



ON
THE
MOVE

The Situation of At-risk and Displaced
Artists and Culture Professionals

Defending Arts Professionals Impacted by Forced Displacement

**Stepping Up Strategies
in the United States**

Volume 4
New Instruments



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On the Move is the international information network dedicated to artistic and cultural mobility, gathering 93 members from 33 countries. Since 2002, On the Move has been working to provide regular, up-to-date and free information on mobility opportunities, conditions and funding, and to advocate for the value of cross-border cultural mobility. Co-funded by the European Union and the French Ministry of Culture, On the Move is implementing an ambitious multiannual programme to build the capacities of local, regional, national, European and international stakeholders for the sustainable development of our cultural ecosystems.

On the Move regularly commissions researchers to investigate different themes closely related to the network's activities and the work carried out by its members. Reflecting on transversal concerns and key areas of artistic and cultural mobility, the network tries to establish a clearer picture of current movements and trends while formulating policy recommendations.

<http://on-the-move.org>

Editor Yohann Floch

Researchers Mary Ann DeVlieg

English Proofreader John Ellingsworth

Graphic design and layout Marine Domec

Advisory committee members Anupama Sekhar – independent expert (United Arab Emirates), Birgit Ellinghaus – alba KULTUR (Germany), Bojana Panevska – DutchCulture / TransArtists (The Netherlands), Clymene Christoforou – D6: Culture in Transit (United Kingdom), Dirk de Wit – Kunstenpunt / Flanders Arts Institute (Belgium), Dr Mary Ann DeVlieg – independent expert (Italy), Dr. (habil.) Gokce Dervisoglu Okandan – researcher (Turkey), Fairouz Tamimi – Action for Hope (Brussels), Geoliane Arab – Onda, Office national de diffusion artistique (France), Ghita Khladi – Afrikayna (Morocco), Ivanna Karpeniuk – Ukrainian Cultural Foundation (Ukraine), Ixone Sabada Fernandez – Moving Artists (Spain), Gracie Golden – AFI, Artistic Freedom Initiative (United States of America), Julie Trébault – ARC, Artists at Risk Connection (United States of America), Laëtitia Manach – On the Move France (United Kingdom), Lara Bourdin – independent expert (Canada), Lina Allia – Phd candidate On the Move France, Radio Grenouille / Euphonia, Lyon University (France), Liudmyla Kozhekina – Ukrainian Cultural Foundation (Ukraine), Olga Yurkova – Ukrainian Institute (Ukraine), Ouafa Belgacem – Culture Funding Watch (Tunisia), Outi Elena Valanto – TGR, The Green Room (Germany), Simon Dove – CEC ArtsLink (United States of America), Yelyzaveta Sidelnykova – Ukrainian Institute (Ukraine)

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Foreword

In November 2024, On the Move embarked on a research-action initiative dedicated to the situation of at-risk and displaced artists and culture professionals.¹ The overarching aim of this project was to identify policies and practices across Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States that provide both immediate and longer-term support, accessibility and professional continuity for displaced artists and cultural practitioners. This analysis enabled the mapping of existing support schemes, the identification of success factors and structural gaps, and the development of recommendations to assist support organisations and institutions in strengthening monitoring mechanisms, sharing innovative responses, and adapting policies and programmes where necessary.

In this fourth and final volume, On the Move presents a set of proposed instruments – whether newly designed, replicated, upscaled or adapted – aimed at strengthening support for at-risk and displaced artists. Co-designed with relocated artists, researchers and cultural stakeholders, the publication sets out operational recommendations, identifies avenues for the development of existing support schemes, and lays the groundwork for the establishment of new mechanisms.

This publication is extracted from the original paper² co-commissioned by On the Move and CEC ArtsLink following the CEC ArtsLink Assembly 2025 titled 'Defending Each Other – Building collective support for artists in the US amid persecution, crisis, and conflict' held at La MaMa in New York City on 6 and 7 November 2025.³ It builds upon the interviews and findings of a first research paper published under the Volume 3 Case Studies⁴ of On the Move's research-action project.

Since early 2025, the United States government, under the newly elected Trump administration, has initiated a series of executive and legislative measures that threaten artistic freedom and cultural participation. These include increased governmental oversight of arts and cultural institutions; the censorship of artists and the cancellation of performances on political grounds; stated intentions to prohibit LGBTQ+ representation in the arts; the labelling of dissenting or critical artists and artworks as 'anti-American'; the denial of performance visas to international artists critical of the administration; and attacks on press freedom. In 2025, the US government deported several asylum seekers with pending legal cases, including artists and cultural workers, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement and the right to seek and receive asylum under international law.⁵

1 Floch, Y. (ed.), *The Situation of At-risk and Displaced Artists and Culture Professionals – Volumes 1-4*, On the Move, 2025-2026, available here: <https://on-the-move.org/work/projects/risk-and-displaced-artists-and-culture-professionals>

2 The full version, published in January 2026, is available here: <https://www.cecartslink.org/defending-each-other-in-the-usa>

3 The event was co-curated and produced by CEC ArtsLink and AFI - Artistic Freedom Initiative. The programme and the recordings are available here: <https://www.cecartslink.org/session/artslink-assembly-2025-defending-each-other>

4 DeVlieg, M. A., 'Chapter 2: Opening Our Minds: Including Incoming Artists in the Communities and Cultural Sector of the USA' in Floch, Y. (ed.), *Protecting and Supporting At-risk and Displaced Arts Professionals Across Borders – Volume 3 Case Studies*, 2025, On the Move, available here: <https://on-the-move.org/resources/library/protecting-and-supporting-risk-and-displaced-arts-professionals-across-borders>

5 See Artistic Freedom Initiative's Artistic Freedom Monitor (AFM) USA, 2025 Fact Sheet, available here: <https://artisticfreedominitiative.org/research/artistic-freedom-monitor-usa-2025-fact-sheet>

This publication is conceived as a practical 'tool' for cultural stakeholders. It seeks to address the current situation of at-risk and forcibly displaced artists and cultural professionals residing in the United States, to open up discussion, and to explore pathways for joint action aimed at establishing concrete support mechanisms both in the US and beyond.

Given the relevance and precision of the coordination processes proposed, the methodology outlined, and the pertinence of the questions raised, On the Move has decided to publish this material separately and to circulate it beyond US-based networks. As comparable restrictive measures continue to threaten artistic freedom and cultural participation – including LGBTQ+ representation in the arts, press freedom, cross-border mobility and access to visas – it is important to share such guidance with cultural stakeholders operating in other contexts under pressure, supporting them to organise and strategise more effectively. Although originally conceived for the American context, these reflections can serve as a starting point for discussion within the cultural sector as it shapes its own responses to emerging and recurring threats from populist powers.

We wish you an engaging and thought-provoking read.

Yohann Floch, Director of Operations

The argument, the approach and the questions

The arts sector sits at the intersection of community, responsibility, and the obligation to live in an interdependent world. If resistance is to give real form to democratic values, it must be collective and lived, grounded in the presence and participation of people rather than abstract ideals alone. This is a call to resist: to push back against narratives that diminish those who move to the USA to escape repression, that devalue the contributions of artists and the arts, and that erode commitments to justice and equity. It is a call for the arts sector to step forward and claim its territory.

Written for the arts sector, **this paper intends to initiate a process for key actors to produce the answers that only they can identify; it is an invitation to think and create together, from concept to action.**⁶ It calls for a cross-sector alliance to strengthen what can be called a solidarity network, be it formal or informal. Networks in the arts sector are ubiquitous because (and when) they are effective. Some may see a simple 'coordination' process as needed. It may be better to think of this as a movement that can include a multiplicity of responses, in large cities, in rural areas or small towns, local, regional or national, each acting according to their own strengths and interests. The aim will be to prepare the arts sector for resilience in a constantly and rapidly shifting political and social environment, specifically as it relates to artists impacted by forced displacement. Yet by sharing and addressing concerns, pragmatic actions will emerge and the sector as a whole will move forward. Various approaches are valid, but whatever is created should be founded on a number of principles:

Firstly, that there is a **shared, baseline goal that emerges out of this process.** This might be along the lines of 'to contribute to society through a vibrant and pertinent arts sector that supports artists at risk and impacted by displacement who have relocated to the USA, to develop their potential as fully as possible'.

This goal needs to be further articulated as **actionable and strategic, and respond to the question - what needs to exist or be done that is not here already? It cannot be abstract - outputs must be concrete and material.**

Secondly, that the arts sector can break away from a model shaped by competition for resources, and build a **pragmatic, forward-looking solidarity movement that combines the unique strengths of all** in order to **envision and prepare for a positive future** environment.

Thirdly, that this positive environment will emerge through the hard work and **dedication of a cross-sector, multi-scale critical mass including those with skills of advocacy organising.**

Fourthly, that despite a scarcity of existent resources (time, money, energy), there is enough creativity in the sector to construct an **agile, feasible, enjoyable, equitable and productive structure or process to comprise and sustain such a movement.**

And, rather than last, a principle that underscores all the above: **it must be artist centred.**

⁶ Anonymised quotations appearing throughout the text are drawn from artists and other participants at the November 2025 event, as well as from feedback received during the presentation of these elements.

A seminal study of transnational advocacy networks defined them as civil society activists who **'identify a problem, specify a cause, and propose a solution, all with an eye toward producing procedural, substantive, and normative change in the area of concern'**, adding that **'without the disruptive activity of these actors neither normative change or change in practices is likely to occur'**.⁷

Aligned by shared values and principles, networks act as organisers, awareness-raisers and federators. Arts sector professionals, beyond

upholding their own public rhetoric, have a responsibility to actively influence policy and political action in their sector, to demand that policy and action are coherent with the rhetoric in their policies, missions and project proposals. **It is time for the arts sector, including artists, arts organisations, funders and perhaps also audiences, to step up to defend one another, to become a unified voice that demonstrates its focus, strength and purpose to past and potential supporters and in so doing, strengthens itself.**

The 'blueprint'

In the following pages, elements of discussions and interviews are accompanied by questions to spark reflection in and amongst those who wish to contribute to this initiative. The results of this process should result in a type of 'blueprint' to develop a nationwide / internationally entwined coordination mechanism and/or an inspiring 'movement' to support artists impacted by displacement. And artists need to participate in its formation: 'In practice, many displaced artists find themselves caught between visibility and invisibility - welcomed for their stories but not always integrated as full collaborators'.

- **Networking is seen as a strategic method to achieve a common goal. Sample questions** are suggested for participants to address in order to achieve a feasible collective movement. **Only a structure and system defined and designed by its participants will be legitimate.**
- Sector professionals, including artists and funders, are all **under pressure** currently but **pockets of promising practice can explore** models, share experiences, and ultimately grow, **scaling both up and out.**

- Networked initiatives thrive when **members gain something** - mutual support, learning or skills exchanges, useful contacts, inspiration for their own work, recognition, resources, new innovative shared projects. It stresses the importance of **early, quick, visible wins to keep members motivated.**
- Far more can be achieved if the **arts sector allies with other pertinent sectors**, e.g. immigrant and refugee organisations, human rights, free expression, faith, social and community groups, educational institutions, and so on.
- **A hub and spoke concept maximises the capillary nature of networks** to spread information, both within the group and between groups via brokers and bridgers active in multiple locations, between artists, other organisations, funders, policy-makers. A) **small experimental clusters** analyse their work to support artists and formalise local or regional coalitions, while they B) build towards a **national grouping** in which everyone can be represented and to which funders and supporters can react.

7 Kekk, M. and Sikkink, K., *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*, Cornell University Press, 1998, available here: <https://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/9780801484568/activists-beyond-borders>

Addressing challenges by strategising

Throughout the ArtsLink Assembly 2025, participants repeatedly emphasised **the need for strategic thinking in order to move forward effectively**. This paper proposes the creation of a networked structure or movement as a means to that end. Many individuals and organisations already possess strong organising and/or strategic skills, and a cross-sector network would benefit from the additional experience and perspectives of other fields. Some funders have required training in strategic planning, and the human rights sector has long provided similar support to help build and sustain resistance movements.

Although networks and consortia already exist, there have been consistent calls for improved coordination and communication – both among these structures

and with external partners. Strategic thinking will be essential to establish a network or coordination platform, and clear strategies will be required to enable collective action and achieve shared objectives. Such thinking must acknowledge the ‘messiness’ of displaced artists’ complex, unpredictable and often fragmented experiences.

What is the future we wish to co-create? What is already happening, whether at scale or only in limited ways? What remains absent? What conditions must be in place for change to occur? What steps are required to create those conditions? Who can contribute, and how can they be meaningfully engaged? By approaching these questions methodically and logically, it becomes possible to build a coherent path forward.

Recommended approach

Clearly, there are experienced and capable actors and hosting initiatives highly motivated to support the immediate as well as ongoing development of artists who have been displaced from home countries and are in the USA. The importance of coalitions is demonstrated for example, in Fall of Freedom,⁸ the call to collective action in November 2025 led by artist Dread Scott, and Collective Courage,⁹ the nationwide initiative addressing the rise in US authoritarianism

through the arts and coordinated by the NCAC – National Coalition Against Censorship.¹⁰ ONWARDS is another example of a learning and mutual support initiative, a project of the US Protection Group for Cultural Rights Defenders (CRDs) and Human Rights Defenders (HRDs), conceived as an informal network of organisations that support at-risk scholars, artists, writers, and rights defenders.¹¹

8 <https://www.fallofffreedom.com>

9 <https://www.collective-courage.com>

10 <https://ncac.org>

11 Coordinated by the Center for Transformative Action through its Ithaca City of Asylum project and supported by Cornell University's Scholars Under Threat Initiative, part of Global Cornell. Visit <https://onwardsproject.org>

However, there is a call for more coordination and communication of this type of activism in the arts sector, with the additional aim of inspiring others to act where and how they can. This would benefit from more peer exchanges, together with artists, and exploration of the deeper values and differences that underlie hospitality. It is equally important to map resources, assets but also **gaps that exist and could be filled**, whether in major cities or in smaller towns.

Artists themselves must be central to this discussion. Although the terminology 'at risk' or 'displaced' provides a useful argumentation for specialised public and private support, does it become a stigma? **Surely the narrative needs adjustment - the emphasis should be on their status as artists, and the conditions in which they can flourish, both inspired by and giving new inspiration to the US arts sector.**

One approach would be to create a selected number of **cross-sector local or regional clusters** of good practice including artists, arts organisations and residencies, with pertinent health, legal, social, rights or other advocates and community activists,

and local funders. These clusters can start to build trust and experiment with skill-sharing, identification of resources and gaps - while at the same time working on **defining both focused objectives and a common goal or mission that might be adopted by a national grouping.**

The smaller **clusters' representatives (bridgers) could meet on a national level** to share their experiences and work toward defining a common national goal and message that can be taken to the larger, national funders. If this initiative were to be conceived as a movement, 'artists support group clusters' might inspire other local clusters to form in other places, even 'naming' the movement in order to be attractive to communities wishing to be aligned. Again, displaced artists need to be central to this, but also local artists.

A **funders affinity group** should also be created and be represented at the national level. Whereas funders are also under pressure, a number of them do support at-risk artists, artistic freedom and artists seen as human and cultural rights defenders. (See also the Swedish Arts Council's initiative described here in a later section.)

Questions to consider

As evidenced in On the Move's publications, there is a clear need and desire to come together to identify gaps in the provision of support for forcibly displaced artists and to act collaboratively to address them. This could begin by bringing together key stakeholders and artists willing to reflect and strategise collectively on how best to move forward – whether through the creation of a movement, a network, a coordination platform, or another practical and effective initiative. While this effort will naturally involve organisations already active in this field, it is essential that artists themselves are placed at the centre of the reflection and planning process.

This list seeks to stimulate interest, ideas and action among the individuals, organisations and funders committed to welcoming and supporting artists affected by displacement.

By shaping a feasible and collaborative present, while also articulating a shared vision for the future, it is possible to build a system that welcomes displaced artists as equal creative contributors to the rich cultural fabric that makes a country worth living in.

Core questions

- ✿ What are the strategic and practical approaches needed to build towards a national, networked movement initiative, whether more formal or informal, for bringing together artists impacted by displacement, arts organisations, dedicated at-risk residencies and organisations, and funders?
- ✿ If this is, at least initially, a coalition of the willing, who are the key organisations needed to take part in such an initiative? (And why these?)
- ✿ What does it mean to NOT create another layer or duplication of efforts? How to address what is not being done and identify the gaps?
- ✿ How can artists be included in co-constructing strategies?
- ✿ What is the central mission that all of these players would agree on? How best to settle on a singular, focused priority and message? Research into mission statements to find commonalities? Focus groups whittling down multiple priorities into something focused? A group tasked to do this with a fixed deadline?
- ✿ How would that mission be defined more narrowly to pertain to artists at risk, impacted by displacement?

Structure and process

- ✿ Would a structure with local or regional hubs of organisations, linked to one coordination point, be better than a national-only initiative? Why/why not?
- ✿ What funders might be attracted to an initiative undertaken by a coalition of organisations collaborating on a common goal? What arguments would be convincing to funders?
- ✿ What process of collaborating would be feasible in terms of time, energy and money?
- ✿ Which existing arts organisations can offer what pieces of the puzzle of artists' needs? (databases/information on available resources, health and mental health support, housing, arts spaces, safety training, effective legal aid, mentorship...)

Partners

- ✿ What collaborations or coalitions already exist (locally, regionally or nationally) that might be built upon, expanded, scaled up and out?
- ✿ What non-arts alliances might be added to an arts-based coalition? (health, refugee or migrant support, human rights, religious or humanist organisations, community groups...) What can they add, and what can the arts sector offer them?
- ✿ How best to find aligned partners in terms of values, vision, organisational culture and motivations? How to build the trust that coalitions need to be founded upon?
- ✿ How to decide in what way organisations and individuals would be involved? In a small strategy group(s)? In a larger advisory group?

Local connections

- ✿ What other local organisations or agencies respond to the needs? How can a local, regional or national arts organisation form partnerships with these?
- ✿ How can local artists collaborate with incomers, and what will it bring to each?
- ✿ Can audiences or communities be engaged to contribute to the needs?

Motivation and momentum

- ✿ How to best create motivation and resources within your organisation to participate? What internal processes are necessary and what might be absorbed already into normal work? How to ensure this is central to your work, and the excitement of participating is shared throughout the organisation? What learning will impact on your organisation's daily work?
- ✿ How to ensure that the initiative is owned by the whole organisation and not only one staff member? How to integrate the values and goals into the participation organisations?
- ✿ What valuable learning needs to take place and be shared? By whom?
- ✿ What could be initial, easy, quick and frequent 'wins' to keep motivation strong amongst partners and keep the 'network' together?
- ✿ How to engineer the activities and discussions in order to keep the momentum going?

Coordination

- ✿ What basic coordination activities would be absolutely necessary, either on a regional or a national basis? Is this a campaign manager? A network coordinator? A person or group?

About the author

Dr. Mary Ann DeVlieg is an independent consultant, evaluator, facilitator and speaker, and an Expert for the Council of Europe's initiative on artistic freedom: Free to Create/Create to be Free. Since 2010 she has protected and defended the human rights of artists-at-risk as a case worker. She founded the EU working group, Arts-Rights-Justice; was freeDimensional's Co-Director (2013-2015) and a co-founder of the Arts-Rights-Justice Academy, University of Hildesheim; and was Former Secretary General of IETM (1994-2013), the international network for contemporary performing arts. She co-founded On the Move and Roberto Cimetta Fund for Mobility in the Mediterranean, is currently a Board member of Ettijahat - Independent Culture and of SH|FT Safe Havens Freedom Talks. Her PhD examined the rights of relocated artists in the EU cultural policy and practice landscape.

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