

A new Culture Compass for Europe

SUMMARY

Europe's culture and cultural heritage are fundamental to EU values and identity, providing space for discussion, engagement and debate. Culture also fosters a European sense of belonging and social cohesion, strengthens communities, and drives innovation and economic competitiveness.

The New European Agenda for Culture, which has provided a framework for EU cultural policy since 2018, has become outdated in light of the significant challenges currently facing culture. To address this gap, the priorities of the Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, Glenn Micallef, include the development of an overarching, coherent and ambitious strategic framework for culture. This framework, called a new Culture Compass for Europe, is expected to provide long-term direction for diverse cultural aspects in EU policymaking and to ensure that culture becomes more accessible to all. The Culture Compass can be seen as a new policy approach that places culture at the centre of EU policies, serving as a driver for democracy, security, competitiveness, societal resilience, innovation and international partnerships.

The European Parliament has played a crucial role in advancing discussions on culture at the EU level. Parliament has called on the Commission to strengthen EU support for building more crisis-resilient creative and cultural sectors and to provide adequate funding for EU-wide programmes promoting culture.



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Introduction

Culture plays a fundamental role in human life, helping us to connect with each other, protecting our community values, strengthening and enriching our common European identity and increasing social cohesion. Moreover, culture serves as a fundamental public good and a vector for economic prosperity.

There is no clear, strict or restrictive definition of culture in the founding documents of the EU. Similarly, there is no definition of Europe's cultural heritage. The legal basis of the Creative Europe programme, the only European Union (EU) programme specifically directed towards supporting culture, provides an open-ended [definition of the cultural and creative sectors](#). The definition states that they are 'all sectors whose activities are based on cultural values and/or artistic and other creative expressions, whether those activities are market- or non-market-oriented, whatever the type of structure that carries them out, and irrespective of how that structure is financed'.

EU aims and competences in the area of culture

The overarching objective of the EU in the area of culture is to 'respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity' and 'to ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced' (Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union). While culture is a competence of the EU Member States, the EU can only encourage cooperation between them and support or supplement their actions (Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, (TFEU)). Additionally, the EU must contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States while respecting their national and regional diversity and highlighting the common cultural heritage ([Article 167 TFEU](#)).

According to Article 2 of [Regulation \(EU\) No 1295/2013](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Creative Europe Programme, 'the cultural and creative sectors include inter alia architecture, archives, libraries and museums, artistic crafts, audiovisual (including film, television, video games and multimedia), tangible and intangible cultural heritage, design, festivals, music, literature, performing arts, publishing, radio and visual arts'.

Cultural activity is very particular, as it is perceived both as a business seeking profitability and as a non-profit activity related to creativity, self-expression, identity and a means of expressing something that is deeply human and essential to society. Some aspects of culture are referred to as art, while others are perceived as entertainment. However, there are no clear criteria to distinguish between them, as cultural perception varies across time and geography.

The definition of cultural activities is not fixed but encompasses a wide spectrum of activities, objects and artifacts. Each contributes to cultural diversity and cultural expressions. Each type of cultural activity, goods and services requires different skills, and production and distribution depend on varying conditions. The recent 'digital shift' – often called the 'digital revolution', and considered to be at least as disruptive as the industrial revolution – has affected the very definition of culture to include digital technology as a support for cultural content, and as a means of production, distribution, promotion and monetisation. EU cultural policy is based on the premise that culture is a public good; therefore, the '[cultural exception](#)' protects cultural goods and services from free trade rules.

The role of culture in shaping European identity

Culture enhances European identity by fostering a sense of shared belonging and interconnectedness across borders. At the centre of our shared European identity are core values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law (Article 2 TEU). The EU serves as a testament to our commitment to unity amidst diversity, peace, reconciliation, inclusion and cooperation rather than conflict.

European culture and its heritage are central to EU values and identity, providing space for discussion, engagement and debate. Cultural activities and heritage sites serve as arenas for public

dialogue, community gatherings, sharing, celebration, social interaction and collaboration. They offer opportunities to challenge, provoke, imagine and debate, and to open our minds to new ideas and perspectives. They shape our views of the world and life in their diversity and richness.

Culture and its heritage can engage the public and educate about peace, sustainability, tolerance, human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. Cultural activities can prompt creative reflection on global issues and broaden political imagination. Therefore, they can help challenge conventional wisdom, introduce different ways of thinking and contest privileged narratives, authority or power structures. By encouraging creative thought and enabling citizens, particularly young people, to address hidden issues and concerns, while also engaging people's imagination and emotions, cultural activities can serve as catalysts for behavioural changes in attitudes, preferences, habits and lifestyles. Participation in cultural activities inspires people of all ages and backgrounds.

Culture plays a vital role in fostering a European sense of belonging and social cohesion, along with promoting democracy and European values more broadly. It enhances European resilience to safeguard our democracy, especially in today's increasingly polarised societies, by contributing to a shared sense of unity during times of uncertainty. Additionally, culture is crucial for fostering social cohesion and resilience.

EU institutions paving the way for the Culture Compass

The Commission's [2018 New European Agenda for Culture](#) continued to establish and expand the framework for EU cultural policy, highlighting three strategic objectives with social, economic and external dimensions. The European Parliament, in its [resolution](#) of December 2022 on the New European Agenda for Culture and the EU strategy for international cultural relations, recognised its successful implementation and called for a systemic approach to cultural policy. The Council, in its [resolution](#) on the EU work plan for culture 2023-2026 of December 2022, invited the Commission to put forward an EU strategic framework for culture. In its 2020 [report](#) on EU investment in cultural sites, the European Court of Auditors stated 'that the current framework lacks focus' and requires better coordination of investments from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Court of Auditors furthermore asked for a clear strategic framework for EU action on culture.

The Commission's 2024-2029 [political guidelines](#) and [priorities](#) highlight what constitutes 'our European way of life: our culture and our history', with a need to make it 'easier for people – especially younger generations – to benefit from Europe's rich and diverse cultural heritage'. Commissioner Glenn Micallef's [mission letter](#) mentions 'our shared European identity and values' and includes the development of an overarching, coherent, comprehensive and ambitious new strategic framework for culture. This framework, referred to as the new Culture Compass for Europe in the letter, should provide long-term direction for the various dimensions of culture in EU policymaking and ensure that culture becomes more accessible to all. A thorough and targeted consultation involving Member States, stakeholders and citizens began on 20 March and ended on 30 May 2025.

Parliament held a debate in its plenary with Commissioner Micallef on 31 March 2025, providing Members with an opportunity to share their views on the comprehensive communication that is expected to be published by the end of October 2025.

Following the discussion at the informal ministerial meeting in Warsaw on 8 April, an exchange of views took place during the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council on 13 May 2025 regarding the key policy themes that will be included in the Culture Compass. Additionally, the Commission and the Polish Presidency co-hosted a working seminar on the topic on 17 June 2025 in Brussels. Through all these consultation steps, the Commission is supporting the engagement of the Member States in the design of this strategic EU policy support for culture.

As mentioned in the [call for evidence](#) for a new Culture Compass for Europe:

despite progress made in shaping Europe's cultural policies, there are still many shortcomings: the existing policy frameworks, documents and tools exhibit limited consistency; underlying definitions differ; priorities, objectives or monitoring provisions are not aligned; timeframes overlap; ownership and governance remains fragmented; available data is limited.... This call for a strengthened EU framework has been supported by the European Parliament, the Council and cultural stakeholders over the past years. A more strategic policy approach should aim at embedding culture more visibly in the EU's overarching policy goals, ensuring it becomes more accessible for all and positioning it as a driver of democracy, security, competitiveness, innovation, societal resilience and international partnerships.

The Commission's proposed [initiative](#) seeks to address the significant challenges facing European culture since 2018: the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the growing threats to democracy and security and the rapid digital transformation. This non-legislative initiative will respect the subsidiarity principle 'by ensuring that actions at the EU level complement and support national efforts without infringing on the sovereignty of Member States. The EU's role is not to replace national cultural policies but to enhance them by addressing common and/or cross-border challenges requiring a coordinated approach.'

According to the [call for evidence](#), in addition to the cooperation role clearly mentioned in Article 167 TFEU, the Commission emphasises the 'strategic direction' role of the EU in the area of culture. The Commission also plans to have a joint declaration with Parliament and the Council as a shared political commitment to ensure that the communication on the new Culture Compass is proportional, allowing for flexibility and respect for regional and national autonomy.

A new Culture Compass for Europe: Key aspects

The aim of this initiative is 'to improve the coherence, effectiveness, added value and visibility of cultural policy at EU level. The new Culture Compass should:

- clarify the main principles and overarching objectives that guide cultural policy and cooperation at EU level while also ensuring coherence with other EU's priorities and major Commission initiatives;
- ensure greater coherence between EU financing instruments supporting culture and consistency between them, and coherence with the underlying policies and legislative frameworks;
- enable Member States and the Commission to react to existing and new challenges in a more coordinated and effective manner, while fully respecting subsidiarity and national and regional diversity;
- guide future actions on culture in all policy fields with the aim to bring tangible benefits for Europe's cultural and creative sectors and industries and enhance culture's positive spill-overs;
- facilitate regular structured dialogue with cultural stakeholders at EU level;
- allow for progress tracking and stocktaking to help establish a better evidence-base for cultural policy making.'

The new Culture Compass can be viewed as a fresh policy approach that places culture at the centre of EU policies. Since it is still a work in progress, it is not yet clear what it will entail exactly. However, it is expected to provide guidance on pressing issues such as:

- core principles that should guide cultural cooperation at the EU level;
- international cultural relations;
- culture as a key element of Europe's global image;
- support for Europe's diverse culture and its rich cultural heritage;
- improving working conditions for artists and cultural professionals;
- overcoming barriers for artists and cultural professionals to move freely;

- supporting freedom of artistic expression and creation;
- promoting the cultural and creative sectors' potential for competitiveness and cross-sectoral innovation;
- addressing challenges to adopting environmentally and economically sustainable models in these sectors;
- enhancing citizens' wellbeing and health through increased access and broad participation in culture for all, with a focus on youth;
- improving access to culture in rural or remote areas;
- enhancing access to culture for individuals with accessibility needs and disabilities;
- promoting arts education in schools, and cultural education;
- fostering creativity;
- safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage;
- preserving and digitalising cultural heritage;
- combating illicit trafficking of cultural heritage;
- utilising culture as a catalyst to address broader societal issues such as social cohesion and inclusion, as well as global challenges;
- recognising culture's impact on health and wellbeing;
- addressing concerns about AI by balancing innovation with human creativity, originality and ethical use without compromising artistic value;
- assessing the opportunities and threats of AI for the cultural and creative sectors;
- enhancing data collection and statistics;
- ensuring funding for culture and Creative Europe.

In many of the areas covered by the Culture Compass, the [work of the European Parliament](#) has been crucial in advancing EU-level discussions. Examples include Parliament's input to discussions on the need for more funding for culture through the Creative Europe programme 2021–2027, on establishing an EU framework for the social and professional situation of artists and workers in the cultural and creative sectors, on recognising the role of culture, education, media and sport in fighting against racism, and on developing a strategic approach for culture in external relations. Parliament has urged the Commission to strengthen EU support for building more crisis-resilient creative and cultural sectors and to adequately fund EU-wide programmes that promote European cultural heritage.

This more strategic policy approach, in the form of a Culture Compass for Europe, should aim to integrate culture more prominently into the EU's overall policymaking, as culture is a driver for democracy, security, competitiveness, societal resilience, innovation and international partnerships. The Culture Compass, as envisioned by the European Commission, seeks to depart from the status quo and ensure that the strategic importance of culture is highlighted alongside the new political priorities emerging at EU and Member State level in the current geopolitical context. The Culture Compass should reaffirm who we are and what we stand for.

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