

## Relocating Artists at Risk in Latin America (Summary Document)

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Arbeitspapier / working paper

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Cuny, L. (2021). *Relocating Artists at Risk in Latin America (Summary Document)*. (ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy). Stuttgart: ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen). <https://doi.org/10.17901/AKBP1.06.2021>

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**Martin  
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**Abstract**

This brief summarises key findings and recommendations of a report that maps existing temporary relocation programmes for artists and cultural workers based in Latin American countries. The report investigates the prerequisites for partnerships between arts institutions and human rights organisations as a means to better protect artists at risk and to promote artistic freedom. The human rights and the arts sectors approach these aims from their different perspectives, with different terminology and different focuses. The study calls upon these two sectors to develop synergies in their strategies to better meet the needs of artists at risk in Latin American regional contexts in all their diversity.

The full report is available at:  
[doi.org/10.17901/AKBP1.05.2021](https://doi.org/10.17901/AKBP1.05.2021).

# Relocating Artists at Risk in Latin America

**Laurence Cuny**



## Background

Artists significantly contribute to cultural diversity and to the creation and preservation of open and democratic societies. In response to rising threats to artistic freedom worldwide artists are increasingly included in temporary relocation programmes. Arts-specific initiatives have been set up to enable at-risk artists to continue their practice in another (safer) country.

These initiatives have been mostly based in Europe and the United States so that threatened artists seeking protection could commonly not remain in Latin America. This situation is changing with more focus on establishing regional relocation programmes and an increased attention to the role of artists as actors of social transformation.

This brief summarises a larger report that maps current relocation initiatives in Latin America and examines potential future developments. The information presented in the report was gained through a literature and desk review and semi-structured interviews with respondents who manage programmes at the regional and international level, with representatives of arts organisations as well as relocated artists and academics. Given the limited scope of the report, it does not consider the specific context of every Latin American country but focuses on common challenges in elaborating strategies for the protection of artistic freedom as well as linking human rights organisations and arts institutions. Four ‘spotlights’ on selected national contexts (Mexico, Argentina, Costa Rica and Colombia) provide information on the types of relocation initiatives available and their potential for development.

The main purpose of the report is to provide a starting point and an initial mapping of actors for those interested in further research and in establishing partnerships for new relocation initiatives or the expansion of existing ones for artists. This summary is meant for a diverse group of readers, including artists, cultural workers, arts organisations, human rights organisations, relocation programmes and donors. The publication will be complemented by an episode of the podcast “¡El Arte no Calla!”

[anchor.fm/artistsatriskconnection](https://anchor.fm/artistsatriskconnection)

## Advancing artistic freedom and the protection of artists at risk

In the late 1990s the repression of the human rights movement was very intense in Latin America. Protection schemes developed in parallel with the international recognition of human rights defenders (HRDs) in the 1998 United Nations Declaration. Several states, civil society organisations and intergovernmental bodies such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights created programmes to protect human rights defenders. International non-governmental organisations with presence in Latin America, such as Front Line Defenders, Peace Brigades International or Article 19, and national organisations, such as Somos Defensores in Colombia, Fundación Acceso in Costa Rica, Justiça Global in Brazil, Unidad de Protección a Defensoras y Defensores de Derechos Humanos in Guatemala have developed skills and resources, including (digital) security training, legal assistance, psychosocial support, physical protection and visa support. Temporary relocation or shelter in safe houses has been part of these integral protection systems and one of the options offered to HRDs at risk.

In Latin America the often more subtle censorship faced by artists and cultural workers has gone relatively unnoticed and artists have not been included in the above-mentioned protection schemes. This situation has started to change in the last ten years, with more attention given to artistic freedom and the protection of artists at risk at the international level. Human rights organisations and arts organisations are increasingly addressing the challenges faced by artists and are recognising their role in promoting right-respecting societies. This translates into self-relocation of individuals through grants or the extension of protection networks to artists, often related to the protection of specific human rights (e.g. sexual orientation, environmental rights, gender issues).

The conversation around artistic freedom in the terms used by the relocation community is, however, relatively new in Latin America. The first relocation programmes were established in Mexico and Brazil as part of the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN). Their objective was to provide relocation for writers and creatives from outside the continent, not to respond to the need for protection of Latin American artists. The first relocation programme providing protection for all individuals at risk, including artists from inside Latin America, was Shelter City Costa Rica. Two projects are under development in Mexico and Brazil with support from ProtectDefenders.eu and there are plans to expand the university-based relocation model experimented by ICORN in Mexico and Brazil to other universities in several countries. These are promising developments.

However, some challenges remain in addressing the specific needs of artists. Unlike HRDs, artists are not collectively organised. They do not commonly belong to strong unions connected to an international movement. They

appear to be isolated and in economically precarious situations that are not conducive to claiming rights. Artists do not necessarily identify as HRDs and may even reject being labelled as such. This label can be perceived as an infringement upon their freedom to create and upon the nature of artwork. In this context the recent development of the notion of ‘cultural rights defenders’ is an opportunity to build alliances and common strategies between arts organisations and human rights organisations.

In Latin America, there exist more than 30 arts residencies connected to international networks. They do not usually employ human rights terminology, but some are nevertheless socially engaged and have potential as partners in relocation programmes. Arts organisations generally lack experience in safety and protection mechanisms or in judicial processes (presenting claims, following threats, etc.). They can, however, provide accommodation and spaces for exhibitions. As arts venues they can also bring opportunities for debate on artistic freedom and engage new audiences.

### Connecting Latin American and Global Art and Relocation Initiatives

The map visualisation translates the information gathered for the report into a visual tool and highlights support networks for at-risk artists in Latin America, including art residencies, relocation programmes, organisations that provide legal and human rights support, and artistic support. In doing so, it might encourage contact and exchange between actors from the artistic sector and from the human rights and relocation community. It can also serve as a starting point for a deeper analysis at a national level.

The map indicates the current relocation initiatives in Mexico and Brazil that are part of ICORN (since 2006 and 2017 respectively) as well as two initiatives in these countries that are supported by ProtectDefenders.eu, including Casa Xitla. It also includes Shelter City Costa Rica (created in 2018) and Somos Defensores in Colombia (created in 2006).

- ★ Relocation initiatives in Latin America
- ▲ Other safety and support organisations
- ▲ Art residencies
- ▲ International protection and relocation initiatives based in Europe and the United States

For the complete map see p. 42-43 in the full report here: [doi.org/10.17901/AKBP1.05.2021](https://doi.org/10.17901/AKBP1.05.2021)



## Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward to the international, regional and national actors that are part of the 'ecosystem' of the protection of artists at risk and relocation programmes:

- 1. Increase awareness and monitoring of artistic freedom both at the national and regional level.**  
This includes documenting violations of artistic freedom; enhancing visibility of the situation of artists at risk when needed; listing relevant legislation and monitoring case law; developing support networks and research; and offering spaces for information-sharing and awareness-raising.
- 2. Examine the potential that labeling artists as 'cultural rights defenders' (when relevant and accepted by them) may have for their protection, and further explore the link between protecting artists at risk and promoting access to a diversity of cultural expressions and the full realization of cultural rights.**
- 3. For new temporary relocation programmes, a mapping of country/regional/international allies should be the starting point of a feasibility study.** Identification of previous experience with the relocation and protection of artists at risk as well as the collection of available tools can be a means to inform decisions and maximise resources.
- 4. Include art residencies and art institutions in the mapping of country/regional resources.** Arts residency networks should be invited to discussions on the protection of artists at risk as they can invite their members to partner with relocation programmes.
- 5. Include the promotion and defence of artistic freedom and the support of shelter initiatives in the programming of foreign cultural centres.** These entities should offer spaces for discussions that are suited to the language and priorities of cultural and arts institutions. They should likewise extend an invitation to human rights organisations.
- 6. Reinforce cooperation between organisations that provide emergency grants for self-relocation of artists at risk and for relocation programmes.** Such organisations can build on the in-country expertise of relocation initiatives to inform decisions on security situations and adequate financial support. These organisations can also inform self-relocated artists about the existence of relocation initiatives and facilitate their access to services through programme partnerships.

- 7. Further examine the role of universities in hosting artists at risk within the region and the potential for hosting schemes at universities.** Build on the expertise and resources developed at the regional and international level to develop university-based hosting programmes.
- 8. Adapt training programmes provided by relocation initiatives to the specific needs of artists.** This may include training and resources concerning the following activities: curating controversial content; writing an artist's statement on controversial material; acquiring knowledge on artists' rights, including status of the artist and copyrights or communicating the importance of artistic freedom.
- 9. Conduct an evaluation of the experiences of artists from Latin America hosted in relocation programmes to assess their needs and to analyse the multiplier effect in terms of the number of applicants and the impact on their communities.**
- 10. Include country-specific mappings of cultural actors and resources that can be activated when hosting artists at risk.** In particular, identify and liaise with artists' professional entities to provide relocated artists with the best opportunities to continue their work. Such entities may include trade unions (where they exist), artists' independent organisations, museums, exhibition spaces, biennales and festivals, touring companies, studios, as well as all actors involved in an artist's professional development at the local, regional and international level.

## Imprint

The study "Relocating Artists at Risk in Latin America" by Laurence Cuny was commissioned by the Martin Roth-Initiative (MRI) and is published in the ifa Edition Culture and Foreign Policy.

The MRI is a joint project of Goethe-Institut and ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) and is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

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