
Martin
Roth
Initiative



Martin Roth- Initiative

Temporary relocation programme
for artists and cultural actors at risk

Martin Roth-Initiative: Temporary relocation programme for artists and cultural actors at risk

Art and culture can profoundly contribute to social change. The bedrock of such contributions is artistic freedom. Yet, we are experiencing an increase in pressure on artists and cultural actors in many places around the world. Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Sudan are just some of the countries that we have associated with political and economic crises, authoritarianism, violence, and exodus in recent years.

The world is in turmoil. New centres of power have emerged in which values such as freedom and the rule of law are often weighed differently than in Germany or the European Union. Illiberal contexts are on the rise, narrowing space for cultural actors, artists, media, and civil society organisations. Furthermore there are the crises and wars with global repercussions. Intermediary organisations continuously develop international cultural exchange despite increasingly challenging conditions. Today, civil society protection programmes such as the Martin Roth-Initiative are needed to counter this pressure.

The Martin Roth-Initiative enables at-risk actors to continue their work in safety and thus uphold free discourse – in Germany or in respective neighbouring countries. Through these scholarships, we bring together committed individuals and organisations from all over the world who advocate for peace, democracy, and human rights. We network actors in culture and education in close cooperation with local partners, thereby strengthening civil society.

The cooperation between ifa – Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen and the Goethe-Institut within the framework of the Martin Roth-Initiative is unique among the intermediary organisations of German foreign cultural policy. Together, we create safer spaces for at-risk artists and cultural actors around the world. Together, our work goes far beyond the fates of individuals. Together, we must continue to empower them.

Johannes Ebert,
Secretary General,
Goethe-Institut &
Gitte Zschoch,
Secretary General, ifa –
Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen

The Martin Roth-Initiative supports courageous artists and cultural actors who are often exposed to high risks in repressive contexts. Being able to support at-risk artists and cultural actors, ensuring they are (temporarily) safer and can continue their crucial work, is a privilege. We understand this challenging task as an act of solidarity with artists worldwide who, in extremely difficult circumstances, stand up for values that are also increasingly being called into question here in Germany and Europe. Unfortunately, we cannot always fully satisfy the growing need for support, but the commitment of the scholarship holders and partner organisations is encouraging. We see these individual cases and yet, we want our work to have an impact far beyond the individual. The scholarship holders often continue to work with and for the local communities in their countries/regions of origin, even in exile. They enrich the arts and cultural scene in Germany and in other countries, opening up spaces for dialogue that are needed in an increasingly polarised world.

Maik Müller,
Head of the Martin Roth-Initiative



About the Martin Roth-Initiative

Founding organisations

ifa

ifa - Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) works with partners around the world to advance freedom in the arts, research, and civil society. It provides activists, artists, and academics with a mouthpiece, promotes cooperation, and pursues its goals bolstered by European partnerships. The ifa builds networks around its core strengths of art, research, and civil society to achieve sustainable impact.

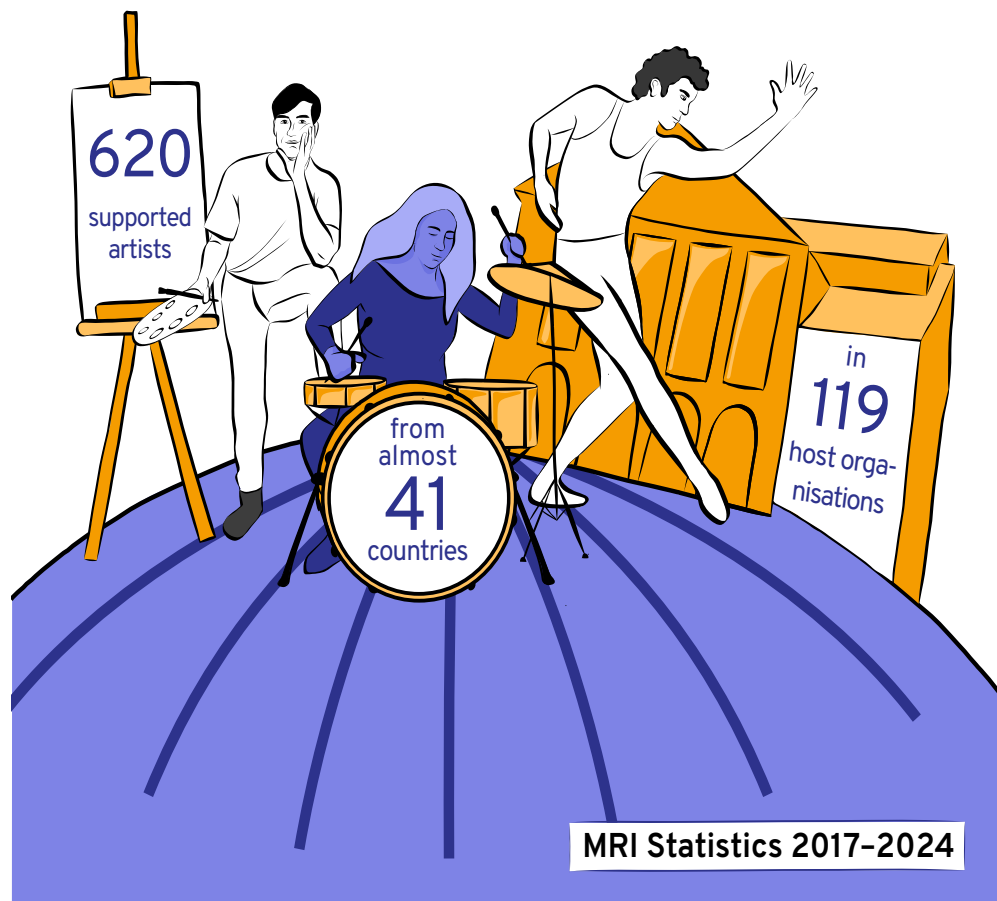
The Goethe-Institut

The Goethe-Institut is the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany and operates on a global basis. It facilitates international cultural exchange, fosters access to the German language, and promotes the free development of culture and science.

The Martin Roth-Initiative (MRI) was founded in 2017 in response to the global shrinking of civic spaces and is carried out in conjunction with ifa – Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen and the Goethe-Institut. The MRI's work is underscored by its vision of an open society in a peaceful world in which artists and cultural actors can freely engage in their practice, and civil society actors can freely take action for democracy and freedom of expression.

The MRI offers temporary protective relocation to Germany or other safe countries to at-risk artists and cultural actors around the world who advocate for open societies, freedom, peace, and democracy through their artistic and cultural work, reject any form of discrimination, and experience restrictions

to their freedom or threats from state and/or non-state actors due to their work or for other reasons. The temporary protective relocation is coordinated in cooperation with German or international partner organisations. Accordingly, host countries' cultural scenes and local civil societies are of particular importance, in that these are the spheres in which the scholarship holders work during the scholarship period and receive active support, enabling them to continue their artistic careers. The Martin Roth-Initiative aims to ensure that the scholarship holders can safely return to their countries of origin after their projects end – or that they have begun their entry into the host country's society.



MRI Statistics 2017-2024

Funding programmes

The Martin Roth-Initiative funds cultural and civil society organisations to be able to temporarily accommodate at-risk artists and cultural actors and provide them with scholarships, thus empowering them to continue their work in a safer context. The Martin Roth-Initiative also offers other funding opportunities for artists and cultural actors, including direct funding, which enables them to receive support independently of host organisations.

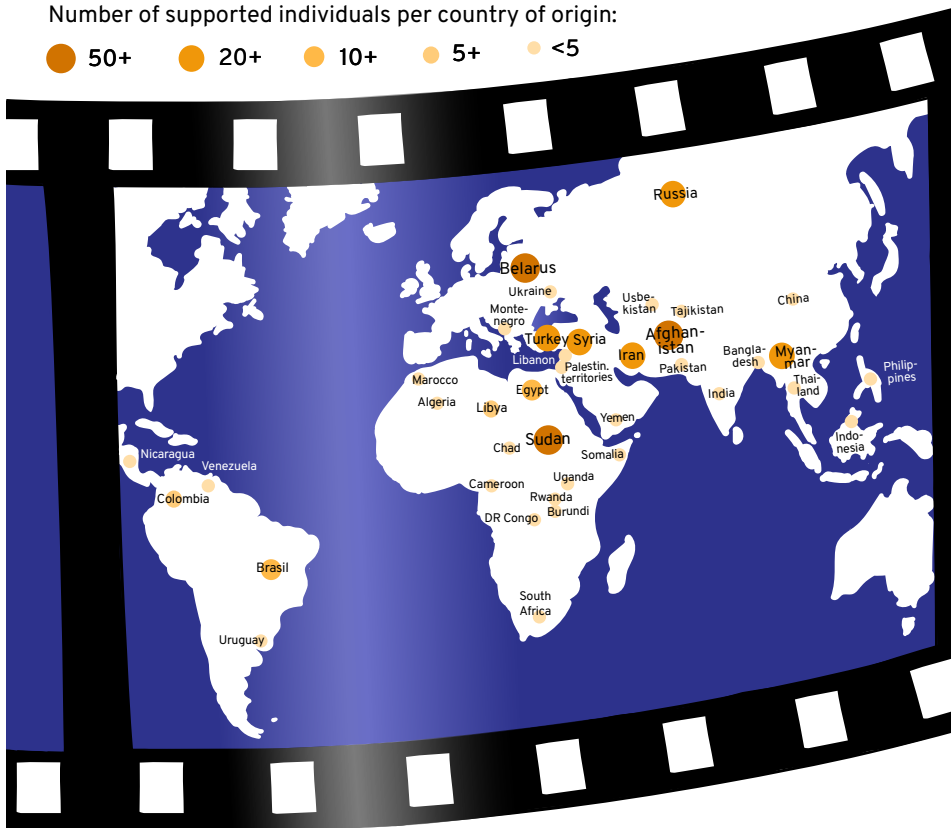
Funding in Germany

In cooperation with cultural and civil society organisations (host organisations), at-risk artists and cultural actors have the opportunity to undergo protective relocation to Germany on a temporary basis to continue their creative work.

Countries of origin of MRI fellows

Number of supported individuals per country of origin:

● 50+ ● 20+ ● 10+ ● 5+ ● <5



Mohamed Anwar Egypt, Sudan, MRI scholarship holder

„I'm a political cartoonist and comics artist. I do graphic novels and animation films also. Imagine that you arrive to a new country, you don't know the language, you don't know the network. Pretty hard challenge, but for me this was a success story. My artistic practice was a big question for me, but I was lucky to be working on one of the biggest projects that I have been doing in my artistic life during this hard time. For me, the most important form of support by the Martin Roth-Initiative was financial support for this project. The second was networking with other artists, who have been exactly in the same situation as I was. To feel not alone is something super big in these moments.“

„For me
this was a
success
story.“



Samad Sharif,
German Association for
Central Asia e. V.,
host organisation,
Berlin

„Collaboration with the MRI has been an immense help for all the artists from Afghanistan and Iran that we support. The scholarship holders represent art that is banned by the government in their countries. With the funding from the MRI we had a great opportunity to organise concerts and workshops in Germany, and in Europe, too. The artists can be a voice for their art and this can have an immense impact, also for the voice of other artists in the region.“

„The scholarship holders represent art that is banned in their countries.“

Funding in regions of origin

At-risk artists and cultural actors are offered protective relocation on a temporary basis within their region of origin, either with the individual funding or in so called hubs with the support of host organisations, or through direct funding.

Protective relocation with host organisations

This type of funding from the Martin Roth-Initiative enables cultural and civil society organisations (host organisations) to temporarily host artists and cultural actors at risk within their region of origin (e.g., in a neighbouring country), provide them with a scholarship, and empower them to continue their work.

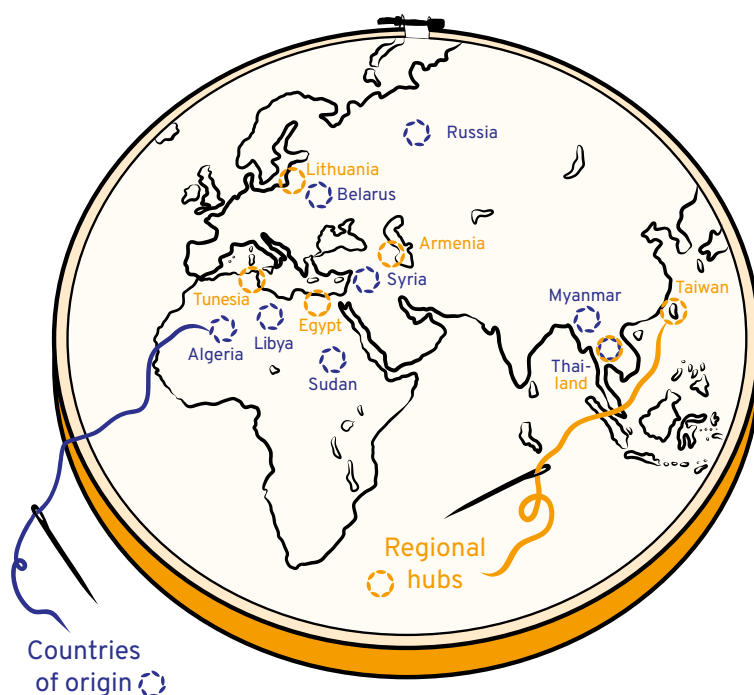
Direct funding without host organisations

Since 2023, the Martin Roth-Initiative has allocated a limited amount of direct funding for artists and cultural actors in emergency situations. Scholarship holders are thus enabled to travel independently to a location where they are safer. This form of support includes a one-off scholarship payment and is usually intended for a period of three months.

Support for partner organisations

This form of funding from the Martin Roth-Initiative enables selected partner organisations (host organisations) outside of Germany to support several artists and cultural actors within their region of origin. In addition to implementing necessary protective relocation for groups in so called hubs, these partner organisations' capacities are also strengthened.

Hubs of MRI partner organisations in regions of origin



Support and networking activities

The Martin Roth-Initiative offers comprehensive support and networking activities for scholarship holders to ensure that they may continue their artistic practices in a safe and supportive environment as well as make local and international connections. This is made possible through the MRI's targeted networking activities and special resilience-building programmes.

Capacity Building Networking

The MRI attaches great importance to capacity building for scholarship holders. With specially designed training programmes on digital security or workshops on trauma-informed communication, in addition to other opportunities, the MRI aims to provide artists and cultural actors with the necessary tools to strengthen both the skills they need to continue their work as well as their personal resilience in a constantly changing environment.

The MRI offers scholarship holders networking opportunities through coordinated networking trips at key cultural events in Germany. In addition, the MRI promotes dialogue with major actors in the German cultural scene through targeted networking meetings. These opportunities are augmented by network events that serve to deepen the exchange of experience among artists and cultural actors, as well as additional training programmes that strengthen scholarship holders' professional skills.



Anna Chistoserdova Belarus, MRI scholarship holder

„I am a Belarusian art manager and curator and a co-founder of Ambassada Kultury Organisation. I moved to Germany in mid-2021, and then realized that there is no way back home for me because of the current political situation in my country. The Martin Roth-Initiative and its scholarship programme was the only one possibility to continue my life, at least in safe conditions, but as well to professionally develop myself. My work in the framework of the projects I was realising during the MRI scholarship influenced my local artistic and professional communities a lot. It gave me a possibility to present these hidden voices internationally and to talk more about the context of my country, and to present more contemporary art from Belarus.“

„It gave me the possibility to present these hidden voices.“

Jenny Alten artifact e. V., host organisation, Potsdam

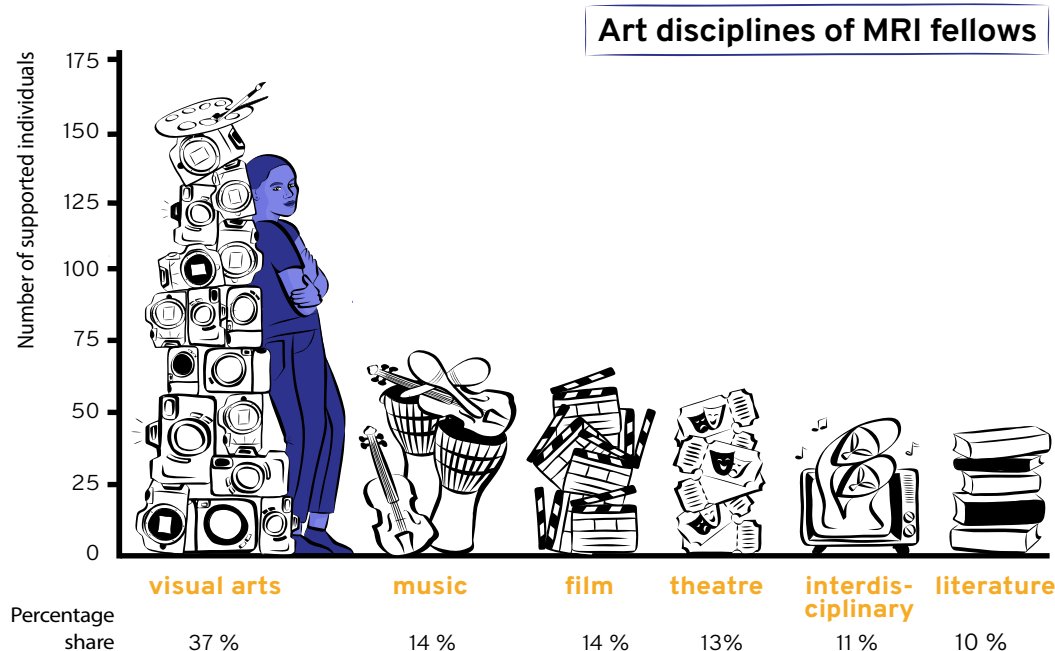
„While we were hosting artists with the MRI, the biggest challenge for us as an arts association was that we had never come into contact with such form of administration and trauma before. But we grew a lot as an organisation as a result. It was also very important that there was no pressure to push forward with artistic production at every single moment, but, rather, the money was available [for the artists] to arrive and sense the traumas and only then begin to find out how this would flow into artistic expression.“



„We grew a lot as an organisation as a result.“

Research & publications

Parallel research has played a major role in the activities of the Martin Roth-Initiative, especially at its inception. The concrete implementation and funding of the MRI's protective relocation schemes is bolstered by the extensive knowledge and experience documented in publications over several years through research commissions. These findings are continuously incorporated into the MRI's work and are available in various publication formats on MRI's website; they are therefore also accessible to artists, cultural organisations, and other protection programmes.



MRI contacts

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