



“The Show Must Go On” safely - health and safety in the live performance sector

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Executive Summary

This report explores the health and safety landscape of the live performance sector in Europe, with a particular emphasis on emerging mental health challenges. Developed within the framework of the “Strengthening Capacities in the Live Performance Sector” project, it reflects priorities identified by European social partners who emphasised the need to examine health and safety as one of the key focus areas alongside artificial intelligence and climate change.

Live performance encompasses a wide array of artistic expressions, from theatre and music to circus and festivals, and involves a diverse workforce of creative and technical professionals. While the sector brings significant cultural and social value, it also presents a complex set of health and safety risks. These range from event-specific hazards (such as crowd control and fire safety) to occupational risks, as well as psychological and social stressors linked to irregular hours, job insecurity, and high-performance pressure.

A growing concern is the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of performers, behind the stage workers and supporting staff. Recent studies show that performing artists can be at higher risk of anxiety, depression, and burnout compared to the general population. These risks are particularly acute among young, neurodiverse, low-income workers and those with disabilities. Touring adds another layer of vulnerability, with long hours, travel-related exhaustion, and isolation contributing to poor mental health outcomes.

Despite these challenges, the sector has also shown resilience and innovation. The report highlights numerous initiatives—both national and cross-European—aimed at promoting safer working environments. The examples include the Online Interactive Risk Assessment tools developed by European social partners in the live performance sector, with the help of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, the Safety Passport for technical crews, and sector-specific occupational health services such as BAPAM (UK), Thalie Santé (France), and ArboPodium (Netherlands). These initiatives demonstrate the potential of cross-sectoral collaboration and social dialogue in enhancing workplace safety, and with the support of dedicated funding.

The report also provides an overview of the European Union's legal and policy framework on occupational safety and health, and identifies opportunities for further alignment with the needs of the live performance sector.

In conclusion, the report identifies a number of areas for further consideration:

- mental health infrastructure tailored to the performing arts,
- wellbeing included in social dialogue,
- support for marginalised groups,
- targeted data collection and research—particularly in Eastern and Southern Europe,
- awareness-raising campaigns.

Addressing these issues will not only protect the sector's workforce but also enhance the role of live performance as a contributor to social cohesion, cultural vitality, and public well-being.

1. Introduction

This paper provides an overview of selected topics related to health and safety at work in the live performance sector from the perspective of the European social partners (FIM, FIA, UNI MEI and Pearle). It is the second report developed as part of the project “*Strengthening capacities in the live performance sector*”. The decision to devote one of the research papers to health and safety issues was taken by the participating employers’ organisations and trade unions that voted on a selection of possible topics in a survey in the beginning of 2024. Health and safety gained the second largest number of votes of social partners (with AI being the first one)¹. After a brainstorming session in December 2024 that took place during the training on artificial intelligence held in Warsaw, national social partners opted for emphasising topics related to mental health.

Live performance is understood as all forms of artistic expression that involve real-time interaction with audience present in-person. This sector includes a wide range of disciplines and venues, from traditional performing arts (theatre, music, dance, circus) to large-scale commercial productions (music festivals, etc.) It is a diverse industry that relies on actors, musicians, performers, other creative professionals, technical crews, venue operators and producers to deliver cultural experiences.

European social partners play an essential role informing the design and implementation of regulations on labour conditions and health and safety standards. Through collective bargaining, policy advocacy, and health and safety initiatives, social partners help create a more sustainable, safe and equitable industry. Since the 1990s, the close collaboration with EU institutions has ensured that the voices of both employers and workers are heard and help in shaping the future of the sector.

The awareness of potential risks is crucial to create safe live performances. Proper safety measures and procedures have to be in place so that everyone can feel safe and enjoy the live experience.

This report starts from a brief overview of challenges and risks with the emphasis on the ones specific to the sector. Section 3 provides selected examples of initiatives, especially those developed by or with contributions from social partners aiming to improve the health and safety situation with added emphasis on initiatives related to the mental health situation. Section 4 briefly sketches the European legal framework for health and safety. Conclusions and recommendations are provided in the last section.

The research for the report started in 2023 and was finalised in early 2025. Beyond desk research, the sources included interviews, e.g. with an artist and educator

¹ See Agnieszka Paczynska (2024), AI unplugged: the perspective of the live performance sector, available at https://www.uni-europa.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2024/12/AI_in_live_performance_report_final_draft_dec05.pdf. The report was first presented in Warsaw, Poland during the thematic seminar on artificial intelligence in December 2024.

involved in developing support schemes for dancers, an expert working as a counsellor for dancers and psychologists working with musicians and dancers within a state supported scheme. The interviews were conducted in March and April 2025.

2. Health and safety challenges and risks in the live performance sector

A range of diverse health and safety risks are associated with live performances. Some are related to the fact that potentially large audiences gather in limited spaces, while other ones relate to the character of the work by performers or support staff. The current paper does not aim to provide a systematic presentation of the risks. It is still instructive to discuss certain examples illustrating the variety of health- and safety-related challenges.

Risks related to preparing a live event range from the risk of fire to the risk of injury in the crowd, e.g. near exits. 'Every event has its own set of risk factors and considerations,' says Eddy Grant CMIOH, director of safety at Symphotech. 'You're creating a standalone experience and, for that to be successful, it needs its own well-researched, properly formulated and effective safety plan.'² Each event may have a unique set of risks due to the fact that crew sizes vary, type of audience may vary or the performance has some specificity. This complexity calls for a tailored risk assessment as generic one may turn out insufficient.

2.1. Event and venue-related risks

Crowd management is one of the challenges and this involves design features of facilities where large live events take place. Lack of planning and mitigation measures may lead to serious accidents. One example is provided by the December 2022 incident during the concert at O2 Academy Brixton in London. The incident resulted in the deaths of two people and was caused by a large number of fans trying to force entry into the venue without tickets, leading to overcrowding and chaos at the entrance. As a result, the venue's license was suspended. It has reopened two years later after introducing improvements such as reinforced doors, enhanced queuing systems, and stricter ticketing procedures.³

While new technologies offer significant opportunities for enhancing live performance experiences and audience engagement, they also introduce risks. Increasing digital interaction with audiences increases the vulnerability of venues and individuals to data breaches and cyberattacks aimed at stealing personal or sensitive information. Additionally, the widespread use of social media platforms

² IOSH Magazine <https://www.ioshmagazine.com/2023/05/03/new-challenges-event-safety>.

³ BBC, Brixton Academy to reopen more than a year after fatal crush, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-68467231>.

presents reputational risks for performers, staff, and venue operators, particularly when individuals are publicly associated with specific events, roles, or artistic content. In extreme cases, such online exposure can lead to harassment, abuse, and long-term reputational or psychological harm.

Another safety challenge in the industry is related to the often-demanding working hours schedules (including night shifts) at live performance venues. This may lead to fatigue of both the performers and support staff members increasing the likelihood of injuries and accidents. Exposition to stage lights for a prolonged time may pose a risk of heat stress. This risk may also be linked to the severe weather conditions like very high temperatures, sudden storms and other. Experts on crowd safety agree that rigorous contingency plans are a must in case an event has to be postponed, cancelled, interrupted or evacuated due to the weather⁴.

2.2. Occupational health risks for performers and crew

People working in the live performance sector may be exposed to various hazards, including working at heights, loud noise exposure, potential injuries from equipment, and use of harmful chemicals (such as adhesives, paints, cosmetics, or pyrotechnics). Risks are also linked to poorly maintained venues (e.g., dust, mould, and fungi). While awareness is important, it often isn't enough to ensure protection—some organizers or venue owners may prioritize cost savings over safety and holding them accountable can be difficult and time-consuming. In the case of loud noise exposure, addressing the risk goes beyond financial investment. It also requires a shift in behaviour and culture: quieter performances, scheduled breaks, thoughtful stage layouts, and willingness from promoters, musicians, and audiences to adapt. In short, designing shows with noise reduction in mind is essential, and not solely a question of resources.

Equally concerning is the high level of stress caused by performance-related injuries such as hearing loss, musculoskeletal disorders, or focal dystonia. Many performers fear that disclosing first signs of such issues could jeopardize their careers, leading them to hide symptoms and postpone treatment rather than seek help. This issue is deeply rooted in a professional culture where physical pain is often normalized, especially among dancers and musicians who are traditionally trained to endure discomfort as part of the job.

Late working hours and night shifts also pose psychosocial and physical health risks for performers, technical crews, and venue staff. Staff shortages can lead to long overtime, fatigue, and insufficient recovery periods. Many workers experience fragmented sleep and chronic exhaustion, especially when juggling multiple jobs. These challenges are more acute for older workers and for physically demanding or public-facing roles, such as stagehands, technicians, and touring performers. In addition, social isolation, disrupted relationships, and poor diet or exercise routines

⁴ Too hot to party? Extreme temperatures threaten live music shows
<https://www.eco-business.com/news/too-hot-to-party-extreme-temperatures-threaten-live-music-shows/>.

can intensify health impacts. Theatre workers (especially women) also report safety concerns related to commuting late at night.⁵

Climate change poses new risks to individuals working in the sector. There are no precise data on how many live performances event are disrupted or cancelled due to extreme weather conditions that have become increasingly common in recent years. Still, anecdotal evidence suggests that the numbers have been growing. The real impact is yet hard to estimate and it is clear that not only outdoor events are affected and that it may also have an impact on individual mental well-being.

2.3. Sexual harassment and sexist behaviors

Sexual harassment remains a significant threat to health and safety in the live performance sector. Reports and research studies highlight that these behaviors are often normalized within the industry, creating a culture where abuse is often tolerated, underreported and not sufficiently addressed.⁶ The nature of live performance work and its unique characteristics such as late-night hours, informal environments, crowd density, impulsive behaviors often because of alcohol or drug abuse, increase the risk of harassment and creates specific vulnerabilities. On top of that many performers, stage technicians, and other staff members are engaged on a freelance or short-term basis, which can discourage reporting out of fear of retaliation or loss of future work opportunities. In some cases, blurred professional boundaries and the intimate context of artistic collaboration may also be exploited. These risks may lead to feeling of fear and powerlessness and may result in avoidance of certain situations, people or venues. The psychological impacts can be long-lasting, affecting mental health, well-being, and career. Such risks not only undermine individual safety and mental health but also restrict equal participation and enjoyment in the live performance sector. Addressing this issue requires both preventive and responsive measures, including robust reporting systems, sector-wide codes of conduct, and accessible support mechanisms for those affected.

2.4. Risks linked to artistic content and freedom of artistic expression

Another layer of the health and safety challenges may be linked to the artistic content of the shows. An incident in Stuttgart Opera has shown that even explicit warnings before the show that it contains shocking scenes may not be enough to keep audience safe. In October 2024 in the Stuttgart Opera about 18 people sought medical assistance due to the severe nausea caused by watching the performance *Sancta Susanna* by Florentina Holzinger. The provocative production included

⁵ Moore, S., & Ballardie, R. (2024). *The health and safety impacts of night working*. Anglia Ruskin University & University of Greenwich https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/health-and-safety-impacts-night-working?mail=1841@w2NLCx-6smtsajtAStq0f5Cy3_oKUX7zCjwqSdGRQTM@132200.

⁶ This is elaborated for example in the report **Gender discrimination in the music industry compels action** a report from European Composer's and Songwriters Alliance (ECSA, 2024) and in the ILO **Policy Brief on sexual harassment in the entertainment industry** (ILO, 2020)

elements such as live body piercing, unsimulated sexual acts, and a mix of real and fake blood. These visuals, combined with the absence of a break during the nearly three-hour show, reportedly overwhelmed some attendees.

The content of the show may not only do harm to the audience, but it may also disturb the outside world or even pose a threat to performers. This risk can materialise e.g. when the content of the show hurts someone's religious or other feelings leading to protests, that can become violent. The performers themselves may be also targeted by such protests, with ensuing psychological burden or in extreme cases also risks to physical safety. For example, both artists and audience were put at risk many times across US and other countries on the occasion of performing and/or attending the show based on "The Vagina Monologues" by Eve Ensler.

Risks may also appear where the theatre (or any other art) tries to confront authoritarian power of the state that can provoke state retaliation, thus placing both the artists and audience of such events in position of real vulnerability.⁷

2.5. Time pressure and its cost

Time pressure in the live performance sector is a serious safety and well-being risk. The incident during a theatre rehearsal in France involving a stage water tank proves this. In this case, the water was too cold, but the director insisted the actors proceed with the scene rather than wait for the water to be properly warmed. While most of the team rightly refused to enter the tank, one performer complied and later suffered from a cold. This situation shows how production timelines and performance demands can sometimes overrule common sense safety considerations and lead to preventable harm. It is clear that time pressure is one of the risks increasingly affecting the live performance industry. The demand for rapid production and frequent touring is intensifying, affecting all professions across the industry. Individuals are expected to deliver high-quality results within extremely tight timelines. Touring schedules are often unrealistic, leaving little room for rest, proper stage setup, long enough rehearsal periods and adequate planning. This undoubtedly increases the likelihood of vocal strain, burnout, or mental health breakdowns. Young artists at the start of their careers are particularly vulnerable. They frequently have to choose between taking on roles to build their reputation or stepping back for essential reasons like sick leave or maternity leave. People are often afraid of doing this because they are worried that it could jeopardise future opportunities.

2.6. Audience behaviour and public safety

Both audience and the venue staff may feel unsafe when being exposed to an anti-social behaviour of a person or a group of people participating in a cultural event. One example of such a behaviour is from a performance at the Manchester's Palace Theatre where the show had to be disrupted as some people in the audience

⁷ For example, the Belarus Free Theatre (BFT) was an underground theatre group that used performance as a form of political resistance against the authoritarian regime in Belarus. The group operated under constant threat of persecution making its performances dangerous for both artists and audiences. In 2021, members of the group were forced to leave the country.

started loud singing and refused to remain seated. The situation escalated to the point where security had to intervene to remove several individuals from the theatre. Incidents of this type illustrate the challenges theatres face in managing audience behaviour and ensuring a safe environment for both performers and attendees. According to a survey done in the UK by BECTU, a union representing workers in the media and entertainment industries, this incident reflects a broader trend of increasing anti-social behaviour in theatres, with incidents of physical aggression and verbal abuse. The BECTU survey found that nearly 80% of respondents had experienced "acts of bullying, violence, intimidation, harassment, or abuse of staff." ⁸ Reports suggest that many theatre staff fear for their safety due to such behaviours, prompting calls for stricter enforcement of audience conduct policies.

2.7. Physical and psychological strain for older workers

"Getting older is an unforeseen event in the music industry' said Rosana Corbacho, a psychologist. She notes that stepping away from the stage can feel akin to losing one's identity, as artists' self-worth is often closely tied to an artistic career.⁹ For many, performing is not just a job but an integral part of who they are. However, older performers and support staff often face challenges related to their age. The industry often prioritizes young performers, which may create a barrier for older artists despite their experience and talent. Mainstream opportunities (stable employment, new lucrative contracts) often diminish with age, forcing many to rely on ad hoc gigs for income due to the lack of retirement planning or financial security within the industry. Additionally, touring increases physical vulnerabilities, with older artists more frequently suffering from fatigue, injuries, and other health complications during extended tours.

Support staff also face systemic issues. The post-pandemic recovery has led to a shortage of skilled workers in technical roles, such as production and sound engineering, as many left the sector for more stable careers. This has resulted in overworked staff and difficulty recruiting new talent, particularly during high-demand periods like festival seasons.

To address those challenges, the audience has an important role to play. The stereotypes related to age (e.g. that creativity/performance ability declines with age, that older people should not attend performances of a young pop-star or should not engage in the pop music gigs, etc.) should be challenged, as older performers often bring decades of experience, emotional depth, and mastery to their art.

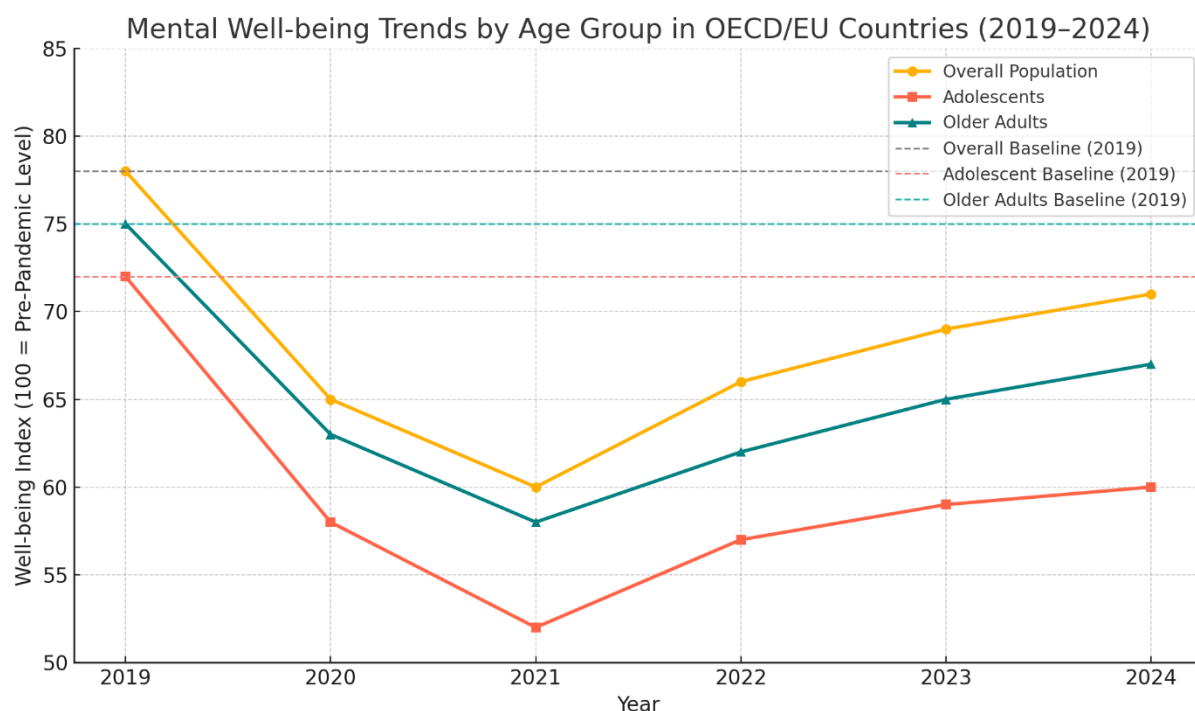
2.7. Mental health and psychosocial challenges

⁸ Audience Behaviours in Uk Theatrical Venues. Summary findings of a Bectu survey, February 2023 <https://members.bectu.org.uk/advice-resources/library/3104>.

⁹ Old rockers and the retirement dilemma: 'Getting older is an unforeseen event in the music industry'<https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-03-15/old-rockers-and-the-retirement-dilemma-getting-older-is-an-unforeseen-event-in-the-music-industry.html>

Mental health and well-being seem to be currently among the main challenges for people in Europe. A worsening of the situation can be observed in the last few years. Initially it was triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. While all age groups have been affected, the data indicates that young people have emerged as one of the most vulnerable populations.

Figure 1. Mental well-being trends by age group in OECD/EU countries



Source: *Health at a Glance*, OECD 2024

According to recent findings from the OECD's *Health at a Glance 2024*, adolescent mental health has worsened more than that of the general population. By 2024, mental well-being levels among the youth remained markedly below pre-pandemic benchmarks. As older populations begin to recover, adolescents are struggling to regain emotional stability, hindered by post pandemic problems (a period of social isolation, educational disruption, digital overload), climate change, geopolitical tensions, and potentially some other factors.

Live performance sector is a workspace for many young people and a sector that connects with youth audiences. Some individuals enter the industry in their early adulthood or even earlier combining it with education. The pressures specific to the sector such as irregular working hours, performance pressure, competitiveness can exacerbate mental health vulnerabilities.

The sector-specific literature review commissioned by Equity and the Musicians' Union reveals problematic mental health trends in the live performing sector.¹⁰ Two studies covered by that review reported depression prevalence to be twice as likely among

¹⁰ Moore, S., Ballardie, R., and Green, D. *Global Scoping Review of Factors Related to Poor Mental Health and Wellbeing within the Performing Arts Sector*. Equity UK 2022.

performers (actors and ballet dancers) than among the general population.¹¹ The review also suggests that people working in the industry may be more prone to experiencing anxiety because of stress resulting from competition with and comparison to other artists, struggling for perfection, and/or dissatisfaction with performance. Other factors may contribute to this situation:

- Irregular working hours, extended periods away from home, and financial insecurity were the most frequently discussed sources of stress and mental health concerns among performing artists,
- Numerous studies highlighted job instability, including unpredictable and short-term employment, low wages and workload imbalances,
- Other research papers found that stressful work environments were linked to negative relationships with those in positions of power, particularly when they were indifferent, unsupportive, or authoritarian,
- Studies also suggested that education institutions offer insufficient support, leaving students largely unprepared for managing their psychological well-being once they enter the labour market.

Mental health of both performers and crew members is often challenged by intense touring. At first it may look fabulous and exciting but often it is linked to long traveling, sleep deprivation, pressure of delivering perfection during the show, long periods away from home and loved ones and last-minute changes in the schedules. All this can lead to physical exhaustion, increasing stress and weakening mental well-being. In some cases, it may result in anxiety, depression and substance abuse. The 2020 study among North American touring professionals found some 50% of survey participants at high risk for clinical depression.¹²

Exploring mental health in relation to ethnically diverse performers, performers with disabilities¹³, and their social class remains a challenge. It is possible that some groups of performers may face particular challenges. This is to some extent reflected in the report *Musicians' Census Mental Wellbeing Report 2023*.¹⁴ This report focuses on *situation of musicians in the UK* but the findings may to some extent be extrapolated for EU countries. The reports' main findings include:

¹¹ Maxwell, I., Seton, M., & Szabo, M. (2015). The Australian actors' wellbeing study: A preliminary report. In *About Performance* (No. 13, pp. 69-113). Ravaldi, C., Vannacci, A., Zucchi, T., Mannucci, E., Cabras, P. L., Boldrini, M., ... & Ricca, V. (2003). Eating disorders and body image disturbances among ballet dancers, gymnasium users and body builders. *Psychopathology*, 36(5), 247-254.

¹² Newman C, George RP, Beitz T, Bergson Z, Zemon V. (2022), Mental health issues among international touring professionals in the music industry. *J Psychiatr Res.*, Vol 145, pp. Pages 243-249, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2021.12.031>.

¹³ More info on knowledge gaps for disabled artists and audiences can be find in the report *On the Move – Time to Act: Two Years On* (British Council, 2023). <https://disabilityarts.online/resources/research-and-learning/research-and-reports/on-the-move-time-to-act-two-years-on-2023/>.

¹⁴ Help Musicians & Musicians' Union (2023) *Musicians' Census Mental Wellbeing Report*. Available at: www.helpmusicians.org.uk.

- Although there is no substantial difference in reporting low mental wellbeing between musicians from Global Majority backgrounds and musicians from white backgrounds, lack of representation of ethnically diverse individuals in the industry may contribute to mental health struggles and create some structural barriers such as limited access to opportunities, financial instability, and exclusion from mainstream networks. Ethnic minority musicians who also identify as LGBTQ+ or have disabilities may face compounded challenges leading to even lower mental wellbeing.
- Some 49% of the surveyed musicians with disabilities reported low mental wellbeing, a 2.5 times higher share than for musicians without disabilities (20%). Similarly, 66% neurodiverse musicians reported low mental wellbeing and mental health conditions affects another 54%. Musicians often indicate that the stigma surrounding disabilities, lack of accessibility in music venues, and stressful work environments (especially on tour) contribute to worsening mental health. There are also certain barriers for performers with low-income socioeconomic background to the entry into the industry and to the career progression.
- Income levels seem to correlate strongly with mental well-being. Low-income musicians were twice as likely to experience poor mental health compared to musicians with high earnings.

On the other hand, live performance also has a unique role to play in addressing the youth mental health crisis. As a mode of expression and connection, theatre, music, dance, and interdisciplinary arts can offer young people tools to process their emotions, build resilience, and regain a sense of community. For audiences, attending live performances can be a healing and socially restorative experience. For performers, creative engagement — when supported in a safe and inclusive environment — can foster confidence, identity development, and peer connection.

For audiences, attending performances can be emotionally healing and socially restorative. Live music elicits stronger and more consistent activity in the human brain than recorded music by driving stronger emotional responses¹⁵. There is growing interest in studying the therapeutical force of music, with some authors observing that “regularly experiencing live music is the key to building a long-standing improvement to wellbeing”¹⁶.

Music holds profound therapeutic potential also for performers, especially when supported by inclusive and safe environments. Creative engagement can foster resilience, confidence, and community belonging. It is not only a form of artistic expression but also a mechanism for emotional self-regulation. Performing live offers a unique environment where stress can be transformed into energy, allowing artists to meaningfully connect with audiences and derive emotional fulfillment from the

¹⁵ Live Music's Unique Spark: A Brain's Emotional Journey, February 26, 2024
<https://neurosciencenews.com/live-music-emotion-25665/>.

¹⁶ Quotation of Patrick Fagan, an expert in behavioral science and lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London. <https://www.newsweek.com/going-concerts-can-help-you-live-longer-according-new-study-863628>.

act of performing¹⁷. Scientific research stresses music's capacity to reduce stress hormones, increase endorphins, and foster social connection. For performers, this manifests in both in emotional relief and enhanced mental resilience. Musical engagement stimulates brain activity more intensely than verbal communication, creating a powerful platform for emotional expression that is particularly valuable for those navigating the high-pressure demands of performance careers.

Music can serve as a therapeutic tool during times of personal or professional strain. Artists often report that live performance allows them to process complex emotions, find identity, and regain a sense of control. When facilitated in inclusive, empathetic environments, music can thus become a source of healing rather than stress.

3. Examples of initiatives in the sector

Social partners across Europe are aware of the health and safety challenges in the live performance sector, though levels of engagement and action vary across countries. While specific national initiatives may be different, the awareness and efforts to address these challenges are often influenced by broader European frameworks and social dialogue processes. At the EU level, social dialogue creates a platform for negotiation, development of standards, and for work to influence policy on employment, working conditions, health and safety, and professional development. The Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for the Live Performance Sector has been discussing the importance of improving health and safety in the sector and been implementing joint research and actions on the topic for over 20 years. This chapter covers selected examples of the recent initiatives of this type.

3.1. International projects

One important initiative is the **OIRA tool (Online Interactive Risk assessment)**. These are occupational health and safety tools designed for assessing risks of accidents and work-related diseases in the workplace. They have been developed by the European Agency for Health and Safety at Work (EU OSHA) in cooperation with European social partners. These tools enable venues and productions in the live performance sector to identify and manage risks associated with various activities, including technical elements like set design, rigging, special effects, and audience interactions. They can help prevent accidents in diverse performance environments. The tools cover a wide range of risks, including hazards related to staging and equipment, risks from chemical substances, noise exposure levels and safety considerations for some specific scenes that require some specific skills.

¹⁷ Live Music Industry and Mental Health: How Music Venues Can Show Support <https://prism.fm/blog/insights/live-music-industry-and-mental-health-how-music-venues-can-show-support/>.

Figure 2. Examples of OIRA test tools interface for the live performance sector



Source: Online Interactive Risk Assessment, <https://oira.osha.europa.eu/oira-tools>

In 2023, 27 new OiRA tools were developed widening the resources available to stakeholders in other sectors. The tools are available in many EU languages, making them accessible to diverse stakeholders within the sector. In 2023, more than 367,000 risk assessments were completed with the use of these tools.¹⁸

For the OIRA tools the EU OSHA also partners with national authorities (ministries and labour inspectorates) and national occupational health and safety institutes that have decided to join the OiRA community. In some cases, this leads to creating national resources inspired by OIRA tools. Examples of this approach can be found in Belgium, Finland, and Greece.¹⁹

Another example of a joint initiative is **The European Safety Passport** for the live performance sector. It was developed through a collaboration of organisations such as:

- Sociaal Fonds Podiumkunsten (Belgium)
- Die Deutsche Theater-technische Gesellschaft, DTHG (Germany)
- Vereniging voor Podiumtechnologie, VPT (Netherlands)
- Svensk Teater-tek-nisk Förening, STTF (Sweden)
- Royal Institute for Theatre, Cinema and Sound, RITCS (Belgium),
- Professional association of producers, designers and technicians of the arts and event sector, STEPP (Belgium)
- Metropolia University of Applied Sciences Helsinki (Finland)

The European Safety Passport is a qualification connected with a training course designed for professionals in the live performing sector. To obtain the Safety Passport, candidates must complete a three-step process: online learning, written exam and a practical assessment. The Safety Passport is recognized across Europe by the

¹⁸ <https://osha.europa.eu/en/oshnews/discover-oira-facts-2023-27-new-tools-and-more-86-000-risk-assessments>.

¹⁹ A Finnish version of the OIRA tool could be found at <https://www.ttl.fi/hyvinvoiva-pienyryitys/pienyryityksen-tyoturvallisuus/oira-riskien-arvioinnin-verkkotyokalu-mikro-pienyryityksille/>.

respective organisations involved in the initiative and serves as a certification of the commitment to and skills related to the safety standards in the live performing sector.

Besides those, many national social partners provide a tailored health and safety guidance for professionals in the live performance sector.

3.2. National initiatives

ArboPodium, a Dutch foundation, promotes healthy and safe working conditions in the live performance sector. It implements two key Initiatives:

- PodiumRIE: A sector-specific Risk Inventory & Evaluation (RI&E) instrument designed for the sector and recognized by the Dutch Labour Inspectorate as the current safety standard.
- Arbocatalogus: Comprehensive guides that provide solutions and best practices for addressing various occupational risks within the performing arts sector. These catalogues cover topics such as physical strain, working at heights, and the use of hazardous substances.

Thalie Santé is a French health and safety service dedicated to professionals in the cultural and creative industries offering specialised support to sectors such as media, advertising, communication, performing arts, and audiovisual production. The institution was established in 2021 by merging the Centre Médical Bourse (CMB) and the Centre Médical de la Publicité et de la Communication (CMPC).

Thalie Santé offers support both for individuals working in the industry (regardless from their employment status) and for employers. Workers can access regular occupational medical examinations and health assessments, mental support and sessions with psychologists, consultations on health concerns related to work and prevention programs mitigating risks related to stress, fatigue, and physical strain.

Employers can reach out for advice on how to meet legal obligations under French occupational laws, and can obtain help in risk assessments, in particular in developing a risk inventory (Document Unique d'Évaluation des Risques) and assistance with designing and implementing safety strategies. Employers can also access trainings, tools, and guidance to prevent workplace accidents.

In Denmark there is **Partnership for Sustainable Development in Music**²⁰, an industry alliance of more than 90 companies, organisations, and institutions from across the Danish music ecosystem. They work together towards a more sustainable development of music industry by calling to ensure equal access for all talents, health and wellbeing on and behind the stage, and to support a greener and more sustainable music scene. What seems innovative about this initiative is that it combines health & safety, mental wellbeing and climate change challenges and tries to address those in a comprehensive way.

The **British Association for Performing Arts Medicine (BAPAM)**, a charity, delivers expert health and wellbeing services for the UK's entire performing arts sector,

²⁰ More info can be found here: <https://partnershipforsustainablemusic.com/>

supporting industry professionals and students, from musicians and singers to dancers, actors, and circus performers as well as those who work behind the scenes. BAPAM provides information and training to prevent poor health as well as specialist care when things go wrong. BAPAM was established in 1984 and since then has helped thousands of artists and creators each year.

The Musicians Union, a UK-based trade union, offers resources on risk assessments, and mental health support, addressing unique challenges facing performers.²¹

For preventing sexual harassment and sexist behaviours and dealing with it there is big variety of national initiatives ranging from collective agreements like in France ²² through codes of conduct, pledges, toolkits, training and mentoring programmes and victim support schemes. Good practices in this field have been collected by European social partners within a project “Gender Equality on and off the stage”²³.

Prioritising health and safety in the live performance sector is not just about preventing accidents. The key aspects also include workers' well-being, legal compliance, financial stability, and there are strong links with the overall success of the industry. As the sector continues to evolve, investing in better working conditions and innovative safety solutions will be key to its resilience and growth.

As mentioned above over the recent years mental well-being of the individuals active in the sector receives more and more attention.

3.3. Mental health and well-being initiatives

There are many European and national initiatives targeting improving mental wellbeing and preventing mental wellbeing deterioration for the general public²⁴. It is important as they sensitize the society and contribute to creating a supportive environment. They also encourage open discussion, enable early intervention and better management of mental health challenges. Such campaigns help reduce stigma associated with mental health issues and encourage individuals to seek help without fear of judgment.

Individuals working in the live performance sector are often offered support schemes designed specifically for the sector. This is true for countries where initiatives mentioned above like ArboPodium, Thalie Santé and BAPAM are already in place. In many European countries social partners are supported by NGOs. An example of such an initiative is Stichting Sociale Veiligheid Podiumkunsten (Foundation for Social

²¹ <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/health-safety-wellbeing/health-and-safety>.

²² National collective agreement *Lutte contre les Violences et le Harcèlement Sexiste et Sexuel (VHSS) au travail*.

https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/conv_coll/id/KALITEXT000049095162/?idConteneur=KALICONT000028157262&origin=list.

²³ Database of the Gender Equality Good Practices can be found here: <https://gender-equality-onandoffstage.eu/en/database.php>.

²⁴ European Mental Health Week is an example of such an initiative

<https://www.mentalhealth-europe.org/mental-health-social-rights-european-mental-health-week-2025s-theme/> with the topic for the 2025 edition “Care for mental health, invest in social rights”.

Safety in the Performing Arts) in the Netherlands which undertakes prevention, complaint handling, support and tools. At the beginning of 2025 another interesting Dutch initiative called "Heal the Healer" has been launched. It aims at improving mental well-being within the music industry and tries to address the high levels of stress, burnout, and emotional strain experienced by artists, producers, managers, and other professionals whose part of their careers is taking care of others. By offering tailor made resources, peer-support networks, accessible therapeutic interventions and mental-health training tailored to address the stress linked to touring and performing, the project helps individuals working in the industry to enhance their own emotional resilience. This initiative not only promotes self-care among "healers" but also helps foster a healthier, more sustainable music ecosystem. Another example is "Music Minds Matter" in the UK, an initiative supported by the music industry, including the Musicians Union through advocacy, research, outreach, and joint campaigning.²⁵ In other countries the topic is often handled by dedicated prevention services in the workplace, publicly funded institutions or NGOs. Business-oriented entities are also active but their offer is not always affordable for all artists.

Based on the literature review and interviews with two artists (an actor and a dancer), a psychologist providing support for artists active in the live performance and a president of a musicians' trade union from one of the EU country the following patterns can be identified:

- Young people entering the industry are more vulnerable. They are often not prepared to face the challenges specific for the sector as self-care and strategies for mitigation of the professional risks are not yet widely taught in the artistic higher education institutions,
- Young individuals entering the industry often encounter an "expectation gap" resulting from the disparity between their educational experiences and the realities of a professional career.²⁶ Many are surprised to find that a career in music is often poorly paid, precarious, and highly challenging or competitive. This gap between expectations and reality can lead to feelings of disillusionment and mental health challenges among emerging artists. Educational institutions should try to manage this gap by incorporating comprehensive career transition planning into their curricula and by addressing the practical and psychological challenges of being an artist.
- At the same time, the younger generation is often the driving force for a change. This is for at least two reasons. Firstly, young performers are less and less willing to accept unhealthy work relations (like abuse of power and hierarchy, all kinds of inequalities, precarity) and are more open to question the status quo and to look for solutions. Secondly, at the beginning of their careers they are often linked to some informal groups and movements that are often quicker than well-established institutions in undertaking action aiming at improving the situation for artists.

²⁵ Detailed list of the allies can be found here: <https://www.musicmindsmatter.org.uk/allies>. More info can be found at: <https://www.musicmindsmatter.org.uk/about>.

²⁶ "When Music Speaks: Mental Health and Next Steps in the Danish Music Industry" report by the Partnership for Sustainable Development, 2024

- The quality of mental health support is a critical factor in its effectiveness. Job-related counselling should be delivered by professionals who not only possess appropriate psychological or psychotherapeutic qualifications, but who also have a deep understanding of the specific characteristics and demands of the live performance sector. Without this contextual knowledge, counselling risks being ineffective or even counterproductive, as clients may feel misunderstood or unable to relate their experiences to a practitioner unfamiliar with the nuances of their professional environment.

4. Observations on the EU regulatory landscape

The EU Member States all have elaborate work health and safety regulations. The European Union framework in this area is based on Article 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. This framework covers all aspects of workplace health and safety: including working environment and conditions; social security and protection of workers; and consultation of employees²⁷.

Article 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union gives the EU the authority to adopt legislation (directives) in the field of safety and health at work, in order to support and complement the activities of Member States.

OSH "Framework Directive" (89/391/EEC) defines main principles to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers. The directive sets minimum safety and health requirements throughout the European Union, while allowing Member States to maintain or establish more detailed, national measures. Member States have discretion as to the implementation of the Framework Directive, although reporting on implementation to the European Commission is required.

The OSH Framework Directive is accompanied by further directives focusing on specific aspects of safety and health at work. Together they form the fundamentals of European safety and health legislation. Since 1989, 25 directives with more detailed requirements were adopted; these cover a broad range of topics and risks such as physical, chemical and biological agents, general workplace requirements, work equipment, and personal protective equipment. Several are relevant for the live performance sector including Directive 2003/10/EC on the exposure of workers to the risks arising from noise. This directive sets binding exposure limits and requires employers, such as venues and production companies, to assess and control noise risks, provide hearing protection, and offer training and health surveillance. Chapter 8 of the directive specifically recognises the challenges in the music and entertainment industry.

²⁷ Full overview of the health and safety legal basis can be found at the European Commission website: https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/rights-work/health-and-safety-work_en

For better protection of the workers the European Commission has adopted various strategic policy documents:

- The strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027 identifies key objectives for health and safety at work, presents key actions and describes instruments to address these
- The Commission Communication "Safer and Healthier Work for All - Modernisation of the EU Occupational Safety and Health Legislation and Policy", adopted on January 2017, proposes key actions in specific OSH priority areas
- Health and safety is also part of the European Pillar of Social Right, proclaimed in 2017.

Since 1994 the **European Agency for Safety & Health at Work (EU-OSHA)** has promoted risk prevention and safe and healthy workplaces in Europe by providing information, research, and tools for businesses, workers, and governments. In cooperation with European social partners in the live performance sector (Pearle*-Live Performance Europe, representing employers' associations in Europe, EAEA - European Arts and Entertainment Alliance representing the workers' associations. EAEA is the sectoral alliance bringing together the International Federation of Actors (FIA), the International Federation of Musicians (FIM) and UNI-MEI, Global Union for Media and Entertainment) an Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA) tools have been specifically designed for the live performance sector.

The European Commission's 2023 Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health is also worth mentioning in this context. The strategic framework it outlines is relevant to the live performance sector in several ways. The document underscores the importance of integrating mental health into all policies, recognizing workplaces as critical environments for promoting well-being and addressing psychosocial risks. The document stresses that mental health challenges have economic as well as social costs, with work-related stress, burnout, and mental ill-health identified as major issues affecting individuals across the EU. The Commission calls for early intervention, cross-sectoral cooperation, and specific focus on vulnerable groups, including young people who constitute a significant portion of the live performance workforce. Moreover, it calls for establishing an inclusive, accessible support, and highlights the therapeutic role of arts and culture in enhancing mental health resilience²⁸.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The live performance sector stands at a critical moment where mental health must be addressed as a core component of occupational well-being. The challenges faced by performers, technicians, and venue workers demand a sector-specific approach for mental health infrastructure.

²⁸ Full text of the Communication can be found here: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2023%3A298%3AFIN>

Investing in young professionals is essential to ensure the future of the live performance sector. Many individuals enter this field early in their careers, even when still finalizing formal education and immediately face high pressure, and often precarious work environment. Without adequate support, these emerging artists and technicians are particularly vulnerable to burnout, mental health struggles, and early exit from the profession. Supporting youth through targeted training, mentorship programs, and mental health resources not only strengthens their personal resilience but also fosters a more diverse and creative industry.

At the same time older workers must not be neglected. As the workforce in the live performance sector becomes more age-diverse, it is essential to recognize and address the specific needs of older professionals. Evidence shows that older workers are more vulnerable to the effects of fatigue, particularly in roles requiring night work or extended hours. Additionally, age discrimination, whether implicit in casting decisions or reflected in limited access to training and job opportunities, increase their feeling of insecurity. To ensure that older professionals can continue contributing meaningfully to the sector, dedicated policies should be introduced. These might include flexible scheduling, ergonomic adaptations, access to mental health resources, targeted upskilling, and protections against age-related bias in hiring and employment practices.

Confidential, easily accessible services—such as counselling, peer support networks, and mental health hotlines should become standard practice and should be widely promoted within the sector. To achieve lasting impact, mental health must be fully embedded in occupational health and safety frameworks and supported by sectoral agreements and collective bargaining. Incorporating well-being clauses into contracts and policies can help maintain long-term focus on mental resilience.

A more inclusive and equitable approach is essential. Artists from marginalised communities (people with disabilities, ethnically diverse, LGBTQ+, and individuals facing financial hardship) often face challenges being represented. Accessible services must be developed to ensure that all professionals, regardless of background or employment status, receive the support they need.

Employers in cultural institutions have a significant role to play. They can create supportive workplaces by investing in mental health literacy among managers, offering employee well-being programs, and opening space for conversations about stress and burnout. Such actions not only foster healthier teams but also contribute to safer and more productive work environments.

Research and data collection on mental health in the live performance sector is more and more present but still remains insufficient and fragmented. EU-supported or national initiatives could be launched to find synergies in existing research and to close the gaps. This would be particularly helpful in regions where relatively less is known about the current situation, especially the Eastern and Southern Europe. Cross-border exchanges of best practices through joint projects, sectoral meetings, and publicly available toolkits could be actively supported to foster shared learning and information exchange. This may not be linked to new or additional funding, but rather to enhanced cooperation among all stakeholders and a commitment to improving the efficiency and coordination of research efforts.

Addressing audience behaviour also deserves attention. Incidents of aggression and harassment directed at performers or staff must be eliminated. Initiatives such as the UK's "Safer Theatres Charter" or the Dutch "Guide to dealing with outspoken and aggressive reactions at performances for youth and young people" should be scaled up and implemented across Member States to promote respectful, inclusive cultural spaces.

Importantly, the healing power of the live performance must not be underestimated. Theatre, music and dance performances can serve as a powerful force for community resilience, emotional expression, and social cohesion. To achieve that, public and private funding may include schemes for mental health-focused artistic initiatives that benefit both creators and audiences.

Finally, special attention must be given to self-employed and freelance workers—many of whom fall outside traditional safety nets. Extending access to occupational health services, offering income guarantees, and providing microgrants or mental health subsidies can help build a more sustainable and mentally resilient workforce across the sector.

In short, ensuring a healthy future for the live performance sector requires not only good legal basis, policies and tools but also funding to support the mental well-being of those who contribute to the cultural life.

Social partners, both employers' organizations and trade unions, have a central role to play in advancing health and safety and mental health. They are well positioned to identify shared challenges, negotiate tailored solutions, and push for policy changes that reflect the reality of the industry and ensure that workers' well-being remains at the heart of industry standards. At both national and EU levels, social partners can act as advocates for inclusive, rights-based approaches to mental health, driving innovation through collaborative projects, joint recommendations, and monitoring of implementation. Strengthening the capacities of social partners and reinforcing the mechanisms of social dialogue is essential to sustain meaningful progress and ensure the effective roll-out of health and well-being strategies across diverse cultural contexts.

