

The artists' social statuses in Italy - Introduction

In Italy, labour laws are undergoing an increasingly rapid process of modification. The traditional employee status is changing, implying many controversial aspects and social conflicts, while the independent status is becoming more and more relevant in the labour market.

In the creative and artistic sectors, the number of independent workers was always higher than that of the employees. Visual artists or architects usually manage their job with independent contracts, while in the performing arts sector (especially theatre and dance) the main contractual forms in use are for employees. This status is justified by the fact that in the performing arts the actor, dancer etc. depends from somebody managing the production while in other sectors, work mostly has an independent nature: by this we mean a larger autonomy in the organisation and management of every single contract with the clients. Nevertheless, the features of contracts in the performing arts sector are very peculiar, being based on daily salaries (an artist or a technician can be employed even just for one day).

As in the overall job market, also the characteristics of work in the “arts” are changing, and in many cases it would be interesting to think about hybrid contractual typologies bridging the differences between employee and independent worker.

In this scenario, we decided to consider the cultural sector by distinguishing not only between the specific disciplines (music, theatre, dance, etc.) but also between the different forms of work contracts and statuses (independent musicians, actors, dancers, etc.), and creative professionals such as architects, visual artists, etc.

After identifying the boundaries of the labour market that we intend to analyse, we focused on the different statuses existing in Italy, and we summarised their main features.

In accordance with the R2E project's main target groups, and in order to have a wider overview of the creative sector, we decided to focus on the performing arts (theatre, dance, music, street performances and performance art), the visual arts (sculpture, painting, visual performances, video art), and professionals such as architects and designers having a professional regulation. Other professionals can be included in the creative sector if we consider education, involving different kinds of expertise such as psychologists, teachers, etc. However, these sectors are not part of our research because each of these professional categories usually has quite different social security regulations that would lead us away from our core interests.

Another particular work condition that we have only mentioned is the so-called “occasional independent collaboration”, having a very simplified bureaucracy and no social security status unless the yearly gross income produced within this category exceeds 5.000 €.

Last but not least, the other segment of the creative sector that we haven't analysed is the one that exploits “intellectual property rights”: authors, writers, translators, etc., because in the Italian legislation this is not considered “work”, and the revenues are not considered “earned income”. This kind of professionals does not have any social security protection.

For emerging artists at the start of their career, the different statuses are often seen as heavy bureaucracies. It is also very difficult to find a complete and easily accessible information in the institutional web sites (see <https://www.inps.it/portale/default.aspx#chiudi> for social security). A more user-friendly information system is therefore particularly needed. In Italy, SMartIt is working on one hand to give artists information about work statuses, rights and the Italian social security system, and on the other hand to implement tools for facilitating the management of bureaucracies. While famous artists can easily afford to have their work managed by private advisors and collaborators, the young and emerging ones struggle to understand how to manage their work. This is one of the main causes of a flourishing “black market” and informal economy. Especially in the visual arts sector, where personal relations are often stronger than the professional ones.

Finally, we note that in these months of 2016 the Italian Parliament is discussing a new law on independent workers aimed at regulating aspects such as illness, pregnancy and other rights (see <http://www.actainrete.it/2016/02/statuto-del-lavoro-autonomo-punto-per-punto/>).

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Impressum

Published by Centro di Creazione e Cultura in collaboration with SMartIt.

All information without guarantee. Updated in July 2016.

This publication was funded by the EU programme Erasmus+ in the framework of the project “Routes to Employment”. Content lies in the sole responsibility of the authors and publisher, it does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the European Commission.