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MOVE

# Time To Act: Two Years On

## Data-led insights on Performing Arts & Disability in Europe

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A research report authored by On the Move, commissioned by the British Council at the conclusion of the Europe Beyond Access project, May 2023



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



*Time To Act: Two Years On, Data-led insights on Performing Arts & Disability in Europe* 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).

A first report, *Time to Act* was commissioned to On the Move by the British Council and published in November 2021 (available in English and French, with executive summaries in French, Italian, Polish, Spanish, German, Serbian, Greek, Romanian and English).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, *Time to Act: Two Years On, Data-led insights on Performing Arts & Disability in Europe* identifies the most significant barriers to the accessibility, participation, international mobility and professional development of disabled artists in the European performing arts, as well as the progress made in some countries in recent years. Conducted in the framework of Europe Beyond Access,<sup>1</sup> a large-scale cooperation project funded by the Creative Europe programme of the EU, the report builds on the results of *Time to Act*, a report undertaken in 2020/21.<sup>2</sup> As in the case of *Time To Act*, this new report has been conducted by On the Move (OTM), the international cultural mobility information network,<sup>3</sup> on behalf of the British Council.

As Europe Beyond Access reaches its final stages, one of the aims of *Time To Act: Two Years On* is to take stock of the contribution made by the project in some of the countries where it has been implemented, as well as to analyse changes since the previous report was published. The research shows some achievements and successes to celebrate, which have occurred since then, but also some outstanding challenges which continue to obstruct the professional participation of disabled artists in the European performing arts scene. These identified challenges should be addressed by future projects.

## WHAT THE STATISTICS SHOW

The survey conducted in the context of this research report shows some important evidence on the accessibility and professional participation of disabled artists:

- It is important to note that 62% of respondents to the survey indicate that they are planning to programme works by disabled artists in the 2023-2024 season, and an additional 33% are considering it.
- This would be quite a significant change because, according to the survey, 48% of respondents currently present work by disabled artists only occasionally (that is, less than once a year) and 23% never do it.

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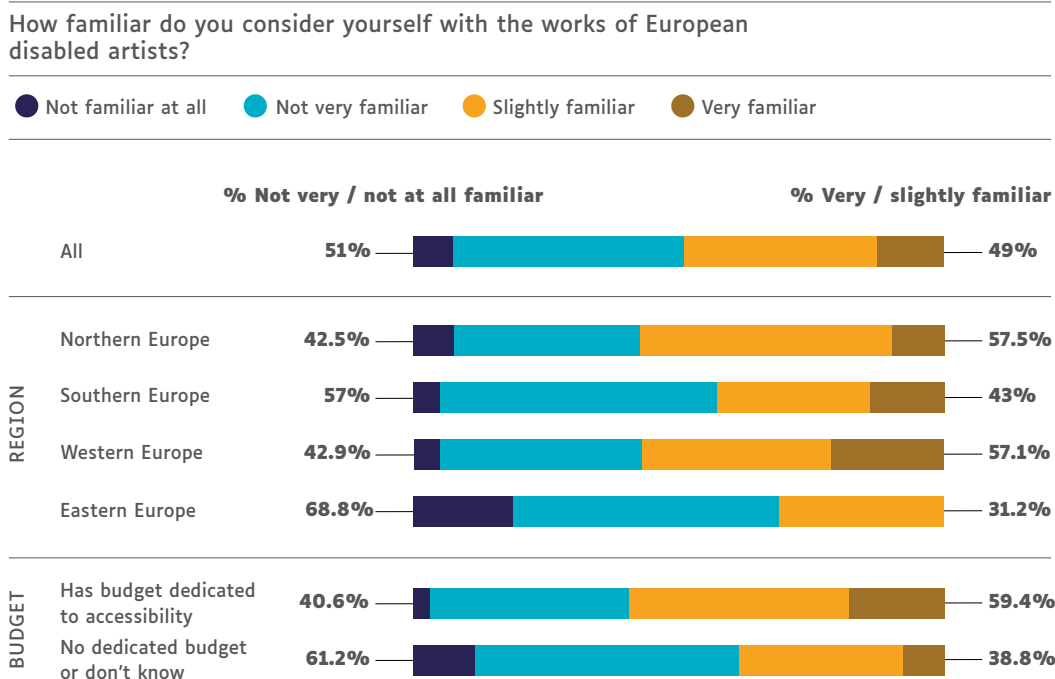
<sup>1</sup> For more information: [www.europebeyondaccess.com](http://www.europebeyondaccess.com)

<sup>2</sup> For more information: <https://www.disabilityartsinternational.org/resources/time-to-act-final-results/>

<sup>3</sup> For more information: [www.on-the-move.org](http://www.on-the-move.org)

### Familiarity with the works of European disabled artists

In percentage: total, regional breakdown, and breakdown on the basis of availability of dedicated budgets



Source: On the Move's elaboration, on the basis of survey results.

- However, the level of knowledge of works by disabled artists remains low: 51% of professionals surveyed say they are not very familiar or not familiar at all with this work. The figure is very similar to that of the previous report (52%). This means that, although programmers are expressing an increased interest in programming disabled artists, their knowledge of available work in this field needs broadening.
- The number of works by disabled artists seen by professionals in the field remains similar: while there is an increase in the percentage of professionals who have seen seven or more productions and a slight decrease in those who have not seen any, broader trends show only limited improvement. One in seven performing arts professionals have not seen any work by disabled artists over the last two years.
- Data in several of these questions shows very marked differences between European sub-regions. In general, venues and festivals in Northern and Western Europe are more likely to present or support work by disabled artists than those in Southern and Eastern Europe. The percentage of organisations that do not present or support work by disabled artists ranges from 5% in Western Europe to 29% in Southern Europe. The same patterns appear across several other questions, including the frequency of measures adopted to enable accessibility for disabled artists.

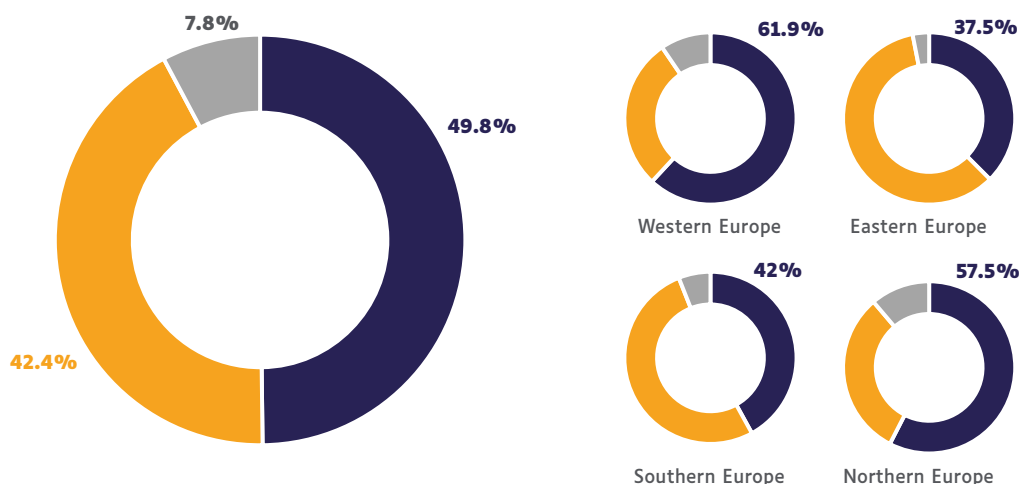
- National organisations and networks appear to gain importance as places where to scout for new works by disabled artists, while European and international events and networks, that had been more important at the time of the previous report, are mentioned less frequently now. This may point to an increased availability of knowledge at national level, something to which initiatives such as Europe Beyond Access, by strengthening key national and local organisations and networks, have contributed. Indeed, several organisations connected to Europe Beyond Access were mentioned by survey respondents as key information providers.
- Again, visible differences arise when regional comparisons are established here: direct contacts between artistic leaders and companies, tour bookers and agents are much more frequent in Western Europe than Eastern Europe.
- The level of confidence in the accessibility of artistic programmes remains modest: only 45% of survey respondents are very confident or confident that their programmes are accessible.
- Meanwhile, however, there is a positive perception of the progress made in terms of accessibility for disabled artists: 75% of respondents observe either a significant or slight improvement in accessibility of their organisations over the past five years, with a marked increase over 2020/21 figures.
- While similar trends are observed across the regions, there are visible differences depending on whether organisations have a dedicated budget for accessibility. For those that have a dedicated budget, 86% observed an improvement in terms of the accessibility of their organisations, with 0% noting any worsening of accessibility. Those that didn't have a dedicated budget were much less likely to note an improvement (only 62%) and 4.6% reported a decline in their accessibility. This confirms the importance of allocating resources to accessibility.

### Dedicated budgets for inclusive policies or activities

In percentage, total and regional breakdown

Is there any dedicated budget to adopt and implement inclusive policies or activities in your organisation?

● Yes ● No ● Don't know



Source: On the Move's elaboration, on the basis of survey results.

## PROGRESS MADE, AND THE IMPACT OF EUROPE BEYOND ACCESS

The report also examines what areas of qualitative progress can be observed across Europe in terms of the accessibility and professional participation of disabled artists, and particularly what evidence can be extracted from the experience of Europe Beyond Access. In this respect, in the countries where an in-depth analysis has been conducted (Italy, Poland and Sweden), evidence suggests the following:

- Europe Beyond Access and other initiatives in this field are contributing to progressively moving approaches to disability in the arts from a social assistance perspective to one that recognises the agency of disabled artists. This is reflected, for instance, in the engagement of disabled artists (such as members of the Italian association Al.Di.Qua Artists, established in the context of Europe Beyond Access) as consultants to improve accessibility in venues and festivals.
- There is also increased visibility and recognition of the artistic value of disabled artists in the mainstream performing arts, even if this is frequently restricted to a relatively small group of artists. The activism of artists and culture professionals engaged in this area, the commitment of a few pioneering organisations, and the role of some European networks and EU-funded projects, including Europe Beyond Access, have been critical in

this respect. Visibility has also been enabled by large-scale communication campaigns such as *I am an artist*, conducted by the British Council in Poland, in the context of Europe Beyond Access: its billboards were seen by 5.4 million people, and the online campaign reached 1.4 million people in Poland and across Europe.

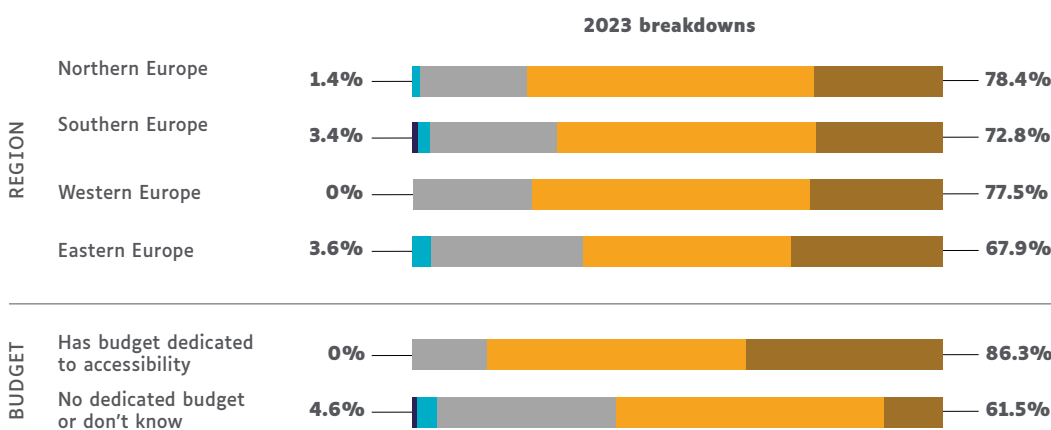
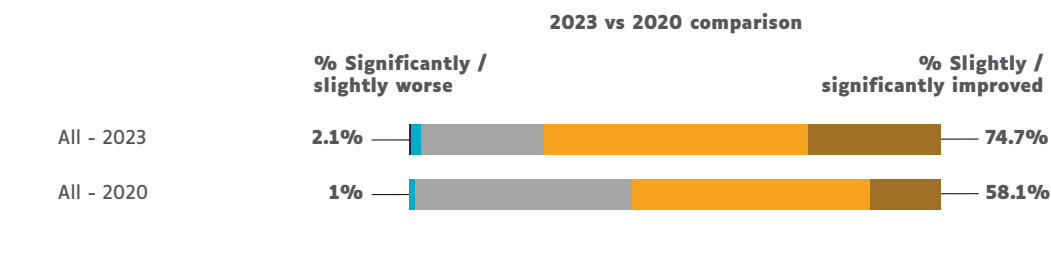
- By supporting the professional development of disabled artists and their engagement with specialised and mainstream arts organisations, projects like Europe Beyond Access, and the drive of the organisations involved in them, contribute to opening up the aesthetics and diversity of the performing arts. An illustrative example is the recruitment of a disabled dancer and choreographer by mainstream dance company Skånes Dansteater, in Sweden, which contributes to a more diverse representation on stage. These steps are leading performing arts organisations to make internal procedures more accessible, and contribute to changing mindsets and practices across the sector.
- In some countries, there is an increasing number of collaborations and partnerships between disabled artists and organisations supporting them, as well as between these and mainstream arts organisations. In Italy, a national network which currently involves 60 organisations has been established as a result of Europe Beyond Access.
- Cross-border knowledge and collaboration, in the form of artist laboratories, co-productions, conferences and networks (such as the European Arts & Disability Cluster), have also been enhanced through Europe Beyond Access and other EU-funded projects and networks.
- *Time to Act* helped to shed light on the limited availability of knowledge on accessibility and inclusion, and how this was an obstacle to further progress: in order to face this, several new initiatives are aiming to strengthen advocacy and raise awareness on the importance of specialised knowledge, leading to increased data collection and dissemination, and capacity-building.
- Overall, this is contributing to making accessibility and professional participation of disabled artists a more central issue in the policy agenda, at least in those countries where activities have focused. In Italy, the Ministry of culture has launched its first-ever call to support national tours of disabled performing artists. In Poland, some progress in the availability of funding for accessibility at national and local level has also been observed. In Sweden, Region Skåne's Regional Cultural Plan 2021-2024 was informed by work undertaken in the context of Europe Beyond Access, including the *Time to Act* report, and places emphasis on the accessibility and inclusion of disabled artists and audiences.

## Change in accessibility for disabled artists in the last 5 years

In percentage, with comparison with 2020 data: total results, regional breakdown and breakdown as per availability of dedicated budgets

Has accessibility for disabled artists improved or worsened in your organisation in the last 5 years?

● Significantly worsened 
 ● Slightly worsened 
 ● No change 
 ● Slightly improved 
 ● Significantly improved



Source: On the Move's elaboration, on the basis of survey results. Percentages exclude respondents who answered 'Don't know'.

## CHALLENGES REMAINING

At the same time, the report sheds light on a number of challenges and obstacles that remain pending, including the following:

- Accessibility to venues remains a central challenge in many countries: very often, accessibility improvements are targeted to audiences rather than artists.
- Lack of funding to address accessibility and full professional participation of disabled artists, related to the absence of dedicated policies, is also identified as a major challenge in many countries.
- Even though more awareness of accessibility and inclusion exists, much remains to be done in this field – a change in mindsets, or a cultural



change to make accessibility, inclusion and participation central to arts organisations and venues is still pending. This should involve multiple areas: revising canons or narratives, involving disabled people in decision-making, ensuring that higher education institutions are open to disabled people, etc.

- It is also necessary to distribute responsibilities in terms of accessibility better within organisations and across the performing arts sector – this should help to address the frequent tendency to expect that disabled artists and professionals, as well as specialised organisations, hold the knowledge and responsibility for driving change.
- Improving access to education, developing policies which provide an enabling environment to develop more accessible performing arts, and improving the availability of data arise as other challenges to be tackled.
- As the survey has amply demonstrated, there are significant regional differences across the EU in terms of awareness, knowledge and resources to make the performing arts more accessible to everyone. Organisations and professionals in Northern and Western Europe have better knowledge and are more actively engaged in accessibility, inclusion and participation than their peers in Southern and Eastern Europe. Addressing these inequalities, through national, regional and local policies, as well as the role of the EU and European networks and platforms, arises as a major issue in the short and mid-term.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The report closes with a set of observations that summarise the progress made, and the challenges that remain:

- There is evidence of progress towards the accessibility of disabled artists. Progress is slow and complex, but it can happen, when organisations and professionals are committed to foster change and resources are available.
- There is more awareness about accessibility, in a context where equality, diversity and inclusion gain relevance, at least in some countries. This remains, however, a long-term process, and very often it is easier for professionals in this field to identify the challenges remaining than the progress observed.
- There are very significant regional differences across Europe, which need to be addressed. Opportunities for disabled artists differ significantly across societies, as a result of resources available, political will, mindset shifts, and

the availability of knowledge. In general, countries in Northern and Western Europe are doing better in these areas than those in Southern and Eastern Europe.

- EU-funded projects and initiatives have made significant contributions in raising awareness about accessibility and participation, presenting the work of disabled artists across borders, helping to build capacities, and contributing to the emergence of a coalition of dedicated professionals and organisations.
- The availability of dedicated policies and budgets makes a difference. Progress has been achieved particularly in countries where access is a policy priority, and where organisations have dedicated budgets for accessibility, inclusion and participation.
- Information and knowledge remain central and need to be more widespread. Knowledge on how to make the performing arts more accessible to everyone is not yet sufficiently widespread. In the countries where it is available, it contributes to triggering change. Data collection and dissemination, capacity-building and peer-learning, and good practice transfer need to be seen as priorities.
- Progress continues to be necessary even where positive change has been achieved. While the report illustrates significant progress in several countries and organisations, which needs to be celebrated, these are often small-scale stories. More change is still necessary, by further involving disabled artists and audiences in decision-making, addressing education, or scaling up good practices.

Overall, the report shows that progress has been achieved, particularly in the countries where organisations, disabled professionals and policymakers have taken a commitment and actively worked together to foster change. It demonstrates that multi-country, long-term actions lead to change. EU funding has also made a very significant contribution in this respect. However, progress continues to be necessary even where advancements have been made.