

Guidelines for fees and wages in independent theatre



VTS Vereinigte Theaterschaffende der Schweiz

Introduction

Wages are rarely or never discussed on Switzerland's independent theatre scene, let alone negotiated. If anything, independent artists are glad to have bookings.

VTS has therefore drawn a comparison: how does the annual income of a freelance actor with a college degree and average number of bookings compare to that of a social education worker with a college degree?

Our calculations reveal that an actor with an average number of bookings earns less than half of what a social education worker earns.

This prompted us to work out commensurate minimum wages, which can serve as a guideline when negotiating wages in the future. Although these figures correspond to minimum fees, in reality they cannot be paid, however. Thus, we refer to them as «guideline wages».

A medium-term goal is to establish these guideline wages as minimum wages among organisers and authorities.

The wage calculations are based on the results of the following research:

on the one hand, from surveys among freelance actors and organisers; on the other hand, from information on comparable job descriptions (e.g. social education worker with a college degree) and the basis of calculation used by the city of Bern for determining the minimum living wage.

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Part I:

Guideline fees for performances of independent theatre productions

The wages for guest performances listed below refer to independent productions for which rehearsals and production costs were paid in full, in accordance with Part II.

We are aware of the fact that there are also other financing models and production conditions in Switzerland. Cabaret productions in particular are frequently carried out without remuneration for rehearsals and thus require higher fees for guest performances. These and other productions which have to finance their production costs almost exclusively through guest performances are not taken into account here.

Another exceptional case – the solo production – is listed separately because an actor in a solo production generally has more expenses, for which the estimated fee of CHF 450.– (cf. Part II) is too low.

Guideline fees recommended by VTS:

For a single performance

Number of actors/actresses

per performance

2	CHF	2'619.–
3	CHF	3'465.–
4	CHF	4'311.–
5	CHF	5'158.–
6	CHF	6'004.–

Each additional actor/actress

CHF 600.–

For solo production

For each additional performance at the same venue

Number of actors/actresses

per performance

2	CHF	2'262.–
3	CHF	3'029.–
4	CHF	3'796.–
5	CHF	4'563.–
6	CHF	5'330.–

Each additional actor/actress

CHF 550.–

per performance CHF 2'256.–

Basis of calculation for guideline fees

For one performance only

1st performance

Number of actors	2	3	4	5	6
Actor's fee, including expenses	900.–	1'350.–	1'800.–	2'250.–	2'700.–
Ancillary costs, including vacation allowance	180.–	270.–	360.–	450.–	540.–
Technical (flat-rate) (1)	550.–	550.–	550.–	550.–	550.–
Infrastructure production (telephone, rental fees, etc.)	50.–	50.–	50.–	50.–	50.–
Vehicle / transport costs (2)	300.–	400.–	500.–	600.–	700.–
Royalties (15% of proceeds) / average (2)	297.–	393.–	489.–	585.–	681.–
Guest performance mediation / production management 15%	342.–	452.–	562.–	673.–	783.–
Total	2'619.–	3'465.–	4'311.–	5'158.–	6'004.–

For 2 or more performances

As of 2nd performance

Number of actors	2	3	4	5	6
Actor's fee, including expenses	800.–	1'200.–	1'600.–	2'000.–	2'400.–
Ancillary costs, including vacation allowance	160.–	240.–	320.–	400.–	480.–
Set-up/take-down technical (flat-rate) (1)	0.–	0.–	0.–	0.–	0.–
Technical during performance (flat-rate) (1)	400.–	400.–	400.–	400.–	400.–
Infrastructure production (telephone, rental fees, etc.)	50.–	50.–	50.–	50.–	50.–
Vehicle / transport costs (2)	300.–	400.–	500.–	600.–	700.–
Royalties (15% of proceeds) / average (2)	257.–	344.–	431.–	518.–	605.–
Guest performance mediation / production management 15%	295.–	395.–	495.–	595.–	695.–
Total	2'262.–	3'029.–	3'796.–	4'563.–	5'330.–

(1) When the ensemble's own technician is hired

(2) Varies according to actual expenses (railway expenses for actors, transport, car, stage)

Solo production

Actor's fee, including expenses	900.–
Ancillary costs, including vacation allowance	180.–
Technical during performance (flat-rate) (1)	400.–
Infrastructure production (telephone, rental fees, etc.)	50.–
Vehicle / transport costs (2)	200.–
Royalties (15% of proceeds) / average (2)	245.–
Guest performance mediation / production management 15%	281.–
Total	2'256.–

(1) When the ensemble's own technician is hired

(2) Varies according to actual expenses (railway expenses for actors, transport, car, stage)

Basis of calculation for guideline fees for performances of independent theatre productions

Surveys conducted by VTS among organisers have shown that fees for performances of independent theatre projects differ just as much as the criteria on which they are based. Oftentimes, they do not cover the actual costs, or a deficit from the rehearsal phase has to be covered with cross-financing, which leads to a forced reduction of the daily fee for the actors and actresses. On the basis of wage calculations for actors and actresses and additional accruing costs, a list was compiled, outlining the wages necessary to cover the costs of a performance of an independent theatre production. This calculation serves as a basis for budgeting for both organisers and independent theatre productions, with the objective of being able to pay actors and actresses reasonably fair wages.

Part II: Guideline wages for actors / actresses in independent theatre

Guideline wages recommended by VTS:

Gross wage, with rehearsals, per week:	CHF	1'250.–
Gross wage per performance (single performance)	CHF	450.–
Gross wage per performance (several performances, same venue)	CHF	400.–

Basis of calculation

Gross annual income actor/actress with main activity in independent theatre

With average number of bookings (1 st example)	Unit	Nr	Fee	Total
Rehearsals - 3 projects	Weeks	21	1'250.–	26'250.–
Single performances	Days	8	450.–	3'600.–
Multiple performances	Days	26	400.–	10'400.–
Further activities (film, forum theatre, narration, teaching positions)	flat-rate			4'000.–
Annual gross income				44'250.–
Monthly gross income				3'687.–
Net income ca. - 13%				3'208.–

With high number of bookings (2 nd example)	Unit	Nr	Fee	Total
Rehearsals - 5 projects	Weeks	35	1'250.–	43'750.–
Single performances	Days	12	450.–	5'400.–
Multiple performances	Days	52	400.–	20'800.–
Further activities (film, forum theatre, narration, teaching positions)	flat-rate			4'000.–
Annual gross income				73'950.–
Monthly gross income				6'162.–
Net income ca. - 13%				5'361.–

With low number of bookings (3 rd example)	Unit	Nr	Fee	Total
Rehearsals - 2 projects	Weeks	14	1'250.–	17'500.–
Single performances	Days	6	450.–	2'700.–
Multiple performances	Days	15	400.–	6'000.–
Further activities (film, forum theatre, narration, teaching positions)	flat-rate			2'000.–
Annual gross income				28'200.–
Monthly gross income				2'350.–
Net income ca. - 13%				2'044.–

Activity level for calculation of fees

Based on surveys among VTS members and professional experience, we assume that an actor with an average to moderate number of bookings takes part in three productions per year, so that along with 34 performances, an income from additional sources (film / television / narrator / courses, etc.) can still be generated. The profession of an independent actor includes, along with the actual rehearsals and performances, studying the roles, memorizing texts, pursuing professional development, seeking engagements, etc.

Fee estimations / comparison

Ideally, the goal to be achieved would enable an actor to attain an annual income on a par to an employee in a comparable profession (with a college degree). Clarifications in the field of social work have revealed that a person employed in the field of social animation, with a college degree and approximately 8 years of experience in the profession, earns an annual income of approximately CHF 91'000.– (without allowances) at institutions in the city of Zurich. A freelance actor with guideline wages proposed by VTS in years **with an average number of bookings (1st example)** comes nowhere near to earning such an income, but only rarely in years **with a high number of bookings (2nd example)** – at best.

According to the administrative commission of the higher courts in the canton of Zurich (Circular, May 2001), the subsistence level (minimum living wage) for a single recipient amounts to CHF 1'100.– per month; according to the SKOS Guidelines (Swiss Conference for Social Assistance) in the city of Bern, CHF 960.–, plus housing costs, social insurance contributions (provided they are not already deducted from the wage), exceptional professional expenses as well as welfare and supplementary benefits. In years with low activity, an actor with the guideline wages proposed by VTS in years **with a low number of bookings (3rd example)** barely earns an income on a par with the minimum living wage.

With the guideline wages recommended by VTS, actors and actresses in independent theatre might not earn wages identical to employees with the same level of education in other professions but at least, with an average number of bookings, they will be able to make a living.



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