



Steps taken by ZDUS / SADA since the COVID-19 has become a global pandemic – and an epidemic in Slovenia.

First, it is perhaps necessary to give you a brief background of our recent activities: in the beginning of 2020, ZDUS has joined other arts' associations to offer a set of government coordinated recommendations for self-employed artists and create conditions and opportunities which would allow them to have a career dynamic as similar as possible to the one available to workers in full-time employment. We formulated a list of specific suggestions, however, on 28 January 2020 our Prime Minister resigned and the government was dissolved. Consequently, all our activities were put on hold.

In February, when it became clear that a new government was going to form from the existing parties in the Parliament rather than an election being called, it has been agreed to pause all the activities until the new government is formed and the new National Programme for Culture comes out.

Unfortunately, the outbreak of covid-19 in our immediate vicinity (Italian regions Lombardy and Veneto) interfered. On 9 March, a government decree banned all events with more than 500 participants; literally hours later, this number was reduced to 100 participants. As venue after venue decided not to continue with their programme, most of our members very rapidly lost open contracts and engagements.

While the performers and other artists with full time contracts were protected by the employment law, self-employed workers lost their expected income in a matter of hours.



In the light of this, ZDUS connected once more with other arts' associations as well as organisations of self-employed workers in other sectors.

On 12 March, ZDUS sent a letter to the outgoing and incoming governments, demanding that the situation of freelance artists be particularly carefully considered. The new government, however, showed very little understanding for our plight – and not much for the plight of over 100.000 self-employed (around 10% of the active population) in the country in general.

Along with other groups concerned, and with either help or at least support of unions and certain political parties, ZDUS continues to work to improve the situation of self-employed workers in the arts, and arts workers in general.

We are currently conducting a survey of the estimated loss of income among our members, prepared by an independent group of freelancers, and once we have gathered the information we will prepare a report. An additional problem for our members is that the crisis came in the months just before the end of the performing season (theatres traditionally close over the summer in Slovenia), when most of our self-employed members must earn enough to tide them over through summer. Many are already reporting cancellations of contracts for the rest of the season. All major festivals between now and the end of June have been postponed, and summer festivals will probably not take place.

Combined with the proposed 30% cut in budget to redirect the money to epidemic crisis management, the rest of 2020 looks very bleak.

Together with the unions, Cultural Chamber of Slovenia and other representatives of self-employed, ZDUS proposed the following measures:



- reallocation of the funds of Ministry of Culture from the European funds for culture development into a fund for immediate relief of the most vulnerable as a short term temporary measure that doesn't need a new legislation and can be executed by the Ministry itself;
- immediate exemption of self-employed from paying social security and pension contributions for at least the duration of the crisis;
- paid sick leave from the first day of absence (currently self-employed workers in the arts are entitled to paid sick leave only from the 30<sup>th</sup> working day of their medically reported absence / inability to work),
- compensation for lost income, either in the same percentages as the full-time employees or as a flat sum;
- paid child care or dependant leave;
- tax and rent exemption for work premises that house art and culture;
- reimbursement of all financial loss for public institutions;
- establishment of a mutual aid fund for all people working in the arts, not just ZDUS members;
- honouring all-existing contracts in government funded arts organisations and paying self-employed 80% of their fees as an advance;
- newly formed working bodies of the Parliament must include relevant experts.

On 24 March, specialist consulting governmental body presented guidelines for the stimulus package for the economy. After much pressure from the self-employed and their organisations, associations, guilds, as well as the unions, it currently includes the following measures for self-employed:

- all self-employed who are prohibited to work, or whose work is significantly reduced due to COVID-2019 prevention measures are eligible to state aid consisting of paid



social security (healthcare and pension) contributions for three months/the duration of the crisis;

- self-employed are entitled to universal income of 70 % of net minimum wage, which will be paid by the government.

For both these relief measures to take place, the self-employed worker must fill in a statement, which will be available online and publicly accessible (to prevent fraud);

- income tax advance payments for 2020 are frozen/automatically deferred to March 2021.

We believe these are steps in the right direction, but without having seen the actual proposal yet, it is hard to assess their value. The Slovenian government will continue to define the proposal in more details on Friday, 27 March.

Today, March 25, 28 Slovenian associations / guilds and 2 trade unions signed a joint statement with comments on this proposal and sent it to the Slovenian Government, the Minister of Culture and the Parliament.

We do find several things concerning:

- while 70 % of minimum wage is a good start, it is still less than full-time workers get;
- the proposed publicly accessible list of aid recipients perpetuates the image of self-employed – and particularly workers in the arts among them – as untrustworthy. We agree that measures need to be taken to prevent fraud, but we question the execution;
- these measures cover all the self-employed, and no specific steps were taken to account for particularities of professions in the arts and culture. The almost complete silence from the Ministry of Culture gives us little comfort that the current government has any firm plans for the arts and culture. Unlike other ministries that have rolled out at least recommendations for their respective fields, we have not heard much from ours. We do not know what plans they have for culture once the pandemic is over – be it



structural plans, such as the National Programme for Culture for the years 2021–2027, or more immediate ones, such as – for example – what will happen with international projects and co-productions if not all countries lift travel quarantine in time to allow the agreed projects to go ahead.

ZDUS continues to monitor the situation closely and work with the relevant sister associations, unions, self- employed, NGOs, institutions and government bodies.

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