

Touring Today: the impact on young and emerging artists across the EU and UK

There is continued evidence of the ongoing impact of a hostile touring environment across Europe on both UK and EU artists, particularly on upcoming, young, emerging and grassroots talent.

- EU-UK border restrictions impact both EU and UK artists. The detention of equipment, crossing delays and visa issues have caused several cancellations on both sides.
- Both the EU and the UK face a reduction in artist income post-Brexit. However, artists who generate the most GDP (largely, this means internationally renowned bands) can continue work because of their greater financial and administrative resources.
- This means the biggest impact of Brexit is felt by grassroots and emerging artists, who make up a significantly larger portion of the creative sector (but drive significantly less GDP).
- The nature of the sector means that grassroots bands are typically younger, which means that young people across both the UK and EU are disproportionately impacted by challenges to touring.
- Continued cultural exchange – in the form of artists’ touring – has benefits for both the UK and the EU in an increasingly competitive global market and is essential for sustaining a vibrant creative industry across all of Europe.

1. Cancellation and curtailment

Some of the biggest impacts to both the UK and EU creative industries have come from artists facing restrictions or rejections at border crossings. For instance, several EU artists touring the UK in 2023 have been turned away at the UK border and prevented from performing. In November 2023, The Guardian reported a fivefold rise in number of EU citizens refused entry to UK since Brexit, highlighting the inconsistency of border officials’ knowledge regarding legally permitted work, as well as the countries with the highest refusal rates, which appear to be Romania and Bulgaria.¹ Home Office and border refusals affect touring artists: key members of a Ukrainian orchestra were refused visas to play in UK², and Trigger Cut, a German band, were refused entry to the UK at the border, despite a long arranged and planned UK tour³: As Trigger Cut explained, ‘*We were completely unfairly rejected and were not allowed to enter the UK. We were handed over like criminals to the French border police and had to leave Calais.*’⁴

Similar impacts are evident for UK artists touring the EU. Walt Disco, an upcoming band from Glasgow, reported facing substantial financial and administrative barriers, including the cost of an ATA carnet, during their 2022 Netherlands and Ireland tour⁵. Squid and Black Country recently cancelled their entire tour of Spain⁶ while established English band, White Lies, were set to play in Paris as part of their 2022 European headline tour but had to cancel on the day

¹ Lisa O’Carroll and Michael Goodier (2023) [Fivefold rise in number of EU citizens refused entry to UK since Brexit](#), The Guardian

² Helen Pidd (2023) [Ukrainian orchestra’s key members refused visas to play in UK](#)

³ Fraser Lewry (2023) [GERMAN BAND DITCH UK TOUR AFTER BEING TREATED “LIKE CRIMINALS” AT BORDER, BLAME BREXIT](#)

⁴ Peony Hirwani (2023) [German band to boycott UK after ‘humiliating’ treatment at border](#)

⁵ Lisa O’Carroll (2022) [Brexit stage left: British band tells of farcical barriers encountered on EU tour](#)

⁶ Primavera Sound (2022) [No visas, no music: Squid and Black Country, New Road cancel their concerts in Spain due to the bureaucratic problems derived from Brexit](#)

because their truck carrying equipment and instruments was ‘*detained by Brexit legislation leaving England, along with countless other trucks*’⁷. The introduction of visa controls and border restrictions exposes creative artists wishing to tour to stressful risks and uncertainties in an environment that is now, fundamentally, hostile to artists. This hostility is making it increasingly difficult for any band to justify the expense of touring in Europe. For instance, Animal Collective, an American band, cancelled their UK and Europe tour, pointing to an ‘economic reality that simply does not work’ in October 2022⁸.

Reduced opportunity and income

The hostile touring landscape has an economic impact on both the UK and the EU. For instance, between 2017 and 2019, the number of UK artists booked for European festivals was down 45%⁹, and similarly, the number of EU artists had dropped by 40% in September 2023 compared to pre-Brexit levels.¹⁰ Among respondents to the latest ISM survey in 2023, 47.4% said that they had less work in the EU after January 2021 than they did before Brexit. Over a quarter (27.8%) said that they had none at all, with some leaving the industry altogether.¹¹ In 2019 the European Commission noted that UK acts ‘dominated the European panorama’¹² and that any reduction in UK artists showcasing or performing in the EU would be a significant loss to event organisers. This is because UK artists typically have bigger box office, bringing revenue for EU countries and supporting European cities to become a go-to destination for live music and festivals, with all countries benefiting from showcasing the best of the continent. However, the costly red tape which comes with booking UK artists means European venues and festivals are looking elsewhere, to the detriment of both UK grassroots artists and EU venues. The loss of opportunity has led UK musicians to lose between £500 to £450,000 per year, with a mean of £43,175 and a median of £10,000¹³.

2. The economics of the creative sector across Europe

The creative sector makes an important economic contribution in many European countries. Germany is estimated to have the highest market value from live music from 2018-2023, with France, Italy and the Netherlands and the UK also having significant market share¹⁴. Major music festivals create many of the opportunities for younger musicians to develop audiences and reputations. They therefore contribute towards this market value, with research indicating their growing importance. For example, in 2019 Amsterdam Dance Event, a multi-venue festival, was revealed in research by StubHub to have grown to more than 230 times its original size: growing from an audience of just 300 in 1995 to 70,000 in latest editions¹⁵, topping their list of international fast-growing festivals.

3. Impact on European venues

The issues of harsher border controls and confusing visas designed for long-term contracts for UK artists impact European venues beyond the music industry. The EU

⁷ Tom Skinner (2022) [White Lies say Brexit-related gig cancellation is result of "appalling" system](#)

⁸ Eilish Gilligan (2022) [Risks, rising costs and 'relentless demands': why so many musicians are cancelling their tours](#)

⁹ Dan Whitehead (2022) ['Fears of new bureaucracy, rules and costs have all come true': Brexit making touring Europe 'unviable' for UK artists](#)

¹⁰ Best for Britain (2023) [EU musicians booked for British festivals down 40% post-Brexit](#)

¹¹ Jodie Underhill et al (2023) [Paying the Price: The Sixth ISM Brexit Report](#)

¹² UK Music (2022) [Touring and Working in the EU](#)

¹³ ISM (2021) [Survey reveals Brexit paperwork is a 'complete nightmare' for musicians](#)

¹⁴ Marie Charlotte Götting (2021) [Leading live music markets in Europe 2018-2023](#)

¹⁵ Anna Grace (2019) [EU FESTIVALS RANK AS FASTEST GROWING WORLDWIDE](#)

Dance sector relies on UK ballet dancers to fill in short-term contracts or replace injured dancers at minimal notice and often uses the UK ‘*because there is a good market in the UK of experienced professional dancers*’¹⁶. Similarly, the UK has a ‘*good singing market*’ on which EU Opera venues rely for guest singers.

4. Emerging artists: the importance of touring

The benefit for countries engaging in this cultural exchange is by no means just economic. It plays a vital part in sustaining the web of contacts between citizens in the EU and UK, and is particularly important in the development of emerging artists.

The creative sector is highly mobile and performers need to move to flourish¹⁷. Unlike other sectors, which grow by putting down roots, artists develop and flourish by moving between different environments and experiences and, as Harvey Goldsmith put it, ‘the only thing they leave behind is pleasure’. Touring provides means of accessing new career opportunities, audiences and markets, it creates jobs in the cultural and creative sectors, and it promotes cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, networking and the building of partnerships¹⁸. The product of increased bureaucracy and red tape is fewer opportunities for artist exposure, and this damages emerging UK & EU artists the most. This perpetuates an industry ‘*where the only artists who can afford to tour properly are those who have been going for decades and have already sold millions of records.*’¹⁹ This is because the current arrangements post-Brexit significantly impact smaller organisations across the EU that do not have the resources to address these costs and administration needs. ‘*You’ve got James Blunt saying it doesn’t matter and won’t affect him – and you know what? He’s right. With the amount of money he makes from touring, he won’t even notice.*’²⁰ But the grassroots, up-and-coming, new talent will. In the UK, large organisations typically account for a relatively small proportion of the total enterprises within the arts and culture industry.²¹ In 2019, 95% of creative companies were micro-businesses (fewer than 10 employees)²². Similarly, across Europe ‘99% of music businesses are micro, small or medium-sized enterprises’ with only three major multinational businesses²³. The burdens therefore fall disproportionately on smaller groups of touring artists across Europe, and on freelancers and sole traders, who constituted 28% of the sector in the UK from April 2022 - March 2023, with some sub-sectors like music, performing and visual arts having over half of their workforce self employed. Many professionals had to turn down work, due to the 90 out of 180 days rule, with a significant loss of income.²⁴ Overall, touring Europe is vital for all artists and small companies because it underpins how artists make new work, enables collaboration with others, allows artists to reach new audiences and supports their livelihoods²⁵.

¹⁶ Interview with Opera/Ballet house

¹⁷ A New Direction (2021) [Building the creative workforce of the future](#)

¹⁸ European Commission (2023) [Culture & Creativity. Music](#)

¹⁹ Elton John (2021) [I learned by touring Europe in the 60s. Young artists need the same chance](#)

²⁰ Andrew Trendell (2020) [“It’s going to be devastating” – here’s how Brexit will screw over British touring artists](#)

²¹ Cebr (2017) [Contribution of the arts and culture industry to the UK economy](#) Page 7.

²² Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (2022) [National Statistics on the Creative Industries](#)

²³ IMPALA (2023) [European music in numbers](#)

²⁴ Jodie Underhill et al (2023) [Paying the Price: The Sixth ISM Brexit Report](#)

²⁵ ArtsAdmin (2020) [The tour must go on! A guide to touring across Europe for UK performing artists and companies](#)

5. Emerging artists: demographic

Because of the nature of the sector, grassroots bands are typically younger, which means that it is young people that have faced the worst impact. In the UK the creative industries employ more young people (aged 15-29) than any other sector, and with females constituting nearly half of the workforce.²⁶²⁷²⁸ In 2020, there were 7.4 million people in cultural employment across the EU, 3.7% of total employment²⁹. 1,224,500 cultural workers were aged between 15 and 29 years old³⁰. The highest numbers were from Germany (308,200) and France (173,000).

Young people suffered disproportionately from the Covid pandemic and are likely to be further disadvantaged by the global economic downturn. The importance of young people is reflected in the EU Youth Strategy, where it is noted ‘*Access to culture can reinforce awareness of sharing a common cultural heritage and promote active citizenship open to the world. Involvement in cultural activities can allow young people to express their creative energy and contribute to their personal development and their feeling of belonging to a community*³¹’ The European Youth Forum’s ‘Future of Europe’ report³² confirms the majority support of young people for the European project but highlights the need for the EU to come closer to its citizens. Ensuring young people in all our countries continue to derive value from the EU-UK relationship will be vital as the next generation shapes the EU and the UK of tomorrow.

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²⁶ UNCTAD (2021) [Creative economy to have its year in the sun in 2021](#)

²⁷ UNESCO (2018) [Launch of the 2018 Global Report](#)

²⁸ The Economist (2021) [Creative Industries Trade challenges and opportunities post pandemic](#)

²⁹ Eurostat (2021) [Translate Culture statistics - cultural employment](#)

³⁰ Eurostat (2021) [Cultural employment by age](#)

³¹ [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#)

³² [The Future of Europe: unleashing the potential of young people](#)