Toolkit for cultural organisations

Supporting artists in exile

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In Ex(ile) Lab

Introduction

Welcome to the toolkit of In Ex(ile) Lab, a European cooperation project led by atelier des artistes en exil (France), developed and implemented with Visual Voices (Cyprus), Alkantara (Portugal) and Santarcangelo Festival (Italy).

↘What is In Ex(ile) Lab?

In Ex(ile) Lab is an experiment that took place between 2022 and 2024 and pursued two main goals:
1. Build the capacities of cultural organisations to create opportunities for artists in exile,
2. Test transdisciplinary integration paths in which artists can grow, in host society and more generally in the European space.

During two years, In Ex(ile) Lab partners designed and implemented a tailored program for a group of artists in exile, including a wide array of activities (master classes, residencies, mentorship program, webinars, workshops, public pitching). The idea was to use this program as a bedrock to test new ways of collaborating with artists and cater to the specific needs of the group, in order to be able to share the results with kindred organisations interested in collaborating with artists in exile.

172 artists who had recently relocated to France, Cyprus, Italy and Portugal applied to the open call with a performance project they wanted to develop. Out of the applicants, 12 artists were selected. During the program, partners were in constant dialogue with the artists in order to support them in their creation process. You can discover the 12 performances in the digital catalog downloadable from our website: inexilelab.eu

↘Why a toolkit?

When submitting In Ex(ile) Lab to the European Commission in the framework of Creative Europe calls, we highlighted the absence of sustainable cooperation to pool existing resources and create tools to guide cultural organisations willing to work with artists in exile. We identified that the main pitfall to avoid was to suggest ready-made solutions and compulsory stages in the development of projects supporting artists in exile. We had the intuition that projects tailored for artists in exile would take many different forms according to the migratory situation and structuring of the cultural sectors of each European country.

We imagined In Ex(ile) Lab could pave the way for organisations to innovate at their own scale and pace, and suggest areas of work to be combined and adapted to a local context. Each organisation would be able to try out the proposed methodologies and share their experience with other organisations, which would contribute to the global knowledge available regarding artists in exile in Europe. We knew that the complexity of the topic would require cooperation at various scales (local, regional, national, European and beyond the European borders) and in various areas (artistic training, creation and distribution, legal advice, social care, medical and psychological support).

This is what this toolkit is for – we want to inspire cultural organisations to engage with artists in exile and support one another in doing so. We firmly believe that this will contribute to renewing the discourse on immigration, diversity and inclusion.

↘What is this toolkit made of?

Throughout the project, the main partners met regularly online to share the development of the project and the difficulties they faced. On four occasions, they met during extended meetings with associated partners and a group of artists in exile who were invited to participate as experts. They also regularly checked in with participating artists at the local level (each partner with artists residing in their country). At the end of the project, supported artists, mentors and partners all met at Santarcangelo Festival to debrief.

From this open dialogue, we drew five major points of attention that cultural organisations should have in mind when starting a collaboration with exiled artists living in their country.

Because projects involving artists in exile can take various shapes according to the local context and goals, we highly encourage organisations to identify early in project design the blind spots of their project.

For this reason, we imagined a self-evaluation tool in the form of a questionnaire that organisations can use during the preparation and implementation of their project.

Five points of attention

① Open Call accessibility

↘ Define terms precisely

In our project, we used the term “artists in exile” which we defined as artists living in a foreign country who cannot return to their home country due to war, racial, ethnic, sexual and gender discrimination, or religious, economic and political marginalisation. We chose not to refer to legal statuses (such as asylum seeker, refugee or any visa category) but rather focus on the condition of exile. We chose to focus on newcomers, that is to say individuals who recently relocated to one of the participating countries. We defined “recently” by choosing a maximum number of years that the artists have been living in the host country. The word “performance” also had to be defined as our target group could include musicians and visual artists developing a performance.

Whatever vocabulary you choose, it is crucial to define any term that is relevant to understand the scope of your call and your project. Throughout the project, it might also be useful to come back to the terms that seemed unclear for the artists during the open call phase (in our case, we noted the terms “mentor” and “exile” were the most questioned).

↘ Translate the call in the most commonly used languages in the country where you are, and give the possibility of responding in one of these languages

This requires you to do some research about the communities living in your country, for instance through available data about the origin of asylum seekers / refugees. This also requires the availability of translators and a dedicated time that should be taken into account in your open call timeline. While translating, attention should be paid to terms related to artistic practices (master class, residency, workshop, pitching session) that may not exist in other languages and/or may need to be defined precisely.

↘ Organise informative and/or support sessions about your open call

Open calls in the arts are not necessarily a common practice all around the globe. Some artists might have never responded to an open call before, others may lack information, context or cultural references to decipher this specific call, understand eligibility criteria and/or proposed activities. Organising Q/A sessions will help some prepare their applications, although some others may need extended support in order to reply. If the number of applicants allows, consider organising smaller sessions where artists can get individual assistance when drafting their replies.

↘ Propose alternative formats of applications

For some, understanding and replying in a written format may be more challenging than for others because of a specific health condition and/or linguistic, socio-cultural barriers. Offering multiple formats in which the open call is published and/or in which the artists can reply to the questions (audio, video, text) can alleviate some of these barriers and ensure the participation of the greatest number and a diversity of profiles.

↘ Get feedback before launching the open call

If possible, we advise to have the call proofread by individuals who can identify with the group you are targeting as well as other professional artists. As a reference, we launched the open call three months after starting brainstorming internally about it, and we had it reviewed by experts over a month prior to publishing it.

↘ Disseminate the call in the NGO sector

When we designed the project, we had in mind that creating connections with the social sector was key in order to reach out to individuals in exile who were professional artists in their home country but might not be identified as such in their host country. NGOs focusing on migrant/refugee populations are often the first ones to be in touch with artists in exile upon their arrival, therefore they will be able to disseminate the call to your target group.

Five points of attention

② Project definition & timeline

↘ Describe precisely the activities and timeline of the project in the open call

Be as precise as possible regarding program activities (indicating which ones are mandatory) as well as time frame in order to ensure that applicants are available to take part in your project. We highly advise to define or paraphrase terms connected to artistic activities that might not be in use at all in some languages or might be used in English in other languages.

↘ Draft and sign a memorandum of understanding with all participants

Writing all details of the program, mutual obligations, expected result (if any) as well as financial compensation (if any) and payment modalities in an agreement will ensure that all parties understand what they are committing to. This can greatly help problem-solving in case of misunderstandings and/or conflict during the program. We found it helpful and necessary to go through the memorandum of understanding orally with participants before signature. We also recommend discussing the communications of the project with the artists when reviewing the memorandum of understanding and throughout the project, in order to make sure they are comfortable with how the project and the artists are presented.

↘ Be aware of the limits of the program you are offering

What we tested through In Ex(ile) Lab is the capacity of cultural organisations to provide a suitable framework for artists in exile. The term framework is one of the most used throughout our meetings. This framework you are offering at the start of your program can evolve depending on your capacity and availability to answer the artist's needs, and the artist's ability and availability to participate. However it should always be mindful of equality between participants. We highly encourage you to be responsible and realistic in the ambitions of your project, in order to uphold the commitments your organisation has made. This will incite artists to uphold the commitments they have made too.

↘ Find a good balance between online activities and in-person activities

What came out of the evaluation of our project is that for many artists, having in-person activities (especially when it comes to artistic creation) was deemed necessary to overcome isolation, gain confidence and create connections. Upon arrival in a new country, exiles experience intense stress and loneliness, sometimes helplessness (to various degrees according to whether they had prior professional connections, friends or family living in their host country). They feel disoriented. In our case, starting our program with an in-person activity helped a lot in installing a safer environment for artists. However, we under-estimated this point when it came to mentoring: the mentorship program was designed to take place online but it turned out all artists and mentors would have preferred in-person sessions, even if it meant there were going to be fewer. Regarding in-person activities, what also came out from our evaluation is the need for a platform to showcase their works publicly, on top of peer-to-peer activities that are also valuable for artistic and personal growth.

③ Administrative status

↘ Artists in exile go through long, dehumanizing administrative processes which oftentimes become a mental workload when it comes to scheduling activities. Such processes as renewal of visas, residence permits or travel documents is likely to be an obstacle to their full participation in an activity involving mobility. Sharing this preoccupation with them from the start of the project (or at least 6 months before any activity involving mobility) will alleviate this burden and most likely prevent failures of the project – such as postponement or cancellation of activities.

④ Mental Health

↘ Drawing from our experience through In Ex(ile) Lab and prior experience of partners working with artists in exile, we can say that artists are likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder which can impact their participation and professional relationships. Each artist's relationship with time management and/or commitment can vary and be tricky when it comes to deadlines and fast answers, especially if the project has a long duration. In order to create a safe and realistic framework for all, mental health issues are a topic that cannot be overlooked and should be in the mind of cultural organisations. However, both empathy and respect of privacy are key to work with artists in exile.

⑤ Resources & key organisations

↘ NGOs and specialised organisations such as Mobility Information Point (MIP) present in some EU countries are likely to have reliable resources about artist visas, asylum applications and the qualification for refugee status and subsidiary protection status in the country you are located. They also are up-to-date regarding national immigration policies. In some cases, they might not have all the answers regarding individual cases of artists nor the capacity to operate beyond their scope. The contact of lawyers specialised in asylum and immigration law can therefore be useful, although working with lawyers is likely to require a specific budget line if the lawyers are not working pro bono. When the case is complex, it can be useful to choose lawyers who can give legal expertise in different areas of law (family law, criminal law, intellectual property).

You are thinking of engaging with artists in exile for an artistic project.

↘ Section I

1. Have you done some research about the migratory situation and immigration policies of your country?

○ Yes ○ No

→ If yes...

2. Are you aware if there is an artist visa or artist residence permit in your country?

○ Yes ○ No

3. Do you know how the asylum process works in your country?

○ Yes ○ No

4. Do you know what are the rights and obligations of a refugee in your country?

○ Yes ○ No

5. Do you know what the government reception schemes are for newcomers in your country?

○ Yes ○ No

→ If you have replied no to one of the previous questions (1-5):

6. Are you in contact with NGOs, institutions, lawyers, social workers with an expertise or field experience with migrant / refugee populations?

○ Yes ○ No

↘ Section II

7. Do you already have an internal policy regarding the inclusion of specific marginalised groups in your organisation?

◯ Yes ◯ No

→ If yes...

8. Can you adapt some of the best practices you have for other categories of marginalised groups to artists in exile?

◯ Yes ◯ No

→ If no...

9. Do you have available resources or contacts to reach out to in order to know best practices for the inclusion of marginalised groups?

◯ Yes ◯ No

↘ Section III

10. Did you take into account the location of participants and facilitators (mentors, experts, speakers) to design and budget the activities of the project?

◯ Yes ◯ No

11. Have you anticipated the case of artists who cannot engage with activities involving mobility?

◯ Yes ◯ No

12. Have you asked the artist what is their legal status in your country, what type of visa or residence permit they have and if this visa or residence permit allows them to cross borders (within and/or outside the EU) on the dates of your project?

◯ Yes ◯ No

13. Have you asked if the artist is covered by social security or a health insurance policy in their country of residence?

◯ Yes ◯ No

→ If yes, and the artist needs assistance in administrative procedures, please check question 6.

14. Have you established MoUs (memorandum of understanding) or contracts with all participants prior to starting your project activities?

◯ Yes ◯ No

15. Have you discussed the communications of the project with the artists and made sure they are comfortable with how they will be presented and their works introduced?

◯ Yes ◯ No

16. Have you assessed the technical and financial feasibility of their projects with the artists?

◯ Yes ◯ No

17. Have you asked the artists what their needs are prior to starting an activity taking place outside their city of residence?
It can be hospitality needs, translation needs, special needs related to their health condition or family situation, access to facilities, organisations and individuals to develop their project.

◯ Yes ◯ No

→ If yes...

18. Have you checked with the artist that travel and accommodation arrangements are compatible with such needs and the situation of the artist (current health condition, proficiency in a foreign language)?

◯ Yes ◯ No

→ If yes...

19. Do you have a list of professionals to reach out to in case of emergency during an activity of the project (health professionals, social workers, lawyers)?

◯ Yes ◯ No

20. Have you scheduled debriefing sessions with the artists throughout the project?

◯ Yes ◯ No

In Ex(ile) Lab is a project created & supported by

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VISU/L VOICES
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Design: Studio des formes