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**POLICY BRIEF: SUPPORTING ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES
FOR CULTURAL AND CREATIVE SECTOR (CCS)
PROFESSIONALS AND MICRO FIRMS IN IRELAND**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Purpose and scope of the policy brief

The purpose of this policy brief is to provide an overview of the initiatives and strategies aimed at supporting the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS) professionals and micro firms in Ireland. As a partner organisation in the European project DiGiPORT, our objective is to equip adult trainers and adult education organisations with the necessary tools and resources to assist CCS professionals and artists in developing essential skills for their sustainability and resilience.

The scope of this policy brief encompasses the identification of key challenges faced by CCS professionals and micro firms in Ireland. By addressing these challenges, we aim to provide recommendations and policy measures that will enable the growth and development of the Cultural and Creative Sector. Our focus will be on fostering collaboration, providing access to resources, and creating an environment conducive to the success of CCS professionals in Ireland.

Through this policy brief, we seek to advocate for the necessary support structures and initiatives required to uplift the CCS professionals in Ireland. By leveraging the expertise and experiences of our European partners within the DiGiPORT project, we aim to create a framework that aligns with international best practices while addressing Ireland's specific needs and context.

Introduction to the project DiGiPORT

Cultural and creative sectors (along with the tourism sector) are among the most affected by the current Covid-19 crisis throughout the whole of Europe, with jobs at risk ranging from 0.8% to 5.5% of employment across OECD regions. Social distancing measures had a severe negative impact on the venue-based sectors, such as galleries, pop-up shops, handcraft stores, performing arts, museums, etc., affecting negatively their

revenues and, therefore, their financial sustainability and viability. On the other hand, online content platforms have profited from the increased demand for cultural content streaming during the lockdown, however, the benefits from this extra demand have largely accrued to the largest firms in the industry and not to the self-employed artists and professionals. Specifically for the creative arts market on which the DiGiPORT project shall mainly focus, it relies heavily on a dense European calendar of venue-based events (i.e. art fairs, biennial events, gallery exhibitions, etc.). The covid-19 crisis has led to the cancellation of most such activities and the foreseen major downsizing of European mobility in the short and medium term. Such trends make it highly unlikely that the European art agenda may quickly recover. CCS is largely composed of micro-firms and creative self-employed professionals, often operating on the margins of financial sustainability. However, according to the Pilot Policy Project's "Creative FLIP" field research conducted in 9 European Countries (<https://creativeflip.creativehubs.net/project/>), one of the main skills needs that CCS professionals have reported is the lack of entrepreneurial skills. According to the relevant report, educational and training courses available at the national level are able to provide them with the basic technical skills of their profession but do not provide them with the necessary and market-based skills. While creativity encourages creative individuals to create products/services that are entirely new and innovative, the skills to assimilate into the world of business and thereby get the products/services to market are often weak. Furthermore, massive digitalisation combined with emerging technologies (VR and AR) can create new forms of cultural experience, dissemination and new business models that are well-adapted to new needs and trends. There is an opportunity for a major innovation breakthrough in terms of the deployment of state-of-the-art technologies that allow "presence at a distance" (artificial intelligence, virtual and enriched reality, Internet of Things, etc.) to build a new "experience economy". New forms of digitally mediated, decentralised creative production allow for engagement with larger and wider communities, not only at the receiving end but also in terms of content production. To capitalise on them, there is a need to address the digital skills shortages within the sector.

The DiGiPORT project aims to equip adult trainers and adult education organisations in order to enable them to support CCS professionals and artists from France, Italy, Ireland, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece with developing the necessary digital and entrepreneurial skills that will allow them to ensure their sustainability and, also, to enhance their resilience towards similar challenges and crises. Moving onwards from the competencies' development, the DiGiPORT project developed and established a pan-European online platform that allows CCS professionals and artists to establish their own digital pop-up shops, through which they are able to promote and disseminate their work and reach out to their target groups.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF CCS PROFESSIONALS AND MICRO FIRMS IN IRELAND

The CCS in Ireland has been a significant economic driver, bringing in a sizable sum of money and creating several job possibilities. As a result, tourists worldwide have been drawn to the nation to take advantage of its diverse cultural offers.

For the cultural and creative industry to continue to flourish and be relevant, it is essential to support and nurture small enterprises. Governments, cultural organisations, and industry participants should fund programmes and projects that support small enterprises, give them financial support, improve their digital capabilities, and foster an environment that supports their artistic endeavours. By doing this, the cultural and creative industry will be able to thrive with a wide range of voices, ideas, and expressions, enriching society and fostering economic growth.

Ireland has put into place a number of assistance programmes and services to help and empower professionals in the Cultural and Creative Sector (CCS) and micro businesses. The Irish government provides financing and grants to support various projects, arts organisations, and individual artists through organisations like the Arts Council. These cash resources support the creative endeavours and business growth of CCS professionals and micro companies. It has put into place programmes that support diversity and inclusivity within the CCS, encourage artists and makers from many origins, and provide funding for programmes that honour cultural traditions and heritage.

Young people can investigate their cultural presumptions and beliefs through cultural and creative education, appreciate cultural diversity, value their heritage, and comprehend how cultures evolve. The Western Development Commission (WDC) expressed a desire for creative course graduates to complement their degrees with a course in entrepreneurship so they can use their education to develop their artistic abilities into a product that can be sold to customers both inside and outside of Ireland. Although there are many different creative industries with various goals, all of them share the necessity to increase the commercialisation and internationalisation components given the significance of preserving and expanding Irish products' access to global markets.

The mismatch between education, training, and work possibilities necessitates the teaching of creative skills at a young age. It emphasises the need for further work to be done on digital literacy in particular. The cultural and creative industries are still having trouble adjusting to the digital environment and to advance; future generations will need to be educated in these technologies.

Regarding intellectual property, innovation, the creation of new jobs in the creative industry, and creative and knowledge-based jobs, there is a lot of space for improvement.

The Creative Ireland Programme 2017–2022, which strives to mainstream creativity in the life of the country, acknowledges the relationship between culture and creativity. By 2025, the goal is to double the current levels of public spending for the arts and culture. A five-year programme called "Creative Ireland" links well-being, creativity, and people are formed that use creativity to uplift and transform individuals, locations, and communities.

Creative Ireland forges collaborations with the local and federal government, cultural and business organisations, and local businesses. They believe in the strength and

creative potential of people, groups, and government agencies collaborating, exchanging knowledge, and sparking initiatives.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

An overall vision and framework for Government policy in the cultural sector are outlined in a National Cultural Policy Framework to 2025, which is supported by a pledge to double public financing for the arts and culture from 2017 levels (€288 million) to €576 million by 2025.

Government strategy in the entire cultural sphere is outlined and pointed in the right direction by Culture 2025. It outlines the existing situation in a wide range of areas related to the cultural sector, the goals the government has for those fields, and the goals the government is committed to pursuing. A unified and cohesive approach to cultural policy throughout government as well as planning and provision across the cultural sector is what Culture 2025 is primarily intended to achieve.

Digitisation effectively reaches a wide range of consumers worldwide with information about the projects and collections of cultural institutions. To preserve cultural material, digitisation is essential, and new technologies must be used. To adapt to the digital environment, CCS professionals and small businesses need to develop new skills, make technology investments, and be proficient in utilising online channels.

However, state archives, libraries, and higher education institutions must carry out this activity with the necessary regulations, staff, and sustainability. Ireland cannot afford to have a cultural heritage that is underdeveloped or rendered invisible online. To ensure that new technologies serve the interests of the Irish public by providing access to cultural property in novel and interesting ways, governmental policies and dedicated resources are required.

CONCLUSION

A broad-based Expert Advisory Group made up of representatives from important state institutions as well as the larger creative and cultural sector, will be in charge of monitoring the accomplishment of the goals of Culture 2025 and the Creative Ireland Programme.

Current government efforts, such as the Creative Ireland Programme, the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language, Global Ireland 2025, the National Biodiversity Action Plan, and the Audiovisual Action Plan, are already advancing the goals of Culture 2025. The main framework for promoting and bolstering culture and creativity in Ireland will continue, to be the government's Creative Ireland Programme 2017–2022.

According to the ideas outlined in Global Ireland 2025, Irish culture will be promoted throughout the world. Through the Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010- 2030, Irish language objectives will be met. Heritage Ireland 2030, Ireland's National Heritage Plan will recognise and support the crucial role that our built and natural heritage plays in Irish communities, economy, and society.

Ireland can continue to nurture its thriving cultural and creative sector and equip its professionals and micro businesses to prosper in a rapidly changing setting by fostering an enabling environment that includes increased funding, digital support, access to markets, and opportunities for professional development.

Thoughtful policy initiatives that embrace and promote the cultural and creative sector will not only unlock the sector's enormous potential for economic growth but will also improve society as a whole by safeguarding our history, encouraging innovation, and fostering cross-cultural understanding on a large scale.