

The webinar '**Cultural Mobility for Sustainable Cultural Cooperation**' was jointly organised on 18 September 2025 as an **online side event leading to Mondiacult 2025** by the **International Music Council, On the Move, Zone Franche, Pearle*, Culture et Développement, Africalia and MobiCulture**.

It was co-funded by the European Union via On the Move's network funding. The webinar aimed to facilitate the creation of more sustainable and fruitful frameworks for cultural cooperation and to address the recurring and complex visa issues that hinder cross-border artistic mobility between developed and developing countries, and between developing countries.

This webinar was conceived following [a joint call](#) by the International Music Council, Zone Franche, Culture et Développement, Africalia and Pearle* at the last Intergovernmental Committee meeting of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the promotion and the protection of the diversity of cultural expressions, in February 2025. The webinar in English with French and Spanish interpretation, available [here](#), was facilitated by **Silja Fischer**, Secretary General of the International Music Council, together with the following speakers: **Pierre Claver Mabiala**, Director, Espace Culturel Yaro, Republic of Congo, **Kellie Magnus**, Executive Director, Caribbean Cultural Fund, Jamaica and **Nguyen Tu Hang**, Founder, AirVine artists' residency network, Vietnam. 175 people registered for this online event, including representatives from national and public governments, as well as culture professionals and artists from all over the world.

The first part of the webinar focused on the challenges regarding visas at national, regional and international levels, based on some key facts:

- On the Move's report in 2023 [Schengen Visa Code and Cultural Mobility: Latest Insights with a Focus on Artists and Culture Professionals from the African Continent](#), in collaboration with Pearle*, alba Kultur, Zone Franche, the Mobility Information Points and the International Music Council. The report, part of the EU-funded *Deconfining* project, highlights the financial and networking losses resulting from visa rejections for artists and host organisations, as well as the negative impact on the mental health of affected arts professionals, including stress, anxiety and feelings of rejection.
- A statistic from the [Comité Visas Artistes](#), led by Zone Franche in France, speaks for itself: two years ago, they resolved 70% of urgent/problematic visa cases in France. However, since the beginning of 2025, this figure has fallen to 40%, despite much effort and persistence in overcoming diverse communication barriers.

The speakers in the webinar confirmed the facts and realities, including uneven barriers, depending on where people are based. The following shared realities were discussed:

- Nguyen Tu Hang insisted on **visa precarity and discriminatory trust gaps**: *'Artists from Vietnam and other Global South countries often face arbitrary visa denials, long delays, or requests for additional documents that are not required from peers with "strong passports" (....) Visa obstacles are not just logistical: they reproduce inequalities between North–South and even South–South cultural cooperation'*.
- Kellie Magnus attested that the sense of inequality experienced in the visa process is exacerbated by **limited or non-existent opportunities for transnational and international cultural mobility**: *'travel can be prohibitively expensive, even within the Caribbean itself. It's difficult for creatives to travel to cultural events around the region and to spend time building relationships with creatives and cultural organisations in other countries'*.

- Pierre Claver Mabiala also addressed the issue of cultural mobility patterns within the African continent, such as the need to travel to another country to submit a visa application when the embassy of the destination country is not located in one's own country, as well as the additional costs involved in such a process. He also mentioned the problem of corrupt civil servants or security/military officers who impose high arbitrary taxes, as experienced by the [project RAAC](#) (La Route de l'Artiste en Afrique Centrale), which created additional financial burden on artists and cultural professionals as a result. Last but not least, with regard to the Schengen countries, the requested documents do not take into account the specific working conditions of arts professionals, particularly the fact that most of them do not have a regular income and that invitations to participate in festivals can be given at short notice.

In terms of **solutions**, the following were mentioned while focusing on various mobility routes:

- **at governmental level, at regional and continental levels:**
 - > There is a need to facilitate the visa application process online. This point was particularly emphasised with regard to sub-regions in Africa, with calls also being made to the African Union to abolish visas. Within some sub-regions of Africa, such as Central Africa, states are taking measures to support the provisions included in the future cultural strategy of the [CEMAC](#) (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa), including those relating to road mobility.
 - > In general, there is a need to encourage South-South mobility and reciprocal agreements, for example in the Asian and Caribbean regions. This would facilitate visa applications, provide funding for mobility and grant access to these resources.
- **at the level of the Schengen code of visas:** There is a need to recognise the specific working conditions of artists and culture professionals more clearly, while placing greater emphasis on letters of invitation and funding guarantees from host organisations, and the legal status of the respective hosting organisations and scope of activities. In this regard, better recognition would also require a better understanding of the sector by ministerial or consular administrators. Training and information sharing could be facilitated via tools such as the [Lexicon to Support Training for Consular and Ministry Staff on Visa Processes](#). Furthermore, the introduction of longer-term visas (covering periods that reflect the duration of artistic residencies, multi-country tours, or recurring projects) should be considered. This would better accommodate the sector's mobility patterns. Such visas should also allow for temporary returns to the country of residence between engagements, without invalidating the visa or requiring a new application.
- **at the level of the sector:** Encourage and support regular dialogue and the sharing of information between networks of artists and organisations (including residencies), in order to keep track of challenges and advocate for change. Key strategies identified to build trust include collaborative advocacy, data collection on mobility barriers, and information and training for artists and culture professionals, following the model of [Mobility Information Points](#). Building alliances with policymakers was also identified as a key strategy.

At a time when wars, conflicts, and restrictive border policies threaten diversity of cultural expressions and risk the commodification of culture, this webinar reaffirmed the urgent need to promote and defend the diversity of cultural expressions across borders, and strengthen resilience in international artistic mobility, while reiterating the fact that **mobility is a right and a necessity for cultural cooperation, not a privilege**.