



**We take care
of the cultural
ecosystem**

Towards the Culture Compass: A Sector Blueprint

Discussion paper

September 2025

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Foreword

This discussion paper outlines the approach of the European cultural sector, represented in its diversity, towards the future of EU cultural policies.

As the European Commission prepares its new cultural strategy, the Culture Compass, approximately 30 cross-border European cultural networks—members of [Culture Action Europe](#)—have worked together to develop a complementary vision: the Sector Blueprint of the Culture Compass.

In March 2025, Culture Action Europe presented its first strategic direction for the Culture Compass at the consultation roundtable organised by the European Commission. In spring 2025, as part of our Network Coordination Action, we started a dialogue with our members and agreed to produce a Sector Blueprint of the Culture Compass. Working groups composed of Culture Action Europe network member representatives have been formed around key priority topics: **1) artistic freedom; 2) working conditions; 3) artistic research, culture and innovation; 4) international cultural relations; 5) culture and health and well-being; 6) culture and sustainability; 7) cultural participation; 8) access to cultural and arts education; 9) culture and security; 10) culture and digital.**

Networks met at the [BEYOND](#) biennial gathering in Turin and at the Members' Forum on 7 June 2025 to discuss the Blueprint's principles and structure.

Over summer 2025, the working groups drafted ten policy briefs on their respective topics using a shared template: outlining the context of the issue, proposing solutions, and identifying relevant resources (existing research, studies, policy recommendations, and best cases).

Across the prepared policy briefs, several common trends emerge:

First, culture is a foundational element of democratic and civic infrastructure, and access to culture and cultural participation is a fundamental right. This status should be clearly embedded in policies at every level and reflected in concrete measures to support cultural democracy, access to cultural and arts education, and socially engaged arts.

Second, there is a shared call for stronger analysis and mutual learning, for example, through the Artistic Freedom Observatory or Culture and Well-being Observatory or the Cultural Democracy Index. However, evidence is seen not as an end in itself but as a way to build the political case for targeted interventions where problems are documented. There is a clear need to consolidate the extensive body of studies, research, and expertise developed by the sector in recent years, including through EU-funded projects.

Third, we argue for stronger EU-level protections. Members call for more binding EU measures on urgent issues, such as an Artistic Freedom Act and a Directive on Decent Working Conditions in the Cultural Sector. They recognise that cross-border cultural activity and mobility require alignment and guarantees that individual Member States cannot always provide.



Fourth, attention turns to the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034, which will determine the funding architecture for culture. There is broad support for a visible and well-resourced Creative Europe — Culture Strand within the proposed AgoraEU programme, complemented by structural culture components in other funding instruments (European Competitiveness Fund, Horizon Europe, Global Europe Fund, National and Regional Partnership Plans). It is not just the overall culture budget that's under scrutiny; networks are also proposing specific funding priorities and schemes, funding conditionalities, and governance structures.

Fifth, there is broad recognition that international cultural relations should be a key strand of EU cultural policy. Amid global tensions and conflicts, international cultural relations offer a way for the EU to act as a global partner focused on mutual benefit and reciprocity. Europe's cultural and creative sectors are globally active and committed to solidarity with cultural and creative actors worldwide. Now is the moment to deliver on the 2016 Joint Communication 'Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations' and to embed international cultural relations within a more ambitious and coherent cultural strategy. The EU must also keep pace with global developments: the UN, G7, and G20 have all recently strengthened their cultural dimensions.

Finally, members consistently caution against instrumentalisation of culture. As set out in our [State of Culture](#) report, culture can contribute meaningfully to democracy, security and competitiveness only when core conditions are in place: artistic freedom, fair working conditions, and public support.

These insights reaffirm the principles Culture Action Europe has advanced over time: **Ask, Pay, Trust the Artist.** **Ask** by giving artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors a seat at the decision-making table; **Pay** by ensuring fair working conditions and investment; and **Trust** by recognising culture's foundational role and backing the experimental, forward-looking work of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors.

Ten policy briefs are interconnected and were drafted with the aim of strengthening the cultural ecosystem as a whole. Different topics reinforce and depend on one another.

We hope our suggestions will offer inspiration and constructive input for shaping the future of cultural policies in Europe. This document is a living framework and will continue to evolve as our work develops and new insights and feedback emerge.

Before presenting the ten thematic policy briefs, the Sector Blueprint sets out an overarching vision that complements the individual topics by keeping the bigger picture in focus.



Introduction

Editorial by Culture Action Europe

Our Culture Compass: Sector Blueprint relies on three main arguments based on data, research and in-depth knowledge that European cultural networks have collected over the years.

1. Culture is a foundational public good beneficial for artists and the broader public alike.

Future EU cultural policy must treat culture as a foundational public good and a distinct sector with a clear public purpose. In this context, cultural institutions, regulatory frameworks, and shared infrastructure (such as public media, archives, arts education institutions, digital cultural platforms, etc.) are upstream goods that generate common experience and democratic consent. For individuals, it means a personal, experiential practice of being: of joy, meaning-making, resilience, and care that shape how we live in the world.

Because of this foundational character, culture is essential to the becoming and making of Europe and is inherently linked to the lived experience, to the production of presence, in Gumbrecht's words. The answers we seek, including to urgent questions around the future of democracy, competitiveness, and security, are not 'out there,' waiting to be discovered. They are the work of being, not merely knowing. The European project is, at heart, a project of becoming European.

Therefore, the future lies in a cultural policy that supports not only what culture means but what culture does, as practices of living and choosing in all their diversity and plurality. Democracy, ultimately, is a culture of openness to alternative self-descriptions. Policy should provide a public mandate to trust the variety of experiences that culture generates. It can do so by investing in safe, inclusive public spaces and cultural infrastructure—spaces for public debate and deliberation—and supporting the independent cultural sector, grassroots movements, civil society, and socially engaged arts.

To truly treat culture as foundational infrastructure, the EU must promote cultural participation and arts education and ensure equitable access for young people and underrepresented groups everywhere. Member States should guarantee access to the arts through their education systems.

Above all, cultural policies must ensure freedom that touches not only artists but all people. For the artist, it is the ability to create without fear of censorship, state pressure, or economic retaliation—to tell uncomfortable truths, to experiment, to provoke, to move. For the individual, it is the right to encounter these works: to experience art that challenges, questions, or inspires, to be confronted with different perspectives, or to feel seen in stories that might otherwise remain untold—and nurture this openness through continuous learning. In these moments, the freedom of the artist meets the freedom of every other person. One



cannot exist without the other. And in a volatile world of polarisation, disinformation, and shrinking civic space, this shared freedom is what keeps societies open, diverse, and democratic. Safeguarding it means safeguarding the right of all of us—artists and other people—to imagine, question, and create the futures we want to live in.

2. Culture is the structural condition of European democracy. It sustains the civic space—openness, contestation, and shared imagination—on which democratic resilience depends.

The cultural sector insists that amidst the [erosion of the rule-based world order](#) and the global shift of power, Europe must remain democratic and build alliances with those who choose democracy.

For that, Europe has to become stronger, capable of protecting its current and future citizens, its human and natural environments, and the quality of life necessary for democratic freedoms and rights to be fully exercised.

The shortcomings of specific democracies or the crises they face should not be used to devalue democracy itself. Democracy is a good in its own right, no matter what advantages techno-authoritarian or illiberal systems claim.

Democracy needs culture because culture sustains the unpredictability that democracy depends on.

Unpredictability keeps politics from hardening into scripted routines that authoritarians can control. It allows citizens to make accountable choices and to decide on their futures freely, rather than being ruled by fear or inertia. Culture opens space for protest, dissent, and agonistic contestation—disagreement that is necessary for democratic deliberation. **It is part of Europe's civic infrastructure that enables people to take part meaningfully in public life.** It is where the social contract between citizens and authorities becomes a lived experience shaping how we belong, participate, and imagine a shared future rooted in democratic values.

Beyond contributing to competitiveness and the economic cooperation logic,

Beyond being deployed as an integration tool to foster unity and to make Europeans 'fall in love with the single market,'

Beyond serving as soft power or as a unifying force within the emerging European security architecture,

Culture has a larger potential: to act as the structural condition for civic space, our living-in-the-world together. Culture is how civic space becomes tangible. It convenes Europe's immense talents, resources, and know-how and helps organise a political system capable of putting them to work. That makes culture inherently political. Whether we choose to embrace this political character or not is up to each of us; the freedom to do so is precisely one of European culture's strengths.



3. Amid fragmented markets, bureaucracy, and stagnation, culture broadens Europe's horizon of possibilities and must be embedded in decision-making. We need to build the channels that carry cultural imagination into policies and budgets.

Culture defines the limits of our imagination; it sets what is possible before policy even begins. It rehearses futures in public and lets strangers talk concretely about what comes next. That is why political projects so often begin as cultural projects understood in a broader sense. Victor Hugo's *United States of Europe* prefigured European integration long before Schuman and Monnet. The Rationalist community around Eliezer Yudkowsky's *Sequences* shaped contemporary AI frameworks and the ethics of AI. The counterculture of 1968, feminist performance art, science fiction, and environmental theatre expanded the political imagination long before their ideas entered institutions.

Culture equips us for the future by allowing us to inhabit fictional worlds and imagine lives beyond our own. It is the richest archive of shared human experience, that, at the same time, gives us space to look beyond our personal story and imagine the multiple possibilities that lie ahead. Culture is experience beyond experience.

If culture expands Europe's option set, our institutions must be able to act on it. The cultural sector in Europe does not lack ideas. Just look at biennales, artists' manifestos, and festivals, where culture is full of rethinking the future. What is needed is infrastructure to translate cultural ideas into political action; pipelines that carry imagination into law.

In EU governance terms, this means shifting from lowest-common-denominator compromise to structured agonism and accepting principled confrontation to make real decisions. It means revising the Treaties to update decision-making procedures, enable faster accession, and give the EU more competence to provide the enabling conditions for creation—physical and digital infrastructure, tools, and platforms—while content decisions remain independently with artists and the autonomy of cultural organisations is respected.

The boldest cultural visions must have a say at the decision-making table and a way to make it to the rules, budgets, and mandates. Just as fundamental research is essential in science, so too must culture be trusted with the space to experiment and bring these ideas to life.



Policy briefs

1. Artistic Freedom

Edited and coordinated by Reset!

Context

‘Artistic freedom is the freedom to imagine, create, and distribute diverse cultural expressions free of governmental censorship, political interference or the pressures of non-state actors. It includes the right of all citizens to have access to these works and is essential for the well-being of societies.’ [UNESCO](#) defines artistic freedom in these terms, underlining its essential role in safeguarding pluralism and free expression. We consider artistic freedom to encompass not only the freedom of artists but also freedom of other workers in the cultural and creative sectors and the autonomy of cultural organisations.

In light of the increasing instrumentalisation of culture and the arts for political messaging or propaganda, clear and context-sensitive safeguards are needed. In spaces dedicated to artistic expression, whether on-site or online, audiences should be able to expect artistic ambition and creative experimentation. At the same time, in broader public information spaces, transparency and accountability standards must apply, without allowing such standards to become a pretext for censorship.

Alongside media independence and academic autonomy, the degree to which artistic freedom is upheld serves as a strong indicator of a society’s democratic health. Today, however, artistic freedom in Europe faces increasing pressure. Attacks on artistic freedom in Europe are taking increasingly diverse and concerning forms—from direct censorship and political interference to the manipulation of public funding. While these developments differ across national contexts, they point in the same direction: a broader trend of democratic erosion, where cultural expression becomes a target of political control.

In recent years, cultural actors across Europe have observed several cases of **politically motivated changes in the leadership of public cultural institutions**. These dismissals—sometimes imposed from above, other times prompted by pressure leading to voluntary resignations—signal a clear attempt to subordinate artistic vision to political agendas. Such ‘purges’ have been documented across several Member States.

Another critical pressure point is the growing **politicisation of public funding**. With cultural budgets shrinking in many countries, funding decisions have become an increasingly effective tool of influence. In some cases, governments—whether national or local—explicitly or implicitly condition financial support on alignment with official narratives. Institutions or individuals expressing dissent risk being excluded from subsidies. For example, in the context of what many international observers and legal scholars describe as a possible genocide in Gaza, numerous cultural actors across Europe have reported being pressured



into silence regarding their support for Palestinian communities, for fear of losing institutional support or public funding.

These developments are compounded by other repressive mechanisms. **Self-censorship** is on the rise, as artists anticipate potential backlash, reputational damage, or financial consequences for critical or controversial work. In parallel, **direct censorship** is deployed in certain countries where authorities openly block or ban artistic productions that diverge from dominant nationalist or ideological narratives. They sometimes even restrict access to public spaces for the purpose of creating art. These restrictions disproportionately affect marginalised communities, whose voices are already underrepresented in mainstream culture.

Online repression is also an emerging front. Artists increasingly face harassment and disinformation campaigns on social media, often coordinated and amplified by algorithms that reward polarisation and outrage. The resulting digital climate has become hostile to artistic expression and fuels further self-censorship.

Although these pressures manifest differently across the Union, the underlying trends—political interference, financial coercion, and institutional vulnerability—are widely shared. **Yet, no EU-wide mechanism exists to systematically monitor these developments.** Unlike the media sector, which benefits from regular analysis and public indices, artistic freedom remains largely undocumented at the European level. This absence of reliable, comparable data represents a major blind spot in policymaking and prevents timely, coordinated responses.

The European Union has a clear legal and moral obligation to act. Article 13 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states: *'The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected.'* As such, the EU must take steps to ensure this freedom is not only acknowledged but actively protected.

Proposals

- **Integrate artistic freedom into the Rule of Law Report.** The Rule of Law Report's chapter on media freedom and pluralism should be expanded to cover the full spectrum of freedom of expression, explicitly including artistic and academic freedoms. Together, artistic, media, and academic freedoms form a mutually reinforcing 'triangle of expression' that is integral to democratic governance. The inclusion of artistic freedom in the Rule of Law Report would help document the growing threats to cultural expression and provide a structured basis for response. Monitoring of infringements on Artistic Freedom as part of the Rule of Law Report could be supported by regular research and reporting mechanisms coordinated with a European observatory on artistic freedom.
- **Establish a European Observatory on Artistic Freedom.** It is proposed that the Commission establish a dedicated and independent observatory to monitor and report on violations of artistic freedom in collaboration with organisations with proven expertise and active engagement in the field. It could be structured as a multilingual online portal allowing artists and institutions to confidentially report cases of



censorship, harassment, or political interference. Built in collaboration with European networks and other organisations already documenting such threats, the observatory would publish an annual analytical report and serve as a central hub for data collection. This data could contribute to and inform the Rule of Law Report.

- **Develop an EU Artistic Freedom Index.** To raise public awareness and enhance institutional accountability, the European Commission should support the development of an EU Artistic Freedom Index, possibly through the work of the European Observatory on Artistic Freedom. Inspired by the World Press Freedom Index compiled and published by Reporters Without Borders, or the [Free to Think report](#) by Scholars at Risk's Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, or the [Academic Freedom Index](#), this tool would provide an annual ranking of Member States based on the state of artistic freedom, drawing on data from the proposed observatory and civil society partners.
- **Develop an Artistic Freedom Act.** The Act could establish safeguards for artistic expression and institutional autonomy across the EU: prohibit political interference in programming and funding, require arm's-length governance for publicly supported cultural bodies, and mandate transparent, non-discriminatory criteria with due process and appeal when support is restricted or withdrawn.
- **Create a funding mechanism to support artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors facing restrictions on their artistic freedom.** Following the model of the Creative Europe's [Media Freedom Rapid Response Mechanism](#), the EU should establish a dedicated emergency fund for artists at risk under AgoraEU. Grants could be allocated to those facing repression, harassment, or loss of income due to the political content of their work.
- **Introduce artistic freedom clauses in EU funding.** We welcome the recognition of artistic freedom as a [guiding principle](#) of the Culture Strand under the proposed AgoraEU programme. The Commission should make respect for artistic freedom (incl. non-discrimination, institutional autonomy, and freedom from political interference) a formal condition for receiving support through EU funding streams.

While the EU can commit to upholding these principles in its own funding decisions or require cultural organisations to do so, we acknowledge that it cannot directly prevent political interference at national or local levels. Therefore, artistic freedom conditionality in AgoraEU should be supported by strong leverage mechanisms that influence Member States, as outlined in other proposals.

In cases where a Member State systematically breaches the rule of law and is consequently defunded, this may also jeopardise funding for civil society. To avoid this, safeguards are needed. For instance, in the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034 proposal, funds decommitted from a Member State's National and Regional Partnership Plan due to rule of law violations should be [made available again](#) for use under other programmes, particularly those that support democracy, civil society, Union values, or the fight against corruption. We



stress that these funds should be redirected to the AgoraEU programme to continue supporting civil society, including cultural actors.

- **Regulate tech platforms to prevent online harassment of artists.** The European Commission should ensure that digital platforms are held accountable for enabling or tolerating harassment against artists. Clear regulatory guidelines must require tech companies to monitor and remove content that targets artists and cultural workers, while upholding principles of free expression and artistic integrity. The guidelines could be introduced as part of the upcoming Digital Fairness Act.
- **Support youth-led initiatives and awareness campaigns.** To engage younger generations, the Commission should fund and involve youth-driven artistic initiatives and digital campaigns that promote freedom of expression and artistic freedom. This engagement should begin with understanding how young people themselves define and experience artistic freedom, particularly within today's polarised digital sphere. The Commission could establish a group of young contributors to act as an advisory sample—both to learn from their perspectives, which may be more informed than assumed, and to ensure they can meaningfully shape outcomes. Such initiatives could take the form of EU-sponsored podcasts, panels, exhibitions, and targeted social media campaigns highlighting the role of artistic freedom in democratic societies.



2. Working Conditions

Edited and coordinated by Creative FLIP

Context

The topic of working conditions is a continuing saga of sector needs and ambitions to improve the precarious living conditions of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors versus the willingness of the European Commission and EU Member States to take decisive actions in the right direction. Despite strong recommendations from the [OMC Working Group in July 2023](#) advocating for a distinct status for artists, and the [European Parliament's legislative initiative](#) in November 2023 calling for a directive on working conditions, the [Commission's response](#) in February 2024 fell short.

It proposes a High-Level Round Table on the topic, a mutual learning workshop on social security for artists and other mapping exercises but does not mention any concrete steps towards binding improvements on working conditions. There remains an urgent need for a clear framework to ensure fair working conditions for all artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors, including those who are at risk or displaced, with disabilities, Indigenous, from outermost regions and overseas territories, or with parenting or caregiving responsibilities.

Proposals

We propose a **Charter on Working Conditions** (adopted as a Communication of the Commission), an essential first step toward a directive. This Charter will include a **modular Framework** and launch a **multi-annual Consultation Process** to develop and maintain its content. While not legally binding, the Charter would carry both moral and political weight: by signing it, both the Commission and Member States would commit themselves to upholding its principles and taking responsibility for fair working conditions across the EU. Endorsements could also come from social partners and other European networks and organisations, while at the national level, the charter could be supported by employers and other cultural operators who collaborate with artists or commission their work.

The Charter will aim to:

- provide guidance for actions to improve the working conditions of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors by outlining principles and examples of good practices to follow;
- collect good practices from Member States on specific topics, including for use in Mutual Learning Workshops;
- be adaptive. Its modular structure allows for new topics to be added as the Charter evolves over time;
- be flexible allowing it to be applied at both EU and national levels;



- enable a non-compulsory but coherent framework on working conditions, which helps to structure and simplify policy discussions.

Fair Pay, Fair Share, Fair System—these three principles form the foundation of the Charter on Working Conditions. **Fair Pay** means that all artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors should be able to earn a decent living from their professional work. **Fair Share** encourages discussion about the division of proceeds among artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors in different contexts, whether national, regional, sectoral, or even at the project level. **Fair System** refers to the various parts of the cultural sector ecosystem and a fair distribution of proceeds across the value chain, from concept and production to distribution and reception.

The principles of Fair Pay, Fair Share, and Fair System cut across all topics of the Charter. Upholding these principles is also proposed as the basis for mandatory social conditionality in EU culture programmes, such as AgoraEU.

The Charter would include two key components:

1) The Framework

The Framework will focus on the following key topics:

- A clear **definition of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors** whom the Framework applies to.
- **Fair Pay:** Ensuring that artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors earn a decent living from their professional work in their country of residence and/or abroad.
- **Fair Labour Relations:** creating equal conditions for all types of contracts, whether permanent, fixed-term, temporary, part-time, remote, trainee, or self-employed.
- **Fair Social Security:** providing protection for all artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors against financial risks like illness, old age, workplace accidents, and job loss; preventing poverty and ensuring decent standards of living.
- **Fair Taxation:** designing taxes (incl. on income and turnover) that reflect the actual labour situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors.

Fair pay, labour relations, social security, and taxation must be addressed both at national and EU/international levels, while recognising the specific mobility needs of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors, including income stability, international collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

The Framework will follow a consistent structure across all topics, comprising five key components:

- **Priority:** a clear priority for each topic that aims to improve the working conditions of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors. Each priority demonstrates how it contributes to a fairer system.



- **Good practices:** concrete examples of existing practices and approaches that help advance the priority and support mutual learning. These examples will be collected from Member States and other relevant stakeholders.
- **References to EU** regulations, directives, and decisions that support the priority and validate the identified good practices.
- **References to national** legal frameworks and information providers (such as [Mobility Information Points](#)) that support the priority and its implementation at the Member State level.
- **Indicators** at the EU and/or national level that allow for tracking progress in relation to each priority. These indicators will be developed in parallel with the priorities and may include newly created ones or those selected or aggregated from existing statistical sources, such as Eurostat.

2) The Consultation Process

The consultation process, organised by the European Commission, will engage stakeholders in a structured way and propose a stock-taking event every two years to monitor progress and new developments at both EU and national levels.

This process may include the following steps:

- Launch of an **Expert Working Group**, consisting of independent experts and representatives of artists' organisations at the EU level (and, on a voluntary basis, representatives from the national level, such as former members of the OMC group on working conditions). It would be tasked with producing a draft Framework for consultation, including proposals for indicators for each topic. This group should be supported by extensive expertise, research, and evidence accumulated over the years by numerous organisations across the EU (see Annex A).
- Several rounds of **consultation** with artists' organisations (including those involved in international and national fair practice initiatives), social partners, and other European networks.
- Presentation of a **draft Charter on Working Conditions**, along with a two-year programme of actions, such as Mutual Learning Workshops and an initial round of indicator measurements.
- Following the Charter's adoption, a **biannual stock-taking conference** would be held to track progress and highlight new developments at both the EU and national levels.



3. Artistic Research, Culture and Innovation

Edited and coordinated by ELIA and AEC

Context

The [EU Work Plan for Culture 2023–2026](#) opens with a clear premise: ‘*Culture is an infinite source of inspiration and innovation.*’ Yet the EU still lacks structural, long-term support for artists, creators and cultural practitioners to pursue their most innovative and transformative work. In particular, the arts as a knowledge domain remain undervalued, despite their proven capacity to drive change within the cultural and creative sectors and industries and to help address today’s societal challenges across the green, digital and social transitions.

The EU should fully recognise the arts as a knowledge domain and support artistic research, positioning the arts within the knowledge triangle (research–education–innovation) at European, national and regional levels. Doing so will strengthen the cultural sector itself and contribute to EU priorities, such as social cohesion, democratic resilience and competitiveness.

There is a solid base to build on. The [New European Bauhaus](#) anchors arts and culture in Europe’s green and social transformation. [EIT Culture & Creativity](#) mobilises innovation across the cultural and creative sectors and industries. Horizon Europe has funded cultural, creative and artistic research, while EU competence frameworks (e.g., [Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#), [GreenComp](#)) recognise creative skills. Erasmus+ initiatives such as the Cyanotypes Sector Blueprint have expanded applications of creative and transversal competencies.

This momentum should not be lost. The sector faces funding cuts, pressures on freedom of expression and organisational autonomy, and excessive instrumentalisation. Plans to discontinue the Horizon Europe’s Cluster on Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society in the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034 are especially concerning. Despite repeated evidence from the sector, creative and transversal competencies are not clearly integrated into the [Union of Skills](#).

Proposals

- Recognise the **arts as a knowledge domain** within the European Research Area—by fully recognising **doctorates in the arts** across Member States and updating international research classifications, namely the OECD **Frascati Manual** so research in and through the arts is properly defined and comparable.
- Establish **Creative Innovation Dialogues**, a recurring forum between Commissioners and Directorates-General for culture, research, innovation, education and skills (and, when relevant, those for climate, environment, economy, and regional



development) paired with structured stakeholder consultation. The aim of such a forum would be to fully leverage the arts as a driving force of transformation and innovation, as well as to facilitate trans-sectoral engagement with the arts through EU policy and funding frameworks.

- Provide policy toolkits and roadmaps that Member States can use to widen equitable, diverse and inclusive **access to careers** in artistic research and creative innovation, starting with inclusive arts education across all levels.
- Embed creative skills and competences in the **Union of Skills**, including monitoring through the **European Skills Intelligence Observatory** and engagement of relevant experts in the **European Skills High-Level Board**.
- Secure support for collaborative research across arts, culture, heritage, and creativity as a **structural component** with its own dedicated financial envelope in the Competitiveness cluster under **Horizon Europe 2028–2034** Pillar II. Additionally, systematically support arts as an independent knowledge domain across all Horizon Europe pillars—the [recommendations](#) from the Artistic Research Alliance can provide guidance.
- Design **AgoraEU and Horizon Europe synergies**: how the outcomes of research and innovation projects can be leveraged and implemented to benefit the development and resilience of the European cultural sector.
- Position the cultural and creative sectors and industries as a strategic growth and resilience domain in **the Competitiveness Fund** with relevant funding.



4. International Cultural Relations

Edited and coordinated by EUNIC and Goethe-Institut

Context

Since 2007, the European Union's commitment to international cultural relations (ICR) has integrated culture as a vital element of its external action. A pivotal moment came with the 2016 Joint Communication, [*Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations*](#), which outlined key principles and objectives for the EU's engagement in this field. While not a strategy itself, the Communication laid the foundation for a more coherent, cross-cutting, and inclusive approach. It emphasised culture's contribution to sustainable development, intercultural dialogue, and heritage cooperation, while also integrating cultural policy into broader areas such as education, climate action, digital transformation, and development cooperation. This approach was further reinforced by the [*2018 New European Agenda for Culture*](#).

The EU's Member States have shown an increased commitment and ambition in the field of International Cultural Relations, fully conscious and respectful of subsidiarity, evidenced through the cultural dimension to EU external relations being a core priority in the [*2023–2026 EU Work Plan for Culture*](#), as well as the recent OMC group on the governance of EU ICR. This mirrors a wider global momentum around culture in international relations through other multilateral fora such as the G7, G20 and the UN.

Europe's cultural sector is deeply collaborative and international in its profile and reputation. Many of the European cultural networks are international at their core, committed to international solidarity and cooperation with fellow cultural and creative actors globally. In a global landscape shaped by geopolitical tensions, societal polarisation, the climate crisis, and rapid digital transformation, the cultural sector has evolved its practices and approaches. The international cultural relations approach offers a people-centred and values-driven approach to EU external engagement. Even more, the EU's distinctive ICR approach paired with EU external action in other political areas can provide a unique and attractive offer for collaboration with partners worldwide. By fostering trust, mutual understanding, co-creation, and long-term partnerships, the EU could offer a distinctive model of international engagement—one that connects meaningfully with diverse societies through culture. In contrast to authoritarian narratives that seek to influence public opinion and reshape global norms through coercion and top-down messaging, the EU's approach to international cultural relations could be more values-based and participatory. By consistently and sincerely prioritising co-creation and dialogue, the EU has an opportunity to position itself as a credible and committed partner in global cooperation.

However, despite its growing relevance, the ICR approach remains institutionally underpowered, lacking greater political leadership and resourcing. It lacks a fully-fledged strategy, suffers from fragmented coordination between EU institutions, Member States and civil society stakeholders, and is often constrained by limited resources and inconsistent political prioritization. These structural weaknesses risk undermining its potential.



Proposals

To fully unlock this potential, the EU must adopt a more strategic, coherent, and long-term approach embedded in its external action.

Achieving this requires increased investment, stronger coordination and political leadership. When strategically reinforced, the EU's international cultural relations approach can foster stronger partnerships, empower local communities, and contribute to addressing global challenges through dialogue, cooperation, and shared values.

The following proposals outline key steps to strengthen the ICR approach—not as isolated measures, but as interconnected actions that must reinforce each other to be effective.

- **Develop a fully-fledged EU strategy for International Cultural Relations as an integrated part of a wider holistic Culture Compass**

The EU must move beyond the 2016 Joint Communication and adopt a fully-fledged, binding strategy for international cultural relations. This strategy should articulate clear objectives, implementation mechanisms, and accountability structures.

The strategy should address current institutional weaknesses—such as fragmented coordination, lack of transparency, and limited stakeholder engagement—and provide a long-term vision for the role of culture in EU external action. It must also respond to global challenges, including the climate crisis, digital transformation, and rising geopolitical tensions and armed conflicts, by positioning culture as a tool for resilience, dialogue, engagement and transformation. It should be flexible enough to adapt to evolving global challenges and local realities over the coming years.

- **Mainstream culture as a strategic priority in EU external action**

The recent OMC group on the governance of EU International Cultural Relations highlighted that 'ICR need to be recognised as a policy field on its own, in which the EU plays an important leadership role'. To fully realise the potential of international cultural relations, the EU must treat culture as a strategic and cross-cutting dimension of its external action. This means ensuring the cultural objectives proposed consistently across the regional programmes of the new Global Europe Fund in the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034 must lead to concrete resources and programmes which can be operationalised with an inclusive governance.

Achieving this requires a substantial increase in dedicated funding. Current resources fall short of supporting long-term partnerships, responding to crises, or enabling inclusive participation. The EU must ensure that cultural cooperation is not only well-resourced but also equipped with flexible funding mechanisms that can adapt to rapidly evolving global realities and numerous fragile contexts—whether in response to conflict, displacement, environmental emergencies, or shrinking civic space.

- **Strengthen coordination and break down institutional silos**

The experienced and diverse European stakeholders and networks in International Cultural Relations are a valuable asset to the EU. What is required to build effective and distinctive



EU international cultural relations is a stronger coordination across EU institutions (including the European External Action Service / Foreign Policy Instruments, the European Commission (notably the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, the Directorate-General for International Partnerships, the Directorate-General for Enlargement and the Eastern Neighbourhood, the Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf) and the European Parliament), Member States through the Council, and implementing partners. A joint effort could form a significant ICR portfolio on the global stage. Fragmentation and institutional silos continue to limit the strategic impact of ICR initiatives. A more integrated approach—linking cultural policy with development, foreign affairs, climate action, and digital transformation amongst others—is essential both in terms of shared values and implementation of programmes.

- **Ensure inclusivity, accessibility, fairness and ethics of solidarity as underlying principles of ICR**

To make international cultural relations genuinely inclusive, the EU must address systemic barriers that limit participation, such as administrative (including visas), financial, linguistic and geographic inequalities. Funding programmes should be simplified, transparent, and accessible to a wider range of actors, including smaller organisations, grassroots initiatives, and those operating in underrepresented or marginalised communities in non-EU countries, in line with [Article 16](#) of the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

An enabling environment for people-to-people international relations through culture requires a visa facilitation process at the level of Member States, both within and outside the Schengen area, to avoid negative impacts on artists, workers in the cultural and creative sectors, and host organisations (such as loss of income, missed networking opportunities, reduced visibility, negative effects on mental health, and stress).

Fairness also means rebalancing power dynamics in partnerships. In collaboration with international stakeholders at multiple levels of competencies, the EU should provide the instruments (at funding, legal and capacity-building levels) to promote co-creation and shared ownership, as well as a partnership approach based on universal values and ethics of solidarity in cultural projects, ensuring that local actors are equal partners in shaping priorities and outcomes. Inclusivity must extend to the diversity of voices and perspectives represented in EU cultural cooperation. The EU should also support innovative approaches that tackle the climate crisis and decolonial practices, among other challenges.

Evaluation frameworks must move beyond quantitative metrics to include participatory, context-sensitive approaches that value social impact, mutual learning, and long-term capacity and relationship-building.



5. Culture and Health and Well-being

Edited and coordinated by Amateo and Cluj Cultural Centre

Context

The World Health Organisation defines health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.’ This perspective underlines the role of social, emotional, and psychological conditions in enabling people to live with dignity, connection, and meaning. Cultural participation directly contributes to these conditions: active forms such as singing, dancing, or community art-making strengthen agency, confidence, and belonging, while receptive forms such as attending concerts, exhibitions, or heritage sites foster reflection, empathy, and shared identity.

Key documents including the [World Health Organisation 2019 scoping review](#), the [2022 CultureForHealth report](#), the [EU Comprehensive Approach to Mental Health](#), the Open Method of Coordination group on culture and health, and the EU Work Plan for Culture establish a robust evidence base of these effects and outline pathways for integrating culture into health, education, social, and cohesion policies. Together, they demonstrate that arts and culture have measurable impacts on disease prevention, management, treatment, and recovery from illnesses, and highlight their potential as a structural element of well-being.

However, significant gaps persist at the systemic level. Because engaging in culture is still rarely recognised as a determinant of health and its role across other sectors is poorly understood, initiatives remain fragmented and lack coordination. The weak integration of culture into health policy risks instrumentalising the arts, rather than positioning them as equal partners. As a result, artists and cultural professionals continue to face insufficient recognition and remuneration, inadequate protection, and deficient structural support. Training and projects are largely driven from the cultural field alone, leaving an imbalance with health actors and relying too often on culture’s already limited budgets. Unequal access adds to the problems, with disadvantaged and marginalized groups frequently excluded, both as participants and as professionals. Finally, research and evaluation methods remain inconsistent and fragmented, limiting the robust evidence base that policymakers and health systems need.

While health policy remains primarily the responsibility of Member States, the EU can reinforce well-being through strategic, cross-sector action. Culture plays a vital role in supporting our mental and social health and can contribute to inclusion, social cohesion, and resilience in health, education, youth, social, active aging and care policies. Existing programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the New European Bauhaus, and Cohesion Policy already offer mechanisms to embed culture in these fields. However, other programmes lack entry points for cultural interventions. At the same time, EU responses to global challenges, including armed conflicts, migration, and the climate crisis, show how cultural approaches can help move beyond siloed solutions towards more holistic strategies that strengthen collective health, social resilience, and equity.



Proposals

- Adopt an EU Recommendation on Cultural Participation as a Determinant of Health and Social Well-being, requiring Member States to embed culture in health and social strategies at all levels, including measures that support the workforce delivering these activities.
- Regularly report on the frequency of active and receptive cultural participation by region, age, income, and social group; connect it to self-reported wellbeing, with benchmarks to reduce disparities (through Eurostat and national surveys).
- Anchor cultural participation within EU human- and social-rights frameworks (such as the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Pillar of Social Rights).
- In collaboration with the World Health Organisation/Europe, develop EU guidelines for integrating the arts into healthcare systems, covering procedures, roles, and implementation standards.
- Promote collaborative models in which cultural professionals work as partners with health teams in hospitals, elderly care, and mental health settings without compromising professional boundaries or instrumentalising culture.
- Mandate Eurostat to embed into surveys culture-sensitive metrics of individual and collective well-being—identity, belonging, trust, intergenerational exchange and civic engagement.
- Fund Horizon Europe clusters combining arts, social sciences, neuroscience, and health to develop new frameworks for understanding and measuring well-being. Recognise artistic and participatory methods as valid alongside traditional biomedical research. Integrate arts and humanities into medical and health education to foster a more holistic, inclusive approach to health.
- Finance arts-and-health actions primarily from health, social or regional budgets (not culture's limited funds), and establish multi-year, structural funding lines beyond short projects to ensure sustainability and sector development.
- Strengthen community infrastructures (schools, libraries, cultural centres, public spaces and festivals) as everyday entry points for creativity and collective well-being through Erasmus+, AgoraEU, National and Regional Partnership Plans, and the New European Bauhaus (NEB Lab).
- Establish an EU-level observatory within existing knowledge infrastructures (e.g. Knowledge Centre for Culture, Knowledge4Policy, Eurobarometer, Eurostat, CultureForHealth) to synthesise evidence, develop common frameworks, and pool best practices.



- At the national level, support the creation of arts and health competence centres as hubs for practitioner training, cross-sector collaboration, and community-based support.
- Integrate cultural well-being into climate and sustainability policies in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Fund youth programmes that combine artistic practice, identity exploration, peer support and mental-health guidance, including safe physical and digital cultural hubs. Strengthen arts education in schools to enable young people to express their creativity in a safe, non-judgmental, and non-competitive environment that fosters social bonds.
- Support arts-based initiatives that reduce burnout, build resilience, and help workers adapt to a changing world. Include cultural engagement in care protocols and staff support systems to protect the mental health, emotional well-being, and sense of belonging of workers.
- Support community-based arts programs integrated with social and care services to promote cognitive, emotional, and social well-being among older adults.
- Prioritise the mental health of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors as a structural issue. Strengthen EU-level research on mental health in the cultural and creative sectors, across different professions, statuses, mobility patterns, and stress factors. Address long-term risks such as lack of access to funding opportunities, regulatory issues, related administrative burdens (including visas), financial insecurity and social and performance anxiety. Support systemic solutions (accessible mental health services, preventative care, and peer-based support) adapted to the realities of the cultural sector.
- Ensure targeted mental health and well-being support for artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors from marginalised and vulnerable backgrounds, including persons with disabilities, forcibly displaced individuals, caregivers, emerging artists, LGBTQ+ individuals, ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, and those living in conflict zones. Such support should be recognised as a structural priority and delivered through a mix of formal and informal training and culturally sensitive, embodied, and community-based approaches to emotional resilience.
- Launch EU-wide awareness campaigns on arts and health literacy.



6. Culture and Sustainability

Edited and coordinated by IETM and ENCC

Context

The climate crisis, long recognised as a major threat to planetary sustainability, has only intensified over the past year. Natural disasters are unfolding worldwide and 2024 was the warmest year on record, the first to exceed 1.5°C above the pre-industrial average over a twelve-month period. Other environmental threats weigh heavily on Europeans' health: air pollution causes thousands of premature deaths in cities each year, and microplastics are increasingly present in our waters and our bodies.

At the same time, the green priority is losing political momentum. Unlike 2021–2027, the new EU priorities no longer feature the Green Deal as a standalone strategic direction. Instead, the Commission proposes a [Clean Industrial Deal](#), criticised as light on social and climate safeguards. Environmental organisations warn that the 2028–2034 budget proposal reduces green allocations, risking the downgrading of environmental policy to a mere 'PR exercise.'

As Europe increases defence spending, we must also safeguard climate and social commitments and avoid crowding-out effects. According to the New Economics Foundation, combined defence outlays could reach €613 billion annually and add significant emissions; regardless of the exact figures, the policy task is to protect green and social envelopes, set decarbonisation targets for defence, and pursue synergies (energy-efficient bases, green procurement, resilient infrastructure).

The European Central Bank said in its recently updated policy statement: *'Climate change has profound implications for price stability through its impact on the structure and cyclical dynamics of the economy and the financial system. Addressing climate change is a global challenge and a policy priority for the European Union.'*

Culture's role in the green transition remains under-recognised. Despite strong global advocacy and some rhetorical gains, culture has not been included in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and is absent as a distinct pillar of sustainable development in the UN Pact for the Future.

At the EU level, while the Creative Europe programme requires applicants to contribute to the EU's Green Deal, the Green Deal makes no mention of culture and has overlooked its potential as an ally in reaching climate goals and driving social and economic transformation. Creative Europe is expected to contribute to the EU's goal of dedicating 30% of its budget to climate action, and it acknowledges this as a priority for the cultural and creative sectors. However, since climate mitigation and environmental protection are not listed as explicit objectives of the programme, there are no indicators to track progress.

The recent AgoraEU proposal does not make explicit connections between culture and environmental sustainability. The climate crisis is mentioned only in a general section on



‘preparedness’, alongside health emergencies, security threats, and technological accidents. Beneficiaries are merely expected to ‘navigate’ the green transition.

Cultural policy still lacks a deeper understanding of how art and sustainability intersect. Research shows that national policymakers in Europe tend to focus on reducing the carbon footprint impact of cultural and creative sectors, helping them prepare for natural hazards, and promoting the use of alternative materials and resources. While these measures are essential, there is a striking twofold gap to address:

- 1) limited recognition of the **transformative power of the arts** to prototype solutions, pilot innovations, inspire behaviour change and guide communities; and
- 2) funding frameworks that do not yet align cultural support with **social justice and climate adaptation** needs.

The green priority has gained traction at the city level. Recent research highlights wide variation across European cities and regions in both their progress towards the green transition and in how they engage the arts in this process. Yet, it remains rare to allocate specific budgets that enable grant beneficiaries to implement green criteria or recommendations meaningfully at the municipality level. The same goes for cultural cross-border mobility support: about 14% of mobility funding programmes in 2024 focused on environmental sustainability but only a handful of programmes adapt their funding by means of transport, duration of mobility, etc.

Proposals

- **Treat the climate crisis as a cultural crisis** that cannot be neglected when priorities shift or policy discourses drift away from sustainability. Elevate culture as a distinct pillar of sustainable development in post-2030 frameworks and secure the EU's and Member States' commitment to advocate for culture's recognition as a standalone goal of sustainable development.
- **Embed culture in the European Green Deal.** Create practical channels for artists and cultural professionals to pilot solutions and share existing know-how; establish lab formats that bring artistic perspectives into EU greening efforts. Support existing grassroots projects and cross-sectoral initiatives through the New European Bauhaus as a clear and transparent cultural wing of the EU sustainability efforts. Ensure the cultural sector is explicitly included in the national reform programmes/Operational Programmes of the current and future European Regional Development Fund so it can contribute to renovation, modernisation and local transition plans.
- **The new culture programme, AgoraEU, must include a clear green priority.** Define realistic common standards building on resources such as the SHIFT eco-certification for networks and the Theatre Green Book for the Performing Arts. There is a pressing need for constructive, practical dialogue on what green practice means in the cultural sectors, as well as for robust data on the actual environmental impact of the cultural and creative sector, including its digital impact. Embedding green priorities into the culture programme must be supported by adequate, dedicated budgets.



- **Support climate adaptation of cultural organisations.** The EU's cultural policies should recognise exposure to climate risks and finance risk assessment, contingency planning, and long-term adaptation strategies. This includes funding context-specific training sessions and dedicated schemes to help adapt work practices.
- Future EU cultural programmes must recognise that greening the cultural and creative sectors is about more than just procedures, certifications, or compliance. Funding for the green transition should avoid encouraging overproduction or focusing solely on scale and speed. Instead, it should support a shift from constant project delivery to reflection and sustained practice. For real change to happen, art needs time and space to connect with society, experiment, and learn from failure. Creative practices must remain flexible and responsive to social dynamics, with a focus on processes rather than outputs. **The value of cultural organisations should be measured by the quality of their work and the communities they nurture.**



7. Cultural Participation

Edited and coordinated by ENCC

Context

In 2021, under the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, the [Porto Santo Charter](#) was adopted. Its core idea is cultural democracy: moving beyond mere access ('democratisation of culture') to actively empowering people to participate, co-create, and shape cultural life as a shared civic right ('cultural citizenship').

Participation in culture takes many forms: from creating, performing, producing, governing, curating, volunteering, donating, learning, mentoring to more receptive ways like attending, watching, or listening. Generally speaking, cultural participation aims to enable individuals and communities to engage with, contribute to and benefit from cultural life. As stated in the European Commission's report '[Culture and Democracy: the evidence](#),' citizens who participate in cultural activities are much more likely to engage in civic and democratic life.

Despite the proven societal benefits of cultural participation—from strengthening democracy and social cohesion to promoting well-being—many of the most impactful cultural practices remain underfinanced or undervalued. Structural inequalities, bureaucratic obstacles or top-down models limit the accessibility and transformative potential of culture.

Proposals

- Recognise cultural democracy, including participatory arts, as a driver of imagination and foresight in EU policies (including initiatives like the New European Bauhaus, the Climate Pact and EU Youth Platforms). Participatory art is not only about access or inclusion; it is a way to co-create future narratives and mobilise imagination, collective memory and public space.
- Bridge structural societal divides by creating a structured dialogue between the European institutions, such as the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission and the Culture and Education Committee of the European Parliament, and the cultural sector. Ensure representation from both Creative Europe-funded networks and organisations without such funding.
- Strengthen mechanisms that support inclusive and democratic decision-making in the sector. Prioritise funding for representative membership organisations that actively promote institutionalised democratic processes such as inclusive governance structures with a focus on young people and underrepresented communities.
- Create and protect safe spaces that promote respect, free expression, and open dialogue. Support practical tools like sample protocols, codes of conduct, and memoranda of understanding for such spaces. Develop EU-wide typologies and models for safe spaces and community mediators, including sustainable funding



based on local needs. In small towns and rural areas, a safe space could be a repurposed classroom, library, or natural site.

- Develop long-term support mechanisms to help cultural organisations consistently engage diverse and inclusive audiences. Support inclusive audience development by funding cultural mediators and community connectors, especially from minority groups, as a regular part of participatory programmes.
- Acknowledge the specific role and skills of artists working in non-institutional, socially engaged contexts and invest in their professional development and recognition.
- Launch an EU-wide programme to build capacity for cultural participation. It could include mentoring, peer exchange, and training on how to participate in EU-funded projects. Invest in helping local organisations, especially those with limited time, knowledge, or access, develop their structures and gain opportunities to engage with EU programmes.
- Grassroots actors, non-formal practices and co-creation formats should be recognised and funded as central players in the cultural system complementary to established cultural institutions. Many of the most impactful cultural initiatives take place in community centres, voluntary arts groups, schools, libraries, etc.
- Improve existing regular surveys (Eurostat and national statistical institutes) to capture the intersection of cultural participation with socio-economic, well-being and civic engagement data. Data-driven policies need reliable data sources to sharpen solutions addressed to the multiple factors of social and cultural exclusion.
- Adopt the concept of [Cultural Footprints](#) in research and cultural practices to measure the societal impact of cultural participation in grassroots and community-based contexts and to capture inclusivity, sustainability, local engagement, and cross-border impact. A cultural footprint is the impact of public or private actions on a community's capacity to create, produce, reproduce, transmit, and access its cultural and linguistic expressions, now and for future generations.
- Mainstream culture in other EU policies (e.g. culture and Green Deal, culture and well-being, culture in New European Bauhaus, etc.)—cultural participation thrives at the intersection with science, health, environment, education and social cohesion.
- Use clear, inclusive language that resonates with practitioners and communities in EU strategies and funding programmes. Support artistic and community-driven storytelling to turn buzzwords like 'resilience' and 'innovation' into real, lived experiences. Encourage co-creating narratives that include diverse voices across generations, regions, and minority groups.
- Position life-long cultural participation and cultural citizenship as a fundamental right and a driver of societal imagination and transformation.



8. Access to Cultural and Arts Education

Edited and coordinated by ELIA

Context

Access to cultural and arts education is foundational for a thriving, diverse, and resilient European society and democracy. Cultural and arts education—including arts, music, theatre, and cultural heritage—is essential for developing critical thinking and creative competencies, which contribute to innovation and social inclusion. However, marginalised and underserved communities face significant barriers that limit opportunities for children and lifelong learners.

There is much evidence to support this. The [Porto Santo Charter](#) emphasises that democratising culture requires equipping all citizens from childhood with creative skills for meaningful participation. The [UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education](#) (2024) stresses that creative learning fosters dialogue, sustainability, and skills relevant for future societies—yet gaps persist across Member States in infrastructure, teacher capacity, and prioritisation.

A groundbreaking study '[From Margins to Masterpieces](#)' highlights the transformative impact targeted interventions can have in enabling cultural expression and leadership, especially among marginalised groups. Recent European cultural frameworks affirm the rights of citizens to participate in the arts; for example, the International Music Council's [Five Music Rights](#) highlight universal entitlements to creative expression, learning, access, and fair recognition—principles relevant across all art forms. The UK higher education and creative sector initiative [Creative Education Manifesto](#) highlights not only the role of the arts in fostering individual well-being and innovation, but also its positive impact on social inclusion and the economy through wide-ranging policy investment.

Cultural and arts education is not a mandatory subject in schools across the EU; rather, it is often considered 'nice to have' in curricula and not an essential part of education. Failure to secure access to cultural and arts education undermines personal fulfilment, social inclusion, economic opportunity, and democratic engagement. Europe can distinguish itself by leading the way in guaranteeing lifelong creative learning as both a right and a shared value, beginning with children and extending to citizens of all ages.

Proposals

- Affirm cultural and arts education as a universal right: systematically integrate arts and culture at all levels of compulsory and lifelong education, ensuring inclusion and diversity.
- Build cross-sector partnerships: collaborate among cultural, educational, and social sectors to maximise impact and share resources and expertise.



- Integrate creative skills and competencies as a key element of the EU's Union of Skills, contributing to Europe's societal resilience and competitiveness, including in transdisciplinary contexts.
- Support teacher training and capacity building: launch EU-wide initiatives for teacher training in creative pedagogies and arts integration, including digital strategies to overcome exclusion. Support for art teachers should be included in the [EU Teachers and Trainers Agenda](#) (2026), and dedicated funding through the next rounds for Erasmus+ Teacher Academies should be considered.
- Remove barriers and increase funding: direct funds (preferably through the National and Regional Partnership Plans) to organisations serving marginalised, immigrant, and rural communities and incentivise inclusive educational/outreach programme design.
- Expand access to cultural institutions: encourage schools and families to use museums, theatres, and libraries as creative learning spaces; promote community makerspaces and studios accessible to all through an EU-wide awareness-raising campaign.
- Monitor progress transparently: develop a 'Cultural Democracy Index' to track access, participation, and empowerment in cultural and arts education across member states.
- Promote youth participation: involve young people in cultural programming and governance, empowering them as creative decision-makers.
- Advance inclusive digital strategies: invest in digital platforms for creative exchange, ensuring accessibility for people in remote areas and those with disabilities.
- Elevate community-led projects: support context-sensitive, grassroots cultural and arts education projects that transform and engage communities.



9. Culture and Security

Edited and coordinated by Culture Action Europe

Context

Russia's full-scale, unprovoked invasion of Ukraine shattered assumptions about European security and exposed the lack of a European Defence Union. The Israel-Gaza war further highlighted divisions among Member States in responding to atrocities. At the same time, shifts in transatlantic relations under the new Trump administration underline a hard truth: Europe cannot outsource its strategic autonomy or rely indefinitely on U.S. security guarantees.

That leads Europe to develop its own defence capabilities, from the White Paper for European Defence to the [ReArm Europe Plan — Readiness 2030](#). Europe's security debate has also widened. Alongside defence and cyber, institutions now stress societal resilience, democratic robustness and preparedness. The Commission's [Preparedness Union Strategy](#) (2025) and the [Preparedness Niinistö Report](#) explicitly link hybrid threats and disinformation to societal cohesion. The upcoming European Democracy Shield is expected to focus on policies to counter foreign interference, preserve fairness and integrity of elections, support independent media and journalists as well as protect civil society. However, culture's role is yet to be recognised in strategic documents related to European security and resilience.

Europe's adversaries actively [weaponise](#) culture. Authoritarian regimes treat culture not as 'soft power' but simply power. In 2024, investigations report that Russia allocated more than €1 billion on propaganda through culture and media in 2024 (whereas the Creative Europe budget amounted to €335 million in 2024). It reveals the stark imbalance between the EU's limited investment in culture, which is meant to uphold democracy and social cohesion, and the aggressive strategies of autocracies seeking to instrumentalise culture. Russia's war against Ukraine has a clear cultural dimension: cultural and heritage sites are deliberately targeted, communities are displaced, undermining memory, identity and language. As of [25 August 2025](#), 1553 cultural heritage sites and 2388 cultural infrastructure facilities have been damaged or destroyed in Ukraine due to Russian aggression.

China's Confucius Institutes are seen as instruments of Chinese influence and have raised concerns for promoting Beijing-aligned narratives, operating under opaque agreements with host institutions, and potentially undermining academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

This also raises an important question: shall we limit those instances of artistic expression that explicitly or implicitly spread malign and undemocratic narratives, and is there a credible way to identify them? How far should we go in 'tolerating the intolerant'? There is also fear that positioning culture as part of security serves yet another example of instrumentalisation of culture, and even more, turns culture into counter-propaganda.

To this we say that culture strengthens resilience by mobilising communities and rebuilding trust. The arts, as a domain where expressions can be shared freely across cultures and contexts, through forms and languages that resonate universally, even when rooted in



specific traditions, provide a strong foundation for social cohesion. Investing in robust, independent cultural production rooted in democratic values and developed through cross-border European cooperation is a strategic defence against hybrid threats. This does not mean prescribing the production of specific content, but rather giving artists the means to work with whatever democratic cultural form and content they see fit (see the Artistic Freedom chapter of the Blueprint). The safeguard is the arm's-length principle: a diverse ecosystem of independent institutions and funding schemes that allocate public resources without dictating artistic choices. Preserving the autonomy of cultural organisations is therefore a precondition for any culture-and-security agenda.

In this context, ensuring the mobility and protection of cultural and creative professionals is a matter of strategic resilience. Barriers to mobility undermine the cross-border collaboration essential for democratic cultural exchange. At the same time, artists at risk who are often targeted precisely because of the societal impact of their work need specific, structural support. Enabling their safe movement and continued practice helps sustain the cultural ecosystems that support open and democratic societies.

Proposals

- Recognise cultural participation as a strategic pillar of the European Democracy Shield to counter disinformation and manipulation while promoting democratic values.
- Ensure dedicated funding for cultural participation and European content creation under the 'Democratic participation and rule of law' pillar within the CERV+ strand of the AgoraEU programme.
- Mandate clear labelling of AI-generated content and deepfakes in line with Article 50(4) of the AI Act, and require more granular, transparent disclosure of training data sources to avoid embedding authoritarian narratives in AI systems.
- Allocate 2% of Russia's frozen assets for the cultural recovery of Ukraine.
- Integrate culture into EU security, preparedness and resilience frameworks and the EU mental-health policy to support civic trust, citizen mobilisation and a shared European narrative.
- Facilitate cultural mobility by improving the implementation of the Schengen Visa Code. The Schengen rules should better account for the specific working conditions of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors, such as irregular income, non-standard contracts, and short-notice invitations. A centralised, long-term training programme should be established for staff at consulates, embassies, and external visa agencies to raise awareness of these sector-specific realities and ensure consistent application of the Visa Code. Greater flexibility in accepted documentation (guarantee letters or project grants as proof of means) must be ensured to support mobility in the cultural and creative sectors.



- Establish a dedicated EU pilot scheme for at-risk and displaced artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors under the Programme for Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions. Building on the model of the [EU Pilot Fellowship Scheme SAFE for at-risk researchers](#), the scheme should provide grants and coordinated support for those affected by wars, climate emergencies, and other systemic harms.
- Include [culture as a standalone goal](#) in the post-2030 UN Sustainable Development Agenda, and position it as a central pillar of long-term sustainable development and global stability. Beyond its contributions to environmental sustainability, recognising culture in this way would reinforce its role in promoting social cohesion, countering polarisation, and strengthening the resilience of communities.



10. Culture and Digital

Edited and coordinated by MCA

Context

When we talk about digital, we mean, according to the European Commission's definition in the DIGITAL Europe Programme, everything that is 'technology and infrastructure [on which] we rely to communicate, work, advance science, and answer societal problems.' For this reason, we can identify the influence of digital in two directions: the transformation of the work in the cultural sector and the cultural dimension of the digital environment.

The digital space, both online and offline, is essentially a cultural space: digital platforms and tools generate exchanges between different people, allow self-expression, create, interact, educate, and build communities. Moreover, artificial intelligence systems and algorithms are now systems for managing knowledge and cultural representation (with acknowledged problems of perpetuation of bias). Below, we set out the key opportunities and challenges followed by a set of structural solutions and complementary support measures.

- **Culture in the digital realm**

Digital tech is now part of everyday cultural life, for creators and audiences alike. That's why cultural rights, as set out in the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ratified across Europe), matter online as much as offline. Internet and digital tools offer great potential to democratise cultural creation, dissemination, and access. However, the rapid development of digital technologies and AI raise questions about fairness, transparency, diversity, representation, and fair pay for creative work, especially where markets are dominated by a few players and regulation is still lacking.

What can be done: One of the premises of the [Europe's Digital Decade](#) is that anything that is illegal offline should also be illegal online. It is therefore essential that the EU takes a stand in favour of protecting cultural rights in this field as well.

- **Use digital where it serves real needs**

Too often, digital tools are implemented without real research into what local cultural communities need. When this happens top-down, under 'modernise at any cost' policies, it can alienate staff and audiences. Just as important, people should have the right to stay analogue: professionals, institutions, and artists must be able to refuse using digital tools in their work without being sidelined or excluded.

What can be done: The EU should support practical research into sector needs and where digital tools genuinely help, invest in closing the digital divide for cultural professionals, and address possible job displacement due to digital and AI adoption (skills, transition support, fair safeguards). Just as importantly, recognise and protect analogue practices as a valued part of a pluralistic, healthy cultural ecosystem.



- **Digital governance for and with the cultural sector**

Digital policy shapes cultural space, so it needs the insight of cultural organisations and institutions. Cultural and artistic work often relies on deliberation, inclusion, and negotiation—values that can balance market-driven approaches. Yet cultural professionals are rarely involved in, or even aware of, European and national digital policies. Digital governance should be opened up to collective shaping at local, national, and EU levels. That means creating practical fora for dialogue and constructive disagreement.

What can be done: Cultural organisations can act as testing grounds for bottom-up, participatory models of digital governance. At the same time, cultural professionals should be brought into European digital decision-making, and cultural institutions can engage audiences and communities in designing their own digital strategies.

- **Protecting heritage through digital means**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the destruction in Gaza show how vulnerable cultural heritage is and why it must be protected both physically and digitally. For intangible heritage, safeguarding also means enabling collective reinterpretation and intergenerational transmission; that requires preserving cultural agency in digital spaces.

What can be done: EU support for digitising cultural heritage should move beyond guidelines to direct funding for institutions, with a focus on improving digitisation at grassroots level. This work should be coordinated with existing EU initiatives so that cultural memory is preserved, accessible, and widely shared.

- **Authorship and remuneration in an AI world**

Generative AI is trained on vast amounts of cultural content, often without creators' knowledge or consent. This undermines fair pay and proper credit, and risks shifting authorship from communities of makers to companies that control datasets and outputs.

What can be done: The AI Act and the Code(s) of Practice do not adequately protect creators or establish a fair remuneration system. EU policy should require transparent disclosure of training data and create feasible and accessible mechanisms for consent and compensation going beyond opt-out options. Clear rules on attribution, licensing, and revenue-sharing must be built into AI governance frameworks so that the cultural and creative sectors keep meaningful control over how their works are used and recognised.

Proposals

- **A 'right to culture' as a new principle in the Digital Decade.** The European Commission should add the 'right to culture' to six digital rights already included in the [European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles](#) to protect cultural rights online and support the notion of cultural democracy in the digital sphere.
- **Survey real needs when drafting digital policies.** Whenever the European Commission wants to launch a digital strategy that concerns the cultural and creative field (such as the future AI for Cultural & Creative Industries Strategy, Apply AI



Strategy, etc.), the process should begin with a Eurobarometer survey exploring real needs in terms of tools, know-how, and community/audience engagement.

- **Launch an Open Method of Coordination on collective digital governance in cultural environments.** With Member States and sectoral representatives, launch an OMC to explore grassroots best practices for community consultation, co-creation processes, and empowerment in digital governance across cultural environments. The objective is to produce a time-saving, effort-saving toolkit for cultural organisations and institutions to apply bottom-up approaches to digital governance.
- **Assess the EU copyright framework and establish fair remuneration in the digital information economy.** Review [Directive \(EU\) 2019/790](#) and related laws to ensure that training generative AI on copyrighted works requires authorisation, remuneration (including licensing), and transparency. The framework should cover rights holders and also require models trained on information commons (e.g., publicly available digitised cultural heritage) to contribute meaningfully to the costs of creating, curating, and preserving culture and knowledge.
- **Fund cultural institutions as local hubs for digital governance.** To test bottom-up, participatory models of digital governance, the Commission should finance cultural institutions and organisations through Interreg (or its successor in the next Multiannual Financial Framework) to build local community assemblies. Using the [Alignment Assembly model](#), these assemblies would co-design digital strategies tailored to each institution's needs. The institutions funded through this scheme would form a representative advisory body for the Commission on digital governance.
- **Invest in digitising tangible and intangible cultural heritage.** Through DIGITAL Europe (or its successor in the new Multiannual Financial Framework, i.e. the European Competitiveness Fund) and the National and Regional Partnership Plans, launch national digitisation strategies across galleries, libraries, archives, and museums. Make funding conditional on: (i) balancing tangible and intangible heritage, (ii) enabling collective reinterpretation processes, and (iii) ensuring fair representation of diverse minority communities. Require that all digitised content is routed to the [Common European Data Space for Cultural Heritage](#) via national and thematic aggregators.
- **Fund digital skills, value analogue practices.** Through Erasmus+ and DIGITAL Europe (or their successors in the next Multiannual Financial Framework), support capacity-building for cultural professionals so they can develop digital skills and autonomy. Fund training, facilitation, and infrastructure that enable collaboration and strengthen collective agency, while addressing the downsides of digitalisation. Crucially, funding should also recognise a right to remain analogue: artists, workers, and institutions must be free to decline digital tools without being penalised, and analogue practices should be explicitly accepted in evaluation and assessment.



ANNEX A: Resources

Artistic Freedom

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12. [New European Bauhaus](#), European Commission, 2020.
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ANNEX B: List of organisations that contributed to the Culture Compass: Sector Blueprint

1. Culture Action Europe
2. AMATEO — European network to promote and champion active participation in arts and culture
3. Association des Centres culturels de rencontre
4. Association Européenne des Conservatoires
5. Circostrada
6. Creative FLIP
7. ELIA — European League of Institutes of the Arts
8. European Choral Association
9. European Concert Hall Organisation
10. European Dance Development Network
11. European Festivals Association
12. European Folk Network
13. European Music Council
14. European Music Managers Alliance
15. European Music School Union
16. European Network of Cultural Centres
17. European Theatre Convention
18. EUNIC — European Union National Institutes for Culture
19. Goethe-Institut
20. IETM — International Network for Contemporary Performing Arts
21. Michael Culture Association
22. NEMO — Network of European Museum Organisations
23. On the Move
24. Opera Europa
25. REACC — Red de Espacios y Agentes de Cultura Comunitaria
26. REMA — European Early Music Network
27. Reset! network
28. RESEO — European Network for Opera, Music & Dance Education
29. Trans Europe Halles
30. YOUROPE — The European Festival Association



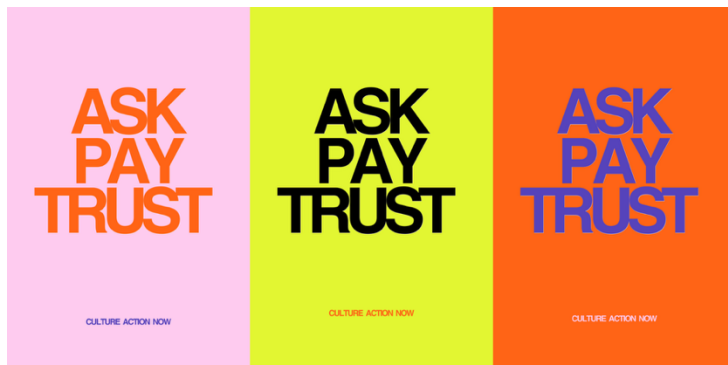


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Our campaign demands putting culture at the heart of changemaking in a time full of division and crises. To help culture help Europe, we need to Ask, Pay, and Trust the Artist. Add your name!

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