

Cultural Exchange Coalition

March 2026

Europe's cultural and creative sectors have long formed one of the world's most dynamic and integrated cultural ecosystems. For decades, performers, technicians, producers and creative businesses from the EU and the UK have collaborated seamlessly across borders, supporting festivals, venues and institutions, enabling emerging talent to reach new audiences and reinforcing Europe's global reputation for artistic excellence. This exchange has generated significant economic and social value, sustaining local economies through ticket sales, increased tourism and related spending, and supporting a broad supply chain of SMEs in production, logistics and event management.

Today, those links remain strong in spirit but constrained in practice. Since the UK's exit from the EU, significant administrative and financial barriers are **limiting opportunities for cultural exchange on both sides of the Channel**. Touring has become financially unviable or too complex for many, particularly young and emerging talent. The effects are felt not only by performers and crew but also by local businesses, event organisers, audiences, and the wider economy. We are working with UK and EU partners to address the following key challenges:

Mobility of people: UK touring artists, companies and crew must navigate new, complex rules for short-term paid work which vary between the 27 Member States, while the UK's Permitted Paid Engagements rules are too restrictive for many EU professionals. Longer engagements in the EU are often constrained by the 90 in 180-day rule, resulting in lost work or additional cost.

Movement of goods: ATA carnets are required to bring instruments and kit into the UK and EU Member States, adding substantial cost and paperwork. New customs rules and VAT requirements make selling merchandise too costly or too complicated, reducing a vital revenue source, particularly for smaller acts.

Transport and logistics: Under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), "own account" transport is restricted by cabotage rules that limit the number of stops, making touring impractical or much more expensive. Many orchestras work as "own-account" operators, using their own customised vehicles to safely move valuable instruments. Unlike commercial hauliers working for hire or reward, these operators transport equipment solely for cultural performances.

In addition, administrative burdens to reclaim taxes following additional or double artist taxation (**withholding tax**) continue to make touring more expensive and put pressure on cash-flows.

The EU and UK agreed on a Common Understanding in May 2025 to "support travel and cultural exchange...including the activities of touring artists," but that commitment has yet to turn into formal discussions or real progress. With the 2026 review of the TCA and the next EU-UK Summit expected in summer, now is a critical time to push for action.

What are the benefits of cultural exchange?

- **Boosts local economies** by driving tourism, ticket sales and spending linked to festivals, performances and cultural events. Visiting audiences generate demand for hospitality and retail, while events attract investment and media attention, raising the international profile of host cities, driving return tourism and long-term economic impact.
- **Grows the cultural and creative sectors** by enabling people-to-people collaborations, leading to co-productions, touring opportunities and shared distribution networks. Local businesses benefit from access to new talent, knowledge exchange and expanded markets, helping them to scale internationally and strengthen their competitiveness.
- **Supports emerging talent and skills development** through exposure to new audiences, new collaborators, and world-leading cultural institutions. Mentoring, residencies and joint training initiatives foster professional development, equipping the next generation with the tools to thrive in an interconnected cultural landscape.
- **Reinforces Europe's cultural leadership and shared values** by sustaining centuries of artistic collaboration and encouraging contemporary reinterpretation. By presenting a united and diverse cultural voice, Europe strengthens its soft power and global influence.

Policy asks

1. Bespoke solutions to support mobility of touring artists

In the EU:

We strongly welcome the commitment in the EU Visa Strategy to “explore new rules for extended short stays for selected categories of third-country professionals, such as touring artists”. These should include:

a. Short-term touring: The EU and Member States should align and expand existing national exemptions for short cultural engagements, so that performing artists and essential crew can undertake short, ad hoc paid work across the Schengen area within the 90 days in any 180-day period, under clear, predictable and consistent conditions.

b. Longer engagements: A dedicated touring visa for artists and crew, allowing stays in the Schengen area beyond the 90 days in any 180-day period.

In the UK:

c. Broaden eligibility for Permitted Paid Engagements (PPE): The current PPE requirement that the engagement must relate directly to an individual's “full-time profession” (and “main job”) is too restrictive for many creative professionals, who often combine several roles and income streams. The UK should broaden eligibility to be based on professional practice and being established in the field, rather than whether the activity is linked to a single full-time occupation.

Policy asks (continued)

2. A cultural exemption for ATA carnets

The UK and EU Member States should work to reach bilateral agreements to remove logistical and financial burden of ATA carnets for cultural professionals.

3. Cabotage exemption

The UK and EU should negotiate an exemption for cultural activities and “Own Account” operators as part of the 2026 TCA review.

4. Merchandise

The UK and EU should seek a bilateral agreement to exempt merchandise carried by touring artists and companies from certain customs and VAT requirements.

5. Withholding tax

Introduce minimum thresholds so that withholding tax is only charged to touring musicians once they are earning over a certain amount (e.g. €30000) to reduce the financial and administrative burden on emerging and developing musicians.

6. AgoraEU

The UK should rejoin Creative Europe, now part of AgoraEU, to offer new funding avenues for increased UK-EU creative collaboration and co-productions

About the Cultural Exchange Coalition

The CEC brings together over 150 organisations from across the cultural and creative sector, including music, visual arts, dance, theatre and orchestra, with a shared ambition to transform the inaugural UK-EU Summit’s Common Understanding commitment to support cultural exchange into meaningful actions.

A full membership list is available [here](#). We welcome new members.

Find out more on our website or via email us at info@culturecoalition.net