

Film Funding and Working Conditions in Europe

This report outlines actions that the European public film funds can undertake to improve working conditions of European film professionals. The below conclusions are made on the basis of the discussions among 15 film workers from 7 European countries during the two-day workshop on film-funding in Vienna (within the framework of the latest EU-XXL conference).

Public film funds are the essential financier of European cinema. According to the report by the European Audiovisual Observatory from 2016, there are over 250 such funds across Europe that operate on the national, subnational and supranational level.¹ Altogether, the public film funds have 2.53 billion euros at their disposal to support all phases in the film value-chain (from development to distribution). Without this support, the situation of many European film workers would be even more precarious than it is now.

Notwithstanding their paramount significance for the entire European film sector, public film funds still dedicate insufficient attention to the working conditions of the European film workers. This is evident already in the official reports from the MEDICI workshops which once a year gather representatives of the European public film funds to discuss the film policy challenges. In the eight MEDICI reports, nothing indicates that the funds have ever properly discussed the working conditions of the film workers.² They neither develop mechanism nor allocate enough funding for monitoring the working conditions of the below-the-line film professionals working on the projects supported by the public film funds. Also, the films tend to be under-financed, which

decreases the wages and work-conditions of film professionals, whereas film workers have no place where they could complain in case they are damaged or discriminated by their national film funds. As a consequence, an increasing number of film workers avoids working on the publicly-financed productions and moves towards the private sector (e.g. Netflix productions) where they, indeed, earn more money, but again under working conditions that no external mechanisms regulate or monitor.

There are two general recommendations for how the European public funds can improve the working conditions of film workers. Firstly, the funds should diversify their funding decision in order to give voice to different communities (e.g. different social classes, ethnic groups³, women-filmmakers⁴ and marginalized groups) and decrease the size of the precariat. Secondly, they should develop mechanisms for monitoring whether producers follow the fair production practices, and establish “the black-list” for the ones who do not.

Speaking in more practical terms, the funds can implement these changes by introducing the “fair production practice” provisions into their funding guidelines. These provisions would relate to the three major phases of the film value chain – development, production and distribution – and would create a new framework within which film workers would be able to demand and negotiate their working conditions.

Development. The majority of film workers develop projects without any financial support, even though the development process is most often very long and demanding. The development

¹ Talavera, M. Julio; Fontaine, G. and Kanzler, M. 2006. *Public Financing for Film and Television Content: The State of Soft Money in Europe*. Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory (p. 11)

² Eight reports covering the MEDICI shops that have been held since April 2012 are available at <https://focal.ch/medici-training/reports/index.html>

³ For example, see the report by the Danish Film Institute (in Danish) demonstrating that people belonging to ethnic minorities do not watch (or find interesting) the Danish film supported by the Danish Film Institute. https://www.dfi.dk/files/docs/2018-02/Etnisk_mangfoldighed_i_dansk_film_dfi_2015.pdf

⁴ For example, see the recent report by the Danish Film Institute (in Danish) about the lack of gender equality in the Danish Film Institute <https://www.dfi.dk/files/docs/2018-02/Koensfordelingen%20i%20dansk%20film%2031052016.pdf>

For the initiatives dedicated to the improvement of gender equality on a European level, see <https://www.coe.int/en/web/eurimages/gender-equality>

process does not only include writing scripts as can be concluded from the funding guidelines of the most of the public film funds. It also implies activities such as attending international script-writing labs and workshops, participating at co-production markets and pitching forums, and doing a lot of testing in collaboration with DoPs, production designers, costume designers and composers. During the development period, film workers are unemployed and finance development mostly by themselves. As a result, they tend to enter the production with under-developed projects, which decreases the quality of their final products. Therefore, **the film funds should diversify the development funding schemes, increase the development budgets and control if this budget has been properly spent.**

The actions by the Danish Film Institute exemplify what funds can take vis-à-vis improvement of the work conditions of film workers during the development stage. Namely, the DFI shut down the automatic support scheme and transferred part of the automatic funding to the new – more generous and more diversified – development scheme. Now the film teams in Denmark can receive up to 300,000 euro in several stages, whereas the idea of development is not any longer defined only as script-writing or pre-production. The DFI funding guidelines now recognize as many as 10 financeable types of development that can take a long period of hard-work.⁵

Furthermore, in addition to increasing and diversifying the development support, **the film funds should also organize more international workshops for below-the-line functions** such as DoPs, costume designers and sound designers. A recent study by Joelle Levie (sponsored by FOCAL – organization for professional training in the audiovisual sector) showed that the below-the-line functions are discriminated in comparison to the above-the-line creatives when it comes to the funding that film funds invest in training and internationalization of film workers.⁶ Professional training is essential for building networks, learning new skills and increasing solidarity and a sense of community of film workers on the European level.

Production: European public film funds support minority co-productions through specific schemes which require that the minority support is spent in the country of the minority producer. To meet this requirement, majority producers tend to execute the post-production in the minority country and leave the post-production film professionals in their home countries without jobs. This is specially the issue between small and big countries (e.g. Austria/Germany or Belgium/France), where bigger countries are pulling resources from smaller countries in this way, just because of the official co-production system. Therefore, **the funds should be more flexible in terms of co-production spending requirements.**

Furthermore, funds tend to establish collaboration with several very successful directors and producers, and give most of the money to them. In this way, they are in position to arrange positive reports on the box-office and/or festival success for politicians. However, while this system makes politicians, public film fund and the small group of elite producers happy, a great majority of film workers only struggles, simultaneously doing five jobs to survive, without a social security and pension. In order to improve the situation, **European public film funds need new criteria that would re-define the notion of quality and change the existing system. One of the quality criteria can require that a film be produced under “the fair conditions for the workers”.** In line with these criteria, funds would check how many weeks, preparation/shooting/post-production work-hours each professional spend on a project. Over-exploitation of film workers through price-dumping and 12-hour-long workdays decreases the quality of the final product and should be sanctioned. Also, the funding applications should be anonymized whenever possible, so that the public funding (whenever possible) can be re-distributed only on the basis of the quality of projects, not according to the gender, social status or previous track-record of the directors and producers.

⁵ See Module 7 in the MEDICI report 5 (<https://focal.ch/medici-training/reports/index.html>)

⁶ Levie, Joelle. 2017. *Professional Training in a Changing World*. FOCAL, Lausanne: FOCAL.

Finally, there is a lot of inequality between the European film workers, depending on their country of origin. For instance, film workers in a rich European country like Norway have much more opportunities than producers in East European countries. As a consequence, many quality projects from economically-challenged European countries never get made, and many film workers in these countries simply leave their profession. **The funds can encourage more solidarity on European level by supporting more projects by foreign filmmakers in need.** There are already some random examples of such actions like *Sørfond*⁷ by the Norwegian Film Institute or *The Aide aux cinémas du monde*⁸ by the French CNC. However, these practices should be more common among the film funds.

Distribution: The public film funds should establish a pan-European VoD platform for all European films.⁹ In this way the awareness of European films would be increased among the European citizens and the films would generate **additional revenues that could be transferred to producers (to feed their, for example, pension or social security funds)**. The pan-European VoD platform could be financed by supranational film funds such as MEDIA Programme which can redirect funding from purely economic schemes (e.g. slate-projects or automatic support) to the VoD promotion scheme. Nourishing a pan-European VoD platform should go hand-in-hand with well-financed media literacy campaigns that would develop the habits among European (especially the young) to regularly check out European films available online.

⁷ Haugsevje, Dahl, Asne. 2015. *In a position to tell Evaluation of Sørfond - the Norwegian South Film Fund*. Telemark Research Institute, Oslo: Telemark Research Institute <https://www.telemarkforskning.no/publikasjoner/filer/2735.pdf>

⁸ Vinuela, Ana. 2018. "Exporting the French Co-production Model: Aide aux cinémas du monde and Produire au Sud." In *European Film and Television Co-production: Policy and Practice*, edited by Julia Hammett-Jamart, Petar Mitric and Eva Novrup Redvall. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹ In 2016, 1740 feature films were produced in Europe (see Talavera, M. 2017. *Film Production in Europe: Production Volume, Co-productions and Worldwide Circulation*. Strasbourg: European Audiovisual Observatory). However, most of these films are not available on any release window and thus remain hidden from Europeans.