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HOLD YOUR GROUND

**Anti-eviction resource
for independent cultural centres**



TRANS EUROPE HALLES

INTRODUCTION

Eviction is a growing concern among Trans Europe Halles members and across the independent cultural sector more broadly. This anti-eviction resource has been developed by Zosia Szczepańska, a research intern at Trans Europe Halles (TEH), based on her research (see more below). It is designed to be practical and accessible, and is written for people active in independent cultural spaces.

The resource is built on the main research findings and organised around three phases: before, during, and after eviction. This distinction emerged from the research and shows the most meaningful network's support at each stage. The "before" phase is the most extensive section because, based on the research findings, pre-eviction support can make the biggest impact.

The inside combines reflection questions and worksheets that name what TEH can build collectively with its members. Additional resources are attached, along with a collection of quotes from participants who have contributed to this resource.

It is a starting point that we, as Trans Europe Halles, can build on, and it will grow as more centres contribute their knowledge and experience.

The research background

The original research was conducted in spring 2026 by Zosia Szczepańska, a student of Global Project and Change Management, as part of her bachelor's thesis at Windesheim Honours College (Zwolle, Netherlands). It posed and answered the question of how independent cultural centres across Europe engage with international networks during various eviction phases. It further suggested what a more meaningful engagement could look like.

The data was collected by conducting 12 interviews with four participant groups across Greece, Italy, Portugal, Moldova, Germany, Switzerland, France, Serbia, and Belgium:

- Group A – Independent cultural centres currently facing eviction threats
- Group B – Network representatives reflecting on their existing support practices
- Group C – External experts with relevant knowledge in urban advocacy or legal support
- Group D – Centres not currently facing eviction threats, sharing about network support

The data was analysed and triangulated by incorporating a document analysis of publications made by networks and independent cultural centres.

The main findings, further explained throughout this resource, include:

- Eviction arrives suddenly, and most centres engage with international networks reactively, during eviction or after, not before.
- Centres that navigate eviction most successfully had two conditions already in place: community embeddedness and democratic governance.
- Shifting from crisis response to “before eviction” for more deliberate and context-sensitive work that truly shifts institutional decisions about eviction.
- Concrete tools needed: legal knowledge transfer, governance and community capacity building, and solidarity funds.
- Recognising eviction as an increasingly political process.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource brings together what we found through research with independent cultural centres across Europe that have experienced or are at risk of eviction, as well as international network representatives and other experts. It is intended to help you better understand your situation and inspire you to build the conditions that make your centre more resilient.

You do not need to read it from start to finish. The resource is organised into three phases: before, during, and after eviction. If you are currently in an active eviction, go to Section 3 – During. If you are navigating recovery, go to Section 4 – After. If you are reading this because you want to be prepared, which our research strongly suggests is the most useful thing you can do, start at Section 2 – Before.

One finding we've prioritised in building this resource is that the before phase is the most important and the most underused so far. Centres that we talked to repeatedly emphasised the strength that comes from investing in community roots and organisational resilience, over the years, before any threat emerged. With this toolkit, we want to take a meaningful step toward establishing anti-eviction support as a network.

You will notice that some sections contain structured worksheets to fill in and others contain open boxes that name what we want to build together. This is intentional, as the resource creates a space to generate collective knowledge that is still needed.

CONTEXT & DEFINITIONS

What do we mean by eviction?

In the context of independent cultural centres, eviction refers to the forced or pressured loss of a physical space (building, venue, or site) that a centre uses to carry out its activities. This can happen when a landlord (public or private) ends a lease, a municipality decides to redevelop a neighbourhood, a funding body withdraws support, or other disagreements over occupancy take place. Importantly, eviction is often a process that unfolds rapidly within a highly pressured timeline, leaving centres with limited agency throughout. Eviction in the independent cultural sector is a structural and broader issue. This means that centres are displaced as a result of gentrifying neighbourhoods and shifting political or funding priorities. That's also why accounting for those broader issues can be a significant part of understanding your individual risk.

What do we mean by independent cultural centres?

For the purposes of this resource, an independent cultural centre is defined as a non-commercial community space that hosts cultural, artistic, or civic activities outside of mainstream institutional structures and funding mechanisms. This includes squats, social centres, artist-run spaces, community art and hybrid spaces that combine cultural programming with social or political missions. These spaces often operate with limited resources, on precarious terms, but with a deep commitment to access and community. Their models, such as relying on volunteer labour and alternative funding structures, can place them outside the protections available to more institutionalised organisations.

Why does this context matter?

More and more often, we hear from our members that eviction is a real concern that should be addressed better in our network, and we believe the impact can be extended even beyond.

Independent cultural centres are often the collective infrastructures where people meet, organise, and create. That's why losing such spaces has real consequences for artists and also the social life of neighbourhoods. The removal can break entire community networks and the opportunities it creates, extending the impact beyond those who are involved in the centre.

The research behind this resource also found that centres described eviction as arriving suddenly and without opportunity for open negotiation. That is why we think it's important to draw attention to the organisational resilience and community embeddedness that help centres survive, but which need to be in place before the threat emerges.

All this is increasingly more relevant considering the political climate around independent cultural support across Europe. Funding cuts and other institutional decisions are becoming more and more common in many countries, as expressed by a participant: "I think we can feel how the civic space is narrowing. The state is taking spaces from initiatives that are critical and vocal. We are being pushed to the periphery – it's a political statement."

TEH strives to acknowledge and address the political dimension of this issue in this resource and beyond.

A quick self-reflection

If you are not sure where your centre stands, these questions can help you reflect on your situation and identify where it might be worth putting your attention. These questions cannot tell you precisely how at risk you are, as the national legal contexts vary and risk depends on factors beyond this checklist. Take it as a first guiding step!

About your space:

- Do you have a formal lease or written agreement for your space?
- Do you know when it expires and what the renewal terms are?
- Do you know on what grounds your landlord or municipality could end the arrangement?
- Have there been any recent signals that your space might be under pressure?

About your organisation:

- If your director left tomorrow, how would the organisation continue to function?
- Are legal and administrative documents up to date and accessible to more than one person?
- How are decisions made in your centre? Is that process documented and transparent?

About your community:

- If your centre faced eviction tomorrow, who outside your usual audience would care?
- Are you embedded in local political conversations and dynamics?
- Do you have relationships with other cultural spaces or community groups nearby?

If several of these questions bring out gaps, that is useful information. The following sections offer ways to work on them.



BEFORE EVICTION

The research behind this resource identified a consistent pattern. The centres that maintained their community and found new spaces were the ones that had built two things over time: deep community embeddedness and democratic, resilient organisational governance. This is built through everyday choices about how you engage your community and how you run your organisation.

Since these building blocks can't be just quickly assembled when a threat arises, this section offers a reflection and a possibility to exchange knowledge collectively.

Know your legal position

Legal knowledge is one of the most significant gaps identified. Centres consistently described not knowing what strategies were best for their lease or whom to turn to for advice about their situation.

This is understandable given the limited resources, but some steps can be taken within your capacity. We offer here a structure to help you map your own situation, so you know what questions to bring to a lawyer, an activist, or another member centre that has relevant experience.

Map your legal situation (fill this in with your team)

- What type of agreement do you have for your space?
- When does it expire, and what are the renewal terms?
- On what legal grounds can the agreement be terminated?
- How much notice are you entitled to?
- Who owns the building? (private owner, municipality, foundation, public institution, etc.)
- Does your space or organisation have any status that could offer additional protection? (heritage building, etc.)

Building shared legal resources

Legal protections for cultural organisations vary significantly across Europe. This resource aims to materialise our first reflections about this issue and cannot yet provide solid legal help. However, we think that there is a lot of capacity in our collective network, and we want to make this capacity accessible. We want to draw on what centres across the network know and begin to build shared legal resources based on our experiences.

Right now, we are continuing to map legal knowledge across the network and to strengthen our collaboration with the European Action Coalition - a network with expertise in housing rights and anti-eviction activism in Europe.

In the meantime, members in the network who have navigated such situations are among the most useful sources of knowledge. **Reach out to TEH, and we will connect you.**

Build community embeddedness

We heard from our members that deep community roots help navigate eviction better. Community mobilisation saved spaces or supported the centre to continue after the building was lost. As one cultural practitioner currently navigating an active eviction put it: "the most important thing is to build a strong solidarity base - people that are attentive, that kind of know what's going on, and are ready to be activated in case something happens. Because in the end, it's about that. The law might fail you."

One participant described spending six years building community before the threat of eviction arose. When eviction came, they had a history behind them that helped them reimagine this big change. Another participant reflected on a centre that was quietly evicted and noted that they had thousands of visitors to the space, but the centre had not embedded itself in a community that could mobilise.

From this, we learn that community embeddedness is not the same as having a large audience. It means that the people who interact with your centre feel a sense of ownership and belonging. In particular, that your centre is part of the broader civic life of its neighbourhood and city.

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What the research found

Centres that survived eviction with communities, after losing their building, had invested in local relationships over the years. This support structure is a pre-eviction condition and can't be as easily assembled during a crisis.

Questions to reflect on with your team

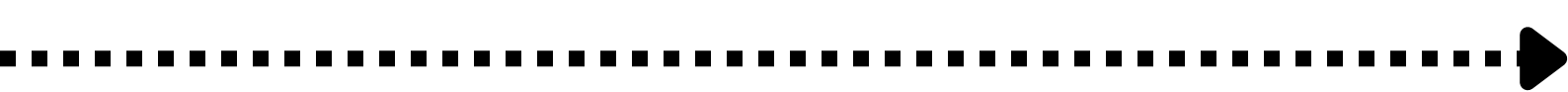
- Who considers your centre theirs? Who finds a community there?
- Are you embedded in local networks beyond the cultural sector: neighbourhood associations, social or political movements, activist organisations?
- Do local politicians or public officials know what your centre does and why it matters?
- If you needed to mobilise your local community tomorrow, how would you do it, and how confident are you that it would work?
- How do you keep your community engaged?

This guidance is about the quality of your relationships with your community over time. Advocacy and solidarity work best when built on trust and not just for an emergency.

Governance and organisational resilience

The second condition we found that helps to build anti-eviction resilience is democratically organised governance. When decisions and knowledge are shared across a team, more people feel invested, and the organisation becomes less dependent on any single person to operate.

This can also be important beyond eviction. Democratic governance creates resilience because it distributes the decision-making capacity and sense of ownership that organisations need to survive difficult periods.



What the research found

Whether the centre survives as a community often depends on whether organisational resilience was built before the crisis. Centres where key knowledge and decision-making power were with one person were more vulnerable.

Questions to reflect on with your team

- How are major decisions made in your organisation? Who is involved, and how?
- Is organisational knowledge like contracts, contacts, legal documents, and founding history shared across the team?
- Does your community have any meaningful role in the organisation's direction, beyond staff and board?
- Have you documented your governance structure in a way that would allow a new team to continue the work?
- What would happen to your organisation if your current director or founding member left?

This guidance is about the quality of your relationships with your community over time. Advocacy and solidarity work best when built on trust and not just for an emergency.

Use the TEH network

In our experience, centres often came for help only when a crisis had already arrived. At that point, the support that networks could offer was limited, such as sending support letters to create visibility. This rarely shifts institutional decisions because effectiveness depends on local political context and cannot be assumed across cases. As one participant reflected, being part of a network felt like a guarantee, but it's not without proactive engagement.

We think that there's a big capacity that the networks can offer: knowledge from similar cases or solidarity before a crisis becomes an urgency. We are also exploring connections to other forms of expertise.



What the research found

Network support is most effective before and after eviction, and less during. During the active crisis, it often arrived too late to build the resilience needed or was shaped by the network's general agenda (rather than the centre's specific needs). The shift this research calls for is investing in the relationship before eviction happens.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS:

- If you are a TEH member and have any concern about your space situation, however vague, reach out now to ask for a conversation.
- Ask about similar cases in the network. Someone has likely faced a similar situation in a comparable political context, and their experience can turn out to be the most useful resource available.
- Actively use the network for knowledge exchange, not only in emergencies. Workshops, peer visits, and shared publications offer implementable support. The value of the network grows with how actively you are engaged.





DURING EVICTION

Photo: @Mains D'Oeuvres

If your community is already mobilised, your governance is functioning, and you know your legal situation, the following steps can be far more effective. If not, some are still worth trying. However, the research detailed that reactive crisis response has significant limits.

WHEN THE THREAT BECOMES REAL – IMMEDIATE STEPS

Communicate with your community

- Do not manage this privately if you can avoid it. Silence tends to make things worse, both for your community's trust and for your ability to mobilise support.
- Identify a clear point of contact and regular updates. This can ensure that the crisis communication works best and is structured.

Get legal clarity as quickly as possible

- Review your agreement with someone who can help you understand it: a lawyer, an activist, or another centre with relevant experience.
- Understand specifically: on what grounds is the eviction happening, is it legally sound, and what options exist to negotiate?
- Document everything from this point forward. Keep records of all communications with your landlord, municipality, or whoever is driving the eviction.

Think about what kind of support you need

From the research, we saw that general advocacy, such as sending solidarity letters or international campaigns, does not work equally in all contexts. In some political environments, international attention creates meaningful pressure on local authorities, but not always. One participant described how letters written to a municipality were never opened and how a public protest would have created more political pressure in their situation.

Ask: What would actually help in your specific context? Visibility? Legal support? Financial resources? Peer advice from someone who has been through this? Being context-specific will make your requests more effective.

Activate your network

- Contact TEH and describe your situation concretely: what is happening, what you need, and what kind of support would be meaningful in your local context.
- Ask to be connected with peer centres that have faced comparable situations.
- If financial pressure is part of the crisis, ask about emergency crowdfunding options and the TEH Solidarity Fund.

Questions to think through your advocacy approach

The effectiveness of advocacy depends heavily on local context. These questions can help you think things through before reaching out.

- Does your municipality care about its cultural reputation locally, nationally, and internationally?
- Who in local politics is sympathetic to your work, and can they do anything meaningful?
- What does your community need from now on: mobilisation, or something else?
- Who has the power to change the decision, and what influences them?

Building shared crisis knowledge

What tactics have worked or not in your national and political context? What do you wish someone had told you when the crisis began? We want to gather this knowledge from centres across the network and work toward more context-sensitive crisis support. We hope to collect those experiences via the Telethon (a data update campaign to verify our database).



AFTER EVICTION

For several centres interviewed, losing their physical space was devastating, but the community that had been built around the centre continued to exist, and in some cases found new forms.

What often made the difference was whether the community had been built to outlast the physical space. This brings us back to Section 2, which is why, if you are reading this section after an eviction, one of the most useful things you can do is also read that section, as a guide for what to build next.

THE POST-EVICTION PERIOD

Give space for grief and rest

The period immediately after eviction is often marked by exhaustion after fighting for a space for months or years. One participant described the post-eviction support she received as "a healing process after years of exhausting work to organise for people every day."

Consider: what do the people at the core of your organisation actually need right now? It may be an acknowledgement of what was lost.

Document what you've built

Make an effort to document the history of your centre and community impact. This preserves institutional memory and supports future funding applications. One centre produced a documentary with this intention: "It is important to look at what you created together."

Keep your community connected

Even without a physical space, your community can maintain connection through events in other spaces.

Reach out to the network

The research found that network support is effective in the post-eviction period, when what centres need is a space to reflect, reimagine, and rebuild. TEH's Rebuilding to Last project served very well for this as it connected centres with workshops, funding, and peer support to help them collectively rethink their future.

Questions to carry forward

- What are you most proud of from your centre's work? What do you want to carry forward?
- Who is the community that still exists, even without the building?
- What did the eviction reveal about your organisation that you want to do differently?
- What kind of space or model would actually serve your community best going forward?

Building shared crisis knowledge

What helped you rebuild after eviction? What models, resources, or connections made the difference? What do you wish had existed?

We want to create space for centres to share post-eviction experiences and establish what recovery can look like across different contexts.



WHAT TEH IS DOING

OUR COMMITMENT

The research that produced this toolkit identified that international networks tend to engage most with members during the crisis phase of eviction, but this is also where their support is least effective. The most meaningful support comes before (building the preconditions for resilience) and after (supporting recovery and reimagining).

TEH is working to address this misalignment

- Shifting toward pre-eviction support by investing in knowledge exchange, governance capacity, and community-building support for members before a threat is present.
- Promoting a communication system through which TEH stays in regular contact with members about their space situation, so that support can be offered earlier and more proactively.
- Context-sensitive support to move away from generic solidarity responses toward support that is adjusted based on what actually makes sense in the local political and legal context.

The collaboration with the European Action Coalition

One direct outcome of the research process was the initiation of a partnership between TEH and the European Action Coalition. This collaboration aims to bring knowledge from housing movements that is directly applicable to cultural centres through legal strategies, organising tactics, and international solidarity.

The collaboration is being developed with the ambition to offer a physical opportunity for TEH members to engage with anti-eviction knowledge. We especially hope to connect members in similar situations and shape how the network develops its support going forward.

CONTACT US

If your centre is facing eviction, is at risk, or has been through it and wants to share what you learned, please reach out. The knowledge in this toolkit comes from centres willing to share their experience.

Contact:

- Erika Haxhi, TEH Senior Project Manager – about the future of anti-eviction in the network | erika@teh.net
- Borut Cigale, TEH Community Manager – to get connected to the members who have experienced eviction in the past | borut@teh.net
- Zofia Szczepańska, author of the toolkit – if you have questions about the contents of this resource | szczepanska.zofia7@gmail.com

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

If you want to go deeper:

- [Creative Land Trusts: A Practical Guide](#)
- [Handbook of Resistance Tactics Against Evictions – Collection of tactics from housing justice and anti-racist movements in Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Germany, Portugal and Spain – European Action Coalition](#)
- [La Pah. A Handbook – Lessons for collective action from the fight for the right to housing](#)
- [Right To the City/Resources](#)



Photo: @TEH97_Nele Tammedid

WORDS OF ADVICE

FROM PARTICIPANTS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE RESOURCE

"The most important thing is to build a strong solidarity base – people that are attentive, that kind of know what's going on, and are ready to be activated in case something happens. Because in the end, it's about that. The law might fail you." (Sirigaita, Portugal)

"The biggest thing networks can bring is the international solidarity it allows for. We are a little social centre in Lisbon with 5,000 associates – but our experience is not unique, and we can lean on each other's experiences."
(Sirigaita, Portugal)

"When you're part of a network, your weight is bigger than yours alone. I remember a cultural centre in the suburbs of Paris. Because it was part of a network, it was much easier for them to become visible, and that visibility helped them."
(Right to the City, France)

"When this situation starts to unfold, you need to be battle-ready.
You need a plan beforehand."
(PhD researcher in civic cultural centres, Italy)

"I always invested in being part of TEH more for the familiarity – the sense of a tribe and the connection. Trans Europe Halles is an institution that also asks from its members. We need to support it too."
(independent cultural space, Greece)

"Legal knowledge is fundamental. You don't have to agree with the law, but you have to know the situation. Who owns it? What are the legal issues? If the police come, what do you do? Do you give your ID or not?"
(anti-eviction activist & writer, Serbia)

"Any individual who is a renter should know everything about their landlord, the maximum information possible. It's important to have a lawyer you can ask legal questions to, so you can work with correct information."
(Sirigaita, Portugal)



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