PRAXIS

PRAXIS: THE ARTISTS' UNION OF IRELAND

THE CASE FOR THE BASIC INCOME FOR THE ARTS

Over the past three years, the Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) scheme has proven to be a resounding success, improving the living standards and health of recipients, and allowing them to devote more time and resources to their work. Praxis commends and supports the work done by the NCFA (National Campaign for the Arts) amongst the many other artists' resource organisations in campaigning and lobbying for the retention and expansion of the scheme. As debate continues around what a potential successor to the scheme should look like, Praxis aims to advocate for the best possible outcome for artists in Ireland.

To that end, Praxis advocates:

- That the BIA scheme should be implemented permanently
- That the BIA should be expanded to all eligible artists in Ireland
- That the BIA should be allocated for an indefinite period of time
- That the rate of the BIA should be indexed to inflation

THE BIA IN CONTEXT

The Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) pilot scheme in Ireland was launched in response to the severe financial instability faced by artists and the creative sector, compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the arts in Ireland generate €1.5 billion in income each year, artists themselves face extremely challenging economic conditions. The Basic Income for the Arts Impact Assessment (Second year) (p.82) reported that 50.7% of artists in Ireland - regardless of art form - live in Enforced Deprivation[1], compared to 15.7% of the general population.

[1] The Central Statistics Office defines Enforced Deprivation as occurring where a household experiences two or more of 11 national deprivation items. Enforced deprivation went down from 17.3% in 2023 to 15.7% in 2024.

The scheme has been a resounding success, producing positive reports and statistics. Among artists who received the payments, average arts-related earnings increased by over **€500 per month**, while reliance on social welfare also declined, with an average reduction in support of **€100 per month**.
Recipients spent more time on creative work (roughly **11 extra hours/week**), fewer hours in non-arts jobs, reported better financial stability, improvements in wellbeing (reduced anxiety/depression), and a greater ability to plan and take risks in their artistic practice.

The recently published Basic Income for the Arts Cost-Benefit Analysis prepared by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport found that over the period 2021-2025 the scheme produced **over €100 million** in socio-economic benefits, with every **€1 invested in the pilot returning €1.39** in value to society.

The BIA has not only paid for itself, it has been profitable to society.

PERMANENT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SCHEME

Praxis believes that a permanent BIA scheme should be introduced and legislated for, on the basis of the success of the pilot.

A successor to the Basic Income for the Arts pilot scheme should be underpinned by legislation. A legislated BIA scheme would send a strong signal of the State's recognition of artists as essential workers in society, whose contributions to cultural, social and economic life are of enduring value. It would enshrine the BIA as a permanent structural support and an essential element of Ireland's cultural policy architecture.

EXPANSION OF THE SCHEME

We recommend that all artists who meet eligibility criteria developed in consultation with artists, and artist resource organisations receive the BIA.

The significant contribution of artists to cultural life in Ireland is widely accepted. When communities and individuals actively participate in artistic and cultural activities they experience positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing. Such participation, fostered and made possible by artists across the country, including in rural and small-town settings, also strengthens local economies and enhances Ireland's international cultural standing.

Despite this, the level of Enforced Deprivation among artists, as defined by the CSO (Central Statistics Office), is well above the general population (50%). The BIA went some way to address this situation but BIA recipients were still twice as likely to endure Enforced Deprivation (30%) than the general population (15.7%).

To select a group, be it 4000 or 8000 from all eligible applicants, risks creating a two-tiered system which could aggravate the deprivation of those not receiving the BIA. The second year assessment report shows that conditions of the control group have degraded on a number of metrics over the first two years of the pilot (sectoral retention, time for art practice, capacity to work in the arts…). In turn, this has the potential to create serious divisions, unfair advantages and resentment in the arts sector which, when combined with an underfunded Arts Council that fails to meet the needs of most artists[2], could be damaging to cohesion in the sector. Therefore, Praxis recommends that **all** artists who meet eligibility criteria developed in consultation with artists and artist resource organisations receive the BIA.

As an all-island union, Praxis strongly recommends that a BIA type scheme is explored by the Dáil and the Northern Ireland Executive to support artists in Northern Ireland.

DURATION OF THE SCHEME

We recommend that there is no time limit on receiving the BIA.

In the BIA Interviews Report 2025 published in June, several BIA recipients expressed anxiety over the end of the BIA pilot scheme. This was echoed in the results of a survey Praxis conducted of its members in August this year, where the stability and security offered by the BIA was the most often cited benefit of the scheme. A short-term BIA successor scheme risks re-introducing a sense of fear and precarity

[2] In 2024, 1,156 artists applied for Arts Council Round 1 bursaries, but only 261 (22.6%) could be funded.

when such a scheme ends. The only way to alleviate these negative effects is to ensure that an artist is guaranteed the BIA permanently.

Furthermore, it is not the case that an artist, by being established in their career, is guaranteed financial stability. Even amongst Aosdána members, who are chosen for their exceptional contribution to the arts in Ireland, many are on low or irregular incomes, as indicated by the high proportion (55%) of them who qualify for the Cnuas, which is payable only to individuals with incomes below €25,770 per year. This evidences the need for artists to receive the BIA for as long as their career demands.

LEVEL OF PAYMENT

We recommend that the BIA be indexed to inflation.

The BIA should be indexed to inflation and reviewed in parallel with adjustments to the minimum wage.. This would mean that the €325 received in 2022 would rise to €375 in 2026, when a successor to the scheme is due to start.

Regarding the difficulties encountered by those in receipt of the Disability Allowance, following a motion passed at our 2024 AGM, Praxis advocates that means testing for Disability Allowance be abolished. We recommend that the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport coordinates with the Department of Social Protection to ensure that receiving the BIA does not interfere with or reduce a person's Disability Allowance.

ELIGIBLE PRACTICES

Artists from all practices should be eligible to receive the BIA. The original list of eligible art practices used for the BIA pilot scheme should be expanded to include practices which were omitted, including but not limited to: performance artists, socially-engaged artists, craftspeople, and designers.

Craftspeople and designers, while not currently recognised as "artists" by the Arts Council, contribute significantly to Ireland's cultural, social, and economic life. Their work is inherently creative, often

innovative, and subject to the same demands of continuous professional development, audience engagement, and unstable income streams. Excluding them from the BIA risks reinforcing arbitrary hierarchies within the cultural sector and fails to address the scheme's broader purpose of providing security and sustainability for all those engaged in creative work.

For the BIA to realise its full potential as a transformative cultural policy, eligibility must be inclusive of the full spectrum of creative practice. This would ensure fairness, strengthen Ireland's cultural ecosystem, and better reflect the diversity of contemporary artistic and creative work.

PROOF OF ELIGIBILITY

As the BIA is rolled out to all eligible artists, the question of proof of eligibility must be approached with fairness, transparency, and sensitivity to the diversity of artistic practices. Rigid or exclusionary criteria risk undermining the inclusivity and equity of the scheme.

Drawing on the pilot model, the number of required proofs could reasonably be expanded (e.g. from two to four), ensuring robustness while still remaining accessible. Membership of recognised professional bodies should be considered an important indicator, but not the sole pathway, as not all artists are represented by or can afford membership in such organisations.

Crucially, the emphasis should be placed on commitment to artistic practice rather than conventional measures of success. Success is often contingent on external recognition, financial backing, or institutional support, which many artists, particularly those in emerging, experimental, or marginalised fields, may not yet have secured. A fairer approach would be to measure sustained engagement, such as time dedicated to artistic practice; evidence of professional development; participation in exhibitions, performances, or community projects; documented collaborations; or other demonstrable contributions to cultural life.

THE BIA PAYS FOR ITSELF

A central question arising from the full implementation of an unrestricted BIA concerns its financing. The recently published cost–benefit analysis demonstrates that the BIA should not be regarded solely as an

expenditure, but rather as an investment that generates measurable returns. Using a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) methodology to compare outcomes over time between the treatment group (BIA recipients) and a comparison group (eligible but non-selected applicants), the evaluation quantified the impact of the pilot. The analysis identified fiscal returns, reductions in social protection payments, productivity gains, enhanced cultural value through public engagement, and improvements in psychological wellbeing. Overall, for every €1 invested in the scheme, €1.39 in benefits accrued to society.

To support the permanent extension of the BIA to all eligible artists, we recommend financing the scheme through progressive taxation[3]. Unlike means-tested social assistance payments, basic income is unconditional. A progressive tax framework would ensure that those with the greatest need receive support to meet basic living costs, while higher-income earners contribute proportionally more through the tax system. We contend that means testing at source is not only administratively burdensome and costly, requiring ongoing monitoring and reassessment, but also ill-suited to the irregular and fluctuating nature of artists' incomes.

We believe the BIA should be thought of as a social floor, a guarantee that provides a basic income security to prevent and alleviate poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion.

We strongly emphasise that financing the BIA should not come at the expense of reduced funding to arts agencies such as the Arts Council, Culture Ireland or Creative Ireland. The sector faces a variety of other structural challenges, only some of which are addressed by BIA. The arts sector needs more funding, not less.

September 2025

REFERENCES

Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme: Guidelines

Aosdána

BIA Interviews Report 2025

[3] Basic Income Ireland proposes a well thought through taxation index in their publication A Model of Basic Income for Ireland, that might be applied to the BIA to ensure the financial viability of the scheme.

Basic Income for the Arts Impact Assessment (Second year)

Basic Income for the Arts Cost-Benefit Analysis

Minister O'Donovan announces plans for a Shared Island Cultural Cooperation Fund

Publication: A Model of Basic Income For Ireland

Basic Income for the Arts Pilot Scheme: Reports