

Study on the Social Situation of Artists in Austria

Summary

1 Aims and methods of the Study

To date, we have only had partial knowledge of the actual living and working conditions of artists in Austria. To gain updated information on the social situation of artists from all art disciplines, the Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture commissioned the Vienna-based social research institute “L&R Sozialforschung” – in cooperation with Dr. Gerhard Wohlfahrt from the University of Graz – to conduct a study, the results of which are summarised below.

The core element of the study was a questionnaire-based survey issued in early 2008, intended to obtain information on the following areas of interest: employment, income and social protection, private situation, utilisation of grants and subsidies, training and further education, mobility and networking. A total of 1,850 artists from the fields of music, literature, the visual arts, the performing arts and film responded to the questionnaire. The survey provides a solid data base for analysing the social situation of Austrian artists.¹ The quantitative survey was extended by two qualitative instruments: on the one hand, expert interviews with representatives from all art sectors, and on the other, group discussions with individual artists. The results were presented in a comprehensive report. The present summary is based on some of the central results.²

FACT BOX / Basic data on respondent artists

Gender and age: A total of 1,850 artists took part in the survey. The female share was 46%, with a high of 52% in the performing arts and a low of 26% in music. The majority of respondents were in the middle-age bracket of 35-55 years, while the proportion of women was higher in the younger age groups.

Place of residence and region: Artists from all disciplines were strongly concentrated in urban areas and especially in Vienna: while 61% had their main place of residence in a major city, 46% of them lived in Vienna. Only 45% of the artists were also born in their current home state. This internal migration means a relatively strong influx not only in Vienna, but also in Lower Austria, Burgenland and Salzburg. Further, international mobility is important: 17% of respondents were born outside of Austria.

Priority disciplines: The respondent artists were distributed across disciplines as follows: the largest group was formed by visual artists, with a percentage of 42%, while 20% were in the performing arts, 15% work in literature, 14% belong to the group of musical artists and 6% work in the film sector. Three percent (52 respondents) said they did not belong to any clear priority discipline.

¹ According to estimates based on data issued by Statistics Austria (census and micro-census) and information obtained from the interest groups on the size of the interest group, the total of 1,850 completed questionnaires corresponds to a return rate of around 10%. A more detailed calculation is not possible, due to certain blurs in defining the basic population.

² To facilitate interpretation, percentages were rounded up to the nearest higher integer and sources or comparative data were omitted. For more detailed information, please refer to the full report (in German).

2 Types of work and incomes of artists

Artists often work in several disciplines of art and cannot (any longer) be classified as belonging to a single discipline. Apart from their genuine artistic work, many artists are also engaged in art-related areas (e.g. as educators or presenters in an art environment) or in areas not related to the arts. While the former applies primarily to artists working in music, the latter is most common among writers.

These art-related and/or unrelated activities are essentially pursued as a source of income, given that incomes from artistic work are meagre and for the majority of artists come at irregular intervals, making income planning rather difficult. On average, the net income from artistic work in the year under review was Euro 4,500, with a tendency towards somewhat higher artistic incomes earned by film makers and performing artists. The artistic earnings – in line with the high number of self-employed persons in all disciplines – are mostly gained from the sale of services and works. The share of awards, premiums, grants and individual subsidies varies between disciplines but is generally rather small.

The overall personal income of artists (including income from non-artistic activities) remains significantly below that of other professional groups. These personal incomes are moreover determined by factors commonly observed in the population at large: females earn less than males and young artists earn less than older ones. The artists' standard of living is low in comparison to that of other segments of the population: their poverty-risk threshold is markedly higher than in the Austrian population as a whole and among gainfully employed persons.

FACT BOX / Types of activities and income situation

Types of activities: 76% of respondents are (also) active in art-related and/or unrelated fields. Artists with an exclusive focus on artistic work are above all film makers and performing artists (approximately 30% vs. 24% overall). Art-related activities are found relatively more often in the music sector (73% of musical artists vs. 58% overall), whereas non-art-related activities are predominantly pursued in the literature group (58% of authors vs. 42% overall).

Income from artistic activities: The median artistic net income was Euro 4,500 in the year under review. Women earn a median income which is 35% below that of men. Performing artists and film makers have the relatively highest income, with a little over Euro 8,000 p.a. while writers have the lowest income, namely 2,600 euro (median).

Sources and income (dis-)continuity: On the level of all respondents, 64% of artistic earnings come from the sale of works and services, 20% from employment-based activities, 7% from royalties and other sources, and 9% from awards, premiums, grants and individual subsidies. The latter share is slightly higher for women than for men and is clearly the highest for writers (23%) as compared to other sectors. Altogether, 60% of artists find that their artistic income is earned at irregular intervals and that it is hard to plan ahead while 21% say that earnings come at irregular intervals, but they are able to plan ahead. Only 19% earn a regular artistic income.

Incomes from art-related and/or non-related activities: Taking all incomes into account, artists earned a median net income of Euro 12,400 in the year under review, with men earning 36% more (median). By comparison, the average annual net income of self-employed persons in Austria in 2005 was Euro 18,900, and the median net income of employees in 2006 was Euro 17,100.

The median equivalent income³ of artists of around 1,000 euro per month in the year under review is only slightly above the poverty line (2006: Euro 893 per month) and clearly below the median equivalent income of the overall Austrian population (2006: Euro 1,488 per month). 37% of artists live below the poverty line, which is only true of 13% of the total population and 7% of all gainfully employed persons.

³ The equivalent income takes into account the size of the household and thus describes the standard of living of the household members.

3 Employment, social security and public funding

The types of employment in the art sector are seen in the relevant literature as being typical examples of a type of employment model that will become increasingly widespread in the future labour market. It is marked by the fact that work organisation and employment do not correspond to wage-dependent, self-employed or entrepreneurial activities. Such trends are not limited to artists, but do specifically affect them. Complex employment situations with large shares of self-employed persons, multiple employment and gainful employment careers that are hard to plan ahead are some of the key results of the present study.

Employment. In the framework of artistic activities, self-employment is the predominant form of employment. Especially in visual arts and literature, respondents were almost exclusively self-employed. In the performing arts, film and music, salaried employment plays a comparatively greater role, not least because of the statutory framework conditions (Actors' Act, collective bargaining agreement for film makers). The duration of assignments and employment contracts varies mostly between one week and three months, which means that long-term planning is hardly possible at all.

The working time of respondent artists is on average around 52 hours per week, which is higher than that of the gainfully employed population, but only average when compared to the group of self-employed workers. Part-time work, like in the overall population, is more often performed by women than by men. In the field of artistic work, organisational or administrative activities are increasing and in the case of film makers and visual artists already take up more than one-fifth of the artistic working time.

For around half of all artists, the artistic work follows a regular time pattern (which is not true of their artistic earnings, see above). Particularly strong discontinuity or irregularity and a poor planning situation in comparison to other sectors are to be observed in the working time of film makers and performing artists.

Social security. Multiple employments and a variety of employment situations in the art sector, as well as in art-related and unrelated fields, frequently lead to complex constellations in social insurance law and to multiple compulsory insurances within different insurance systems. In relative terms, insurance gaps are most likely in the field of pension insurance, which poses problems in view of the gradual extension of the periods that count for the wage base of the pension claim). Film makers, in particular, are affected by gaps in social insurance, which reflects the specific employment situation in this discipline. Protection against unemployment under the Unemployment Insurance Act is difficult in all disciplines due to the large share of self-employed persons, but also because of the existence of parallel employment.

The Social Security Insurance Fund for Artists, established in 2001 to provide insurance cover under the pension insurance scheme, is mainly utilised by visual artists, according to data issued by the Fund. Close to one-fourth of respondents has already received benefits from the Fund. Criticism of this funding scheme is largely related to the mandatory minimum and maximum income requirements.

Overall, protection under the social insurance law is seen by artists from all disciplines as a key personal stress factor. In particular, respondents said they lacked affordable insurance protection against loss of income in cases of illness or accident. Similarly, insurance protection in old age is seen as a burden on the individual respondent. Suggestions for improvement are therefore mostly geared toward some form of unemployment insurance or a basic income.

Funding systems. The study focuses on the individual utilisation of public funding systems by the artists themselves (i.e. mostly individual funding), which is most important in the field of literature, with projects, institutions or infrastructure investments (also) receiving support in other disciplines. Generally, the groups which are in the middle income classes are most frequently in contact with the funding systems. Established applicants have greater success in obtaining arts funding (from federal, regional, local or private sources). Social welfare benefits for artists are more frequently requested by women than by men, thus reflecting their relative financial disadvantage.

Suggestions to improve the situation primarily concerned a bigger budget for the funding institutions, in order to upgrade the structural framework conditions for artistic work, and a better organised funding environment, with more information on available funding and with greater transparency in the allocation of funds.

FACT BOX / Employment, social insurance and grants

Types of employment: As regards their artistic activities, around 80% of respondents were self-employed, while 14% were both self-employed and employed and only 5% worked exclusively as employees. Employment relationships play a relevant role only in three sectors: 50% of performing artists, 36% of film makers and 24% of musicians were (also) employed in the survey year.

Working time: The part-time rate is higher for female artists (20%) than for male artists (13%). When compared to the overall gainfully employed population, this share is below average for women (total part-time percentage of gainfully employed women: 40%) and above average for men (total part-time percentage of gainfully employed men: 7%). The time needed for administrative or organisational tasks – depending on the type of activity – averages between 16% and 20% of the weekly working time.

Time (dis-)continuity: Nearly half of the respondents devote their time to artistic work at regular intervals, while one-third do artistic work at irregular intervals, but are able to plan ahead. 17% of respondents work with greater discontinuity, i.e. their artistic working time is irregular and hard to plan ahead.

Multiple employment: A total of 52% reported multiple employment (both self-employed and dependently employed, in various types of activity – artistic, art-related and non-related activities). From a long-term perspective, these constellations are typical for the majority of respondents.

Insurance status and seamless cover: Around 83% of responding artists in the gainfully employed age group were protected against the social risks of illness, accident and old age under the mandatory insurance scheme in the year under review, with the degree of integration into the scheme rising with age. Where no mandatory insurance was available, the majority (especially women) are protected under a spouse insurance scheme, accident insurance is predominantly provided by private insurances, and pension insurance in those cases is largely missing. No insurance relationship in the three segments was reported by 1% of respondents in health

insurance, 3% in accident insurance and 6% in pension insurance. Seamless insurance cover in all three segments as a long-term perspective is comparatively least favourable for film makers.

Artists' Social Insurance Fund: In 2004, a total of 4,929 artists received benefits including 68% through the commission for visual arts. 35% were required retroactively to pay back the benefits, mainly on the grounds that their income was below the statutory minimum. 28% of respondents have (at least once) received benefits from the Fund, the percentage for film makers and writers being comparatively lower (16%) than for other priority sectors.

Public grants and subsidies: The study focuses on the individual perspective of artists (utilisation and familiarity) and provides no information on the amounts of grants or subsidies. A total of 29% of respondents have not yet applied for grants or subsidies, a share which is larger in the upper and lower income brackets, and smaller in the middle brackets. Among writers, the share is only 19%. As regards the allocation of grants, established artists are more successful than less-established or non-established artists: Grants and subsidies from the federal government are obtained by 78% of the former, and by 61% of the latter group, whereas grants and subsidies from regional and local authorities show a success rate of 92% vs. 67%. 11% of respondent women and 7% of men had applied for benefits from the Social Welfare Fund for Artists to alleviate a social emergency.

4 Private life

Social background. Artists' families of origin are distinguished by their parents' high level of professional qualification, in comparison with the general population. Living conditions in the parental home are mostly considered middle-class. The number of persons describing the living conditions of their parent's home as modest increases with age, which is an indication that it becomes more difficult for persons from underprivileged families to find access to the professions in the arts.

Professional training. Just as women are generally more oriented toward education, female artists more often have an art-specific training (especially in the visual and performing arts) and are more eager to pursue further education careers than their male colleagues. These results correspond to the graduation data of university art schools, where women are in the majority.

Private life. Overall, artists are less likely to be married and tend to have children less frequently and at a later period than the average population. Married artists are most likely to have children, whereas artists living in other forms of relationship tend to remain without children. A right to a family life is often perceived as "not liveable" in view of uncertain employment and income perspectives. Women are more likely to be single than their male colleagues, who live more often in partnership constellations and hence benefit from stronger private support.

Stress and quality of life. The central stress aspects for artists revolve around questions of social security and income protection. Women are more often subject to a greater level of stress than men. Overall, an increase in stress is accompanied by a diminished feeling of well-being, which is markedly lower among artists than in the population at large.

FACT BOX / Social background, training, private environment, quality of life

Family background: 54% of the fathers and 38% of the mothers of respondents are/were employed in higher and highly qualified jobs. At the level of all gainfully employed persons, these values are 26% for men and 21% for women. The percentage of artists from modest family backgrounds is 49% in the 65+ age group and 19% in the under-35 age group. Overall, 33% describe the living conditions in their parental home as modest, 61% as middle-class and 6% as wealthy.

Training: 82% of female and 76% of male artists in the survey have completed an art-specific training course. Academic courses (university, academy, conservatory) were attended by 74 % and completed by 43% of respondents. 13% completed private training courses and 11% passed specific school exams. The number of women among the graduates of art studies at a university was recently found to be 61% in Austria.

Life forms and parenthood: 39% female artists vs. 24% of male artists are single, while 44% of men and 33% of women are married. Whereas 55% of all Austrian females aged 15-44 have given birth to at least one live-born child, only 35% of female artists in the same age group are mothers. In the under-35 age group, more than 80% are childless and only when they reach the age of 35-45 do half of them have children. Parenthood is far more common in traditional marriages (84%) than in all other forms of relationship (between 35% and 45%).

Stress exposure and subjective well-being: 57% feel exposed to great stress in connection with their social security, 53% with regard to their income. The smallest percentage is in respect of the employment situation (18%). An overall high stress exposure is experienced by 31% of women as against 20% of men. Low subjective well-being is reported by 51% of artists (total population: 22%) while only 11% experience a high degree of well-being (as compared to 27% in the total population).

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