

# VERDENSROMMET MANIFESTO

## [2021]



Verdensrommet's Manifesto was written collectively by the following members of the working group, artists Rodrigo Ghattas-Pérez and Purna Bishnoi in conversation with Gabrielle Paré and Anthony Morton, in the summer of 2021. It was published for the first time, in the same year, as part of the public assembly, *Participatory Imaginaries for Rest and the Future of Retirement*.

The Manifesto makes available Verdensrommet's key political, social, cultural, and economic missions and ambitions as envisioned and steered by the working group. It intends to expose a number of systemic contradictions and structural inequalities, which are urgent to the network.

### **[WHO IS VERDENSROMMET?]**

Verdensrommet is an artist-powered mutual support network by and for immigrant creative professionals based in Norway. We stand for fair immigration policies, better living and working conditions, and encourage new imaginations of the future of cultural work. The network is a grassroots and volunteer-led group of 170+ creative professionals across the country. It is grounded in solidarity and was created as a call to self-organize and develop infrastructures for mutual-aid. We use our joint forces to overcome precarity and immigration uncertainty in the midst of a myriad shades of global crises.

### **[WHY WAS IT FOUNDED?]**

Verdensrommet was founded in March 2020 to address the precarious conditions of visual artists whose citizenship led them to slip through the state's support net. Later, this was expanded to include all creative professionals of non-EU/EEA backgrounds sharing similar experiences. The low income levels, highly bureaucratic regimes, unrealistic immigration policies, limited accessibility to social assistance, and the cultural deficit in public life created by the Covid-19 pandemic have worsened the already precarious cultural workers' economy.

The network was founded by visual artists and the working group is composed of them too, since visual arts is the least regulated cultural sector with the lowest income. However, our efforts engage with all creative professionals: musicians, dancers, theatre and performing artists, film & TV professionals, designers, and architects. Hopefully, future working groups will have more mixed compositions.

### **[WHAT DO WE DO?]**

Verdensrommet is anti-bureaucratic in organisation., Our goal is to place debates around invisible and undervalued labor at the heart of the public and artistic agenda. We try to do so by

questioning the high-performance regimes imposed upon artists and refusing institutionalized exhaustion. Therefore, our core mission is to establish a sustainable solidarity network for artists and cultural workers by providing assistance in navigating the rules and regulations of bureaucracy, demystifying immigration procedures, and lobbying for better living and labour conditions for cultural workers. As many live in the country without the security of citizenship, our ultimate goal is to fight for a fair immigration policy.

For the past year and a half, we have addressed immigration, economic, and labor concerns pertaining to creative professionals through advocacy, guidance, and network-building. We encourage critical as well as creative engagement with our own experiences of immigration and conditions of labour through collective and cooperative work. Furthermore, we work in collaboration with local and international artist unions and organisations that work for equality in the cultural sector like, Norske Billedkunstnere, Unge Kunstneres Samfund, Balansekunst, Safemuse, and Unge Kunstnere og Kunstformidlere (Denmark) and IMMART (Denmark).

Currently, our political backbone is to lobby for changes in the immigration regulations such that they address the gap between residence permit requirements for non-EU/EEA creative professionals wanting to live and work in Norway and their working conditions in the cultural sector. For example, the financial requirement for a yearly self-employed visa is 265 998 NOK pre-tax (as of 2021), while the average yearly earnings (from artistic sources) of visual artists in Norway is, 89 000 NOK (2015). Moreover, the immigration regulations do not permit immigrant cultural workers to earn an income from outside the cultural field, nor do they allow them to be both employed and self-employed when such a “patchwork economy” constitutes the key working conditions of the majority of creative professionals in Norway. Furthermore, with limited access to social assistance, they slip through the state’s support system increasing economic inequalities, which have been radically accentuated due to Covid-19. We expose such structural inequalities and advocate for changes that can bridge the same.

For access to a Wider Action and Scope Overview, please visit the following resources:

- Verdensrommet Petition  
<https://bit.ly/2TNbvAO>
- Verdensrommet Resource Center  
<https://linktr.ee/verdensrommet.network>
- Verdensrommet ‘Post-capitalist lexicon for immigrant artists’  
<https://verdensrommet.network/lexicon>
- Verdensrommet Website  
<https://verdensrommet.network>
- Verdensrommet Instagram  
<https://www.instagram.com/verdensrommet.network>

## **[THE WORKING GROUP]**

Since Verdensrommet is a horizontal and informal solidarity network, for the time being the working group is not elected but self-appointed, self-nominated, driven only by the desire to put in the work to steer such a network. The working group's concerns lie at the intersection of immigration, labour conditions and practices of solidarity for immigrant cultural workers of non-EU/EEA citizenship. The term of each working group will be determined quite organically. A working group is flexible, malleable and its constitution will change hands every few years depending on people's commitment. The following ideas about the role and function of the working group have been established by and for us, the first working group of Verdensrommet that came together in March 2020, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A working group has an autonomous social and political configuration, thus each must establish and agree upon their own ethics, ambitions, missions, concepts, and codes of conduct, based on which they will formulate their strategies and activities. A working group is not obliged to carry forward previously established ethics but thinking about and discussing them before discarding them is encouraged.

### Working Group | Primary Guidelines

1. Verdensrommet has no official procedure to become a “member” or a node of the network. Everyone is welcome to join our Facebook private group or Discord server. Artists are encouraged to freely self-organize under the umbrella of the network, which might include doing projects together, or applying for funding under the name of “Verdensrommet”. However, these projects must be concerned with immigration, labour conditions, and/or practices of solidarity and must benefit a larger group of cultural workers and/or other workers facing similar working conditions.
2. We emphasise the importance of redistribution practices to counter the income inequality in the arts. We do so by generating paid assignments for people in the network.
3. The working group's political views and actions were defined and shaped through shared weekly gatherings, and are incapable of reflecting the diversity of ideas and positions within the larger network. Our objectives are not aligned with narratives of victimhood, thus, we are skeptical of identity politics in pursuit of our mission. Reluctantly, we engage with the politics of diversity as it is the rhetoric by which we can achieve our political goals in the current diversity-driven cultural-political landscape. Nevertheless, we acknowledge these contradictions and endeavour to work through these constant ethical negotiations.

## **[MANIFESTO OUTLINES]**

To address the precarious conditions of non-EU/EEA creative professionals in Norway, we call for fairer immigration policies and better living and working conditions. This Manifesto exposes a number of systemic contradictions and structural inequalities which are urgent to the network. Hereby, we encourage new imaginations of the future of cultural work.

[This is a composite manifesto. Each member of the working group prioritises these points according to a self-determined scale; we make no claims of consensus.]

**x/** The creation of a fair and inclusive immigration visa for non-EU/EEA creative professionals in Norway that takes into consideration their working conditions: fluctuating income levels and patchwork economy.

**x/** The formulation of a White Paper on a solidarity economy model for self-employed creative professionals that enables more equal income redistribution. The resource should propose commons-oriented protocols and encourage a hybrid economy through cooperative configurations that put community currency, affective economies, and blockchain technology at the heart.

**x/** We should remain proactive in challenging and questioning current power structures, bureaucratic regimes, and institutionalized exhaustion. We reject the system of high-performance which is imposed upon artists (and others), demanding them to be hyper-productive in the pursuit of capital, the only non-negotiable means of sustaining a livelihood.

**x/** The creation of a mutual-aid and retirement fund to help the management of economic uncertainty for artists in the present and in anticipation of the future.

**x/** The maintenance and upgrade of mutual-support infrastructures that help construct anti-bureaucratic and sustainable artistic practices in order to make creative agency available and care practices possible.

**x/** Universal and Unconditional Basic Income is the best measure for the arts and cultural sector. Art workers advocate for basic income not only for themselves but for everyone.

**x/** A critical examination of the fallacies of meritocracy in relation to the operation and management of the contemporary art world and its resources.

**x/** Our work is grounded in the ethics of mutual care, greater cooperation, economic self-determination and exchange of value. We want to enhance economic justice by tackling the roots of precarious labor for artists. We do so through practices of financial inclusion and the redefinition of artistic labor (and its value) through monetary and (non)monetary explorations.

x/ We must build and help maintain alliances with each other, as well as create P2P infrastructures of collaboration based on trust, in order to facilitate fair value-exchange of skills and 'official' and 'unofficial' knowledge sharing.

### **[CALL FOR CHANGE]**

As creative professionals producing cultural and affective value in Norwegian society, we would like to propose the following changes in the immigration regulations that will help us continue to contribute to the cultural richness and diversity of Norway:

1. First and foremost, we demand that the loss of clients, audiences and the financial deficits caused by the pandemic in the field of culture be taken into account and the financial requirement for the renewal of the Self-Employed Visa be lowered for the years 2021-24.
2. The immigration regulations should take into consideration the working conditions in the field of art and culture. Below are our specific demands in response to the three key working restrictions that misalign with the way in which the cultural sector operates:
  - The immigration regulations do not allow creative professionals to earn an income from any other field other than culture, even though it is well documented through data collected and analysed by the Kulturdepartementet via Telemark Forskning that creative professionals earn a living through a "patchwork economy" with multiple and diverse sources of income from both "skilled" and "unskilled" work. We demand that all creative professionals under the Self-Employed Visa be allowed to earn an income from outside the cultural field, especially in the establishing phase of their career.
  - Currently, the immigration regulations only permit creative professionals to be either employed or self-employed as mutually exclusive conditions, and exceptions for the above are few and far between. It is essential that all creative professionals are allowed to have up to 50% employment alongside their self-employed activities and that the sum of the income from both sources be taken into consideration during visa renewals.
  - Most importantly, the financial requirement for creative professionals (currently at 265 998 NOK per year) should be determined either as an aggregate of the past 3 years or the last year, whichever is greater. This would take cognisance of the fluctuating income of cultural workers.
3. Last but not least, we appeal to all cultural and other institutions in Norway to pay creative professionals according to the government-recognised payment scales, in proportion to their qualifications or union-established rates.

## **[IN CONCLUSION]**

We are aware that as we strive towards an artist clause in the self-employed visa regulations or an artist visa as a separate category, we cannot create a more isolating and privileged immigration system. How can we forge an alliance with other workers who have similar working conditions? While we strive for fair immigration policies, we also engage with the question of what would an economically sustainable way of working look like for artists, while still retaining their political and ethical position in society? We are interested in re-thinking and re-imagining the work and field of contribution of creative professionals, especially visual artists’.

With an increasing number of non-standard workers, specifically gig, platform and solo self-employed, it is of paramount importance to pay attention to the working conditions of creative professionals. Self-employed creative professionals have a long history of organising themselves and building alternatives to the mainstream economy, and can thus help create robust models for the safety and security for sustainable labour conditions.. This is even more critical and urgent today, during and in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Tackling current and real issues for artists' communities is urgent, however it is not enough to look at the present struggles alone but to anticipate future problems as well. Bearing this in mind, we must create new protocols of economic solidarity to provide long-term alternatives to secure livelihoods. Our work is to build alliances with each other, as well as to create infrastructures of collaboration and exchange through trust, to facilitate skill and knowledge sharing.

When social benefits and welfare assistance are limited under immigrant residency permits, then critical research and new solidarity economies become urgently necessary. We welcome anyone who would like to co-create a blueprint for how we can emerge from these simultaneous crises by shaping new community economies as well as by putting care at the heart of artistic and social debates.