



Impact of Brexit on Actors

The situation facing UK performers and those parts of our creative industries that support them is dire. The loss of freedom of movement post-Brexit has installed prohibitive administrative barriers and costs that have had a profound impact on the entire casting process. Spotlight surveyed our subscribers for their input to fully understand the situation they are facing. We asked all performers who held only a UK passport to let us know what differences they have seen in employment opportunities both pre- and post-Brexit.

1. Some streams of work are now unavailable

Some streams of employment are now almost completely unavailable to UK performers, such as commercials, where the quick turnaround from audition to filming cannot be met by the administrative requirements placed on that UK performer wishing to work in the EU. In fact, we are aware of named holiday companies, for example, that no longer audition UK-only passport holders. Respondents to the survey also highlighted an overall decreased availability of jobs. Casting for jobs in the EU will often specify a requirement for EU passport holders only, because the turnaround time for casting then engagement will be shorter than the turnaround time for the paperwork processes for UK passport holders. As a result, most agents/performers will not bother to apply because they know that they will not meet the deadlines. In our survey, 36% of performers report having lost out on work because of their passport status. However, performers were split when asked at what stage of the process they were asked for their passport status but this likely due to agents' management of their availability for EU-based work which is supported by information provided by agents and casting directors. In order to mitigate this, performers also noted that agents are encouraging their clients to get an EU passport where possible to allow them to be put forward for work and that some casting calls have asked for a list of EU passport holders from agents for casting for roles in a group or block.

Should a UK passport holder be cast in an EU role, performers may find that their contracts specify that an artist cannot visit a Schengen country for holiday/another contract for a specified period prior to a contract beginning so as not to impact on the 90-day allowance. Failure to comply may lead to termination of that contract. This requirement has placed an unnecessary burden on performers and will restrict both their ability to work and where they choose to spend their leisure time.

2. Prohibitive costs and legal uncertainties

Performers cite the amount of paperwork and its precise completion as a key problem particularly as they required a level of legal understanding that neither they, nor their agent could meet. They considered that they did not have the experience, skills or understanding to confidently meet the requirements of the processes across all EU member countries. If applications are not completed correctly, then owing to the delays to rectify that, the performer could lose their job before even starting work. If and when they do go through a process, the costs involved are often too high. Many performers who have worked in the EU post-Brexit have

relied on their agent or hirer to meet the administrative requirements for their work, thereby passing the administrative and financial burden to another part of the industry but for those who cannot, the increased costs were a major consideration. Because the level of paperwork and its precise compliance is as difficult for agents as it is for performers, with legal repercussions if they are inaccurate and if incorrectly completed could lead to the performer losing that job because of the delays to rectify, many will automatically seek legal advice, which then becomes a disproportionate, but necessary, additional cost on performers.

Most concerning is the anecdotal evidence that suggests performers are being asked to lie about their reasons for visiting an EU country (indicating tourism when in fact they are travelling for employment) if paperwork has not been finalised, putting them at a personal high legal risk. This circumvents the visa process but puts the performer at real risk because they are failing to meet the legal requirements placed on them when working in the EU. This is a 'ticking timebomb', with the potential for performers and their agents to face sanctions from the host country, including deportation and potential 'blacklisting' preventing future applications and, therefore, work opportunities.

3. Administrative burdens and financial delays

The costs involved for applications for A1 forms and visas can be prohibitive - financial costs, time for completion, research and/or legal advice. In total 81% of respondents unsurprisingly said that the process was more expensive post-Brexit. Even when performers do persist with EU engagements, the tax and social security provisions can leave a performer unpaid for 6-12 months as paperwork confirming their UK status (A1 Form) is processed slowly. Tax will be processed at source which has also meant a loss of earnings while that is reclaimed, making accepting work in the EU or a tour across the EU a financial and logistical consideration. This is a particular problem for new entrants into the industry and for those from working class or underrepresented backgrounds. Without a financial safety net, the wait for the tax rebate can be critical as to whether one can afford to work in the EU or not.

There is also a lack of uniformity across EU countries, which makes it harder to navigate. Some countries can process visas in a few days, others require weeks. Casting directors will have to become experts themselves in these processes to know whether they can audition performers with a UK-only passport for a role. Things can be so country dependent that we have been given examples of major television shows, which would have been career defining for a UK actor that have conducted a UK casting process and provided a short audition list, but the production timings changed which led to insufficient time for those UK actors to be cast and obtain visas. In one instance the casting director was instructed to abandon the UK casting and look for EU actors. This was nothing to do with the experience, skills or suitability of the UK performers but merely a timing issue. Time simply ran out to be able to cast them. Casting directors can often work to deadlines of three weeks to rehearsals, sometimes less.

4. Loss of touring and loss of experience

Without empirical evidence, it is hard to be definitive but there is an acceptance within the sector that there has been a loss of jobs for performers in the EU across all forms of engagement, particularly touring productions originating in the UK due to prohibitive administration and costs

leading to a loss of income, skills development and cultural exchange. Working as a performer in the EU allows performers to diversify their skillset, to contribute to EU productions and then bring their experience back to the UK and build on our rich tapestry. This has been lost with the loss of touring opportunities.

It is not just the income for creatives that has been lost but also the loss of shared experiences through culture and the development and growth that comes with it. English Touring Theatres have all but disappeared from our cultural offering to the EU, and authenticity of performance is threatened with the loss of UK performers for specific roles that may have an historical origin. Our sector also loses the experience and skills that come with engaging on a European cultural level. This has an impact on economic growth and our global competitiveness.

Major UK cultural institutions who also tour are now restricted in their casting choices because of visa requirements. Through this limitation in their choices, their reputation, quality and opportunities for UK actors to grow their skills and experience with internationally recognised cultural organisations is diminished. If the large organisations are finding this difficult, it is no surprise that smaller organisations are no longer able to navigate it at all.

Recommendations:

1. VISA WAIVERS/TOURING ARTIST VISA WAIVERS

Musicians have lobbied for a Visa Waiver Agreement for workers, which would allow exemptions to the normal rules for people travelling between two countries. This could potentially allow more time to work in the EU and reduce costs when performers travel to the EU to work. This would be reciprocal and therefore support EU actors working in the UK as well. If a Touring Artist Visa Waiver Agreement could be achieved then this would also remove the bureaucratic barriers with the removal of the need for reciprocal visas.

The introduction of a Waiver could also deal with issues such as last minute bookings or quick casting for commercials for example, and the Touring Waiver could restart the cultural exchange that was so valued pre-Brexit. For example, English speaking theatre tours would be able to make use of these visas for all their performers.

2. REJOIN CREATIVE EUROPE (AgoraEU)

Another significant development would be the UK rejoining Creative Europe. Through its access to EU funding, Creative Europe was a significant partner for the distribution of UK films (190 between 2014-2018). Creative Europe has an extensive budget that has been utilised to the UK's benefit in the past. It has also been key in developing networks that have fostered new opportunities, specialist expertise and developed export markets. Artistic exchange is important not just for the employment of actors and performers from a financial point of view, but is also essential for our cultural offer and relevance to grow. As a nation, we gain real value from our artists performing overseas. Those skills and experiences add to our cultural offer make our creative industries more relevant and enhance our quality.

3. IMPROVEMENTS IN MOVEMENT FOR STUDENTS

The UK already has youth mobility arrangements with Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Korea. A similar initiative to create new opportunities for cultural exchange and mobility between the UK and the EU, particularly for the younger generation would be an excellent way forward. It is important to ensure that this incorporates changes in the ability of EU students in the UK to gain experience of performing while they are in the UK. One potential option is an Exchange Partnership for Study allowing UK and EU drama students to work in their respective study countries with similar provisions to the UK US theatre exchange programme. This would provide oversight and measurable value while fostering greater connections between UK and EU drama schools who will need to host students while they are in their host countries.

The rejoining of the Erasmus+ programme is certainly a positive move and will create more opportunities for students to spend time studying abroad, and also EU students in the UK. It also potentially allows drama schools the opportunity to engage teachers from EU institutions to teach for a short period of time. This should be welcomed. However, there is still more to be done to truly improve the opportunities for performers.