

**We Are
Monitoring
Violations of
Theater Workers' Rights**



Theater Producers Association

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Executive Summary

The novel coronavirus (Covid-19), which emerged in China at the end of 2019 and soon spread all over the world, has severely damaged all areas of social life. The epidemic turned into a pandemic as early as March, and resulted in restrictions on social life.

Restrictions in Turkey began in April, with theater halls, cultural centers, performance venues, and similar places closed down.

The idea that live theater in front of large crowds would accelerate the spread of the virus led to the cancellation of all theater performances and closing down of all theater halls, leaving tens of thousands of theater workers unemployed.

Theater workers, who used to be hired on a daily basis for individual plays or with seasonal contracts, and did not have social security or reliable income even in normal times, were among the most negatively affected groups in economic terms by the pandemic.

Theater workers not only lost the opportunity to work and the income to meet their basic needs, they also suffered psychological distress due to the inability to perform their profession.

Theater companies that had their own venues, on the other hand, had to stop all operations in an environment where they were unable to meet the most basic expenses. As a result, private/boutique theater companies had to shoulder expenses including rent, taxes, social security premiums, and other administrative expenses without earning any income.

Faced with these difficulties, many theater companies closed down their venues entirely and disbanded.

No live theater performances have been staged during the pandemic, which meant many theaters were closed down for good due to economic reasons, and the culture and arts scene in the country became even more barren.

Depending on the severity of the restrictions, theater halls were closed down entirely or allowed to stage shows with limited capacity only, which, taken together with other practices, appear to be arbitrary decisions instead of necessary ones.

In an environment where factories and shopping malls remained open, political parties held their congresses in indoor gyms, condoned by the President of the country, and crowded rallies and other political events took place in outdoor areas without regard for pandemic restrictions, the closing down of theater halls were viewed by many theater workers as being motivated by political and ideological considerations rather than aimed at limiting the spread of the virus.

This study, titled "We Are Monitoring Violations of Theater Workers' Rights," used a survey and focus group meetings to identify the difficulties faced by theater workers and the violations of their rights.

150 theater workers took part in the survey, and focus group meetings were conducted with 21 theater workers.

30.7% of the participants were actors, 13.7% were directors, and 11.1% were playwrights. Other participants included assistant directors, producers, dramaturges and workers in other roles.

Because theater workers earned very limited income from plays even before the pandemic, 37.1% of theater workers were found to earn less than TRY1,000 a month from their theater-related work. 60.3% of the participants said they were forced to have non-theater jobs to make a living.

With these economic difficulties, 58.6% of theater workers lived in rented apartments, close to 50% had a monthly household income below TRY3,500, and 59.5% had a monthly personal income under TRY2,000.

Theater workers continue to live in difficult conditions during the pandemic. With the closing down of production and staging areas, existing difficulties were exacerbated and became unbearable.

E.T., one of the participants in the focus group meeting, underlined the ongoing difficulties as follows: “What little I earn from this profession, including the support provided by the state, is less than the pocket money I received from my dad in primary school.”

73.3% of theater workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, with only 7.1% of them receiving Unemployment Benefits (UB).

71.6% of theater workers do not have any social security. As a result, 30.2% of them, that is to say one third, had to be covered by the health insurance of their parents or spouses.

71.6% of the participants did not earn a regular income during the pandemic.

This state of deprivation meant they faced difficulties in meeting their basic living expenses, and 51.7% had to receive support from their parents.

14% of the participants received social aid, 21.5% took out bank loans, 19% received cash support from local governments, 21.5% received support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and 13% received cash support from civil society organizations (CSOs).

Because theaters had to stop or limit their operations due to the pandemic, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism increased the state support provided to private theaters on an annual basis, allocating a budget of TRY12 million. 390 registered private theaters applied to receive this support; of those, 328 projects were supported whereas 62 were denied support without any explanation. Moreover, many well-established private theaters –which have been contributing to the theater scene with the many performances they have produced over the years– failed to receive support because they owed back taxes or social security premiums, along with many amateur theater companies because of an amendment to the regulations.¹

After consultations with the representatives of private theaters and industry stakeholders, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism provided project-based support for “Audio Plays and Digital Plays” through the project “Our Theaters on the Stages of State Theaters” (“*Tiyatrolarımız DT Sahnelerinde*”). However, as per the provisions in the contracts signed with the Accounting Department of the Ministry, back taxes owed were deducted from the support to be provided, and the support failed to solve theaters’ problems both because of these deductions and because of delays in payments due to red tape.

The failure of the state and relevant agencies to provide support that would be capable of meeting the needs of theater halls and theater workers was reflected in participants’ comments.

To the question “Do you believe the following agencies/organizations provided the necessary support to theater during the pandemic?”, participants gave the following responses:

¹ <https://kronos34.news/tr/bakanligin-destegi-hangi-ozel-tiyatrolara-gitti-vergi-borcu-olanlar-basvuramamis/>

Has the Presidency of the Republic provided the necessary support? Yes:3.4%, No:96.6%

Has the Grand National Assembly provided the necessary support? Yes:3.4%, No:96.6%

Has the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Provided the necessary support? Yes:12%, No:88%

Have local governments provided the necessary support? Yes:31%, No:69%

Have governor's and district governor's offices provided the necessary support? Yes:1.7%, No:98.3%

Have civil society organizations provided the necessary support? Yes:33.6%, No:66.4%

Have labor unions provided the necessary support? Yes:21.5%, No:78.5%

Have private companies provided the necessary support? Yes:12%, No:88%

Participants were of the opinion that civil society organizations and labor unions took more initiatives and provided more support to theater workers during the pandemic, compared to official agencies/organizations.

Findings of the study showed that theater workers were unable to meet their basic needs and exercise their right to live in dignity during the pandemic.

It was found that during the pandemic, the government did not fulfill its obligation, required by international human rights treaties and the constitution, to ensure that all citizens have access to work and social security and protection against poverty.

State organs and the central government are responsible for violations of the human rights in the field of culture and arts, particularly of the rights of theater workers.

1. Introduction

1.1 OVERVIEW

One of the most basic personal needs, as well as an important requirement for seeking happiness, is the feeling of having a secure future and being protected against threats. Preventing risks that may arise in life and dealing with their potential consequences is a task that usually goes beyond the capabilities of any one individual. Contemporary states, welfare states in particular, have assumed the responsibility of protecting individuals against social risks and ensuring that they look to the future with confidence.

The right to social security is the most important instrument for the state to secure the present and the future of individuals. “The right to social security was recognized by almost all constitutions made after the Second World War, and relevant national legislations. This right is regulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 (Articles 22 and 25), which is ratified by Turkey as well, the International Labor Organization (ILO) Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention No. 102 of 1952, the European Social Charter of 1961 (Articles 12-13), the revised European Social Charter of 1995, and the 1972 European Convention on Social Security.” (İş Hukuku [Labor Law] – Prof. Dr. Sarper Süzek – Revised 19th Edition. 2020 Beta Basım Yayım Dağıtım A.Ş. Page 4)

Article 2 of the Constitution, which is one of the articles that cannot be amended, lists the principle of “social state” among the characteristics of the Republic. Article 5 of the Constitution says the duties of the state include “...to strive for the removal of political, economic, and social obstacles which restrict the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual in a manner incompatible with the principles of justice and of the social state governed by rule of law; and to provide the conditions required for the development of the individual’s material and spiritual existence,” reflecting the idea of social state.

Article 60 of the Constitution says “Everyone has the right to social security. The State shall take the necessary measures and establish the organization for the provision of social security,” requiring the state to ensure that citizens enjoy the right to social security.

In line with the general principle of ensuring citizens have the right to social security, the Constitution includes the right to work among basic rights, and details the responsibility of the state with regards to this matter: “The State shall take the necessary measures to raise the standard of living of workers, and to protect workers and the unemployed in order to improve the general conditions of labor, to promote labor, to create suitable economic conditions for prevention of unemployment and to secure labor peace.”²

The field of culture and arts, the subject matter of the present study, is another field of work protected by the Constitution. Article 27 of the Constitution states that everyone has the right to culture and arts: “Everyone has the right to study and teach, express, and disseminate science and the arts, and to carry out research in these fields freely.” Article 64, on the other hand, states that it is

² <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/anayasa.htm>

the duty and the responsibility of the state to secure the rights of people professionally employed in the field of culture and arts: “The State shall protect artistic activities and artists. The State shall take the necessary measures to protect, promote and support works of art and artists, and encourage the spread of appreciation for the arts.”

The responsibilities assigned by national legislation to the state and thus to the government regarding the social security of individuals are based on international human rights treaties. In other words, international treaties protect citizens’ rights specified in national legislation, and guarantee that states shall carry out their responsibilities.

Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights³ (CESCR) states “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right to work, which includes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts, and will take appropriate steps to safeguard this right,” whereas Article 9 provides an international-level guarantee for the protection of the right to social security, saying “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance.”

Legal texts, be they national or international, recognize that artists, along with everyone else, have the right to work and social security.

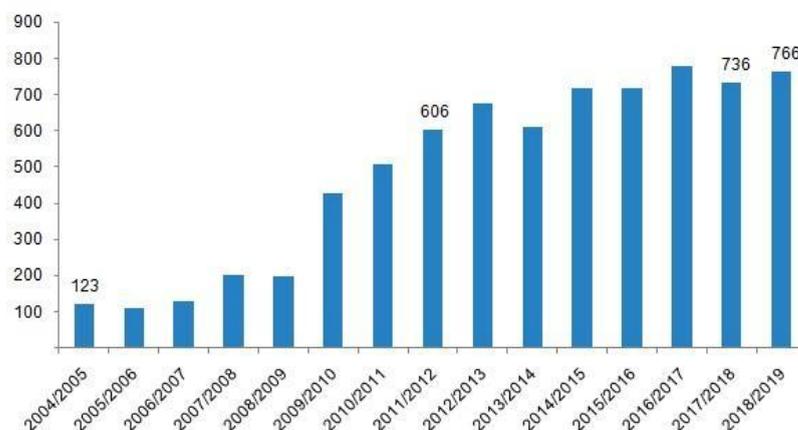
Whether this right is actually enjoyed by culture and art workers in daily life, on the other hand, is controversial. Evidence to the contrary is even stronger when the focus is on individual sub-fields of culture and arts.

The Covid-19 pandemic acted as a catalyzer to shed light on this controversy, revealing that culture and arts workers were unable to exercise the rights granted to them by national and international law.

1.2 The Current Situation

1.2.1 Before the Pandemic

According to 2018/2019 data by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), there were 766 active theater halls and 354,688 theater seats in Turkey.



³ <https://www.ihd.org.tr/ekonomik-sosyal-ve-ktel-haklar-uluslararasi-sleesi/>

The number of performances staged in these halls increased by 0.2% in the 2018/2019 season compared to the previous season, to reach 33,835. A total of 7,899,547 viewers attended these performances.

TURKSTAT data⁴ also show that the population has increased by 1.4% in 2019 compared to the previous year. In other words, there was a 0.2% increase in the number of live shows in the 2018/2019 season, but the increase in population in the same period was 7 times this figure. The increase in the number of performances lagged behind the increase in population.

In the 2018/2019 season, there were 231 viewers per theater seat, and 107,054 viewers per theater hall.

These data show that there is a lack of theater seats and theater halls in Turkey, and the situation was not bright for the theater sector even before the pandemic.

Another piece of data that supports this assessment was shared by CHP (Republican People's Party) Vice President Gamze Akkuş İlgezdi. According to information provided by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in response to a parliamentary question submitted by İlgezdi, the number of artists employed by State Theaters across the country declined to 534 in 2018, from 628 in 2002.

Turkey's population has increased by 23% from 2002 to 2018, but the number of artists employed by State Theaters declined over the same period, by 15%. There were 103 thousand people per State Theaters artist in 2002, which increased to 150 thousand in 2018.

From 2002 to the pandemic, the field of theater was turned into a field where all sorts of rights were violated through practices such as censorship, downsizing, and finger-pointing;

- Due to a lack of artists and downsizing, Adana State Theater was unable to stage the play "Miletus Güzeli" ("The Girl from Miletus");
- In January 2020, right before the beginning of the pandemic, Ankara State Theater fired tens of artists and other employees on "security investigation" grounds;
- The play "Taranta Babu" by the theater company Oyun Sandalı, which previously faced obstruction from Amasya Municipality run by the MHP (Nationalist Action Party), was cancelled in Erzincan in 2019 on the grounds that the Mufti's Office in Erzincan was undertaking renovations;⁵
- Leven Üzümcü, an actor, was dismissed from his job in City Theater



SIEGE

4

<https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Inde%20B1I%20C4%B1k%20n%20C3%BCfus%20da%20binde%2013%2C9%20oldu.&te%202018%20y%20C4%B1%20C4%B1nda%2092,y%20C4%B1%20C4%B1nda%2092%2C8%20oldu.>

⁵ <https://www.birgun.net/haber/taranta-babu-bu-kez-de-erzincan-da-yasaklandi-261224>

for his press statements and social media posts;

- Following the state of emergency declared after the attempted coup of July 15, many agencies were associated with the terrorist organization responsible, closed down, or had their employees suspended or fired;
- During the state of emergency, the City Theater first dismissed 6 actors, and then fired another 20 actors on the grounds of 'low performance';
- Müjdat Gezen Art Center, harshly criticized by the governing party and its supporters, has been the target of an arson attack;
- The play "Yala Ama Yutma" ("Lick It, But Don't Swallow") by Özen Yula, demonized in the press and branded "an affront to morality," was prevented from being staged in Turkey, and the theater company had to ask for police protection against threats;
- Women theater artists were not allowed to attend the event "Meclis Sohbetleri" ("Assembly Talk") hosted by the Board of Culture, Arts and Broadcasting of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey;
- The play "Sadece Diktatör" ("Only the Dictator") by Barış Atay was prevented from being staged in theater halls in Kadıköy;
- Ataturk Cultural Center (AKM) was first left to decay, and then demolished;⁶
- Emek theater hall was demolished and a shopping mall was built in its place.

1.2.2. During the pandemic

The novel coronavirus, which emerged at the end of 2019 in China, spread all over the world within two months, and turned into a global disaster in terms of health, economy, social life, and human rights. On March 11th, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that this was indeed a disaster in terms of health, declaring the coronavirus a "pandemic."

In the year to March 2021, the entire world was preoccupied with the spread of the pandemic, the countermeasures taken, restrictions, vaccine development and vaccination, economic hardships, and violations of human rights.

The situation in Turkey closely paralleled the rest of the world, with the first cases being reported in March 2020, and the coronavirus spreading all over the country by April 2020.

There have been controversies in Turkey regarding the management of the pandemic, transparency, the measures taken, severity of restrictions, economic hardships caused by restrictions, support provided to people who faced economic difficulties, and violations of human rights.

There was a public debate regarding the accuracy of the number of patients reported, which hovered around 5 or 6 thousand until November 2020, when the Ministry of Health announced that the number of cases would instead be reported henceforth, and within 24 hours, the number of positive cases was updated as 28,351. This was viewed as evidence confirming the suspicion that the government was trying to manipulate public opinion by tampering with pandemic data.

Another problematic issue regarding the government's management of the pandemic was the violation of all sorts of human rights.

⁶ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2018/10/31/akm-yikildi>

The Human Rights Association (İHD) made the following observations in its report titled “**Economic and Social Rights during the COVID-19 Pandemic**”⁷: “The power to create uncertainty resorted to by the political power as a governance technique has granted it the excuse to translate the conditions brought about by the pandemic to an

opportunity. The political power has further centralized its power through the extraordinary nature of the pandemic and consolidated its repression and control over the society. The political power has been handling its response to the pandemic not as an act of prevention and protection but as a security problem, while opting for suspending human rights first, as it has always done in such cases. The consequence of all these proves to be the systematic violation of fundamental rights and freedoms; notably the right to access information, right to life, right of access to healthcare, right to work, right to education, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association.”

With the beginning of the pandemic, Turkey started to take a series of measures like the rest of the world. To stop the increase in the number of cases and control the pandemic, the government put restrictions in place in many areas of social life, particularly in education, economy, culture and arts, and travel.

A circular by the Ministry of Interior dated March 16th, 2020⁸ temporarily suspended the operations of theater halls, movie theaters, performance centers, concert halls, engagement/wedding halls, restaurants/cafes with live music, casinos, pubs, taverns, coffee houses, cafeterias, gardens, hookah lounges, hookah cafes, internet lounges, internet cafes, all kinds of gaming rooms, all kinds of indoor children's playgrounds [including those inside shopping malls and restaurants], tea gardens, association clubs, amusement parks, swimming pools, Turkish baths, saunas, spas, massage parlors, and gyms. Following this circular, which restricted or banned social activities, another circular banned all sorts of meetings, activities, and large-scale events bringing people together.

These measures taken by the government placed severe restrictions on social life, and as a result, 149,382 workplaces suspended their operations within a week of the measures going into effect.⁹

This process negatively affected all employees of state theaters, municipal theaters, and private theaters, in particular, including actors, directors, assistant directors, playwrights, lighting designers, prop designers/makers, costume designers/makers, stage managers, box office clerks, dramaturges, musicians, producers, venue owners/managers, trainers, social media managers, audio and video experts, translators, organizers, and project managers.

The closure of theaters meant theater workers were unable to stage the plays they worked on, no work was undertaken to stage new plays, and theater workers lost income to meet their basic needs.

Theater workers spent the period from March to June without staging any plays, and the announcement by the President that “theaters, performance centers, and similar venues [would be able] to resume their operations as of July 1st, 2020” as part of the new normalization plan¹⁰ that began on June 1st failed to meet expectations.

⁷-<https://www.ihd.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Covid-19-Pandemisi-S%C3%BCrecinde-Ekonomik-ve-Sosyal-Haklar-Raporu-1.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/81-il-valiligine-koronavirus-tedbirleri-konulu-ek-genelge-gonderildi>

⁹ <https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/koronavirus-tedbirleri-genelgesi-kapsaminda-149382-is-yeri-gecici-sureligine-faaliyetlerine-ara-verdi>

¹⁰ <https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/81-il-valiligine-lokanta-restoran-kafe-vb-isyerleri-park-piknik-alanlari-mesire-yerleri-ve-giyim-pazarlari-genelgesi>

Many private theaters were unable to resume their operations because the theater season normally ends in June, theater halls were allowed to fill a maximum of 50% of their seats, and people avoided indoor venues because of the pandemic.

Additional measures taken on November 4th regarding theaters¹¹ and new restrictions that began in December 1st¹² meant that theater workers continued to suffer.

Unable to stage any plays until March, that is to say for more than half the normal theater season, which lasts from September to June, theater workers continued to suffer from province-based restrictions from March 1st onwards. Theaters were allowed to be opened with 50% capacity in low-risk provinces, but actual audience numbers have been even smaller.

During the period of normalization that began on March 1st and in line with the decisions of the Ministry of Health, theaters were allowed to resume operations with 50% capacity, within the hours specified in governors' directives. However, because the hours specified were outside usual performance times, many theaters were not opened, and those that were opened had much smaller audiences than normal. Because of night-time curfews that began at 9 p.m., plays had to be staged by 6 p.m. at the latest. This overlapped with the evening rush hour during the weekdays, and given traffic and other problems with transportation in metropolitan cities, theaters were unable to fill even 50% of their seats. In the weekends, a small number of theaters in cities with relaxed restrictions were able to stage their plays during the day, but they also ran into similar problems.

During the pandemic theaters faced censorship and bans as well. The Kurdish play "*Bêrû*" (*Yüzsüz*) (an adaptation of Trumpets and Raspberries), which was supported by Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and to be staged in City Theaters' Gaziosmanpaşa Stage, was banned by Gaziosmanpaşa District Governor's Office.¹³ After Istanbul, the same play was banned in Şanlıurfa as well, this time by the governor's office.¹⁴

To support private theaters, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism¹⁵ allowed private theaters that were unable to open due to the Covid-19 pandemic to use State Theaters stages for the period December 1st, 2020 to June 15th, 2021.

¹¹ <https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/koronavirus-ek-tedbirleri-genelgesi>

¹²

<https://www.icisleri.gov.tr/koronavirus-ile-mucadele-kapsaminda-sokaga-cikma-kisitlamalari---yeni-kisitlama-ve-tedbirler-ge-nelgeleri>

¹³ <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/kaymakamlik-ibbnin-kurtce-tiyatro-oyununu-yasakladi-1773286>

¹⁴ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kurtce-tiyatro-oyunu-beru-sanliurfada-da-yasaklandi-haber-1504466>

¹⁵ <https://basin.ktb.gov.tr/TR-273799/devlet-tiyatrolarinin-sahneleri-ozel-tiyatrolara-aciliy-.html>



During the pandemic, many actors and private theaters that wanted to keep staging shows used online tools¹⁶ to reach their audiences.

Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts¹⁷ had the following to say about these performances, announced with the slogan “Stay At Home, Don’t Stay Away From the Stage”:

“The world is going through a difficult period, but we are happy to have many art organizations, artists, and theater and dance troupes as guests in our houses with performances, interviews, and talks. Some theaters like La Colline and Kumbaracı 50, which participated in Istanbul Theater Festival, post daily recordings and talks, whereas many artists and troupes including Schaubühne Berlin, Münchner Kammerspiele, NDT, Mourad Merzouki, Movement Atelier, and Nilüfer Municipality City Theater have shared their performances with theater and dance enthusiasts.”

Moda Stage¹⁸ shared the following announcement: “Moda Stage and Emek Theater, which have not been able to stage live performances before audiences, are now offering online plays, online interviews, and online seminars.”

Support Provided to Theaters and Theater Workers During the Pandemic

During the pandemic, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and some local municipalities have provided support to private theaters by purchasing the rights to their plays. Moreover, solidarity projects created by platforms and CSOs tried to provide some support to theater workers. Ankara Metropolitan Municipality provided cash support to some theater workers who met certain criteria, paying them TRY500 or TRY650 for three months.

“*Dayanışmanın 100’ü Şiir Platformu*”¹⁹ (“100 Poems Solidarity Platform”), which was formed to support theater workers who were unable to work during the pandemic, brought together veteran names from the theater and cinema sectors to voice 100 different poems, and the proceeds from the project were distributed theater workers who lost their jobs.

¹⁶ <https://www.benioku.com/online-ucretsiz-tiyatro-oyunu-8364/>

¹⁷ <https://tiyatroskv.org/tr/haberler/evde-kalin-sahnedan-uzak-kalmayin>

¹⁸ <https://tiyatroskv.org/tr/haberler/evde-kalin-sahnedan-uzak-kalmayin>

¹⁹ <https://www.dadanizm.com/tiyatro-emekcileri-icin-gucler-birligi-dayanismanin-100u-siir>

General Directorate of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism increased its budget for the annual support it provides as per the Regulation on State Support for Private Theaters, and issued a call for projects. However, applicants were required “not to owe any back taxes or social security premiums” and “to be registered with the Chamber of Commerce,” among other things, which made it impossible for many theaters to receive this support.²⁰

390 private theaters responded to the call for projects issued by the General Directorate of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 83 of them in the children’s category, 252 in the adult category, and 55 in the traditional category.

328 of these projects were supported²¹, whereas 62 private theaters that faced economic difficulties due to the pandemic were denied this support without any explanation. Moreover, because of an amendment to the regulation, many amateur theaters failed to receive support because they owed back taxes or social security premiums.²²

In response to the controversial support program of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Theater Cooperative shared a list of questions with the public, calling on the Ministry to respond:²³

- o What were the criteria used in selecting the theaters to be supported?
- o Who were the people or agencies that served on the board formed to evaluate compliance with these criteria?
- o How much support is to be provided to individual theaters whose applications were accepted, and when will this support be provided?

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism failed to respond to these and similar questions regarding the process of project support, creating a process that is devoid of transparency.

Ankara Metropolitan Municipality announced that it would support theatrical plays by broadcasting them via its digital media. “Ankara Metropolitan Mayor Mansur Yavaş, who provided ongoing support to art artists who are going through a difficult time during the pandemic, said ‘We will support our theaters and retain citizens’ access to art.’ In a social media post, Mayor Yavaş said the Municipality would broadcast 37 theatrical plays via ABB TV and the Başkent Mobil app.”²⁴

Moreover, Ankara Metropolitan Municipality provided cash support to 39 theater workers who lost their jobs and had no other source of income.

This limited support provided to theater workers was not sufficient to deal with the difficulties they faced and the rights they lost.

A.Y., one of the focus group participants, explains the problems and the double standards encountered as follows:

“Because a big portion of private theaters’ revenues goes towards taxes, very little is left to be paid to workers or others who take part in production.” A.Y. also adds, *“The state disregarded small-scale boutique theaters while providing more support to theaters with strong brands, often backed by big*

²⁰ <https://ozeltiyatrolar.kultur.gov.tr/>

²¹ <http://www.mimesis-dergi.org/2020/09/kultur-bakanligi-ozel-tiyatrolara-yardim-listesini-acikladi/>

²²

²³ <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/tiyatro-kooperatifden-ozel-tiyatrolara-destek-paketi-aciklamasi-1769222>

²⁴ <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/haberler/baskan-yavastan-bir-destek-de-tiyatrolara/>

business. This attitude to art on the part of the state reinforces existing inequalities. State support payments during the pandemic were not distributed equally. Popular names, theaters backed by big business, and venues owned by corporations received most of the attention in meetings held with official agencies. We were ignored even when we voiced common problems and spoke on behalf of everyone; boutique theaters, youth theaters, and other theater workers were disregarded.”

M.S.S., another participant in the focus group meeting and a veteran theater worker of 25 years in Istanbul, said, “Back taxes and social security premiums owed became an intractable problem during the pandemic,” adding that “the pandemic put a lot of pressure on private boutique theaters, and made it difficult for their workers to make a living.”

In an interview published in *Cumhuriyet*, Özlem Kalkan, a veteran theater actress of 25 years, said she did not take part in any shows since March 2020, describing the problems faced by many in the sector as follows:²⁵

“I believe all theater workers –be they employed by private theaters or theaters receiving state support, or indeed, all art workers– started to sustain psychological and physical damage during the pandemic. We will simply disappear if this process goes on for another six months. We ask the state to see us, to stop ignoring us. All support provided until now was meant to protect theater producers and owners. We, as workers who serve producers, have been left out in the cold. At the very least, we ask that our health insurance premiums be paid by the state.”

In another case of inability to perform one’s profession due to the pandemic, the award-winning actor Cenk Dost Verdi, who works as a waiter in a cafe in Istanbul to make a living, made a silent protest in front of Moda Stage to call attention to the problems faced by theater workers.²⁶

Ali Cem Köroğlu, a decorator for State Theaters, lost his life due to coronavirus after negligence and administrative failures. This has been another example of the fact that theater workers, whether employed by independent theaters or publicly-funded ones, are not safe.²⁷

In an interview given to the daily *Güçlü Anadolu*, Hasan Tanay, President of the Theater Producers Association,²⁸ said inequalities in the distribution of support provided to private theaters was not the only example of discrimination and violation of rights, and noted that “Both actors and backstage workers failed to benefit from the short work allowance because their social security premiums were not paid on a regular basis,” calling attention to another aspect of the problem.

During this process,

- Ankara Art Theater, which reflected the accumulated history of Ankara, had to part with the stage it had been using for 58 years,²⁹
- İstanbul Öykü Sahne, which was unable to stage any plays during the pandemic and failed to pay its rent, had to close down,³⁰

²⁵-<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/sanatcilardan-bakanliga-cagri-surec-boyle-devam-ederse-yok-olup-gidecegiz-1809623>

²⁶

<https://www.sozcu.com.tr/hayatim/kultur-sanat-haberleri/odullu-oyuncu-once-garson-oldu-simdi-de-susma-eyl-emi-baslatti/>

²⁷-<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/devlet-tiyatrolari-dekoratoru-ali-cem-koroglu-koronavirus-nedeniyle-hayatini-kayb-etti-1796424>

²⁸ <https://www.gucluanadolugazetesi.com/tyatrocular-valniz-birakildi-129997.html/>

²⁹ <https://www.birgun.net/haber/58-yillik-tarih-yok-oldu-325829>

³⁰ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/417511/oyku-sahne-pandemide-odeyemedigi-kira-borclari-nedeniyle-kapaniyor>

- Toy İstanbul had to close down because it was not able to survive under pandemic conditions,³¹
- Küçük Salon, a boutique theater hall, announced that it was closing down, explaining the decision in a post on social media as follows: “We made every attempt to survive. It’s a shame they all came to naught.”³²

2. Aims and Scope of the Study

With the measures taken and restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was an increased in violations of the rights of theater workers in Turkey, who were no longer able to meet their basic needs.

This study aims to shed light on the problems experienced and violations of human rights suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic by theater workers employed at all levels and positions by state, municipal, and private theaters, who were rendered unable to work and earn a living to meet their most basic needs when theaters were closed down as part of the measures taken and restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the pandemic.

Another aim of the study is to remind all that the state has a responsibility to “protect the health and well-being of its citizens” as per national legislation and international human rights treaties, and call on the government and all state officials to carry out their responsibilities.

2.1. Methods of the Study

In line with the aim of monitoring violations of theater workers’ rights in Turkey during the Covid-19 pandemic, raise awareness of the issue, and call on official agencies to carry out their responsibilities to end these violations, the methodology of the study was planned in three stages:

1. Preparation
2. Fieldwork
3. Reporting

Preparation

In the preparation stage, experts taking part in the study conducted preliminary interviews with people working at different levels in the theater sector. Data obtained from these interviews were evaluated and used as an input in preparing the questionnaire to be used during fieldwork. Questionnaire items thus prepared were evaluated and finalized in a meeting attended by the managers of the association, and an online survey was put together. The online survey was piloted with a sample of 15 people, and problems identified were resolved.

Researchers then identified the theater workers to participate in focus group meetings for the qualitative part of the study, and decided topics to be discussed in these meetings.

Fieldwork

³¹ <https://www.birgun.net/haber/pandemi-sartlarina-dayanamayan-toy-istanbul-kapaniyor-315581>

³²

<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/koronavirus-pandemisi-tiyatroyu-vurdu-kucuk-salon-kapaniyor-1772107>

A survey was conducted with the participation of 150 people in order to identify violations of rights suffered by theater workers during the pandemic.

Focus group meetings were conducted with 21 participants. Prior to focus group meetings, participants were provided detailed information about the meeting and its aims, and asked to respond to “semi-structured” questions prepared beforehand.

Representing the different geographical regions of Turkey was a main concern in selecting participants for the survey and for focus group meetings.

News archives were consulted to identify and examine stories about violations of theater workers’ rights in this process.

We also examined practices implemented by other countries to protect the rights of theater workers and prevent violations of their rights, and compared these practices to the situation in Turkey.

Reporting

To prepare the final report, quantitative data obtained from the survey were analyzed and presented along with quotes from focus group meetings and an analysis of practices in other countries.

The final report thus prepared had separate sections on

Demographic data,

The situation before and during the pandemic regarding issues such as economic and social security, employment, and psychology,

An assessment of the work that the state undertook/should be undertaking during the pandemic,

Practices in other countries, and

The expectations of theater workers from local and central governments and the responsibilities of the state.

2.2. Ethical Framework

This study complied with the universal principles that apply when conducting research with people.

Particular attention was paid to the following principles when administering the survey and conducting focus group meetings, as well as throughout the study, considering the interests of participants and all theater workers.

- Principle of respect for persons
- Principle of beneficence
- Principle of no harm
- Principle of justice
- Principle of integrity and honesty

Participants in the study were not asked to provide personal details, and were not required to provide their e-mail addresses.

Responses to the questionnaire were analyzed collectively and anonymously, and not on an individual participant-basis.

Participants' responses to the questionnaire were only seen by the researchers themselves, and not shared with third parties in any way, in whole or in part.

Comments in focus group meetings were quoted without using the real names or visuals of the participants. Pseudonyms were used in the report instead of participants' names.

2.3. Risks Involved in the Study

The survey was administered online. The handicap, common to online surveys, regarding the difficulty of assessing the accuracy of participants' responses applied to this study as well.

We were unable to check the accuracy and the consistency of the demographic information reported by participants, as well their responses to the items on the questionnaire.

However, the risk was indirectly mitigated by evaluating the data collected from the survey in the context of the findings of other studies conducted in this field prior to and during the pandemic, data obtained from focus group meetings, and personal narratives and testimonies.

Moreover, an attempt was made, through periodic interventions, to ensure participation from diverse regions.

3. Findings and Evaluation

The findings of the study were based on a joint evaluation of the data obtained from the meetings held with 21 participants and the survey administered to 150 people.

3.1. Demographic Data and the Situation Prior to the Pandemic

Of the 150 theater workers who participated in the study, 89 (59.3%) were male, 59 (39.3%) were female, 1 was LGBTI+, and 1 preferred not report their gender.

66% of theater workers who participated in the study were above the age of 35.

In other words, many of the participants were veterans of the field, with long years of experience in theater.

Of the total, 1/3 were not married, and only 19.8% reported living alone. 30.2% of participants lived in a household with 2 members, 33.6% lived in a household with 3 members, and 16.4% lived in a household with 4 or more members.

Theater veteran M.A., one of the participants in focus group meetings, said, “During the pandemic, I try to make a living by working other jobs. I did not receive any support from the state. I live with my sister in an apartment that belongs to my parents, and we receive economic support from our parents. I am covered by my dad’s health insurance.”

This comment provides an explanation why 80.2% of theater workers live with other people even though only 66.7% are married.

According to TURKSTAT’s 2019 “Population and Housing Survey,”³³ the average household size in Turkey is 3.35 persons. Half of theater workers live in households larger than the average household size in the country.

In addition, 58.6% of theater workers live in rented houses, and about 50% have household incomes below TRY3,500, which roughly corresponds to minimum wage in Turkey.



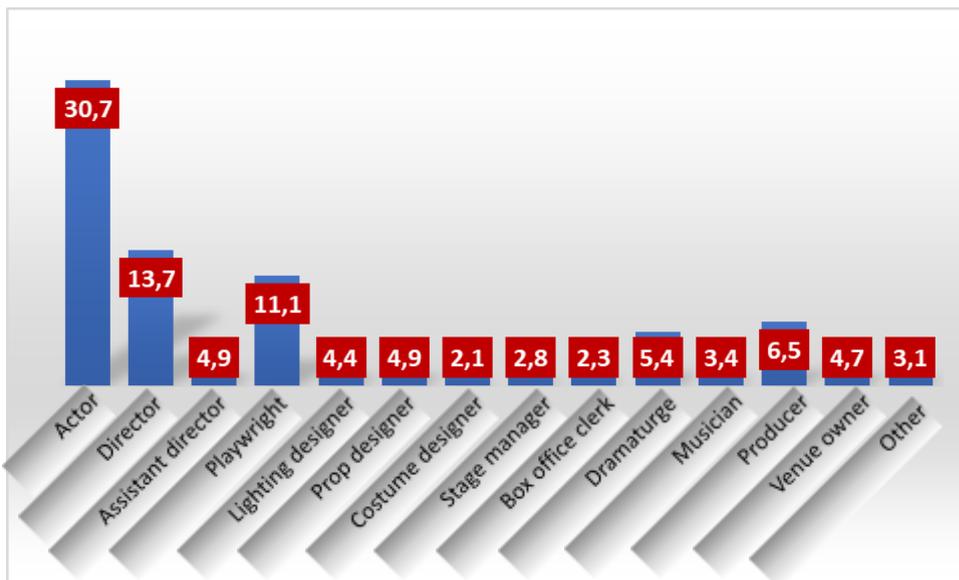
³³<http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?sessionid=nz17W2ZZGnMPMkSDnhpqlFiwircTDKDV61rKmK420W46GyYy7h3rI671394295?id=15843>

Data on educational attainment of theater workers

60.7% of the participants were college graduates. 93.7% of the participants held associate degrees or higher.

54.9% of the participants who held bachelor’s degrees or higher were graduates of a conservatory, or a department of dramaturgy or performing arts. In other words, close to half of theater workers did not receive theater-related formal education.

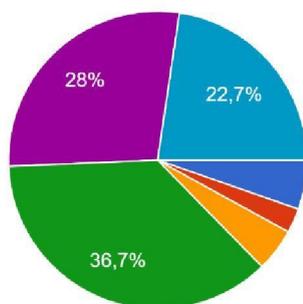
Graduates of conservatories or departments of dramaturgy or fine arts made up 41.3% of participants. 24.7% or about 1/4 of participants learned the profession through a master-apprentice relationship.



30.7% of the participants were actors, 13.7% were directors, and 11.1% were playwrights. Other participants included assistant directors, producers, dramaturges and workers in other roles.

36.7% or more than 1/3 of the participants worked on a per diem or per play basis. 28% of participants worked independently. These work arrangements are characterized by lack of a stable income and social security.

Focus group participant A.Y. confirms this situation: “Theater workers do not have regular income or social security because they tend to work on a per diem basis.” M.S.S., on the other hand, calls



- Regular employee in a publicly funded theater
- Irregular, per play, or per diem employee in a publicly funded theater
- Contract employee in a private theater
- Per play employee in a private theater
- Independent contractor
- I do not earn income from theater

attention to the lack of social security in the field: “I have been working in this sector for 25 years now, and recently got registered for the first time to be able to apply for the support provided by the Ministry of Culture

and Tourism.”

Participants agreed that many theater workers lacked regular income and social security. 71.6% of the participants reported no having any social security.

This means that theater workers who lost their jobs during the pandemic were unable to benefit from rights such as Unemployment Benefit, Short Work Allowance (SWA), and health services, endangering their right to life and health under pandemic conditions.

Another indicator that shows the scale of the violation of rights is the fact that about 400 private theaters a year apply for project-based and other state support provided by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, but they employ only 300 registered workers with health insurance.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) requires states parties to the covenant to recognize the right of everyone to work, and to take necessary measures to protect this right. Violations of theater workers' rights during the pandemic made it clear that Turkey has not been carrying out this responsibility.

Lack of access to regular income to meet their needs forced theater workers to work additional jobs even before the pandemic. 60.3% of the participants said they were forced to have non-theater jobs to earn additional income.

Income levels of theater workers explain why they feel the need to work additional jobs.

Theater workers who participated in the study reported the following figures regarding the personal monthly income they earned from theater-related work:

37.1% earned less than TRY1,000 from theater,

22.4% earned between TRY1,000-2,000,

19% earned between TRY3,000-4,000, and

11% earned above TRY5,000.

58.6% of theater workers lived in rented apartments, close to 50% had a monthly household income below TRY3,500, and 59.5% had a monthly personal income under TRY2,000, indicating that many theater workers lived in poverty.

Although they perform important social roles and are considered to be role models by many in society, theater workers struggle to meet their needs and continue practicing their art under heavy economic conditions. Some of the theater workers are unable to meet their most basic human needs, and face severe poverty.

This is a violation of the principle, stated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control," and the principle, stated Article 4 of the **European Social Charter**,³⁴ that "All workers have the right to a fair remuneration sufficient for a decent standard of living for themselves and their families," and shows that the state has failed to protect these rights.

Another consequence of the practice of informal work among theater workers, without social security, is the lack of organization in the field.

³⁴ <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/kefe/docs/sosyalsart.pdf>

65% of the theater workers who participated in the study said they were not members of a union, association, foundation, or professional body. The high rate of informal work among participants shows that most of those who are members of an organization are members of associations, foundations, and the like, instead of labor unions that would help protect their economic and social rights.

Members of the Patronların Ensesindeyiz Solidarity Network for Culture and Art Workers, which started organizing during the pandemic, said they “founded this network to fight against unregistered, informal work without social security benefits as culture and art workers slide into poverty and are never prioritized.”³⁵

3.2. Theater Workers During the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has been affecting disadvantaged groups in society far more than other groups, for more than a year now.

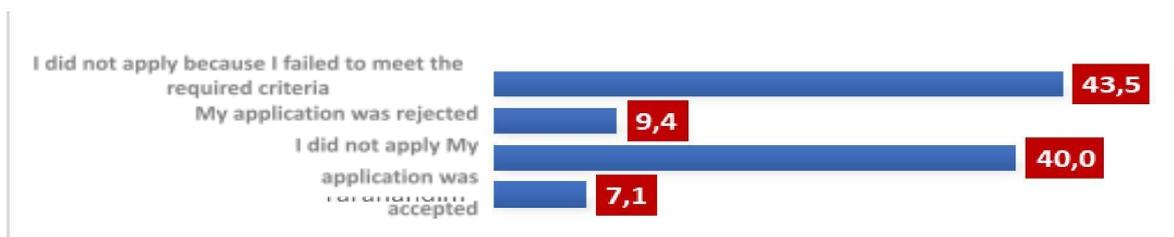
Women, children, the elderly, migrants and refugees, and those without regular income and social security have faced the destructive effects of the pandemic.

Without access to regular income and social security, theater workers also try to survive under conditions created by the pandemic.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) warns that “**The pandemic is moving like a wave—one that may yet crash on those least able to cope.**”³⁶

73.3% of theater workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, and 93.1% reported earning less, which confirms that the UNDP’s warning is apt.

E.T., one of the participants in the focus group meeting, said, “*What little I earn from this profession, including the support provided by the state, is less than the pocket money I received from my dad in primary school,*” while **S.C.Ç.**, another participant, said, “*I live with my mom. I rely on my mom’s and other relatives’ support to survive,*” pointing to the scale of the difficulties and violations they faced.



73.3% of theater workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, with only 7.1% of them receiving Unemployment Benefits (UB).

71.6% of theater workers were unable to receive unemployment benefit because they were not formally employed and their social security premiums were not being paid prior to the pandemic.

The failure on the part of the government to make a temporary arrangement that would allow theater workers to receive unemployment benefits regardless of work status or payment of social

³⁵ <http://www.gazetekadikoy.com.tr/gundem/hikayelerimiz-farkli-ama-cozum-ortak-h17168.html>

³⁶ <https://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/tr/home/coronavirus.html>

security premiums meant that theater workers lost all income and were rendered unable to meet their basic needs.

To help companies keep paying their employees, the government relaxed the conditions for receiving the Short Work Allowance (SW), did not perform checks normally required by law, and made amendments to this effect, but when it came to theater workers, the government avoided making any such arrangements, leaving theater workers to fend for themselves under pandemic conditions.

Actors' Union of Turkey³⁷ criticized this practice and the disregard for theater workers, asking, "We find it difficult to understand, what are professional and amateur culture and art workers in the field of theater supposed to do when they have been deprived of real, comprehensive, and regular support for a whole year now, and are at their wit's end economically?"



We Are Invisible Again!

As of March 1st, 2021, we have entered a new period as a country, called controlled normalization. Various service-providing businesses and facilities, including cafes and restaurants, have resumed their operations subject to certain conditions.

However, there was not a single word about theaters and theater workers, again, and we have not been able to see any mention of us or our presence in official statements. We find it difficult to understand, what are professional and amateur culture and art workers in the field of theater supposed to do when they have been deprived of real, comprehensive, and regular support for a whole year now, and are at their wit's end economically?"

We expect authorities to develop an urgent, real, and sustainable solution to the problems of stage workers, who have again been rendered invisible due to the lockdown hours implemented for controlled normalization and the continuing closure of theater halls in practice.

In this context, we would like to express our readiness, one more time, to reconsider all problems, proposed solutions, and models that we have identified or offered as an organization since the pandemic began, and make every effort to contribute to the debate.

- Actors' Union of Turkey

As has been the case in many other countries, Turkey has provided little direct support to the poor, and the "support packages" announced have mostly provided direct support to companies.

³⁷ <https://twitter.com/oyuncusendika/status/1367856567572430850/photo/1>

The “Shield of Economic Stability Package” announced by the government on March 18th provided TRY100 billion to businesses, whereas those deprived of all income had to keep waiting for yet another package.

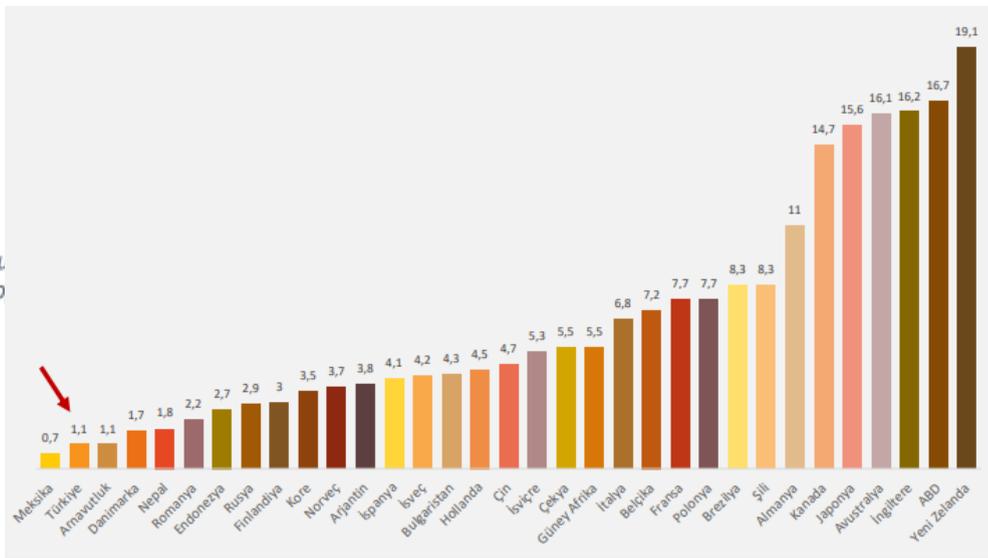
The “Shield of Economic Stability” package announced by the government in the beginning of the pandemic first provided TRY100 billion to businesses, which was later increased to TRY240 billion, whereas direct support provided to people was a meager TRY8.4 billion.

8.4 million households were provided TRY8.4 billion in total, and the average support these households received over a period of one year was TRY1,000.

According to the report “Resources Allocated to Fight the Social and Economic Effects of Covid-19 in Turkey and in the World” prepared by DİSK-Research Center (DİSK-AR)³⁸, Turkey was the country that provided the least cash support to its citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic, after Mexico. Moreover, Turkey took the last place in terms of the ratio of cash support to

total economic support.

Fig. Sup



According to this study, on average, high-income countries provided support worth 12.7% of their GDP to their citizens, in terms of additional

spending and income support; this figure was 3.6% in mid-income countries, and 1.6% in low-income countries. In Turkey, on the other hand, additional spending and income support over the same period corresponded only to 1.1% of GDP.

This shows that the resources allocated by Turkey to support its citizens during the pandemic was less than that allocated by low-income countries.

71. Mexico, Turkey, Albania, Denmark, Nepal, Romania, Indonesia, Finland, Korea, Norway, Argentina, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands, China, Switzerland, Czechia, South Africa, Italy, Belgium, France, Poland, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Canada, Japan, Austria, UK, USA, New Zealand, which made it difficult for them to protect themselves against the pandemic and access healthcare services.

30.2% or about 1/3 of theater workers had to be covered by the health insurance of their parents.

15.5% of participants accessed health services within the framework of General Health Insurance because they had no income, whereas 10%, mostly owners of boutique theaters, were unable to access health services because they owed back social security premiums.

Article 60 of the Constitution says “Everyone has the right to social security. The State shall take the necessary measures and establish the organization for the provision of social security.” Similarly, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights contains the principle that “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.” Despite these principles, however, many theater workers were unable to enjoy their right to health, or had to be covered by other people’s social security.

Under pandemic conditions, which pose serious risks to individual and public health, healthcare services should be provided to everyone, free of charge.

This is required to protect the health of both individuals and society.

The Economic Situation of Theater Workers Under the Pandemic

73.3% of theater workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, and as a result had limited economic means. 71.6% of the participants did not earn a regular income during the pandemic.

This state of deprivation meant they faced difficulties in meeting their basic living expenses, and 51.7% of theater workers had to receive support from their parents.

Deprived of income and facing difficulties in meeting their basic needs, theater workers had to resort to all sorts of means to access financial resources.

14% of the participants received social aid, 21.5% took out bank loans, 19% received cash support from local governments, 21.5% received support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and 13% received cash support from civil society organizations (CSOs).

During the pandemic, theater workers’ level of indebtedness increased significantly. 76.7% of the theater workers who participated in the study said they were indebted to banks, other organizations, or persons.

7.7% of the participants said they borrowed less than TRY1,000.

63.3% of theater workers borrowed TRY5,000 or more, and 16% borrowed TRY30,000 or more.

Theater workers borrowed to meet their basic needs, whereas owners of private theaters took out loans to pay for administrative expenses such as taxes, insurance premiums, and rent, and to meet their personal needs.

The uncertainty regarding how long the pandemic will last, the insufficient support provided, and the difficulties that theater workers, venue owners, and independent theaters will have in paying back their loans show that, going forward, these problems are likely to continue and become even more severe.



Erdoğan: We are trying to provide budget support to some countries due to the pandemic

Some of the theater workers who were denied any support in this process are so desperate that they try to survive by selling their used furniture. One theater worker was freezing to death because he had no heating in his place due to unpaid power and gas bills, and was rescued by his friends who took him to a hospital and pooled their money to pay the hospital bill as he had no health insurance.³⁹

1/3 of theater workers, on the other hand, faced legal action including having their belongings confiscated during the pandemic because they were unable to pay back their debts. Some theater workers, unable to practice their profession, started working as hawkers in markets or day laborers in construction, but still faced confiscation because they were unable to pay rent and bills.⁴⁰

Economic and related problems affected the mental health of theater workers as well. 50.9% of the theater workers who participated in the study said they have been unable to practice their profession due to mental health reasons during the pandemic.

This is directly related to the mental health of theater workers, separate from the effects of pandemic restrictions and the closure of theaters due to the pandemic.

Loss of income and related problems show that lifting the restrictions would not be sufficient for theater workers to be able to meet their basic needs and live with human dignity, and the government needs to develop urgent policies to provide sufficient support to theater workers.

Theater Workers' Views on Support and Concerned Organizations

The government did not provide direct support to theater workers due to loss of jobs and income. The support provided by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was only project-based support.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism allocated a budget of TRY12 millions to support theaters that were unable to perform any live shows due to the pandemic, which was distributed on the basis of project applications. However, many theaters were unable to apply because conditions included not owing any back taxes or social security premiums. Private and boutique theaters had difficulty meeting these obligations even before the pandemic, and were rendered completely unable to pay taxes or social security premiums during the pandemic.

As a result of these conditions imposed by the Ministry, 62 out of 390 applications were rejected due to back taxes or social security premiums owed.

97.4% of theater workers who participated in the study responded in the negative to the question "Do you believe the support provided by government to theaters was planned and distributed on the basis of the needs of theaters and theater workers?" Almost all participants were of the opinion that government policies regarding theaters during the pandemic were not designed to meet their needs.

Almost all participants found these policies to be misguided, and 99.1% said the government failed to provide necessary and sufficient support to theaters and theater workers.

O.P., one of the participants in the focus group meeting, said, "We applied for the support provided by the government. However, we were told we did not meet the criteria because our sector was not covered, and we had not issued any invoices, even though we had been closed throughout this

³⁹ <https://sol.org.tr/yazar/duyan-var-mi-28957>

⁴⁰ <https://sol.org.tr/yazar/duyan-var-mi-28957>

period,” adding they had similar problems with local governments as well: “The municipality said theaters were not mentioned in their documents, and they had lumped us together with wedding halls and gas stations.”

A.Y., another focus group participant, said the parliament had to take urgent legislative action regarding the field of theaters to solve these and similar problems.

Another problem was the lack of transparency in the support provided by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to private theaters.

93.1% of the theater workers who participated in the study said the support provided during the pandemic did not reach the people or organizations that truly needed support.

E.Ş., a focus group participant, pointed to another problem: “Some companies that are close to the government benefit from the field of theater by leveraging their political connections, which means the remaining pie is smaller and many more people are denied an income.”

Questions arose when a list of private theaters that received support from the Ministry of Culture during the pandemic also included food, tourism, agriculture, sports goods, architecture, export, and engineering companies, and the Tiyatromuz Yaşasın (Let Out Theater Live) Initiative made a statement about the issue, calling for transparency.⁴¹



The list announced on Monday, September 21st, 2020 by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and hailed as “Record Support for Private Theaters” created, to say the least, a deep sense of disappointment among theater workers. We have seen that the list in question did not feature some of the most active theater troupes that have been trying for many years to keep theater alive in our country. (We are currently undertaking a study of this list, and will be sharing our findings with the public shortly.) We have to say that this list, in terms of its contents and the way theaters on the list were selected, fails to meet the expectations of theater troupes, which have been having a difficult time under the pandemic. Here are our opinions and demands regarding this support program:



We Demand Transparency!

- The list contains only company names and play titles, which is bound to raise questions. Within the framework of transparency required in any democratic country, the troupes these companies represent should be shared with public, as well as how much support they received, the criteria used in selecting them, and the grounds for denying similar support to other troupes.
- We ask that the members of the commission that made the decisions regarding the support program be made public.



We Demand New Support!

- It is well known that many troupes that owed back taxes or social security premiums have been unable to apply for support. Use of this criterion to deny support to theaters that are already under a heavy load of debt because of the pandemic is unacceptable. It is also well known by the public that some troupes are blacklisted. Continuation of such discriminatory policies even under pandemic conditions is an affront to the public conscience.
- Theaters with their own venues are known to be suffering the most in this process. The current support program is project-based, and this creates a disadvantage for troupes that simultaneously run venues and produce plays at a time when running venues is difficult as it is.
- A new support program that solves the two problems mentioned above must be developed urgently.



We Want To Be On The Board!

- The 7-member board, which currently has one artist and (to the best of our knowledge) one academician, consists mostly of Ministry officials. We demand that the current support board be expanded and reorganized so that artists and academicians would have more weight. We believe that in a democratic country, existing theater organizations must be consulted in creating this board. We urgently demand that artists have a say in the making of decisions concerning them.

Yours sincerely...

As of the writing of this report, the Ministry has not responded to the demands, questions, and arguments raised by the public.

Because government policy regarding theaters during the pandemic was not found to be sufficient or transparent by theater workers, this negatively affected theater workers' perception of the government.

To the question “Do you believe the following agencies/organizations provided the necessary support to theater during the pandemic?”, participants gave the following responses:

Has the Presidency of the Republic provided the necessary support? Yes:3.4%, No:96.6%

Has the Grand National Assembly provided the necessary support? Yes:3.4%, No:96.6%

Has the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Provided the necessary support? Yes:12%, No:88%

Have local governments provided the necessary support? Yes:31%, No:69%

Have governor's and district governor's offices provided the necessary support? Yes:1.7%, No:98.3%

Have civil society organizations provided the necessary support? Yes:33.6%, No:66.4%

Have labor unions provided the necessary support? Yes:21.5%, No:78.5%

Have private companies provided the necessary support? Yes:12%, No:88%

Participants were of the opinion that civil society organizations and labor unions took more initiatives and provided more support to theater workers during the pandemic, compared to official agencies/organizations.

In many cases, local governments have also provided support to theaters and theater workers. However, the government, along with the ministries, governor's offices, and district governor's offices it controls, failed by providing next to no support to theater workers.

Only 3.4% of theater workers thought that necessary support was provided to theater workers by the Presidency, which, after the transition to a presidential system, became the sole authority in the country in terms of shaping the bureaucracy and supervising the work of the executive branch.

The Constitution and international treaties assign the responsibility to protect the right of citizens to life, work, and living with human dignity to the state, or in other words, to those in power.

This responsibility must be carried out in a manner consistent with the requirements of protecting fundamental human rights, not through arbitrary policies or practices by the incumbent government.

Having access to sufficient and high-quality healthcare services during a pandemic is not only necessary for individual health and the right to life, it is also critical for public health. Similarly, having sufficient income to meet one's basic needs is a fundamental human right in normal times, but denying this right under pandemic conditions constitutes a direct violation of the right to life.

By not providing the necessary and sufficient support to theater workers for the period they are unable to work, and by failing to create policies to this end, the government is threatening the right of theater workers to life.

4. Practices in Other Countries

Germany ⁴²⁻⁴³

- o The German government created a 50-billion Euro fund to support small businesses and independent contractors, including those in culture and arts, media, and creative industries.
- o The Federal Culture Minister said red tape involved for receiving state support would be minimized.
- o Multiple aid programs were created for those working in art and culture industries.
- o A system was created for independent contractors and business owners with less than five employees to apply for a one time support of EUR9,000. Business owners with less than ten employees, on the other hand, will be able to apply for a one-time support of EUR15,000.
- o Art professionals who lost their jobs or had their contracts terminated are able to apply to health offices in their districts to receive compensation.
- o The Berlin Senate decided to provide a total of EUR300 million in aid to the art sector. Individuals will be able to receive EUR5,000 every 6 months from this fund, and firms will be able to apply for support once every three months.
- o Independent culture and art workers in Hamburg are eligible for EUR2,500, and small businesses for EUR5,000.
- o The federal government allocated a budget of EUR50 billion for state aid and emergency loans to independent workers and small businesses.

USA

- o In the US, those who earn less than 75 thousand dollars a year would be eligible for USD1,200 in addition to USD500 per child; those who earn up to 99 thousand dollars, on the other hand, would be eligible for a smaller amount. A total of USD1 billion is planned to be distributed in loans to small businesses and civil society organizations.
- o Moreover, the third stimulus package announced by the administration allocated USD307.5 million to the culture and arts sector. ⁴⁴
- o A 75 thousand dollar loan package was proposed in New York. Because most people who work in New York galleries are independent contractors, there are ongoing campaigns for more support to art industry professionals.
- o The Seattle Artist Relief Fund has organized on gofundme.com, and is offering aid ranging from a hundred to a thousand dollars to those who lost their jobs.

UK ⁴⁵

⁴² [Pandemi Sirasinda Kultur Sanatin Birlestirici Gucu ve Alanin Ihtiyaclari Nisan 2020.pdf \(iksv.org\)](#)

⁴³ [The German Ministry of Culture decided to provide EUR30 million to private theaters in corona aid. | Gazete Mstehak \(gazetemustehak.com\)](#)

⁴⁴ [Pandemi Sirasinda Kultur Sanatin Birlestirici Gucu ve Alanin Ihtiyaclari Nisan 2020.pdf \(iksv.org\)](#)

⁴⁵ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kultur-sanat/2020/03/25/sanat-dunyasina-korona-destegi>

- o Arts Council England has allocated a budget of GBP160 million for artists, independent workers, and cultural centers; GBP20 million of this budget is reserved for those working in creative industries and GBP50 million is for culture and arts organizations that are not part of the Council. GBP90 million, on the other hand, is for use by cultural organizations in the national portfolio of the Council.
- o Through the Arts Council England, the UK has started receiving applications for the 160 million pound emergency response fund it has created for organizations and individuals in need. GBP20 million of the fund is reserved for artists, creative industries, and independent culture and arts workers.
- o The UK government provides cash support of up to GBP2,500 to artists and those who work for creative industries.

Austria

- o The Austrian government has created a fund to provide wage support to independent workers in the arts and creative services sectors.⁴⁶

Switzerland

- o CHF280 million (USD281 million) of the emergency package created by the Swiss government is reserved for those working in the field of culture and arts. Independent workers in the arts sector will also be able to benefit from the fund.⁴⁷

France

- o Through official agencies for individual art disciplines, France has created an emergency fund of EUR11.5 for the music sector, EUR5 million for performance arts, EUR5 million for publishing, EUR2 million for visual arts, and EUR2 million for art galleries.⁴⁸
- o Independent workers will be able to receive compensation of up to EUR1,500 in the category of micro-entrepreneurs.
- o Support packages were created at the regional level for organizers of cultural activities that had to be cancelled because of the pandemic.
- o Moreover, hundreds of culture and art workers including theater workers occupied the Odeon Theater in Paris, where concerts, plays, and movie screenings are banned due to the pandemic.

The occupation of theaters spread throughout France, and the government announced that an additional 20 million Euros would be provided to the arts sectors to complement the EUR30 million support previously announced. However, this support package was found to be insufficient by theater workers and their unions.

The trade union DGT continues to protest the support package by calling for continued occupation of theaters.

⁴⁶ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kultur-sanat/2020/03/25/sanat-dunyasina-korona-destegi>

⁴⁷ [Pandemi Sirasinda Kultur Sanatin Birlestirici Gucu ve Alanin Ihtiyaclari Nisan 2020.pdf \(iksv.org\)](#)

⁴⁸ [Pandemi Sirasinda Kultur Sanatin Birlestirici Gucu ve Alanin Ihtiyaclari Nisan 2020.pdf \(iksv.org\)](#)



Italy

- o The Italian government announced that it created a 130 million Euro fund for the culture-arts and tourism sectors.

Belgium

- o Under a fund created by the Belgian government, independent workers in culture and arts will be eligible for EUR1,290 a month, and up to EUR1,614 a month if they have dependents. ⁴⁹

Other Countries ⁵⁰

Other countries created the following funds to support workers and organizations in the field of culture and arts:

Argentina: USD450,000

Australia: USD5,000,000

Estonia: EUR3,000,000

Finland: EUR1,500,000

South Africa: USD8,200,000

South Korea: USD2,500 per artist for 12 thousand artists

The Netherlands: EUR300,000,000

Hong Kong: USD7,000,000

Scotland: GBP2,000,000

Canada: USD43,000,000

Luxembourg: The Employment Fund covers 80% of the salaries of cultural organizations' employees.

Norway: USD29,000,000

Singapore: USD38,000,000

⁴⁹ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kultur-sanat/2020/03/25/sanat-dunyasina-korona-destegi>

⁵⁰ [Pandemi_Sirasinda_Kultur_Sanatin_Birlestirici_Gucu_ve_Alanin_Ihtiyaclari_Nisan_2020.pdf \(iksv.org\)](#)

Chile: USD18,000,000

New Zealand: USD4,500,000

5. Conclusion

Closure of theaters to control the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, restrictions on their working hours when partially opened, and failure to provide support to theater workers so that they could meet their basic needs amounts to starving theater workers. This is a clear violation of the principle, stated in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control,” and the failure to provide the necessary support and security to theater workers under current conditions amounts to a violation of their fundamental human rights. This is also a violation of the principle, stated in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, that “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance,” and “recognize the right to work and take appropriate steps to safeguard this right,” amounting to a failure on the part of Turkey to comply with its obligations as a state party to the Covenant.

Failure to provide adequate support for the protection of theater workers’ economic and social rights constitutes a violation of the Constitution as well.

In line with the general principle of ensuring that citizens have the right to social security, the Constitution includes the right to work among basic rights, and adopts the principle that “The State shall take the necessary measures to raise the standard of living of workers, and to protect workers and the unemployed in order to improve the general conditions of labor, to promote labor, to create suitable economic conditions for prevention of unemployment and to secure labor peace.”

In short, during the pandemic, the government failed to perform its obligations to theater workers under international treaties and the Constitution, and violated the fundamental human rights of theater workers.

To prevent further violations of the rights of theater workers and private-boutique theaters and to alleviate their suffering, the state and the incumbent government must urgently take the following measures:

- o Theater workers who can document having worked in the field of theater “for a specified amount of time” should be paid the highest unemployment benefits possible under the law, regardless of any social security premiums they may owe.
- o Social security and insurance premiums of independent theater workers should be covered by state support, and urgent legislative action should be taken to this end.
- o Theater platforms, foundations, associations, unions, cooperatives, professional organizations, independent initiatives, and theater workers should be consulted when creating support programs for theaters and their workers, and joint planning should be undertaken.

- o When deciding the amount of support to be provided to individual theater workers, the dependents of the recipient –including any disabled or elderly people and students, among others– should be taken into account, and additional support should be provided for these cases.
- o The budget allocated for this purpose should be distributed in a transparent manner, and the relevant commission should also include independent members to be elected by theaters and theater workers.
- o Resources to be transferred to theaters and theater workers should not be subject to any deductions in any form or under any name including tax or premium offsets. This support should be protected against debt collection instruments such as confiscation, liens, etc.
- o The central government should create support mechanisms that directly address the field of theater, are designed and run to meet field-specific needs, and equally apply to all theater producers.
- o Project-based support provided to theaters should be supplemented with operational support to theaters that are unable to resume their operations, and the project requirement should be lifted.
- o Measures should be taken to ensure that independent theater workers, artists and designers also benefit from the support currently provided to registered theater companies.
- o Back taxes and social security premiums owed by private theaters should be forgiven.
- o Applying to support programs for theaters should not be conditional on criteria such as not owing any back taxes or social security premiums.
- o An “Emergency Fund” should be created to be used only in cases of emergency such as a pandemic, and the fund should be controlled by independent theaters and workers.
- o All activities should be exempt from the VAT until the damage done to theaters by the pandemic is repaired.