

# #METOO IN THE CULTURAL SECTOR: FROM CALL-OUTS TO STRUCTURAL CHANGE



The project **SHIFT – Shared Initiatives for Training** was initiated by nine European cultural networks<sup>1</sup> and is co-funded as ‘strategic partnership’ by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

The leaders of these networks recognise the need to join forces to work towards implementing some of the United Nations’ seventeen Sustainable Development Goals. They want to improve their own capacities for guiding their teams and mobilising their members particularly around three specific goals: Reducing Inequalities, Climate Action, and Gender Equality.

This publication, coordinated by IETM – International network for contemporary performing arts, is part of the SHIFT project’s work on **Gender and Power Relations**. This topic encompasses a lot of complex issues, both in society and, more specifically, in the cultural sector. So the partners made a common decision to focus on sexual harassment and power abuse in the arts and culture sectors.

The aim of the SHIFT Gender and Power Relations work is to **research cases** of sexual harassment and power abuse that have been revealed and discussed in the European arts field in recent years, with a focus on the developments since the #MeToo period. The team of researchers also aims to **propose solution-oriented strategies** for creating equitable and safe work environments for culture professionals.

A final publication outlining our extensive research and recommendations will be presented on 22 October 2021, during the IETM Plenary Meeting in Lyon. This first document aims to share and put to discussion some first major takeaways from this work, to be presented in an online session on 6 October 2021.

## OUR PERSPECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

When examining and discussing sexual harassment and power abuse, we believe it is necessary to **shift the focus** from unique cases to macro-structures, **from individual experiences to collective ones**. We aim to go beyond simply assessing the damage that has been done and to seek and offer solutions for repair (if, indeed, this is possible). A transnational, cross-border perspective is of particular importance for us, and a significant challenge.

Keeping in mind the limited timeframe of this study (three months: June-September 2021), we decided to focus on some of the “stories of change”, meaning cases that have been recently tackled and widely discussed in the culture sector and that instigated a broader, structural process of change in a given context. Based on recommendations from SHIFT project partners, we conducted **23 interviews** with professionals working in the European culture field and analysed a selected number of **existing procedures** (eg. codes of conduct, ethical codes etc.) as well as **literature** related to the subject.

Our work is by no means comprehensive, although we have done our best to acknowledge and consider the **existing socio-political differences across Europe**’s nations and regions. We have chosen to see that **diversity as a strength** to be harnessed rather than an obstacle for collective dialogue and organising around complex and sensitive issues.

#METOO

# THREE MAJOR TAKEAWAYS THUS FAR

## 1 THE #METOO MOVEMENT IN EUROPE IS FAR FROM BEING HOMOGENEOUS

The global #MeToo movement, which started in 2017, increased awareness and empowered professionals in various sectors across the globe to report sexual harassment and other inequalities in the workplace. #MeToo brought to the surface the vulnerability and a lack of effective protection mechanisms for anyone facing power abuse, regardless of age, class and gender. However, the movement's pace, scope and outcomes vary in relation to a country and a geopolitical, often hyperlocal, context.

We assumed that, on a European scale, the timelines of national and regional #MeToo movements would vary. And our research has shown stark differences, mainly between countries in Western and Northern Europe and those in the Southern and Eastern parts of the continent. For instance, in countries such as Belgium, Iceland, and Sweden, the #MeToo movement has been widely influencing the debates on work cultures in the performing arts since 2017-2018. While in places such as Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Poland, and Slovenia we saw that the #MeToo movement in the cultural sector has only advanced in early 2021.

Moreover, there are significant discrepancies between different European countries when it comes to broad awareness of how sexual harassment and power abuse intersect with other forms of oppression. In some countries, the problem is that the existing procedures do not work in practice, whereas in others the procedures are still to be negotiated and introduced. Moreover, gender-based violence shares ideological roots with patriarchy, racism, and colonialism, and each culture has its own degree of willingness to publicly address these issues and their commonalities. On top of that, our research shows that backlashes against women's rights, which are currently strong in several Central and Eastern European countries, make tackling sexual harassment and power abuse in those contexts particularly complicated.

While gathering the numerous publications, articles and tools that will be listed in the final report's annotated bibliography, we noticed that many of them originate in and focus on West or North European contexts. And so, we made a deliberate choice to seek out, as much as possible, voices from other geographies. Out of the 23 interviews we conducted, close to 40% of them were with professionals working primarily in Europe's Central, Eastern or Southern countries.



## 2 THE PROCESS OF CHANGE IS OFTEN RESOURCE-INTENSIVE AND COMPLEX

Tools to act against sexual harassment and power abuse (codes of conduct, hotlines, training, etc.) work only if put into everyday practice. They need constant assessment and require regular adaptation done in cooperation with peers, co-workers, cultural professionals, artists, students, lecturers, employees, contractors, freelancers etc. Precise vocabulary, accurate definitions and clear articulations are crucial – and they need time to be formulated, adopted and adapted.

Examining the reported cases is a long process, consisting of careful listening on all sides, mediation between opposing points of view, discussing possible misunderstandings, defining evidence, searching for ways to repair (which often means broadening the discussion and revising working methods or organisational structures) and situating the case in a wider cultural and social context. This process is usually complex, and it rarely quickly produces tangible and effective solutions. Many of our interlocutors, who have been directly involved in examining and attempting to solve cases of sexual harassment or power abuse, addressed the problem of exhaustion. Therefore, it is necessary to resort to support from external professionals (i.a. psychologists, legal advisors, intimacy coordinators, ombudspersons etc.) – not only to handle cases in a consistent manner but also to prevent abuse from happening.

## 3 STRONGER TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION COULD HELP THE EUROPEAN ARTS SECTOR AS A WHOLE TO COMBAT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND POWER ABUSE

While none of the researched procedures or solutions are universal and copying them from one country to the other is not possible due to legal and cultural differences, most of the interviewed professionals expressed a need for sharing experiences and informing each other on the existing solutions. A database compiling codes of conducts, legal solutions and methodologies that are already applied or are in the making can be inspirational or even practically useful in different contexts. The Annotated Bibliography part of our final report can be a useful resource in this regard.

Building transnational alliances could not only support professionals in their everyday efforts but also propose solutions to cases which are difficult to address on the national level only.

BASED ON OUR FINDINGS WE WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST

## A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT WILL BE FURTHER ANALYSED AND ENRICHED

IN THE FINAL REPORT, SUCH AS:



**Transnational solutions that could protect freelancers working across borders would be very helpful, especially if developed in consultation with workers' unions and federations;**



**External, international pressure can be effective in some cases. For example, a rule that only institutions and organisations introducing codes of ethics in their working regulations and complying with code of conducts are eligible for EU funding (as is already the case for some subsidies at national level in Europe);**



**European and transnational cultural networks could provide safe spaces for discussions, regular meetings, training, and workshops, while also developing potential actions for advocacy.**



**A regular common retreat gathering artists, cultural professionals, experts or activists on the subject (that could also cover other sectors) could help to assess changes and provide ways for future actions that would include all forms of sexual harassment, no matter the gender identification.**

**These and other takeaways will be further developed and detailed in the final report to be presented on 22 October 2021 at the [IETM Plenary Meeting in Lyon](#).**

## THREE MAJOR QUESTIONS

WE FIND HIGHLY RELEVANT FOR THE FURTHER DISCUSSION:

1

**What would it look like for arts organisations in Europe to take seriously the wide-spread problems of sexual harassment and power abuse in their sector(s)?**

2

**How can we get our funders, board members, and policy-makers to understand that financial precarity often increases a worker's vulnerability to potential abuse and harassment in the cultural workplace?**

3

**How can we create or increase transnational solidarity and cooperation in the European cultural field around these topics?**



1)

The project SHIFT – Shared Initiatives for Training was initiated by nine European cultural networks: European Music Council; European Choral Association – Europa Cantat; ELIA - European network for higher arts education; European Union of Music Competitions for Youth; Fresh Arts Coalition Europe; IETM - International network for contemporary performing arts; International Music Council; On the Move; and Trans Europe Halles.

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