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# EUNIC KNOWLEDGE SHARING WORKSHOP REPORT

Afghanistan –  
Providing Professional  
Perspectives for Displaced  
Afghan Cultural Workers

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## INTRODUCTION

Building on EUNIC's previous Knowledge Sharing Workshops, research papers and advocacy on the topic of cultural relations in fragile contexts, the aim of the workshop was to raise awareness of the opportunities, approaches and learnings from initiatives providing targeted professional opportunities and perspectives for those displaced following the events of summer 2021 in Afghanistan. The workshop was conceived and intended to encourage EUNIC members to develop programmes to support Afghan cultural actors and artists in exile or diaspora, as well as to consider the position of those remaining in the country, to deepen shared learning and to exchange on individual initiatives already undertaken by organisations both within and beyond the EUNIC network.

The case of Afghanistan continues to present an urgent crisis for cultural relations work. So far, there is no real EU-wide strategy on dealing with it, and especially on how to support cultural workers in exile following the Taliban take over. In a global context where authoritarian tendencies are growing in various parts of the world, the levels of people displaced is exceptionally high, the responsibility for Cultural Institutes to continue to be able to support cultural workers who find themselves displaced from their home country will continue to increase and the displacement for many risks being long term. The workshop also sought to identify paradigms of approaches which can support artists at risk, and those in exile, from countries beyond Afghanistan.

The workshop brought together colleagues from EUNIC members' headquarters actively involved in and working on concrete actions with Afghan cultural workers in exile or within the country, as well as colleagues working on similar situations such as the war in Ukraine. The workshop was also designed for colleagues working in EUNIC member country offices and EUNIC clusters in countries where there are significant numbers of Afghan diaspora.

# 1

## KEYNOTE BY RAHRAW OMARZAD, PROF. FACULTY OF FINE ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF KABUL & FOUNDER OF THE CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS AFGHANISTAN (CCAA)

Omarzad is currently in exile in Germany after being forced to escape the Taliban. He founded the [Center for Contemporary Arts Afghanistan](#) (CCAA) in 2004 and its women art centre in 2006, both of which were forced to move to secrecy in 2016 for security reasons, and also founded the Gahnama-e-Hunar art magazine.

Omarzad began by summarising the main existing threats to Afghan artworks, art institutions, and artists. The collections of the Afghan National Museum, National Gallery and National Archives are at risk, a significant part thereof having been already destroyed or stolen. Artworks that aren't aligned with the views of the Taliban are under threat – hence Omarzad's suggestion to keep these works temporarily in Europe. As for Afghan art education institutions, the decrease in teaching staff and students (mainly women, who were forbidden from being in education) since the takeover of the Taliban was accompanied by the imposition of severe restrictions, such as a ban on musical instruments. Despite these challenges, Omarzad identified several opportunities to support the Afghan cultural sector. Many art institutions in Afghanistan remain open and artists<sup>1</sup> are highly motivated to work. Using online tools to disseminate calls and coordinate support could thus build bridges between artists living inside and outside of Afghanistan. European countries could support this process by funding exhibitions, creating dedicated exchange programmes, and implementing a programme to admit Afghan students to European art universities.

More broadly, re-establishing a Center for Contemporary Art Afghanistan (renamed as "CCAA in Exile") and its women art centre, and relocating it to Europe (Omarzad suggested Germany) would support an alternative approach to art to that which is backed by the Taliban. This Center would link artists in exile (such as the 280 teachers, students and staff from the [Afghanistan National Institute of Music](#) who moved to Portugal in 2021) with artists in Afghanistan as well as the Afghan cultural diaspora. The CCAA in Exile would coordinate support from European institutions

and governments towards Afghan art and culture, supporting goals such as: strengthening the artistic and cultural relations of the European Union with Afghanistan, creating educational and training programmes, supporting the development of Afghan art and art in Afghanistan as a force of resistance, creating a bridge between artists at home and abroad, and supporting female artists. Specifically, this Center would deliver training and capacity building programmes, events, research, publications, and advisory services. Noticeably, women artists require specialised support to continue their education and address their increasing mental health issues; in this context, the CCAA could provide targeted distance education programmes and an art therapy programme. Altogether, this would support the sustainability and institutionalisation of art practices guided by values such as democracy and freedom of expression on the one hand, and combat fanaticism and existing constraints against women's artistic activities on the other hand.

Moreover, Omarzad called for broader ways to support artists, such as: financial assistance (both continued, i.e. via regular art projects and open calls, and for artists in need of urgent assistance); supporting disciplines that the Taliban do not oppose (such as traditional miniature art, abstract art, calligraphy, landscape painting, animation); or initiating a competition supported by online-based capacity-building sessions for applicants, resulting in residencies and exhibitions for the winning artists.

Finally, the keynote stressed the need to evacuate all remaining artists and cultural figures at risk in Afghanistan (calling in particular for a recognition of the practical difficulties that are faced by artists who must live in secret to obtain a passport and other documentation required by visa procedures) and to support those who have been imprisoned and tortured. Omarzad concluded by arguing that any negotiation with the Taliban government should be conditional on defending the rights of artists as well as freedom of education, movement and artistic creativity.

<sup>1</sup> This does of course not apply to all artists. From latest information received, the Taliban closed the departments of music and sculpture in the faculty of Fine Arts at Kabul University and dismissed their professors.

# 2

## PERSPECTIVES OF CULTURAL COOPERATION WITH AFGHANISTAN AND SUPPORTING DISPLACED AFGHAN CULTURAL WORKERS

ELISABETH DYVIK, PROGRAMME DIRECTOR, ICORN

Dyvik began by presenting ICORN: the international cities of refuge network. ICORN is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swedish Arts Council, and it has around 80 member cities that receive and host artists and writers for up to two years in a residency. The network works primarily with local governments, usually municipalities and city governments, and secondarily at the national level, often regarding migration issues. Specifically, its work focuses on three dimensions: freedom of expression, artistic or professional work, and humanitarian work. The network is part of organisations such as the EU Temporary Relocation Platform and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles. Most members of ICORN are European, including several former European Capitals of Culture, and 18 of its members are UNESCO Cities of Culture.

The dramatic situation seen in Afghanistan has been reflected on the network. Although ICORN usually receives in average 150 applications per year, in late 2021 it received around 1000 demands from Afghanistan alone. Despite facing significant capacity challenges, the network was able to [support several displaced Afghan artists, such as Zahra Hussaini](#). However, such artists face several challenges. For example, as residency permits are beginning to run out it is very difficult for most Afghans to return to Afghanistan, and single women cannot travel alone to leave the country. The network and these artists must also navigate technical complications, such as the limits of days associated with each visa, official definitions of family that do not apply to extended family members over 18, and the need to provide multiple forms of help when exiled artists finally arrive at their host city. That is, relocation procedures should be understood as a long-term process requiring a holistic approach, and this differs significantly from traditional art residencies. This is why, in the framework of relocation procedures, ICORN provides both professional support as well as family, medical and psychosocial care, and advocates for long-term or multi-entry visas.

REIKO YOSHIDA, HEAD OF UNESCO PROGRAMMES AND STAKEHOLDERS OUTREACH UNIT: UNESCO'S ASCHBERG PROGRAMME IN AFGHANISTAN

Yoshida began by presenting the Diversity of Cultural Expressions entity, which is based at UNESCO's Headquarters and assumes the secretariat of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. The [UNESCO-Aschberg Programme for Artists and Cultural Professionals](#) supports both states and other stakeholders in their efforts to promote both the diversity of cultural expressions and the status of artists, focusing on capacity building, demand-driven technical assistance, and research, advocacy and monitoring.

Artists and cultural workers are often not prioritised within humanitarian programmes because their status as workers is not easily recognised. Specifically in comparison with journalists, they can count on fewer humanitarian support opportunities and evacuation programmes, and there are fewer Civil Society Organisations monitoring their needs. Thus, Yoshida highlighted the legal gap underlined by these organisations in terms of existing frameworks and mechanisms to support artists in emergencies. Addressing this situation requires recognising artists as a special group necessitating priority humanitarian assistance and, in order to guarantee the protection of artistic freedoms, professional recognition. Specifically regarding Afghanistan, which ratified the 2005 Convention, UNESCO is engaged with the One-UN Transitional Engagement Framework and thus aims to provide holistic emergency interventions. This translates into support for cultural heritage protection, the safe storage of moveable heritage, and for artists at risk. Reflecting these principles, the operational support that UNESCO offers to Afghanistan is currently focused on the preparation of a rapid assessment study on income generation in cultural and creative value chains in Afghanistan, and on a comparative study of the protections that are awarded to journalists and artists in emergency contexts.

# 3

## CASE STUDIES BY EUNIC MEMBERS

### MAIK MÜLLER, HEAD OF MARTIN ROTH-INITIATIVE: INTERNATIONAL RELOCATION PROGRAMMES AND CULTURAL SCENES – ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

In his presentation, Müller began by presenting the Martin Roth-Initiative (MRI), which was started by ifa and the Goethe-Institut and is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office. Similarly to the ICORN network, the MRI helps artists and cultural workers at risk as well as their families by organising temporary relocation or residencies in Germany or in other countries. Its main focus lies in capacity building and in providing additional guidance such as psychosocial support. In response to the crisis in Afghanistan, the MRI [created a dedicated scholarship programme](#).

The presentation highlighted several key points. Namely, there are fundamental differences between temporary relocation policies and procedures on the one hand and the crisis response, emergency and refugee work that has been required to support Afghan cultural workers since 2021 on the other hand. Moreover, existing instruments and frameworks to support Afghan citizens are not easily compatible with the short time frame that is associated with the evacuation of cultural workers in contexts of crisis. The lack of coordination between EU Member States and EU-level action, and the differences between Afghan and Ukrainian nationals in terms of (namely) access to residence permits and to the EU should also be taken into consideration. Altogether, addressing such challenges requires using existing networks and cooperation procedures, and working with states and the EU to update legal frameworks and to support the evacuation of remaining cultural workers in Afghanistan. Specifically, Müller highlighted the need for further support and evacuation funds, to adjust relocation programmes, to foster new collaborations, and to focus on long-term solutions that support the work of exiled cultural actors and thus address their inability to be financially self-sufficient.

### KATHARINA GÖRIG, DIRECTOR PROGRAMMES SOUTH ASIA, GOETHE-INSTITUT NEW DELHI: THE SIMURGH-CENTRE

Görig presented the [Simurgh-Centre](#), an initiative of the Goethe-Institut in New Delhi that aims to reach out to the Afghan diaspora in India. The Simurgh is a mythical bird that is found in legends and symbolises ideas such as renewal, community and sharing. Likewise, the centre's projects support artistic exchange and collaboration between the Afghan community living in New Delhi and Indian artists and cultural workers as well as diaspora communities of Afghans in different parts of the world, and create connections with wider currents of cultural exchange in Europe.

The centre continues the activities of the Goethe-Institut Kabul after the latter was closed in 2017 following a bomb attack to the Germany embassy, and provides a physical space for Afghans living in New Delhi. Due to the pandemic, its programme took place mostly online originally. However, the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban reinforced the need for a physical space. Before it was ready to be used, the centre supported a series of community outreach and networking events in neighbouring spaces, as well as a book club, screenings and other events, namely supporting initiatives led by the local Afghan community. Subsequently, a festival connected cultural practitioners from Germany, India and Afghanistan. This case study was presented as an example of best practice on how to support international cultural relations beyond the national frame, and to offer a space for exchange and conversation on art and culture. Its network and audience members have grown in a sustained manner, confirming the continued need for a physical space.

DOROTA BEREZICKI, HEAD OF PRESS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS, GERMAN EMBASSY ISLAMABAD & ZEEJAH, FOUNDER FOUNDATION FOR ARTS, CULTURE AND EDUCATION (FACE) ISLAMABAD ON EUNIC PAKISTAN: 'HERITAGE LIVE – MUSIC OF PAKISTAN'

Berezicki began by presenting the context framing the '[Heritage Live – Music of Pakistan](#)' project, a one-week music residency in Islamabad in which musicians – especially vulnerable musicians including women, Afghan refugees and youth from rural areas of Pakistan – collaborate to create music together while playing endangered music instruments. The programme also includes a set of workshops with European artists, with whom the 14 selected participants co-create music and perform at various venues 'Heritage Live – Music of Pakistan' is the first project implemented by the EUNIC cluster in Pakistan, and is funded under the [2021 EUNIC Cluster Fund](#).

Subsequently, Zeejah presented the goals of Foundation for Arts, Culture and Education (FACE), EUNIC's partner in this project, to empower artists and communities through art and culture in Pakistan. Regarding the 'Heritage Live – Music of Pakistan' project, he highlighted that half of participants are women and two are refugees from Afghanistan. Although the latter were successful musicians in Afghanistan, they are struggling to get visibility and thus make an income in Pakistan. To address this and other challenges, the project supports participants in different ways. It gives them prime time on stage during a festival, disseminates the result on social media, and subsequently monitors the impact of this work in terms of visibility and changes to participants' income. Additionally, the project includes two training modules on social media and music businesses. With these elements, among other objectives, the project contributes to developing the entrepreneurial, communication and co-creation skills of musicians, preserves and promotes endangered music, and builds musicians' recognition and visibility. Crucially, the project provides an example of how to extend existing international cultural relations projects to Afghan exiled artists.

MARINA MAY, HEAD OF THE DIVISION OF FILM, TV AND RADIO DEPARTMENT AND DEPUTY HEAD OF THE CULTURE DEPARTMENT: GOETHE-INSTITUT HEADQUARTERS

[Goethe in Exile programme in Berlin: How to engage the diaspora of artists and cultural workers in exile in Germany?](#)

May is the former project manager of the [Goethe-Institut Damascus in Exile programme](#) on which the upcoming Goethe-Institut in Exile in Berlin is based. The Damascus in Exile programme emerged as a symbolic response to the decision to close the Goethe-Institut in Syria due to the local security situation. It was composed of a two-and-a-half week programme with exhibitions, performances, concerts, workshops, mentoring programmes, networking and other events hosted in a space in Berlin city centre. The programme gave an important role to Syrian artists, curators, and other partners with access to and the trust of the target group. Rather than providing residencies for artists who had fled their countries or hosting events focused exclusively on exiled artists, the programme addressed broader questions such as the role of contemporary art and the Goethe-Institut in this context in Syria, and the extent to which exiled Syrian artists can only be successful in Germany if they take on the role of refugee.

However, there was a mismatch between the expectations created by the ambition of the original Damascus in Exile programme and its festival-like dimension, that is, its short-term duration. Thus, after the Taliban takeover, the Goethe-Institut decided to create a permanent umbrella with similar concerns. The forthcoming Goethe in Exile space and its programme will initially focus on Syria, Afghanistan, Belarus and Ukraine. Although it will be located in Berlin, the programme will also be active in other places in Germany and abroad. It will combine intensive festival-like moments putting the spotlight on one country (starting with Ukraine and Afghanistan) with permanent projects, community activities and programmes targeted at artists in exile in general. To do so, the new space will have several facilities, including the possibility of renovating the upper floor for residencies in the future. The goals of the programme include giving artists in exile a voice, offering them connections and opportunities to work, and supporting community and capacity-building.

# 4

## RESULTS OF THE PLENARY DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The plenary discussion foregrounded several challenges requiring coordinated work by EUNIC and its members, namely: the imbalance of international attention to the situations in Ukraine and Afghanistan, the gaps between demand for support by Afghan artists and supply and between practical needs and existing policies and frameworks and, finally, the mismatch between the current response, which is mostly uncoordinated, and the transnational scope of the Afghan diaspora. Participants also highlighted several potential responses to address these issues. These can be divided into recommendations focused on sharing knowledge to increase the effectiveness of existing action, fostering synergies and partnerships, and engaging in international policy advocacy.

### KNOWLEDGE SHARING FOR INCREASED EFFECTIVENESS

First, participants in the plenary discussion suggested making a concerted effort towards increasing the effectiveness of existing projects and programmes on the ground. To do so, EUNIC and its members could put in place several actions.

#### EUNIC COULD:

- Continue to highlight the situation of artists and cultural workers at risk in Afghanistan and in its diaspora, and explore how support for individuals at risk (Afghan and others) could be integrated more systematically into EUNIC-funded programmes.
- Use its existing platforms, such as the EUNIC website and social media channels, to facilitate the circulation of information regarding existing projects and best practices to support displaced Afghans at risk among EUNIC members.
- Encourage EUNIC clusters and EUNIC Focal Points based in regions with a high number of displaced Afghan artists and cultural workers to share knowledge of their existing and planned projects.

#### EUNIC MEMBERS COULD:

- Share best practices and learnings regarding the design and implementation of programmes that support artists and cultural workers at risk and/or displaced.
- Examine ways for existing programmes to be brought

together, joining forces to achieve common objectives (e.g., supporting the relocation of such individuals across the EU and beyond).

### SYNERGIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Second, participants called for a more holistic approach to international initiatives supporting Afghan artists and cultural workers by EUNIC and its members. Specifically, Omarzad highlighted that many Afghan art students have been unable to continue their artistic education in exile in Europe, while many Afghan cultural figures who fled are now either isolated or forced to do non-artistic work. Failing to address the needs of these specific groups could preempt the revival of Afghan culture in the post-Taliban era. To address this issue, it is necessary to encourage coalitions and new initiatives both within EUNIC and with other stakeholders. To support this process,

#### EUNIC COULD:

- Identify the main needs and priorities underpinning a holistic approach to support Afghan artists and cultural workers both in the diaspora and within Afghanistan, in different moments of their careers (e.g., art students unable to continue their education abroad and artists under financial pressure) and with different needs (e.g., visa, housing, mental health support). This could take the shape of a commissioned piece of research.

#### EUNIC MEMBERS COULD:

- Support in a coordinated manner the art forms that continue to be permitted by the Taliban, create joint opportunities to connect artists and cultural workers in exile around the world with those in Afghanistan, and support each other to eschew the short-term focus of most existing programmes.
- Commit to developing new joint programmes, thus creating new opportunities to better synchronise demand and supply for support. Specifically, those programmes could provide access to training and capacity building and increase available opportunities through online and offline scholarships and residencies. This said, participants

stressed the need to have detailed knowledge of how to avoid putting cultural workers who remain in Afghanistan at further risk.

- Examine the possibility of developing shared new funding streams (such as direct grants).

## INTERNATIONAL POLICY ADVOCACY

Third, participants called for joint advocacy efforts to overcome some of the challenges mentioned earlier.

To do so,

### EUNIC COULD:

- Continue to organise Knowledge Sharing Workshops with its members, the EU and other relevant organisations on the topic of artists at risk and connected topics<sup>2</sup>.
- Map the gaps between the existing needs of artists and cultural workers at risk on the one hand and EU, UNESCO and other international action and policy frameworks on the other hand, not only regarding specific programmes directed at displaced artists but also concerning related discussions (such as ongoing debates regarding the status of artists and cultural workers, cultural rights, etc.) and advocate for further action in this context.
- Commit to highlighting to the relevant services of the European Commission, EU Delegations and Foreign Ministries the challenges posed to Afghan artists and cultural workers by existing visa regimes and other frameworks (e.g., the limited definitions of 'artist' and 'family members', the different protections that are available to journalists and artists, the impact of the recognition or

lack thereof of artists' professional status on the ability of cultural institutes and other organisations to offer fair remuneration, and the tension between these inequities and SDG 10) and encourage policies that facilitate access to asylum procedures.

- Develop joint actions with international organisations such as UNESCO and the relevant services of the European Commission, particularly the EEAS. In the case of the latter, participants called for communication measures highlighting the extension of the [European Union Temporary Relocation Platform](#) and [Human Rights Defenders Mechanism](#) to artists and cultural workers at risk, and to advocating for a special visa regime for cultural workers and artists at risk.

### EUNIC MEMBERS COULD:

- Undertake advocacy actions at the national level to increase support towards Afghan cultural workers and artists at risk.
- Develop advocacy and communication campaigns to ensure that relevant Foreign Ministries understand the limitations of existing legal and policy frameworks (e.g., built upon the definitions of 'artist' versus 'cultural worker'<sup>3</sup>).
- Support cultural projects addressing discrimination against Afghan artists and cultural workers.

### EUNIC AND ITS MEMBERS COULD:

- Direct advocacy efforts towards countries with a significant Afghan diaspora or that are particularly supportive of these refugees, and examine the possibility of collaborating with local institutions to improve existing support towards Afghan artists and cultural workers.

<sup>2</sup> [Such as the research conducted by Jordi Baltà for EUNIC on the topic of culture in fragile contexts, and the Knowledge Sharing Workshop organised by EUNIC on the topic of Artistic Freedom and its role in International Cultural Relations.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [UNESCO's 1980 Recommendation Concerning the Status of the Artist defines the latter as "any person who creates or gives creative expression to, or re-creates works of art, who considers his \[sic\] artistic creation to be an essential part of his \[sic\] life, who contributes in this way to the development of art and culture and who is or asks to be recognized as an artist, whether or not he \[sic\] is bound by any relations of employment or association". In the context of the EU, multiple definitions coexist. As for the term cultural worker, it refers to all individuals who work in the cultural sectors and industries, such as technicians and administrative staff. Existing legal and policy frameworks that focus exclusively on artists leave a whole range of workers with minimal or no support.](#)

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## ANNEXES

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## ANNEXE I: LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

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Bulgarian State Institute for Culture  
EUNIC office  
FACE – Foundation for Arts, Culture and Education  
French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs  
Goethe-Institut Egypt  
Goethe-Institut Munich (HQ)  
Goethe-Institut New Delhi  
Goethe-Institut Pakistan  
Goethe-Institut Sri Lanka  
German Embassy Islamabad  
ICORN  
ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen)  
Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen  
Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation  
Martin Roth-Initiative  
Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg  
Romanian Cultural Institute  
UNESCO

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## ANNEXE II: LIST OF SPEAKERS

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Dorota Berezicki, Head of Press & Cultural Affairs, German Embassy Islamabad  
Elisabeth Dyvik, Programme Director ICORN  
Johannes Ebert, Secretary General Goethe-Institut  
Katharina Görig, Director Programmes South Asia, Goethe-Institut New Delhi  
Andrew Manning, Director EUNIC  
Marina May, Head of the Division of Film, TV, and Radio & Deputy Head of the Culture Department, Goethe-Institut headquarters  
Maik Müller, Head of Martin Roth-Initiative  
Rahraw Omarzad, Prof. Faculty of Fine Arts Kabul University & Founder of Center for Contemporary Arts Afghanistan (CCAA)  
Reiko Yoshida, Head of UNESCO Programmes and Stakeholders Outreach Unit  
Zeejah, Founder Foundation for Arts, Culture and Education (FACE) Islamabad  
Gitte Zschoch, Secretary General ifa

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## ANNEXE III: REFERENCES

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Jordi Baltà “Cultural Relations - Key Approaches in Fragile Contexts”, 2021, EUNIC, British Council and ifa (eds.), <https://eunicglobal.eu/news/cultural-relations-key-approaches-in-fragile-contexts-report-available>

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The EUNIC Knowledge Sharing Workshop 'Afghanistan – Providing Professional Perspectives for Displaced Afghan Cultural Workers' was co-organised by EUNIC, Goethe-Institut, and ifa.



The workshop was organised by Andrew Manning and Michelle Sun (EUNIC), Mailan Thai (Goethe-Institut), and Sarah Widmaier (ifa).



This report was drafted by Mafalda Dâmaso (Erasmus University Rotterdam), and edited by Michelle Sun (EUNIC), Mailan Thai (Goethe-Institut), and Sarah Widmaier (ifa).

Design by Amélie Bakker and Atelier Brenda.

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EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture – is the European network of organisations engaging in cultural relations from all EU member states and associate countries. Through culture, we strive to build trust and understanding between the people of Europe and the wider world. We work to make culture count in international relations.

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