

SUMMARY REPORT:

Mapping of safe spaces for displaced artists & cultural practitioners in Eastern Europe

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Goethe-Institut Athen



BUILDING BRIDGES & PROTECTING SPACES

In an era where the European cultural landscape faces unprecedented challenges due to conflict and political persecution, the role of the Goethe-Institut is more vital than ever. We are concerned by the increasing **shrinking of discursive spaces** in the cultural sector, where freedom of expression and artistic diversity are under intense pressure. In this fragile context, the Goethe-Institut acts not only as a promoter of the arts but as an active architect of a supportive infrastructure for those who have been forced to flee their homes.

Special thanks go to the authors, **Svetlana Mintcheva and Irini Vouzelakou**, whose profound research and dedicated work form the foundation of this report. Their expertise allows us to look beyond mere documentation and define concrete areas for action.

This report was commissioned with a clear dual strategy:

- To obtain a **systematic overview of existing structures** and actors in Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Poland, Romania, and Türkiye who are already dedicated to supporting at-risk cultural practitioners.
- To identify **new perspectives and potentials for future activities** within the Goethe-Institut network.

The findings of this mapping aim to sustainably strengthen our activities in the region:

- **Enhancing Resilience:** By providing visibility to smaller grassroots initiatives through our digital map, we promote their recognition and strengthen their resilience against external pressures and censorship.
- **Strategic Program Development:** The needs analyzed in the report serve as a direct compass for future projects, tailored precisely to the real-world challenges faced by artists in exile.
- **Platform for Cooperation:** We leverage our global network to link local actors more closely with international support structures, creating synergies that operate far beyond national borders.

This report is not an endpoint but a practical tool. It enables us to provide support where it is most urgently needed and to solidify the region as a place for safe cultural production.

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INTRODUCTION



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In August 2025, Svetlana Mintcheva and Irini Vouzelakou were commissioned by Goethe-Institut Athen to map safe spaces and organisations working with or for displaced artists and cultural practitioners in six selected countries in Eastern Europe: **Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Poland, Romania and Türkiye**. The purpose of the study was to identify and provide a better understanding of the active or emerging structures and institutions offering support to displaced and at-risk artists, including what the scope of their activities is, the challenges they are faced with, the needs they have and the type of programmes or opportunities that would better support them going forward.

The results of the research were reflected in a visual digital map of the identified organisations and a final report summarising the findings of the study. The digital map aims to enhance visibility of the organisations working with and for displaced artists in the region and assist connections between them. It also aims to serve as a resource for displaced artists and creatives, indicating the go-to organisations where they can seek support and opportunities at country level. The report offers an analysis of the general environment affecting displaced artists in the target countries, lays out challenges and needs, and offers recommendations for possible support initiatives. Together the map and the report aim to bring new information and analysis to help inform future Goethe-Institut programmes, partnerships and support strategies in the field in a relevant way.



1.1

METHODOLOGY, SAMPLE & LIMITATIONS

Our research was based on 64 semi-structured interviews and 41 survey responses, complemented by targeted web research and literature review.

We identified approximately 130 organisations which we considered potentially relevant under the scope of this mapping across the six countries and studied them through interviews, a survey and/or desk/web research.

78 organisations either completed the survey or were interviewed:

Armenia: 12, Bulgaria: 14, Greece: 17, Poland: 15, Romania: 8, Türkiye: 12



The sample is fairly well-balanced across the six countries, but we acknowledge it is neither a complete or exhaustive mapping, and it does not allow for comparisons across geographies.

The research process has encountered several challenges. First, the lack of prior research studies on the topic, specific to the countries in focus, limited our ability to build on existing knowledge and relevant databases. Second, this type of work can be 'invisible' or 'sensitive', which made it hard to identify and reach some of the target organisations. Even when relevant work is housed within larger established institutions, it is not always clearly designated as such or listed as a distinct programme area; also, a large part of the organisations engaged in this type of work are small, grassroots and some lack a strong web or social media presence that would facilitate tracing them during the desk research process; others may have been more reluctant to attract publicity and respond to the research, due to the safety risks associated with this type of work. To partly mitigate these challenges, we used a 'snowball method', inviting initial research participants to suggest others we then reached out to. Offering the option of either an interview or the completion of a questionnaire served to accommodate participants' individual preferences and capacity and helped increase trust and responsiveness.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the dimension of internal displacement of artists caused by the earthquakes of 2023 in Southern Türkiye, has not been fully researched due to the time constraints of this study.

The mapping, though not exhaustive, is, we believe, representative of the broad current landscape in each of the target countries, of what is on offer and of the challenges and needs of the key actors working with and for displaced artists. We expect that the digital map, once made public, will boost interest and participation from other initiatives and organisations, who may have remained under our radar or indecisive during the course of the research. We hope the map will grow dynamically in the coming months and years to reflect those as well.

1.2

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this mapping, we have defined displaced and at-risk artists and cultural workers as those who - regardless of civic or legal status - have been forced to move and/or leave their home (temporarily or permanently) due to conflict, violence, human rights violations, persecution, censorship, economic hardship, or natural hazards, in other words, for reasons related to their profession and artistic practice or for other reasons not directly related to their art.

We made no distinctions between different descriptions of displaced people and we used terms such as displaced, forcibly displaced, exiled, asylum seekers, refugee and migrant artists and cultural workers interchangeably during the course of the research. We also sometimes used the term 'artists at risk', which refers more to artists who are persecuted or threatened as a result of their art, very often forced (but not necessarily) into displacement. The two groups are interconnected and sometimes the term artists at risk resonated better with the local context or the work of some research participants.

Given that "displaced and artist-at-risk support" remains an elusive term and may mean many things to many people, we opted for a broad and comprehensive framework, including any initiative, structure, scheme, or organisation that works with and for displaced artists and cultural professionals. This includes actors from the cultural and creative sector (CCS) —institutions, art spaces, residencies, professional artists' associations, networks, festivals, and libraries— as well as wider civil society actors —NGOs, community centres, migration and diaspora organisations— alongside others working at the intersection of arts, democracy, human rights, migration, and citizenship.

The characteristics we considered essential for all organisations to share were:

- A demonstrated consistent interest in and examples of prior or current engagement with artists and cultural workers affected by crisis and displacement.
- That the work with artists in displacement/at-risk artists fits naturally within their mission, even if not explicitly stated.
- That this work aims -at least in part- to have a positive impact on the artist per se (professional or personal), even if this is not framed as support or protection.

We believe this flexible and inclusive approach helped mitigate power imbalances associated with perceptions of host/donor versus guest/beneficiary and offered research participants the space to define what "artist-at-risk support" support means to them in their own terms.



OVERALL LANDSCAPE



2

Levels of interest in and density of work with displaced and at-risk artists differ across the countries studied and are shaped by geopolitical positioning, political responses to global emergencies, regional and national migration dynamics and demographic developments. The presence of large refugee and migrant populations in Türkiye, Greece, Poland, and Armenia has created distinct ecosystems influencing how cultural and civil society actors engage with displaced artists. Geographic and cultural proximity to countries experiencing war, repression, or instability also plays a role in shaping both urgency and sensitivity around such work. Economic factors and different levels of cultural funding and infrastructure across the countries, are also decisive for the capacity of local actors to engage in this work.

Comprehensive public policy frameworks specifically addressing displaced artists and cultural workers from migrant and refugee communities are emphatically lacking everywhere. This concerns not only publicly funded programmes, but also the absence of dedicated policy instruments and measures, policy papers and studies, infrastructure, legal mechanisms, and articulated policy principles and recommendations. Public support, where it exists, is fragmented, emergency-responsive, and not structured as dedicated, rights-based support.

Outside the cultural policy sphere, displaced artists fall under the general migration and asylum policies and systems in each country, but these frameworks do not account for the specific conditions of artistic work or the complex needs of artists at risk. Indeed, we see that, in some countries, public support, indirectly benefitting artists with a displacement background, is more commonly channeled through migration and social integration, rather than cultural budget lines. However, even this type of indirect public support remains limited, sporadic and restricted either at project or local level.

In the absence of structured policy frameworks and targeted publicly funded schemes, initiatives supporting displaced artists in most of the countries researched are primarily driven by independent, non-state actors, working within the arts and cultural sector or the migration and wider civil society field. Their work is sustained to a large extent through EU and international funding streams, supplemented in some cases by municipal or local support, rather than through central national funding mechanisms. In some of the countries, notably Poland, there is a significant number of public funded or municipal cultural organisations maintaining both short- and long-term projects supporting displaced artists.

Overall, we have observed a limited number of organisations and structures exclusively or specifically dedicated to this work. In some of the countries, none exist. But we have identified a significant number of organisations engaging and working with displaced artists, even if this is not an explicit objective. For most of those organisations, support for displaced and at-risk artists is not framed as a standalone objective or programme area, but is embedded within a broader mission that can range from broadening cultural participation, enhancing intercultural understanding and empowering diaspora communities, to supporting artistic continuity, mobility and international collaboration. The landscape of displaced artists support across the six countries is diverse and extends beyond the narrow sphere of arts and culture work. It is also fragmented and 'hidden' within a multiplicity of programmes and initiatives across different sectors and fields, which often work in silos.

Alongside the cultural initiatives directly supporting displaced artists, a wider ecosystem of activist, human-rights, community, feminist, migration and diaspora organisations contributes indirectly to the conditions in which displaced cultural workers live and operate. These actors do not identify as arts-focused or "artists-at-risk" initiatives, but they shape the social infrastructure, ecosystem, networks, and spaces that displaced artists often rely on.

There are several structural features that appear to apply across countries:

- Support is dispersed across sectors: Assistance for displaced artists is rarely centralised within a solely cultural framework; instead, it emerges through a network of civil society, activist, migration, diaspora and human rights organisations.
- Art and social practice are intertwined: Many displaced artists' support initiatives operate at the intersection of arts, cultural production, human rights, migration, activism, civic participation and social justice.
- Informal structures, such as cafés, collectives, libraries, community centres, bars and other 'third spaces', often function as entry points for displaced artists, before they access residencies or institutional programmes, as spaces facilitating connections, cultural transition and a sense of belonging.

Taken together, these are components of a wider ecosystem which responds to artists' displacement. It is sustained by a broad network of civic, cultural and socio-cultural actors that provide social integration, visibility, and community building—often in subtle, but essential ways. Dedicated residency programmes and artist-support initiatives need to be considered within the context of this ecosystem.

Crisis situations affecting the surveyed countries to different degrees, have always triggered rapid mobilisation of projects, residencies, and solidarity initiatives across the breadth of the cultural and civil society sectors. Often, in those moments, support for displaced artists takes a more explicit, targeted and tailored approach. Although these responses are typically temporary, contingent on emergency funding and with limited continuity once the immediate crisis subsides, they create an environment more alert to the necessity and value of this type of work in the long term.

Nevertheless, support and engagement with displaced artists remains largely project-based and temporary, rather than systemically embedded, with variations across countries.

At the same time, the broader arts sectors across the six countries remain structurally fragile. Local artists struggle with income instability, atypical employment, precarious working conditions and fragmented access to social protection. Comprehensive frameworks for safeguarding artists' social, economic and professional rights—at least, comparable to those available in some parts of Western Europe—are largely absent. While reforms are underway in some contexts, both local and displaced artists currently operate in insecure and fragile environments, with displaced artists facing additional layers of precarity and vulnerability.

Despite persistent structural constraints, however, working with displaced and migrant artists is widely regarded as meaningful and transformative for both displaced and local artists and organisations. Across the focus countries, surveyed initiatives and organisations recognise the broader value of embracing displaced artists and cultural practitioners into local cultural ecosystems. This is associated with contributions to cultural diversity, pluralism, equality, social cohesion, and community building, as well as the enrichment of artistic practices through new perspectives and collaborative experimentation. Institutional benefits include strengthened international solidarity networks, diversity and inclusivity in programming, increased reach to communities with limited access to culture, stronger positioning in public dialogue and responsiveness to local and global challenges.



COUNTRY SUMMARIES



3

3.1

ARMENIA



Armenia occupies a unique position within the regional landscape of displacement and cultural mobility. A small, landlocked post-Soviet state undergoing gradual political and institutional transformation, it is situated between countries marked by war, authoritarian governance, and ongoing geopolitical instability. Over the past decade — and especially since 2020 — Armenia has increasingly functioned as what several interviewees described as a “safe island in a turbulent region.” Yet, this safety is relative: human rights violations and border tensions after the 2023 dissolution of Nagorno-Karabakh persist. Media freedom is under pressure and there are reports of violence towards LGBTQ people. It is also economically constrained, and institutionally fragile, and operates without a structured policy framework for receiving or supporting displaced cultural workers.

Since 2022, Armenia has experienced overlapping waves of migration and displacement. These include the mass arrival of Russians and Ukrainians following the invasion of Ukraine and subsequent mobilisation, the forced displacement of over 100,000 Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, continued movement from Belarus, and more recently renewed arrivals from Iran and Iraq amid escalating regional instability. Each of these movements has created new demands on already limited cultural resources, while simultaneously expanding networks of artistic exchange and solidarity.

Support for displaced artists in Armenia is driven, primarily, by civil society and international partnerships rather than state actors. Most initiatives operate on short-term, project-based cycles, making long-term sustainability difficult. “Safe spaces” are often informal — rented apartments, private studios, community centres, and temporary project venues. Legal, psychosocial, and professional services are rarely embedded systematically in cultural programmes, even though they are identified as urgent needs. Housing insecurity and rising rents further complicate the stability of such initiatives.

Within these constraints, the Armenian cultural ecosystem demonstrates remarkable adaptability. Informal networks often compensate for institutional gaps. Diaspora-led initiatives collaborate with local NGOs.

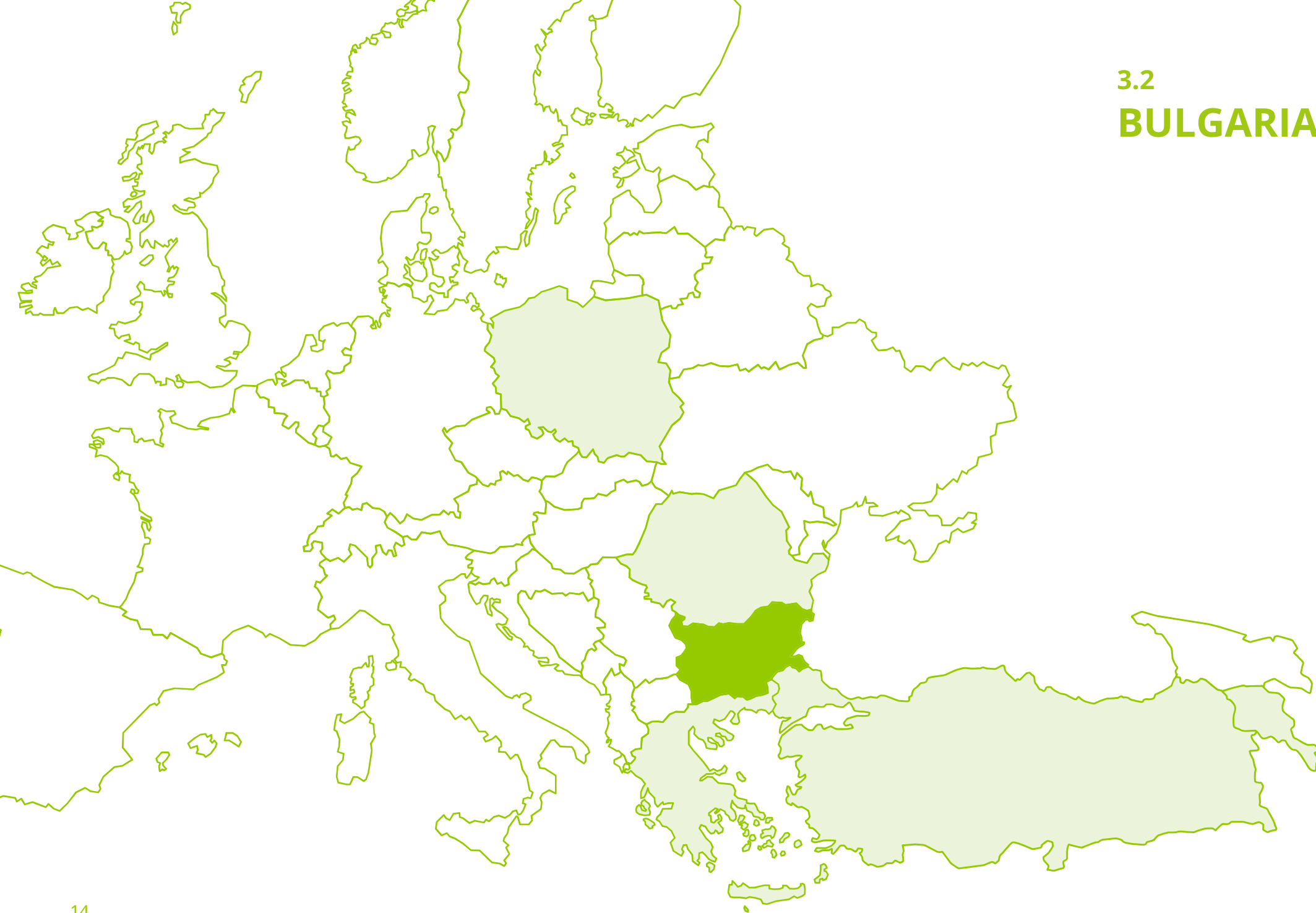
Cross-border partnerships enable temporary residencies, exchanges, and project-based support. Artists themselves, sometimes, initiate support structures, blurring the boundaries between host and guest, organiser and participant.

There is a clear increase in grassroots and NGO-led initiatives responding to displacement, particularly since 2022. This growth is driven by regional crises, diaspora return, international funding priorities, and artist-led solidarity networks. However, this expansion remains fragile. It is largely dependent on short-term project cycles, volunteer labour, and external funding rather than structural change.

Armenia functions mostly as a corridor and provisional base. Many displaced artists treat it as a temporary foothold while navigating visa processes and relocation pathways. Those who remain are generally individuals with Armenian heritage or regional ties.

Armenia’s role in the regional artists’ displacement landscape is defined by accessibility, fragility, and improvisation. It is accessible due to flexible entry regimes and linguistic familiarity; fragile due to economic limitations and unresolved conflict; and improvisational in its cultural response, relying on solidarity, grassroots initiatives, and international collaboration rather than formal state policy initiatives.

3.2 BULGARIA



Bulgaria occupies a complex position at the intersection of European migration routes, post-socialist cultural restructuring, and contemporary geopolitical tensions. As an external border state of the European Union, Bulgaria has long functioned as a transit territory for migrants and refugees moving from the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa towards Western Europe. Many individuals do not intend to settle permanently; instead, Bulgaria is perceived as a temporary passage point in a larger migration trajectory.

The country's contemporary art scene is energetic and increasingly visible, with a proliferation of independent initiatives, festivals, curatorial platforms, and residencies over the past decade. Yet this cultural vitality exists alongside a fragile infrastructure in which artists receive limited structural support and cultural policy remains largely event-driven. State cultural policy is structured around support for larger institutions, events, festivals, and cultural production rather than sustained support for individual artists. While public cultural funding has increased in recent years, it is typically distributed through project-based programmes administered by the Ministry of Culture and the National Culture Fund. These mechanisms do not include provisions specifically targeting displaced artists, and even support for Bulgarian artists is widely perceived as insufficient.

Support for displaced artists therefore arises largely through civil society, independent organisations, and European programmes. Residencies and projects supported through European international frameworks have enabled some displaced artists to work in Bulgaria, but these opportunities are temporary and tied to specific project cycles. They are not embedded within a stable national infrastructure.

At municipal and institutional levels, responses have been uneven. Some publicly supported cultural spaces — particularly in Sofia — have hosted Ukrainian initiatives, offered rehearsal space, or facilitated collaborations. These actions were generally initiated by institutions or curators on a case by case basis rather than mandated by any consistent institutional policy, and they depended on available project funding. Outside the capital, there is some interest, but very sporadic initiatives.

Overall, Bulgaria's support environment for displaced artists remains extremely limited, reactive, and largely indirect. It is sustained through broader cultural funding, international frameworks, and the initiative of individual organisations rather than through dedicated strategies.

Despite these structural gaps, the Bulgarian art scene demonstrates a strong desire for international engagement. Organisations speak of the need to “open the horizon,” invite new perspectives, and transform Sofia and other cities into nodes of cultural exchange rather than peripheral outposts. Displaced artists are frequently viewed not only as beneficiaries of assistance, but as contributors capable of reshaping the local scene through new practices, networks, and political perspectives.

3.3

GREECE



Greece, due to its position at the borders of Europe, has historically served as a crucial passage for people on the move. The country has been at the centre of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in the mid-2000s, being the main entry point for thousands of refugees to the European Union and a host country for thousands of others who did not succeed to reach their target destination in Northern Europe. As much as the flows have dropped since the peak of the crisis, the country remains both a primary gateway for migrants and asylum seekers to the EU and a destination country on its own. The government conducts a strict policy against irregular migration, heavily focusing on deterrence and border control, including suspended access to asylum applications and increasing allegations of systematic pushback practices. In 2024, asylum applications reached close to pre-pandemic numbers, with Syria and Afghanistan remaining the top nationalities, followed by Iraq, Sudan and Palestine. A notable rise in applications from Egypt was also observed.

Incoming migration, however, is not a recent phenomenon. The country had already been transforming from a migrant-sending to a migrant receiving country since the last decades of the 20th century, receiving many migrants from former socialist states, primarily Albania, but also Bulgaria, Romania and Georgia, who have since settled permanently in the country. According to Eurostat's statistics, the non-national population residing in Greece as of January 2024 stood at approximately 1M persons, representing about 11% of the population¹.

Despite Greece's dramatic migration and demographic developments in the last decades, there is a lack of dedicated initiatives and targeted support schemes for artists and cultural practitioners with a displacement or migration background.

¹ **Migration and migrant population statistics,**
Eurostat, February 2026

There is no comprehensive cultural policy framework, structural public support or funding dedicated or explicitly including artists and creative talent from migrant and refugee communities. Public funding which indirectly benefits artists with a displacement background is channeled through social integration budget lines, but this also remains sporadic, either at project or local level. The increasingly hostile political climate around migration, both at country and EU level, is further diverting attention and funds away from human rights protection and integration programmes. On top of that, the non-fulfilment of basic rights and needs for stable living conditions, faced by many refugees and particularly the newcomers, renders the conditions for artistic continuity in the new country extremely challenging.

In the absence of any structured public scheme accessible or relevant to displaced artists, independent cultural actors, small, grassroots initiatives and civil society attempt to fill the gap. It is, indeed, impressive that, within this volatile context and with no guarantee of stable funding, there is a growing number of independent cultural spaces, solidarity networks and bottom-up civic initiatives which show a consistent commitment and appreciation in working with artists from different cultural backgrounds and displaced communities.

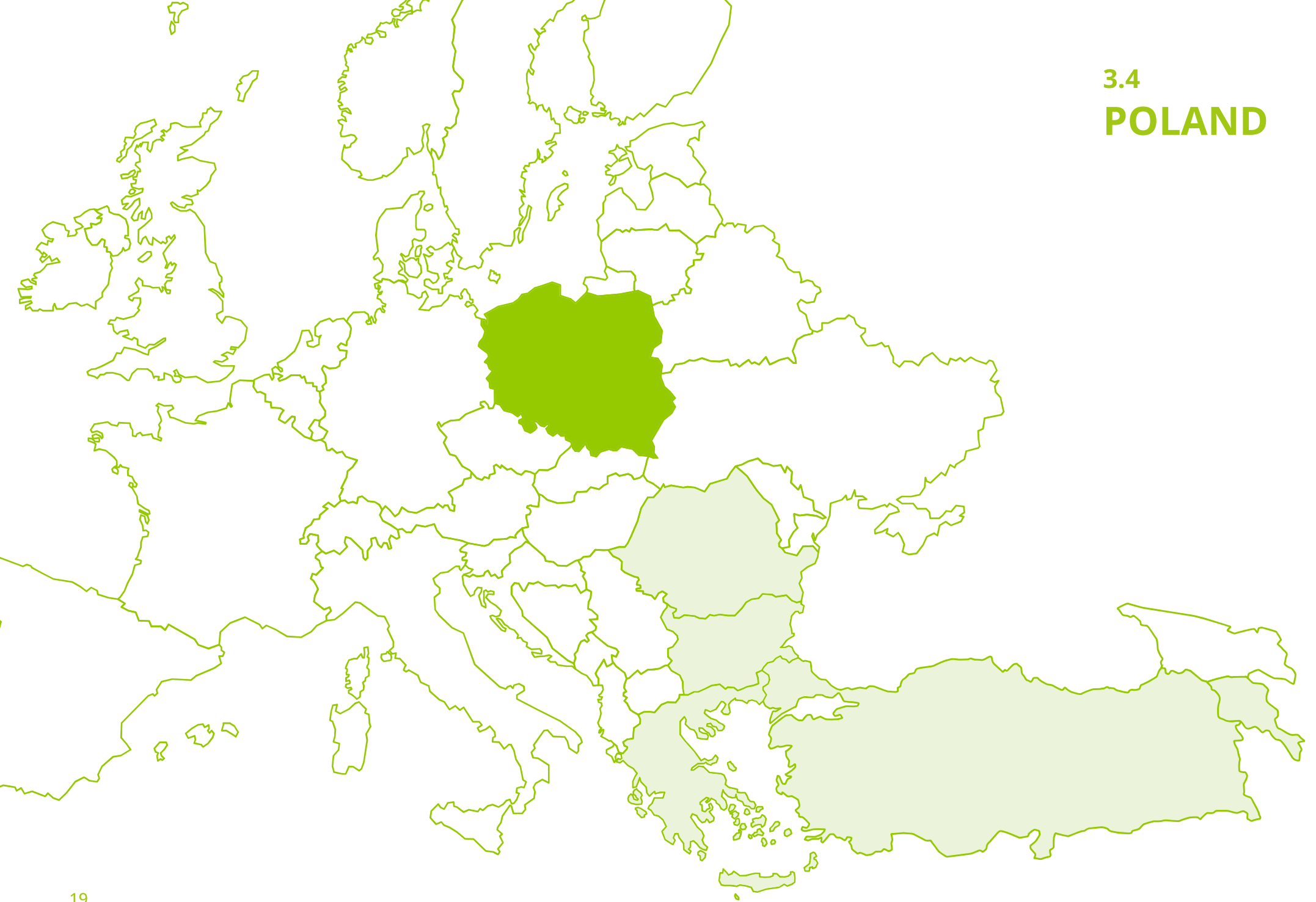
These include solidarity-based artists' networks, migrant-led collectives and creative communities which have come together to devise new ways of self-organising, sharing space and resources, learning, collaborating and supporting each other; migration-focused organisations, using arts and creative education for self-representation, social inclusion, and community building, and working with displaced artists as participants, co-creators, teachers, facilitators and mentors; artists' collectives and sociocultural nonprofits formed by second generation artists, often representing a specific diaspora community, and working at the intersection of arts and active citizenship; and arts organisations and spaces with a strong social and political orientation, offering platforms for critical voices and artists dealing with politically challenging and socially urgent issues.

For most of the organisations identified, work with artists with lived experience of war, persecution, migration and displacement is not framed as a form of support, and neither is it an explicit element of their mission. Usually, this work fits either within a broader social/civic remit (putting the emphasis on the displacement experience) or within an international artistic collaboration agenda (emphasis on the artistic identity and artistic quality/innovation).

However, there are very few initiatives with the capacity and resources to address the multilayered and complex needs of displaced artists in a more systematic and holistic way and provide, for example, opportunities for continuation of artistic practice and professional development, combined with socio-cultural and mental health assistance.

The scarce resources available to the wider arts and cultural eco-system, as well as the inherent fragility of independent, grassroots and self-financed structures, limits the scope and depth of opportunities available and puts both local and displaced artists in a position of shared precarity. Nevertheless, unlike other countries surveyed, we observe in Greece a continuity of efforts and sustained engagement with displaced and migrant artists, which is locally rooted, rather than driven by external crises. As much as the landscape of at-risk artists' support in Greece remains fragile and fragmented, it is sustained, strengthened by the legacy of the solidarity movement that emerged in the previous decade as a response to the overlapping financial and refugee crisis and responding to real and organic needs of a rapidly changing society.

3.4 POLAND



As a large Central-Eastern European country situated on the European Union's eastern border, Poland lies geographically and politically close to several regions affected by conflict, political repression, and economic instability. Over the past decade, and especially since 2022, it has become one of the principal destinations in Europe for people fleeing war and authoritarian regimes in neighbouring countries.

The country experienced an unprecedented influx of refugees following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Within months, millions of Ukrainians crossed into Poland, making it one of the largest host countries for Ukrainian refugees in Europe. This affected Poland's cultural landscape, bringing a significant number of Ukrainian artists, cultural workers, journalists, and academics into the country.

At the same time, Poland has served as an important point of refuge for Belarusian dissidents, artists, and cultural workers fleeing repression following the 2020 Belarusian presidential election and subsequent exacerbation of human rights violations. Many Belarusian cultural initiatives relocated or established parallel structures in Poland, particularly in Warsaw and other major cities.

Partly because of its close historical and cultural connections to neighboring Ukraine and Belarus, Poland has been exceedingly active in offering support to artists fleeing those countries in the years immediately following the start of the war in Ukraine and the new wave of political repression in Belarus. This response was driven by strong public solidarity, emergency funding, and swift action by cultural institutions, cities, and NGOs.

In the last one to two years the landscape has shifted. Although initiatives initially proliferated, most were short-term responses hosted by existing art spaces, and many ceased operating once crisis-response funding ended. Fewer new initiatives are now being created. At the same time, many Ukrainian and Belarusian artists have settled in Poland and gradually integrated into the local cultural and arts ecosystem.

Several long-term projects connected to larger cultural institutions have begun offering residencies to artists from the MENA region and plan to expand this work. There are also well-established diaspora initiatives led by Belarusian and Ukrainian communities that support migrants and, in some cases, artists, potentially creating a more stable environment for longer-term support.

Sustainability therefore remains the central challenge. Long-term structures for migrant and at-risk artists are still scarce, even though they appear to be significantly more than in the other countries surveyed. Stronger collaboration and shared platforms between institutions and grassroots initiatives are needed to ensure lasting impact.

Nevertheless, in contrast to some other countries surveyed, which function as transition spaces, Poland is becoming a permanent destination for many displaced artists. It is developing programs that aim to offer not only residency, but also necessary psycho-social and legal support to artists that are dealing with trauma as well as displacement. Such programs are still few and fragile, but they are hosted by stable institutions and give promise for the future.

3.5

ROMANIA



During its post-communist transition, Romania experienced massive emigration abroad, making the Romanian diaspora one of the biggest in Europe. With the country's accession to the EU, the phenomenon of 'brain drain' significantly expanded. By contrast, incoming migration is a more recent phenomenon, which is slowly starting to gain attention. The vast majority of migration to Romania is regulated, filling shortages in the labour market. During the last five years, there is an increasing number of third-country national migrant workers, particularly from Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Türkiye, who are admitted, through a relatively flexible visa and work permits process, with the intention to settle permanently in the country².

Romania's experience with refugees is equally recent. The wave of Ukrainian refugees in 2022 has been the largest the country has ever seen, but this has now decreased. Romania has primarily served as an entry point to other European countries for many Ukrainian artists who temporarily sought refuge in the country, but eventually moved on somewhere else.

At the beginning of the war, there was an unprecedented mobilisation from across the Romanian cultural sector in solidarity with Ukrainian colleagues fleeing war. This was manifested through formal and informal support -fundraising campaigns, exhibitions, residency opportunities, arts education and outreach programmes, as well as immediate humanitarian relief and connections on a human and artist-to-artist level- demonstrating the solidarity, creativity and agility that can be found in crisis moments. However, most of these projects have been one-off, made possible through a combination of emergency funds, but the level of attention and funding gradually declined.

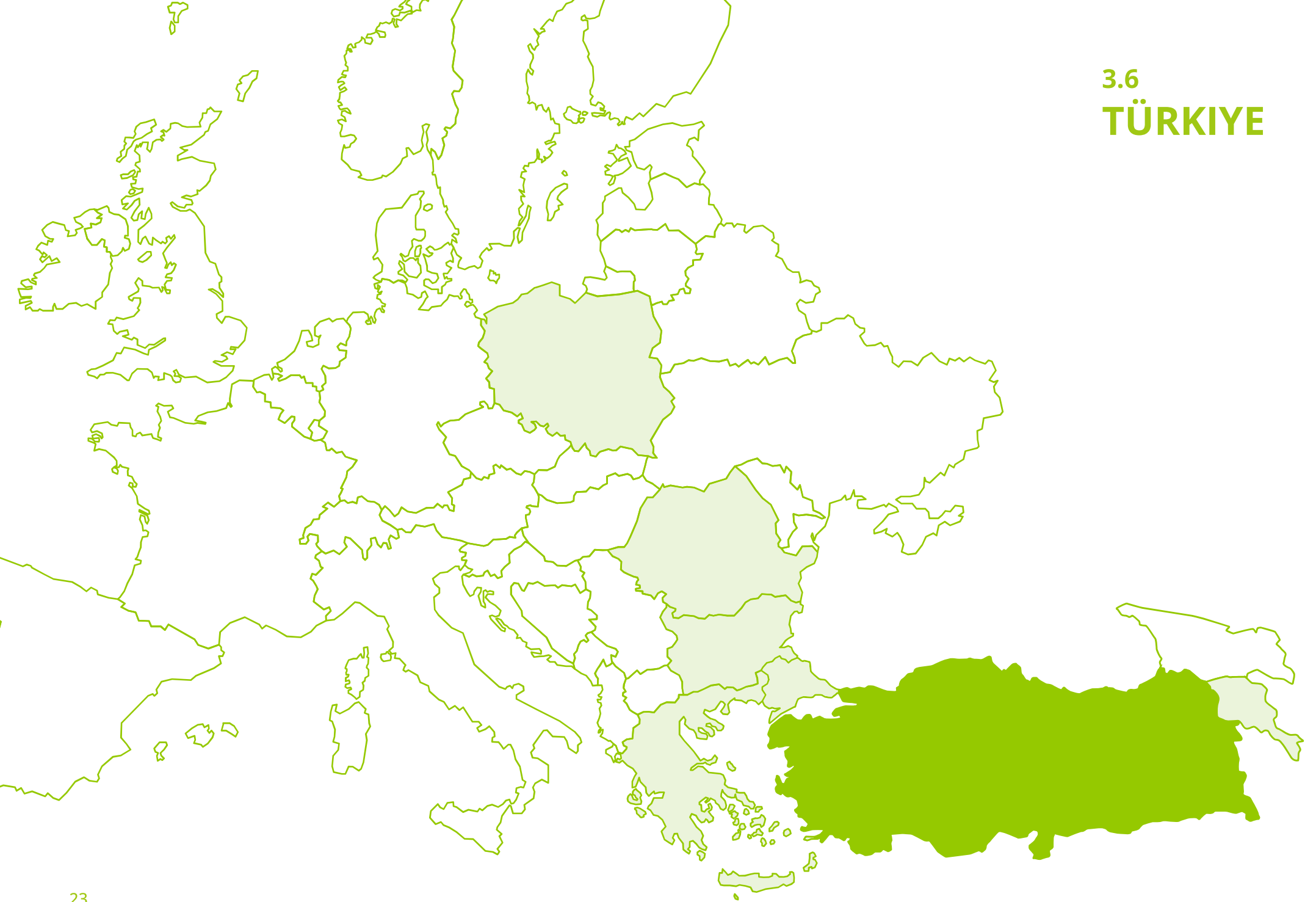
Overall, there are very few initiatives and organisations in Romania showing a continuity and consistency of engagement with at-risk and displaced artists. This appears to be due to both the relatively limited experience with incoming migration and to the high precarity that characterises the local independent arts sector. The challenges of sustainable funding, as well as the lack of cultural infrastructure, visibility platforms and professional development opportunities for independent artists in Romania are described as particularly acute. Young, emerging artists and artists from traditionally marginalised communities in the country, such as Roma and LGBTQ+, are being described by many participants as 'artists at risk'. The local structural issues affecting the cultural sector seem to leave very limited resources and capacity for the emergence of more targeted and tailored initiatives.

Nevertheless, the interest in engaging with artists and cultural professionals from displaced and refugee communities is slowly growing. Relevant initiatives are mostly driven by either independent cultural organisations or migration-focused NGOs, but there seems to be limited interaction or collaboration between the two fields.

Within the independent arts sector there are spaces and associations -largely concentrated in Bucharest- which are trying to invite and include vulnerable and at-risk artists in their work, as part of their wider focus on cross-cultural collaboration. They offer space and platforms for underrepresented voices, as well as for challenging dominant narratives and raising awareness on politically and socially critical issues. In most cases, the artists they work with are on the move, affected by crisis or are at risk in their country of origin, but not permanently residing in Romania. Support may take the form of residencies, public events, commissioned work and exhibitions, but these opportunities are offered on an ad hoc basis, and when there are funds available to do so.

2 **Romania: Exploratory study on labour immigration**

3.6 TÜRKİYE



Türkiye, for many consecutive years, remains one of the largest refugee-hosting countries worldwide. Since the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, Türkiye has become an important partner of the EU on migration management, operating as a buffer zone for migration to Europe.

Since 2011, Türkiye has been the biggest host country for Syrians, who fled war and the oppressive Assad regime, among them many artists, writers, scientists, academics and civil society actors. Change of regime in Syria has led recently to an increase of voluntary returns. The next top countries of origin of refugees and asylum seekers in Türkiye are Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran³. After the Russian war on Ukraine, many Ukrainians flew to Türkiye for temporary relocation, as well as Russians political opponents and anti-war activists⁴.

However, Türkiye has not just been an incoming migration country in the last decades. The curtailing of civil liberties and space for critical dialogue, particularly after the 2016 coup attempt, has led to 'a silent, but, constant exodus'⁵ of many artists, intellectuals, journalists, activists and academics, to Western Europe, who, whether directly targeted or not, felt their work and freedom of expression is suppressed. Reports document increasing cases of censorship and threats, particularly targeting LGBTQ+ and Kurdish artists, and paint an alarming picture of the state of artistic freedom in the country. This apparent contradiction of a country which provides refuge for persecuted voices from neighboring authoritarian regimes, while at the same time, forces local artists into displacement or self-exile, has posed a distinct layer of complexity to analyzing the field of support for displaced artists in the country and created tensions with the artists at-risk (and countries at-risk) definitions.

Türkiye, similarly to all the countries surveyed, lacks a comprehensive public support framework or national-level policy which is specifically targeting displaced and migrant artists. The public policy and infrastructure landscape for displaced artists is fragmented and not structured as a dedicated, rights-based support field. The ecosystem is shaped by limited and fragile cooperations, insufficient cultural funding, and additional constraints stemming from the 2024 austerity measures. Support for artists with refugee and migration backgrounds largely depends on independent initiatives, civil society networks, international cultural institutes and international funding. Some municipalities have also created production spaces and community centres which refugee artists can access indirectly through integration-oriented programmes, but these initiatives are limited and lack guaranteed continuity.

3 Source: **UNHCR Türkiye Factsheet September 2025**

4 Country Report: **Differential treatment of specific nationalities in the procedure, Türkiye, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)**, last updated 2025

5 **Exiled lives on the stage: Support networks and programs for artists at risk from Turkey in Germany**, Pieter Verstraete, 2023

Support for displaced artists has appeared in a more coordinated way as a response to the massive arrival of Syrian refugees in the previous decade. It is worth noting that, in the beginning of the crisis, the government had adopted a pro-refugee narrative, therefore, supporting refugee artists and dissident activists from Syria and the Arab world did not form part of the most politicised or sensitive issues. The role of arts and culture in facilitating intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and integration of newcomers in the host community, had risen to prominence in governmental, policy, cultural and civil society circles. Under the terms of the EU-Turkey Statement, substantial funding was channeled to civil society actors for migration-related capacity building and assistance to refugees, and support for displaced artists has been largely enabled through those funds and through the migration agenda.

Many of the key actors of at-risk artists' support, still operating today, were set up during those years to support Syrian displaced artists and activists in Istanbul and in cities with big refugee populations, such as Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa. These independent, and in many cases refugee-led, cultural centres and meeting spaces have emerged to offer an inclusive and safe space where refugees could express themselves freely and cultivate a sense of belonging. They offer opportunities for cultural participation in a familiar language, reinforcing solidarity, community and building bridges with local artists and audiences. Some of them have grown, consolidated and expanded the scope of their work, being actively engaged in international collaborations and regional solidarity networks, while others have, more recently, been forced to close or cut down their physical presence.

In the last few years, the landscape has drastically changed as the government (and opposition parties) are increasingly shifting towards a repatriation and anti-migration rhetoric. Amidst the economic crisis, xenophobia has also grown, creating conditions of insecurity, and forcing many refugees into a second displacement. Many of the migrant-led cultural centres and initiatives, which had appeared in the mid-2010s, seem to be disappearing. Asylum-seekers and refugees have started to become more isolated and fear deportation.

At the same time European and international funders in Türkiye are shifting their agenda and funding priorities towards more neutral themes and no longer visibly backing migration-related topics and work.

There is, also, a widespread concern that Türkiye's cultural sector is becoming more invisible and losing international connections, particularly after withdrawal from Creative Europe. Grant-giving programmes, initiated by European cultural institutions and/or European foundations, in cooperation with Turkish civil society and cultural operators, such as the **Spaces of Culture**, **CultureCivic**, the British Council's **International Collaboration Grants** and **VAHA Hubs**, have been instrumental in contributing to a more inclusive, non-discriminatory and diverse local arts sector, thus, opening up opportunities and access to refugee and displaced artists, although, those artists have not been a specific target group per se. Yet, even those international programmes remain fragmented, and long-term funding and continuity of support is not guaranteed.



CHALLENGES & NEEDS



4

CHALLENGES

A primary structural barrier is the absence of sustained public policy commitment to supporting displaced artists. Support is frequently reactive, intermittent, tied to emergencies or short-term project cycles. Programmes launched in response to crises often depend on time-limited international funding and may close abruptly once funding expires, leaving artists without continuity of support.

Without dedicated funding mechanisms or institutional frameworks, the majority of displaced artists face systemic obstacles in accessing mainstream cultural platforms for production, presentation and dissemination of their work. This reinforces their invisibility within more established institutions, artistic circles and networks and hinders their professional recognition, validation and interaction with local artists on a peer, equal basis.

Grassroots and independent organisations demonstrate flexibility, agility, adaptability and close community ties, yet, more often than not, lack the financial capacity to offer paid work opportunities, let alone fair remuneration or stable employment to displaced artists. Volunteer labour is widespread within the surveyed organisations; this significantly limits opportunities for professionalisation, organisational development and sustainability and impacts on teams' mental health and wellbeing. Not only organisations' teams, but displaced artists can also find themselves offering their time and work for free. This weakens the prospect of making a living through their art in the host country.

The overall operational environment is highly precarious. Long-term planning is difficult, and in some cases even short-term stability cannot be assumed due to unpredictable funding cycles, increasing costs and shifting political contexts. A small, but not negligible, number of organisations surveyed, have in the last years been forced to cut down their services or even close completely their physical space. Insecurity about the next day remains for most a constant pressure.

Lack of capacity, skills and competences for holistic, wraparound support is another key challenge. The majority of the organisations state they lack resources and in-house expertise to provide the additional support required and address the individual and complex needs of displaced artists related to trauma, stress, legal and administrative issues, access to public services, language barriers, and cross-cultural mediation. While organisations often fill gaps beyond their original remit and area of expertise — providing legal guidance, psychosocial support, or housing assistance — they do so, without adequate resources or training. In the absence of specialised staff, resources and safeguarding frameworks, this critical support is based on goodwill, human relationships and improvisation.

For displaced artists, mobility and legal status remain critical challenges. Increasing restrictions on asylum, temporary protection, residence and work permits across Europe leave many displaced artists in prolonged uncertainty, fear of deportation and in conditions where basic human rights and needs are not always fulfilled. Legal recognition and access to social, economic and cultural rights are fundamental for continuation of artistic practice in the host country. While certain nationalities have benefited from temporary protection regimes or visa exemptions, preferential treatment based on country of origin is evident, creating unequal access to benefits and opportunities among displaced artists and thus perpetuating already established inequalities and discrimination.

Political environments in several surveyed countries remain polarised around migration. Anti-migrant and xenophobic discourse and, in some contexts, restrictions on civil society and freedom of expression create additional risks for both displaced artists and the organisations that support them.

Finally, there is no specialised referral system or clearly identifiable first contact point for displaced artists seeking support in the surveyed countries, making navigation of the local arts ecosystem fragmented and opaque.

Displaced artists who are able to rebuild their careers in their host country can contribute meaningfully to local cultural life and serve as transnational bridges. But that is only possible when they receive recognition and sustained support for their artistic practice. Such support is currently mostly lacking.

NEEDS

FINANCIAL STABILITY & ADAPTED FUNDING MODELS

Across contexts, long-term and core, structural funding emerges as a central need. Stable, multi-year funding is crucial to ensure programme continuity and commitment. Funding criteria need to be tailored to the specificities of this type of work, which needs more time for healing and recovering, developing trust-based relationships, a care-centred and trauma-informed approach, personalised accompaniment and mentorship, as well as, immediate relief interventions and additional assistance outside the core artistic work. Cultural funding models are typically results-oriented and do not recognise the importance and extra costs associated with the more 'invisible' side of this work.

CAPACITY BUILDING & TRAINING

There is consistent demand for access to legal assistance and mental health support for displaced artists. However, most cultural organisations are not structurally equipped, neither have the knowledge or skills to provide these services internally.

Staff training retreats, seminars and organisational capacity-building are necessary to enable organisations to respond more effectively to the multidimensional needs of artists in crisis situations and coming from different cultural environments. Displaced artists, often dealing with post-traumatic stress, need specialised and personalised support, which goes beyond the knowledge and competences of cultural organisations' teams. Language and translation services are frequently required, particularly in early stages of integration.

Additionally, many organisations say they need overall management and organisational support and access to external expertise for services, such as accounting, marketing and fundraising, grant application writing and legal counselling.

ADVOCACY & VISIBILITY

Advocacy remains essential, both in relation to migration, human rights, and artistic freedom. Raising public awareness and sensitivity about human rights violations and countering negative narratives around migration are seen as integral to reducing systemic barriers and the marginalisation facing displaced artists. Participants state they would benefit from stronger and collective advocacy efforts to amplify the voices of displaced artists, including within the cultural sector, highlight the political and social issues that affect them and create more space for public engagement and support. Organisations also emphasise the need to develop ecosystemic approaches that connect cultural actors with stakeholders in policy, civil society, academia, and media. Stronger partnerships between grassroots and mainstream cultural institutions are needed to increase visibility and professional recognition of displaced artists.

FROM NETWORKING TO BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM

Participants strongly support opportunities for cross-sectoral and transnational collaboration, sharing and amplifying impact, tools and resources. While collaboration is already taking place, it remains uneven, and organisations consistently identify the need for deeper connections and longer-term partnerships, not only within the cultural sector, but, across actors from different disciplines and fields, moving from networking to building a wider supportive, interconnected and dynamic ecosystem for this work.

MORE EQUITABLE FRAMEWORKS CO-DESIGNED WITH DISPLACED ARTISTS

A recurring question among participants is how to create programmes which do not reproduce systemic inequalities and give displaced and at-risk artists the space for self-representation and self-advocacy. There are concerns that support for artists at risk is often framed as an emergency solidarity or charitable activity, rather than as a valuable and enriching contribution to the local arts ecosystem and wider community. Participants are also critical of frameworks putting the emphasis on the vulnerability aspect or migration experience of the artist, as this overshadows the artistic identity and their right to self-identify and be recognised for the merit of their art. Alternative frameworks and models based on equality, mutuality and centering the voice of displaced artists or artists with lived experience of displacement, are needed to be truly responsive to their realities and foster emancipation and agency.



RECOMMENDATIONS



5

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop multi-year funding frameworks that ensure continuity and reduce reliance on emergency-driven project cycles. Prioritise core operational funding alongside project grants.
- Strengthen structured partnerships between institutional and independent actors and foster interdisciplinary collaboration across arts, civil society, policy, academia, and media sectors. Such partnerships should increase access to mainstream cultural platforms and venues, while maintaining the flexibility and community connection of grassroots actors.
- Consider co-commissioning and co-production partnerships with established cultural venues to increase visibility, recognition and reach of displaced artists, and help influence more inclusive and diverse programming and cultural narratives.
- Facilitate formal partnerships between cultural organisations and legal and mental health service providers to ensure holistic support structures. Support the creation of referral networks for psychosocial and legal support and immigration advisory partnerships.
- Incorporate trauma-informed practices in programme development, which emphasise the importance of safety, empowerment, individualised support, trusting relationships and safeguarding.
- Support national and intra-regional expertise exchange and capacity-building initiatives, including virtual or hybrid formats where appropriate. Structures assuring virtual mobility are needed to assist artists who decide to remain or cannot leave crisis areas. Such structures could help curate and display a censored artist's work outside their country, as well as offer mentoring, training, and sustain long term links after a short-term residency abroad.
- Along with residencies, consider artist development and skills building programmes focusing on digital presence, grant writing, portfolio preparation, production skills and career sustainability in a new context.
- Facilitate access to studio/work/production/rehearsal spaces and equipment on a longer-term basis, either through institutional partnerships or shared space models.
- Transform and expand mapping initiatives into active regional networking tools that facilitate sustained ecosystem-building, including long-term solidarity networks within Europe and with actors in the MENA region and other parts of the world.
- Collaborate on joint advocacy efforts with other international actors in the field. Develop shared best-practice policy recommendations directed toward policy makers at EU, national and local level, raising awareness of the cultural, social, and democratic value of supporting displaced artists.
- Ensure meaningful participation of displaced artists in decision making around programme design, staff training and policy advocacy.
- Revisit conceptual frameworks and terminology in consultation with displaced artists to mitigate power imbalances and avoid externally imposed narratives.



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APPENDICES

1. LIST OF MAPPED ORGANISATIONS

Armenia

Abastan NGO
Akos Cultural NGO
Archaeology in the Presence
Cultural and Social Narratives laboratory (CSN Lab)
HOSQ
Hrach's Art Space
Krylya (Wings)
MIHR Creative Union NGO
The Living Room Project
The Typography Collective
Today Art Initiative (TAI)

Bulgaria

Derida Dance Center
Eastern Balkans Institute for Art and Architecture
Elizabeth Kostova Foundation
Multi Kulti Collective
Next Page: Literature and Translation House
Radar Sofia
Tanuki Films
Toplocentrala

Greece

Anasa Cultural Centre of African Art and Cultures
Communitism
Counterpoints Greece
Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network (TEN-et-Gr)
HipHop4Hope Athens
Lesvos Solidarity - LESOL
Love Without Borders
Magnolia Art Residency – Créations en Urgence
Melissa Network
Musikarama
NOUCMAS
Office of Displaced Designers
Refugee Week Greece
Scola Society
We are Community
We Need Books

Poland

Baobab Cultural Center

Belarusian Council for Culture

Dom Literatury w Gdańsku /
The Gdańsk House of Literature

Galeria Arsenal

Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego
(Zbigniew Raszewski Theatre Institute)

International Center of Culture

Katarzyna Kozyra Foundation

Migrart Platform

Strefa WolnoSłowa

Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art -
U-jazdowski Residencies

Ukrainian House Foundation

Villa Decius Association

Romania

Arab Cultural Centre

Asociația LOGS - Timisoara Refugee Art Festival

Catinca Tabacaru Gallery and CTG Collective

Gabriela Tudor Foundation

MATKA NGO

Replika Centre for Educational Theatre

Solidart Association - Basca Theatre

TRANZIT.RO ASSOCIATION

Türkiye

Anadolu Kültür

arthereistanbul

Depo

Diyalog Derneği

Hubban network

Kırkayak Kültür

mezopArt

Nefes Foundation for Arts and Culture

The Women's Culture Arts Literature Association
(KASED)

APPENDICES

2. LIST OF INTERVIEWS

2.1 Armenia

When	Where	Who
18/09/2025	online	Goethe Institute Armenia
23/09/2025	online	artasfoundation
07/10/2025	online	CSN Lab
7/12/2025	online	Typography Lab
09/12/2025	online	MIHR Collective
16/12/2025	online	Krylya (Wings)
06/01/2026	online	Abastan

2.2 Bulgaria

When	Where	Who
03/09/2025	Sofia	Goethe Institute Bulgaria
03/09/2025	Sofia	Boryana Rossa
18/09/2025	phone	Eastern balkans institute for art and architecture
24/09/2025	phone	Water Tower Art Residency IME
30/09/2025	online	Elizabeth Kostova Foundation
30/09/2025	online	The Next Page
02/10/2025	phone	ICA
08/10/2025	phone	Bulgarian fund for women
08/10/2025	phone	Art Today Association
11/10/2025	online	Multi Kulti Collective
18/10/2025	By email	Daria Pugachova
12/11/2025	phone	TAM
13/11/2025	phone	Viktor Lilov
14/11/2025	phone	Little Bird Place
02/09 and 17/11/2025	phone	Toplocentrala
07/01/2026	phone	Derida Dance

2.3 Greece

When	Where	Who
15/09/2025	online	Goethe-Institut Athen
03/10/2025	online	LESOL
03/10/2025	online	Lofos Art Project
07/10/2025	online	Goethe-Institut Thessaloniki
14/10/2025	online	Refugee Week Greece
17/10/2025	online	Network for Theatre Education
18/10/2025	Athens	Creations en Urgence
21/10/2025	Athens	Counterpoints Greece
22/10/2025	online	Manal Awad
05/11/2025	online	Noucmas
22/12/2025	Athens	Anasa Cultural Centre
11/12/2025	online	Symbiosis ngo
16/12/2025	online	HipHop4Hope
16/01/2026	online	Love without Borders
27/01/2026	online	We Need Books
29 & 30/1/2026	online	Musikarama
01/02/2026	online	Scola Society

2.4 Romania

When	Where	Who
11/09/2025	online	Goethe-Institut Romania
23/10/2025	online	Rarita Zbranca
6/11/2025	online	Replika Educational theatre Centre
11/12/2025	online	Galleria Catinca Tabacaru
27/01/2026	online	Centrul Cultural Arab Sibiu
2/03/2026	online	Gabriela Tudor Foundation
9/3/2026	online	Teatrul Basca

2.5 Poland

When	Where	Who
10/09/2025	online	Goethe Institute Poland
25/09/2025	Aegina	Marek Baretlik
01/10/2025	online	Baobab
02/10/2025	online	Ihar Kuskin
25/10/2025	online	Arsenal Gallery

2.6 Türkiye

When	Where	Who
11/9/2025	online	Goethe-Institut Istanbul
9/10/2025	online	Culture Civic
17/10/2025	online	Gokce Dervisoglu Okandan
17/11/2025	online	Gülay Ugur Goksel
20/11/2025	online	Anadolu Kültür
20/11/2025	online	Hubban Network
27/11/2025	online	Kreşendo
02/12/2025	online	DiyaLog Derneği
17/12/2025	online	Suha Nabhan
18/12/2025	online	Kırkayak Kültür
13/01/2026	online	Ipek Mhrac Sur
20/01/2026	online	Nefes Foundation for Arts and Culture

