- **Having dedicated staff and budgets:** complementing the previous element, evidence collected in this report shows that organisations that have either specific staff with a mandate for disability issues and/or dedicated budget lines to foster accessibility and inclusion are better placed to make progress in this field. Of course, measures in this area may not be affordable to some organisations. Where this is the case, alternative measures (e.g. fostering training and capacity-building of existing staff) can also be effective.
- **Ensuring physical accessibility:** while, as noted above, legislation in several countries has led to improvements in physical accessibility in many venues, this remains a key factor in hindering or enabling accessibility. As a result, it retains a central place in relevant literature, which has tended to emphasise accessibility for disabled audiences. The decalogue of accessibility and inclusion measures developed by Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 European Capital of Culture includes references to accessible transportation, parking space, external and internal access areas, toilets, furniture, etc.<sup>165</sup> The OMC Working Group on Access to Culture also suggested applying the

160 See e.g. OMC Working Group of EU Member States' Experts on Better Access to and Wider Participation in Culture (2012).

161 Giraud and Miles-Wilden (2018), p. 6.

162 Ramps on the Moon, Attitude is Everything et al. (2020), p. 1.

163 Non-disabled producer, dance venue, Germany – answer to the online survey 2020.

164 Disabled administrator, multidisciplinary centre, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

165 Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 Capital Europea de la Cultura and Elkartu – Gipuzkoako Gutxitasun Fisikoa duten Pertsonen Federazio Koordinatzailea (c. 2016). Kultur ekimen irigarri eta inklusiboak diseinatzeko eta antolatzeko gidaliburua / Guía para diseñar y organizar eventos culturales accesibles e inclusivos. Donostia – San Sebastián, Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 Capital Europea de la Cultura.

'Design for all' approach to ensure the removal of physical barriers.<sup>166</sup> As the results of the survey have shown, while more emphasis tends to be placed on improving accessibility for audiences, there has also been some limited progress in enhancing accessibility for disabled artists by, among other measures, providing step-free access to office and backstage spaces, wheelchair-accessible toilets in office or backstage spaces, extra funding to cover disabled artists' access requirements, etc.

- **In-house information, training and capacity-building:** making events and venues accessible to disabled audiences and artists should encompass informing all relevant staff (e.g. front-of-house, other organisational areas, members of artistic companies, etc.) and ensuring that they have received appropriate training. Contents of information and training activities should cover both the needs of disabled people and the measures that have been adopted to enable accessibility, as well as what this means for staff.<sup>167</sup> Further to enhancing knowledge, training and capacity building activities should also aim to foster an attitude of understanding among the staff who will deal with audiences and artists directly, ensuring they are attentive and willing to understand emerging, unexpected issues.<sup>168</sup>
  
- **Integrating work by disabled artists in programming and making it more visible:** as previous sections have shown, knowledge and experience around the work of disabled artists and its integration in performing arts venues and festivals remains one of the major obstacles towards accessibility and inclusion. Interviews conducted in the context of the project have evidenced a variety of approaches in this respect, ranging from organising specialised programmes and events to the inclusion of work by disabled artists in mainstream programmes, which should be the ultimate goal in terms of inclusion and diversity. 'Including work by disabled artists in a 'main' artistic programme rather than 'othering' it in a special season or other compensatory manner. It devalues the work and audiences get an unfair impression of the quality.'<sup>169</sup> Where relevant, the establishment of quotas to ensure a certain degree of visibility of work by disabled artists could be seen as a necessary, if temporary, step in this direction.
  
- Ultimately, these steps should also contribute to making work by disabled artists more visible, which can have multiple effects in terms of broadening employment opportunities and contributing to making the sector more diverse: 'Touring more disabled work to inspire others, curatorial development through skills, commissioning, residencies to all disabled artists to develop new work, collaborate with festivals, venues, theatres and

166 OMC Working Group of EU Member States' Experts on Better Access to and Wider Participation in Culture (2012).

167 Giraud and Miles-Wilden (2018).

168 Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 Capital Europea de la Cultura and Elkartu – Gipuzkoako Gutxitasun Fisikoa duten Pertsonen Federazio Koordinatzailea (c. 2016).

169 Non-disabled senior producer, theatre company, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

other artists, more creative jobs for disabled artists - short-term or longer term creative projects, more pressure to ensure we are presenting more and sharing at European and International levels, multi-art form strategies to develop more space for disabled artists, more media visibility for companies and artists, more sharing of best practice.<sup>170</sup>

- **Embracing diversity, including at the gatekeeping level:** partly resulting from several of the measures listed above (all-encompassing approaches to accessibility and inclusion, involving disabled people in decision-making, making work by disabled artists more visible, etc.) but also requiring specific steps is the revision of criteria which currently limit opportunities for disabled artists and which, in turn, limit diversity within the arts. In particular, the role of 'gatekeeping' positions such as those of educational and training institutions in the performing arts, which should be increasingly accessible and open to including disabled people, emerges as key in this respect. Related to this is the revision of artistic quality criteria, which should recognise the valuable contributions that can be made by many artists regardless of their (dis)abilities.
  
- **Adapting communication:** several publications emphasise the need to revise the form and contents of communication materials in order to ensure accessibility, attractiveness and inclusiveness for disabled audiences. Among the many tips existing in this area are the elaboration of an audience development plan, the use of standard, recognised logos and signs to describe the accessibility services provided by the venue or event, the use of accessible language, print and visual elements (e.g. photographs, drawings, symbols), the availability of different formats ensuring that key details (e.g. date, time, price) are clearly visible providing, advance information to audiences about the accessibility resources available, and using accessibility standards in online communication.<sup>171</sup> Communication should also involve being sensitive to using the right words, and avoiding those that may lead to misunderstanding or which may have negative connotations. Since this is highly context-dependent, and may vary according to the moment, publications in different languages and countries provide their own 'do's' and 'don'ts', as well as useful glossaries of key terms.<sup>172</sup> Work in this area can be facilitated through collaboration with audience development and marketing consultants, as organisations such as Arts & Disability Ireland have increasingly done.<sup>173</sup> Relevant measures as regards disabled artists include ensuring that open calls are published and disseminated in accessible formats, and that they effectively reach the targeted groups.

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170 Non-disabled arts manager, funding body, United Kingdom – answer to the online survey 2020.

171 Cemaforre (2009); Cotsen, J., R. Kinchin and Disability Arts Cymru (2019). Developing D/deaf, deafened and hard of hearing audiences in Wales. A toolkit for venues and theatre companies. Cardiff, Arts Council of Wales; and Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts (c. 2015).

172 Fertier (2011); Aceso Cultura (2020); European Arts & Disability Cluster (2020); Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts (c. 2015); and Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 Capital Europea de la Cultura and Elkartu – Gipuzkoako Gutxitasun Fisikoa duten Pertsonen Federazio Koordinatzailea (c. 2016).

173 Arts & Disability Ireland (2017); and Maitland (2017b).

- **Integrating accessibility in the design and presentation of productions and events:** a wide range of tips and techniques are available to increase the accessibility and inclusiveness of events, catering to the diverse needs of disabled audiences – audio descriptions, touch tours, tactile model boxes, captions and palantypists, sign language interpreters, relaxed performances, social (or visual) stories, written transcripts of texts, synopses of plays, etc. are some of the techniques described in relevant documents.<sup>174</sup> More detailed guidance for specific types of events or needs also exist. The accessibility guide developed by Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 European Capital of Culture presents specific guidance for performing arts events, concerts, festivals, exhibitions, debates, and other types of activities.<sup>175</sup> Festival.org has also provided guidance on the planning and organisation of outdoor festivals and events,<sup>176</sup> whereas Little Cog has developed a guide to hosting accessible online meetings.<sup>177</sup> Meanwhile, Ciné-ma différence has published a comparative analysis of approaches to relaxed performances in several countries, which describes existing methodologies and stresses the preference for truly inclusive relaxed events – that is, those that are aimed at the general public, in an inclusive way, rather than targeting exclusively disabled audiences.<sup>178</sup> As regards the integration of diverse languages in an event and what this means, an analysis based on the EU-funded Un-Label project suggested that mixing forms of communication (e.g. different national languages, sign languages etc.) may serve to ensure that no privileged group emerges... [and] to broaden the horizons of opportunities'.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, Max Greyson has provided guidance on how to artistically integrate audio description in contemporary dance and music theatre, somehow preventing it from being seen as an 'external' aspect.<sup>180</sup> Other requirements for a truly inclusive 'customer journey for disabled audiences and visitors' should include the provision of free companion tickets, as well as an assessment in terms of equality impact.<sup>181</sup>
- **Other significant aspects in planning:** further to the logistical aspects outlined in the previous section, several other aspects need to be considered, including the need to be realistic about accessibility expectations (including the fact that some specific groups of disabled audiences may not be reached), integrating accessibility costs into budgeting, 'planning for the unexpected', integrating participative evaluation, etc.<sup>182</sup> In the case of disabled artists,

174 See e.g. Giraud and Miles-Wilden (2018); and Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts (c. 2015).

175 Donostia / San Sebastián 2016 Capital Europea de la Cultura and Elkartu – Gipuzkoako Gutxitasun Fisikoa duten Pertsonen Federazio Koordinatzailea (c. 2016).

176 Festival.Org (2020).

177 Little Cog (c. 2020) 'Guide to Hosting An Accessible Online Meeting.'

178 Dupagne, M.-P. (2020). Spectacles Relax / Relaxed Performances. Étude comparative internationale 2018-2020. Paris, Ciné-ma différence.

179 Nutz, A. and J. Vitek (2017). Communicative Challenges for Heterogeneous Groups in Cultural Activities. Insights from the Evaluation Results of Un-Label. Innovation Diversity: New Approaches of Cultural Encounter in Europe. S. Mittler and L. Reuter. Cologne, Sommertheater Pustelblume e.V., p. 44.

180 Greyson, M. (2020). Workbook ArtInAD: Tools for artistic integration of audio description in contemporary dance and music theatre. Antwerp, Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp and others.

181 Ramps on the Moon, Attitude is Everything et al. (2020).

182 Mittler and Reuter (2017a); Giraud and Miles-Wilden (2018); and Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts (c. 2015).

relevant solutions include the early planning of needs related to accessibility (e.g. considering the need for personal assistants, physical accessibility, communication) as well as the consideration of the additional time that may be needed for the production and rehearsal of shows and performances involving disabled artists.

- **The role of specialised and facilitating organisations:** although the evidence and recommendations presented above should in the long term enable all venues and events to be inclusive and provide accessibility to disabled audiences and artists, literature also suggests that organisations specialising in accessibility and in working with disabled people are important facilitators as partners of mainstream venues. In Germany, a survey of disabled people who had received support from Kulturloge Berlin (an organisation that provides cheaper tickets, accompanies disabled people, and raises awareness of mainstream arts organisations about disability) indicated that this effectively enabled beneficiaries to access cultural venues when they would normally feel excluded from cultural life.<sup>183</sup> In this respect, establishing partnerships with mainstream venues and arts organisations is a central area of work for organisations advancing work on arts and disability, some of which have also increasingly moved from working mainly with disabled artists to also fostering access for disabled audiences.<sup>184</sup> In the case of arts companies, mutual knowledge and networking between companies involving disabled artists and those comprising non-disabled artists can be a positive step towards the understanding of respective needs, more visibility of disabled artists, and potential collaboration opportunities.

Several publications have summarised the recommendations and practical guidance outlined above in the form of checklists. Overall, **these checklists and related practical guidance** summarise the knowledge available as to how arts venues and events can ensure accessibility to disabled audiences and artists. The following can be highlighted:

- *The Innovation Diversity: New Approaches of Cultural Encounters in Europe* manual developed by the Un-Label project<sup>185</sup> includes a checklist for practical planning and realisation of inclusive programmes, based on the ramp-up.me project of Ruby Berlin e.V. and Sozialhelden e.V. It addresses time considerations (early planning, considering the need for extra time for some activities, etc.), financing (higher costs related to inclusive art programmes), communication, marketing and public relations, technical equipment, transportation, human resources, venues, and methodological

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183 Seifert, M. (2014). Kulturelle Teilhabe von Menschen mit Behinderung: Ergebnisse einer Befragung von Gästen der Kulturloge Berlin mit Behinderung und Darstellung der Workshop-Diskussion. Mind the Gap! Zugangsbarrieren zu kulturellen Angeboten und Konzeptionen niedrigschwelliger Kulturvermittlung. B. Mandel and T. Renz. Hildesheim, Stiftung Universität Hildesheim.

184 See e.g. Arts & Disability Ireland (2017).

185 Mittler and Reuter (2017a).

framework (considering accessibility issues in the initial analysis, the mission statement, evaluation, etc.). A similar version is presented in the recently published *Creability Practical Guide*.<sup>186</sup> This guidance covers accessibility for both disabled artists and disabled audiences.

- The *Brief Access Guide* developed by Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts summarises existing knowledge in a set of areas, including planning, language, 'disability confidence' ('providing everybody with the same level of good service and knowing what you can do differently for disabled and / or older people to ensure equal access'), marketing and communications, as well as a brief access checklist addressing publicity and marketing, journey and travel, signage and orientation at the venue, and accessibility across all areas.<sup>187</sup> The guide focuses particularly on accessibility for disabled audiences.
- The *Outdoor Arts Festivals and Events: Access Guide* developed by Festival.org on behalf of Without Walls, based on the experience of the Greenwich+Docklands International Festival, includes guidance for volunteers, a site visit checklist (covering transport, toilets, level and physical access, signage, etc.), a marketing checklist (website, diverse formats, social media, etc.), an example of an access plan, and a questionnaire and agreement to ensure that traders setting a stall at the festival take accessibility into consideration.<sup>188</sup> This covers accessibility for both disabled audiences and artists.
- In Portuguese and English, the manual for *creating an accessibility plan* elaborated by Acesso Cultura on behalf of the City of Lisbon includes a self-assessment checklist for organisations that covers how they have integrated accessibility in their work, venue, communication and marketing, pricing and ticketing, and events of different nature (performing arts, exhibitions, workshops, conferences, etc.). While measures are mainly targeted at disabled audiences, some could have implications towards accessibility for disabled artists as well. A standard statement for an organisation's commitment to accessibility, as well as a job description for an accessibility coordinator are also presented.<sup>189</sup> These elements are all based on the experience of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C.<sup>190</sup>

Overall, this provides evidence of the knowledge available as to how venues and events can be made accessible to disabled audiences, and the additional steps that could be adopted in this respect.

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186 Quinten, Reuter et al. (2020).

187 Unlimited Impact and Shape Arts (c. 2015).

188 Festival.Org (2020).

189 Acesso Cultura (2020). EN: <https://accessculture-portugal.org/accessibility-plan/>;  
PT: [https://acessoculturapt.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/manual\\_plano-de-acessibilidade.pdf](https://acessoculturapt.files.wordpress.com/2020/10/manual_plano-de-acessibilidade.pdf)

190 For additional information, see <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/networks-conferences-and-research/research-and-resources/lead-research-and-resources/>

# 6.

# CONCLUSIONS

The evidence presented in this report shows that significant asymmetries across European countries remain as regards the level of development, and probably understanding, of measures to make events, venues and organisations more accessible and inclusive to disabled artists and audiences. Literature covering developments in a few individual countries (the UK being a notable example), as well as the interviews and exchanges maintained in the course of this project, suggest that the adoption of policy frameworks to ensure accessibility and the work of specialised organisations in the field of arts and disability are key to moving things forward in both knowledge and effective practice. The importance of policy support seems to be confirmed by results from the online survey and following interviews, in which lack of funding to adopt accessibility measures arises as an obstacle both as regards the programming of work by disabled artists and the fostering of accessibility for disabled audiences.

There are also significant gaps in the availability of information, as the European Parliament as well as specialised organisations and networks have noted. This is despite existing commitments to collecting data on disability rights (e.g. those deriving from the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). Meanwhile, surveys on obstacles to cultural participation among disabled people have been conducted in a few European countries, and have led to, or been conducted in the context of, policies and legislation fostering accessibility. National and regional governments that do not have data on these matters should be encouraged to undertake relevant studies.

In the last few years, EU-funded projects on arts and disability have contributed to exchanging practices, to identifying needs, and to the progressive emergence of a common language, mutual knowledge, and more visibility for the field of arts and disability. The work of some European and international networks, such as IETM and the ENCC, should also be noted.

The literature review provides evidence that specialised knowledge on how to make arts organisations more inclusive for disabled artists and accessible to disabled audiences is available. Indeed, an extensive number of toolkits, reports, checklists and good practice guides, covering different countries, types of activities, and beneficiary groups have been identified. In general terms, more documents address accessibility for disabled audiences than the inclusion of disabled artists – a situation which may relate to the prevailing notion of disabled people as recipients of culture, rather than active contributors to



cultural life. Despite this, more progress still seems necessary to take advantage of all these resources: findings of the online survey and the interviews conducted indeed point to significant gaps in how existing information and knowledge reaches non-specialised organisations, venues and festivals. Mainstream organisations often report their limited knowledge in this area, somehow assuming that there are specialised bodies that hold the knowledge and have the experience to act. Furthermore, existing knowledge seems to have been disseminated more broadly in some countries than in others, partly as a result of its availability in only some languages. Overall, the cultural sector still needs to embark on the 'accessibility journey'.

At the same time, in some countries there is evidence, in the form of surveys among disabled people and organisations active in the field of disability, of the obstacles or barriers which prevent accessibility for disabled audiences. Some of them appear to be shared with other disadvantaged groups (e.g. elderly people, those with a low socioeconomic status, etc.). As a result, although some specific measures for disabled audiences may be necessary, the need for working towards universal accessibility and inclusion in culture, and in broader society, emerges strongly.

Further to the challenges and obstacles that already existed, there is some evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic has introduced new difficulties, including disabled audiences' sense of vulnerability because of the health crisis, as well as obstacles related to web accessibility in a context in which many activities have moved to online formats. There is also a fear that, given multiple priorities and increasing competition for limited funds, disability issues may receive less attention. It is important to ensure that the specific needs of disabled people are taken into account in policies and programmes responding to the pandemic and to further support advocacy actions like 'Disabled artists in the mainstream: a new cultural agenda for Europe.'<sup>191</sup>

Among the relevant measures in this respect is engaging with 'gatekeepers', including curators, producers, programmers and educational institutions, which have the potential to adopt a more inclusive approach in their respective areas of work, and ultimately influence the broader sector and its practices. Awareness-raising and capacity-building measures targeting these sectors are necessary, as is the move towards increased capacity and diversity in gatekeeping positions. The role of educational and training institutions in particular, and how they should be more inclusive of everyone, has been mentioned in many interviews and conversations held in the context of this project.

As in other work addressing the needs of marginalised groups, involving disabled communities in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies

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191 'European Arts & Disability Cluster (2020). Disabled artists in the mainstream: a new cultural agenda for Europe, from the first European Arts & Disability Cluster Meeting, p. 4.

and programmes (the 'nothing about us without us' principle) should be a central part of strategies in this area.

Particular attention to the intersectional dimension and how it plays out in the field of accessibility is also necessary. That is, further to considering the inclusion and accessibility of disabled artists and audiences as a universal commitment, it is necessary to understand how gender, socioeconomic inequalities, ethnicity, and other considerations generate specific challenges for disabled women, members of ethnic minorities, and other disadvantaged groups. Mechanisms allowing a specific appreciation of these situations and tailored responses will be necessary.

Ultimately, a 'cultural change' which places cultural equity and accessibility at the centre of work for all arts organisations and venues, and which celebrates diversity, including that related to (dis)ability, is necessary. Among the enabling factors in this direction is the existence of legislation and funding programmes at the national level, as well as the role of specialised organisations that provide guidance and advocate for change. Local, national and European partnerships both between specialised organisations and between them and other public and private organisations can also be conducive to this cultural change.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Following the launch of this report on 3 December 2021, the British Council and On the Move are planning a series of Time to Act presentations, aimed particularly at policymakers and funders at a national level in Europe.

The report itself will also be disseminated through various social media channels and in accessible formats, with translations of the Executive Summary first made available in French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Romanian, Spanish and Serbian.

In the longer term, the OTM research team will work on a **third and final report**, rescheduled to the second half of 2023 when the Europe Beyond Access project will be finalised.

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Co-funded by the  
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