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From: Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director

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To: Ms Thérèse BLANCHET, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE  
COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE  
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026**

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# REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION ON THE EU WORK PLAN FOR CULTURE 2023-2026

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Council Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026<sup>1</sup> outlines priorities for policy cooperation, implemented through collaboration between the Member States, the Commission and the Presidencies of the Council. The Resolution invites the Commission to adopt a final implementation report, based on voluntary written contributions from Member States, by June 2026.

This report assesses the progress made since January 2023, highlights key achievements and identifies future priorities beyond 2026 to inform discussions in the Council on the next work plan. While comprehensive, it does not cover EU cultural policy initiatives unrelated to the themes of the work plan.

To prepare the report, the Commission conducted a targeted survey among Member States (3 February to 19 March 2026). This involved gathering data on the work plan's implementation and contribution to national policymaking, the suitability of its working methods and priorities for the next cycle<sup>2</sup>. The findings of the survey are shown in Annex 1. The assessment also draws on the Commission's work, exchanges with other EU institutions, and dialogue with the cultural and creative sectors.

## 2. CONTEXT

Over the past decade, EU policy action in the field of culture has been guided by the Commission's European Agendas for Culture<sup>3</sup>, the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage<sup>4</sup>, the Joint Communication 'Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations'<sup>5</sup>, and, since 2002, the Council's multiannual work plans for culture.

The 2023-2026 EU Work Plan for Culture was formulated in response to four major developments that have had a significant impact on Europe's cultural landscape.

- *The COVID-19 pandemic.* This has exposed structural vulnerabilities in the cultural and creative sectors, including, in particular, the precarious employment conditions of artists, inadequate social protection, and the digital divide in cultural participation.
- *Russia's illegal full-scale invasion of Ukraine.* This has directly threatened Ukrainian heritage, artists and cultural professionals. It has also weaponised culture, thereby undermining fundamental values of the EU. Furthermore, it has highlighted the critical role played by culture in societal resilience and post-conflict reconstruction. It has also underlined the importance of not only the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural goods, but also, more generally, cultural cooperation as a key dimension of EU solidarity.
- *The rapid digital transformation, accelerated by generative AI.* This has created both opportunities for the cultural and creative sectors and also challenges for creators' remuneration and intellectual property protection. It also has implications for cultural diversity and for the discoverability of European content online.
- *The escalating climate emergency and energy crisis.* These have highlighted the cultural and creative sectors' vulnerability to environmental threats while also positioning them as key strategic actors in advancing towards sustainability objectives. Simultaneously, the energy

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<sup>1</sup> [Council Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026](#)

<sup>2</sup> Preliminary findings from the survey analysis were presented to the Cultural Affairs Committee in Brussels on 27 March 2026.

<sup>3</sup> Communications from the Commission on a [European agenda for culture in a globalising world](#) and on a [New European Agenda for Culture](#)

<sup>4</sup> [European framework for action on cultural heritage](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Joint communication towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations](#)

crisis has underscored the urgency of transitioning to sustainable practices across all areas, including culture.

Amidst these challenges, the cultural and creative sectors have been grappling with significant financial strains. These multifaceted issues have placed unprecedented demands on resources, forcing the sectors to adjust operational models and find innovative solutions to build resilience.

The Creative Europe programme has been mobilised to respond to the EU Work Plan for Culture with its annual work programmes supporting key initiatives since 2024. Work plan priorities have been embedded in the main calls for proposals: annual cultural cooperation call; calls for European networks of cultural and creative organisations and European platforms for emerging artists – these have led to the selection of 39 networks and 19 platforms implementing work packages and activities contributing directly to the priorities of the work plan.

At the EU institutional level, the period since 2024 has been marked by the start of new mandates for the European Parliament and the European Commission. The Commission’s Political Guidelines<sup>6</sup> and the European Council’s new strategic agenda<sup>7</sup> set the overarching direction for EU action. This is against a backdrop of heightened global geopolitical tensions, growing threats to democratic values, increasingly volatile markets – with repercussions for Europe’s economy – and the rapid rise of artificial intelligence. These strategic frameworks place a strong emphasis on democracy, resilience, prosperity, competitiveness, security and the EU’s global role.

In response to the Council’s invitation and calls from the European Parliament and stakeholders, in the first year of its new mandate, the Commission presented a new EU strategic framework for culture – the **Culture Compass for Europe**<sup>8</sup> (November 2025). It articulates a vision that places culture in the centre of EU policymaking and aligns cultural policy with the EU’s broader political priorities. The Compass helps Europe’s cultural and creative sectors to thrive, both within Europe and globally. It does so by focusing on key areas, including artistic freedom, access to culture, working conditions in the cultural and creative sectors, resilience, competitiveness, adaptation to AI and international cultural relations.

The Culture Compass aligns with and is further reinforced by the Commission’s proposal for a new Multiannual Financial Framework, particularly the proposed AgoraEU programme, alongside other instruments, such as the European Competitiveness Fund, signalling the intention to increase EU investment in culture.

On the regulatory side, landmark digital legislation adopted since 2022 has had broad implications across sectors, including culture, notably the Digital Services Act (DSA), the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and the AI Act. At different levels and within their scope of application, these contribute to shaping a safer, more transparent and fairer digital environment. They also benefit the cultural and creative industries and creators’ rights.

At the multilateral level, culture has gained prominence in forums such as the G7<sup>9</sup>, the G20<sup>10</sup>, and UNESCO<sup>11</sup>, where it is not only recognised as an important priority in its own right but also as a cross-cutting enabler of democracy, cohesion, competitiveness and Europe’s global standing.

### 3. WORK PLAN – MAIN SURVEY RESULTS

The EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 has continued to be a key instrument guiding policy cooperation between the Member States at EU level. It sets out guiding principles, 4 overarching priorities<sup>12</sup> and 21 thematic actions. Several actions had been designed to ensure policy coherence and

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<sup>6</sup> [Political Guidelines 2024-2029 | European Commission](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Strategic Agenda 2024-2029](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Culture Compass for Europe - Culture and Creativity](#)

<sup>9</sup> [2024 Italy](#)

<sup>10</sup> [2023 India, 2024 Brazil, 2025 South Africa](#)

<sup>11</sup> [MONDIACULT Declaration 2022](#) and [MONDIACULT 2025 Outcome Document](#)

<sup>12</sup> a) Artists and cultural professionals: empowering the cultural and creative sectors, b) Culture for the people: enhancing cultural participation and the role of culture in society, c) Culture for the planet: unleashing the

continuity with the preceding work plan (2019-2022). The following assessment draws from Member States' responses to the survey, including to both ranked and open text questions.

### **3.1. General feedback on the work plan**

Member States<sup>13</sup> positively assessed the work plan as a relevant and strategic framework for guiding European cultural cooperation. The strongest agreement concerned the work plan's overarching priorities<sup>12</sup>, with a clear majority fully agreeing that they were appropriate. Regarding the 21 themes, while respondents largely agreed that these were relevant, many indicated that they could have been further refined.

Implementation of the work plan largely met the expectations of Member States. In terms of policy impact, survey respondents agreed that the work plan informed existing areas of national cultural policymaking and expanded policy agendas to include new topics. Qualitative responses confirmed that outputs, such as Open Method of Cooperation (OMC) reports and peer-learning activities, supported evidence-based policymaking, strengthened inter-ministerial cooperation, and informed national strategies – for example, in areas such as culture and health, sustainability and artists' working conditions.

The work plan also contributed to strengthening the recognition of culture across policy areas, with a vast majority of respondents agreeing that it enhanced the role of culture in other sectors. However, this contribution was more often assessed as partial rather than full agreement, reflecting ongoing challenges in achieving deeper cross-sectoral integration.

Despite these positive findings, some limitations were noted. Member States highlighted uneven translation of EU priorities into concrete national outcomes. They cited recurring issues, such as limited visibility and follow-up of actions, insufficient focus on implementation, and the need for greater consistency across instruments. Several responses also emphasised the importance of maintaining a focused work plan with clear priorities and tangible added value.

### **3.2. Observations on working methods**

The work plan's instruments were widely regarded as suitable for contributing to policymaking, with the OMC groups receiving particularly high ratings and standing out as the most effective cooperation tool. Qualitative feedback highlighted the strong added value of the OMC groups in enabling peer learning, the exchange of knowledge, and developing policy-relevant outputs, while also building lasting expert networks across Member States. OMC groups were considered most effective when they had clear mandates, sufficiently focused topics, and outputs directly linked to implementation and policy and funding instruments. However, challenges identified by respondents included overly broad mandates, heavy workload (including administrative burden), and difficulties in ensuring cross-sectoral participation. Some respondents also noted inconsistencies in organisation, including uneven number of meetings and delays in delivering outputs.

Peer-learning activities<sup>14</sup> were highly valued for providing practical, transferable approaches and supporting implementation at national level. Workshops were similarly well regarded, though slightly less highly, with their effectiveness depending on their focus and follow-up.

Other instruments received more mixed assessments. Think-tank meetings and stocktaking exercises garnered less support, with the latter frequently described as disproportionately burdensome relative to their added value. Commission-led expert groups were viewed positively overall.

Across working methods, Member States consistently called for improvements in follow-up and implementation. These included clearer links between discussions and concrete outcomes, better dissemination of results, and more concise and accessible outputs. There was also strong support for

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power of culture, d) Culture for co-creative partnerships: strengthening the cultural dimension of EU external relations.

<sup>13</sup> 26 EU Member States replied to the survey.

<sup>14</sup> Relating to the following work-plan actions: 'Culture and promoting democracy: towards a cultural citizenship in Europe'; 'Safeguarding heritage against natural and human-made disasters'; 'Preserving cultural heritage and empowering local cultural and creative sectors in Ukraine'.

expanding hybrid participation formats and ensuring adequate resources for engagement. Peer-learning activities were specifically highlighted as a format that could be used more extensively.

Overall, while the working methods are widely regarded as relevant and useful, their effectiveness could be further strengthened through more targeted focus, improved coordination, and a greater emphasis on translating outputs into tangible policy results.

## 4. OVERVIEW OF THE WORK CONDUCTED

This chapter outlines the implementation of the work plan under each priority and across its 21 thematic actions, assessing progress and key outputs. It also gives examples of related actions taken at Member State level. Overall, actions have been implemented as planned, while some adjustments became necessary due to the high number of planned outputs and in view of the challenging geopolitical and political context.

### 4.1. Priority a) Artists and cultural professionals: empowering the cultural and creative sectors

#### 1) *Status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals*

Artists' working conditions have remained a firm priority on the EU agenda, addressed through the EU Work Plan for Culture, ministerial debates, the European Parliament's own-initiative report<sup>15</sup> and collaborative work between the Commission and the Member States. Since the end of 2025, this has been further reinforced by the Culture Compass for Europe.

The Commission facilitated an Open Method of Coordination (OMC) group, comprising experts from all 27 EU Member States' ministries of culture and employment/social affairs. The group examined a range of pertinent subjects – including artist status and social security, fair practice, skills and life-long learning and artistic freedom – and issued its report and recommendations in July 2023<sup>16</sup>. Based on its findings, the 'This is How We Work' section was launched on the CreativesUnite platform<sup>17</sup>, offering factual information and comparative data on Member States' legal frameworks, including on social security and labour relations.

A key recommendation of the OMC group was to 'set up an EU framework for artists' and creative professionals' working conditions'. In November 2023, the European Parliament adopted an own-initiative legislative resolution calling for a framework of this kind.

In May 2024, the Belgian Presidency hosted a seminar on artists' working conditions, while the Commission organised a technical workshop with the OMC group. Meanwhile, the European Labour Authority (ELA) held a seminar on undeclared work in the cultural sector and published a report<sup>18</sup>. The Senior Labour Inspectors Committee (SLIC) launched an investigation into potential issues related to the enforcement of the EU occupational health and safety legislation (report adopted in November 2025). In June 2024, the EU-funded 'MoveS' network (focused on free movement and social security coordination) held a webinar on 'Labour mobility and social security challenges for artists'. In October 2024, the Commission convened a joint meeting of social partners in the audiovisual and live performance sectors to identify gaps in the application of EU rules in relation to the employment situation of artists and cultural professionals. In November 2024, the Directors-General for Industrial Relations (Member States' labour law officials) discussed labour law implementation challenges, focusing on the status of the artist and exchanging national practices.

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<sup>15</sup> [2022/2047\(INI\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> [The status and working conditions of artists and cultural and creative professionals – Publications Office of the EU](#)

<sup>17</sup> <https://creativesunite.eu/work-condition/>

<sup>18</sup> [Creative sectors: ELA study reveals precarious working conditions and undeclared labour | European Labour Authority](#)

In May 2025, the Commission organised a mutual learning seminar on social protection for artists and cultural professionals, bringing together Member States' social security services and ministries of culture, and subsequently issued a report<sup>19</sup>. The same month, the Council adopted conclusions on supporting young artists and cultural and creative professionals in starting their careers<sup>20</sup>, focusing on precarious working conditions, limited business skills and fair pay. The conclusions call for 'promoting appropriate conditions for the social and professional situation of young artists and cultural and creative professionals'.

In December 2025, responding to the European Parliament's resolution, the Commission hosted a high-level round table with stakeholders on artists' working conditions. This was followed, in Brussels in June 2026, by a conference which also featured artists' working conditions and was organised through the Creative FLIP<sup>21</sup> project in cooperation with the Commission.

The Culture Compass maintains momentum on this priority, proposing the development of an EU Artists' Charter, in collaboration with social partners and the cultural and creative sectors, in 2027. The Charter should 'outline fundamental principles, guidance, and commitments for fair working conditions in the sectors, and increase compliance and accountability, particularly by recipients of EU funding for culture'. The Commission started preparations in 2026.

According to the survey among Member States, national measures implemented to improve artists' working conditions include legal reforms (e.g. draft legislation, amendments to legal acts and new social protection or economic support schemes) and administrative tools (e.g. an artist registry or creative persons status for self-employed artists and freelance professionals). One standout example is Ireland's 'basic income for the arts' scheme, which has now been made permanent.

## 2) *Artistic freedom*

The work plan acknowledges artistic freedom as a fundamental part of cultural work and a critical link between culture and democracy. Artistic freedom now faces new and increasingly difficult challenges. The Council recognised that joint efforts throughout the EU are needed.

Under the Swedish Presidency (first half of 2023), these priorities were advanced through a high-level conference 'Free to Create – European Union Conference on Artistic Freedom and Cultural and Creative Industries' (16-17 February, Umeå, Sweden) and Council conclusions on at-risk and displaced artists (adopted on 16 May). The Presidency conference brought together EU institutions, civil society and artistic sector representatives to discuss freedom of creation. Key themes included free expression, exclusion from the arts, displaced artists and artists at risk, and the conditions needed for the cultural and creative sectors to thrive. The Council conclusions affirmed the crucial role that artists play in the life, development and resilience of societies and individuals, and stressed the need to protect creativity from threats or violations that put artists in danger as a result of their artistic work. Moreover, the Council conclusions proposed practical measures, including 'cities of refuge', emergency residencies and integration into local communities.

Artistic freedom has remained at the top of the Council's work on culture in the years since:

- Under the Spanish Presidency (2/2023), EU Culture Ministers, meeting informally, adopted the Cáceres Declaration<sup>22</sup>;
- Under the Belgian Presidency (1/2024), the completion of the European Media Freedom Act<sup>23</sup>, while not falling within the remit of the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS) Council, was a significant achievement with implications for freedom of expression;
- Under the Hungarian Presidency (2/2024), the Council adopted conclusions on improving and fostering access to culture<sup>24</sup>, including provisions that contribute to the protection and promotion of artistic freedom;

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<sup>19</sup> [Mutual learning on inclusive social protection for artists and creative workers – European Commission](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Council conclusions on supporting young artists and cultural and creative professionals in starting their careers](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Finance, Learning, Innovation & Intellectual Property Rights for the CCSI](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Cáceres Declaration](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1083](#)

- Under the Polish Presidency (1/2025), the Council adopted conclusions on supporting young artists and cultural and creative professionals in starting their careers<sup>20</sup>;
- Under the Danish Presidency (2/2025), the Council adopted conclusions on the strategic role of culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works in upholding European values and democratic resilience<sup>25</sup>.

The Culture Compass for Europe takes a rights-based approach and recognises that artistic freedom is fundamental to healthy democratic societies and a resilient Europe that protects its values. A key flagship action under the Compass is the announcement of a new periodic Report on the State of Culture in the EU, with a dedicated focus on artists' experiences in relation to artistic freedom. The Compass also calls for safeguarding artistic freedom through current and future EU policies and programmes, including the future AgoraEU under the next EU long-term budget. Member States and EU institutions are encouraged to ensure that their policies, legal frameworks and administrative practices support free artistic creation, expression and circulation. The European Democracy Shield<sup>26</sup>, adopted on the same day as the Culture Compass, aims to protect and promote democracy and societal resilience in the long run.

At national level, according to the survey, Member States reported non-legislative initiatives as the primary response, including conferences, strategies and safeguards for freedom of creation in public programming or culture funding, as well as targeted programmes, such as 'Safe to Create' and support for at-risk and displaced artists in cities.

### ***3) Stimulate the digital transformation of the cultural and creative sectors***

The digital transition continued to be another central theme in EU cultural policy cooperation. Under the Belgian Presidency, a two-day conference on the Digital Transformation of the Cultural and Creative Sectors placed special emphasis on data-driven audience engagement. A key outcome was the Ghent Manifesto<sup>27</sup>, which led to the establishment of the European Policy Forum on Data-Driven Audience Development in the Cultural and Creative Sectors.

In May 2025, the Council adopted conclusions<sup>28</sup> calling on empowering the cultural and creative sectors through data-driven audience development, skills enhancement, information exchange and a supportive policy framework.

As a follow-up, the Forum released a policy document in March 2026<sup>29</sup> addressing the Commission and the Member States with recommendations to strengthen data literacy across the cultural and creative sectors, develop and implement standardised audience metrics and put in place tools to facilitate data-driven audience engagement.

The Culture Compass reinforces this priority by proposing actions to improve data collection and analysis (cultural data hub, state of culture report), harness digital tech and AI in the cultural and creative sectors and industries, and further develop the Common European Data Space for Cultural Heritage. Several discussions among EU culture ministers, both at formal meetings and during informal gatherings organised by the rotating Presidencies, have focused on digital transformation, in particular AI. This includes the informal meeting of culture ministers in Nicosia on 1-2 June, which focused on subjects including cultural rights, creativity and AI.

In the survey, Member States primarily listed funding initiatives as examples of national-level measures implemented during the work plan period, with several mentions of the National Recovery

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<sup>24</sup> [Council conclusions on improving and fostering access to culture](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Council conclusions on the strategic role of culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works in upholding European values and democratic resilience](#)

<sup>26</sup> [JOIN\(2025\) 791 final](#)

<sup>27</sup> [The Ghent Manifesto](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Council conclusions on empowering the cultural and creative sectors through data-driven audience development](#)

<sup>29</sup> [Naar datagedreven publieksontwikkeling in Europa | Departement Cultuur, Jeugd & Media](#)

and Resilience Plan funds, which supported the digital and green transition of the cultural and creative sectors. A prominent area was the digitalisation of cultural heritage<sup>30</sup>.

#### **4) Stimulate the green transition of the cultural and creative sectors, with a specific focus on the energy crisis**

In the first six months of 2023, the Swedish Presidency carried out a stocktaking exercise within the Cultural Affairs Committee (CAC) to assess the energy crisis' impact on the cultural and creative sectors. The findings were summarised in a Presidency note<sup>31</sup>. This followed the abrupt rise in energy prices, which had, and continues to have, significant financial implications for the cultural and creative sectors, altering the cost structure of their activities. The note examined cultural heritage and energy performance, discussed the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD)<sup>32</sup>, and compiled examples of EU and Member States' support measures in the spirit of sharing knowledge and good practice. In September 2023, the 'Voices of Culture' structured dialogue between the Commission and the cultural sectors gathered to discuss how these sectors drive the green transition, while navigating the energy crisis<sup>33</sup>.

The OMC group 'Stimulate the green transition of the cultural and creative sectors, with specific focus on the energy crisis' started its work in April 2024, co-chaired by Ireland (Environment) and Italy (Culture). The group brought together 42 experts from 22 Member States, from both culture and climate-environmental Ministries. It pursued a dual objective: scaling up proven good practices and tools to support greening efforts of the cultural and creative sectors, while highlighting culture's under-recognised role in enabling the mindset shifts required for a just, inclusive and equitable green transition. The experts' work built on previous OMC reports and EU studies, on external expertise and on two dedicated surveys. It culminated in the report 'Creative shifts: Empowering culture for sustainable living', announced at Mondiacult Barcelona (September 2025) and published in December 2025<sup>34</sup>.

The report shows how the cultural and creative sectors are already making an impact through energy-saving, climate adaptation, circular practices and sustainable mobility. It includes recommendations for improving the use of existing tools and data for informed decision-making, scaling up proven good practices, stimulating action through targeted policies and institutional support, enhancing knowledge-sharing across Europe and better integrating culture into national and EU climate strategies. OMC experts are continuing dissemination efforts at national level to help ensure that the report's recommendations inform policy action. The Culture Compass for Europe highlights the need to address climate change and environmental sustainability through creative pathways as a key area for action.

According to Member States, this OMC has influenced policy and funding priorities by inspiring national funding schemes for sustainable cultural and creative sectors' practices and contributing to the development of climate strategies for cultural institutions and heritage, thereby reinforcing the role of culture in achieving environmental objectives.

#### **5) Enhancing the cultural and creative dimension in the European video games sector**

The European video games sector has gained increasing recognition for its cultural and economic potential, prompting targeted EU-level efforts. In 2024, the Commission organised four round tables to explore (i) the economic and cultural relevance of gaming, within and beyond the gaming industry; (ii) skills and innovation gaps in the sector; (iii) investment needs and available financing; and (iv) national and regional policies/practices and peer learning. With over 50 participants from Member State administrations, academia and business, the discussions highlighted the need to further acknowledge the cultural and economic value of video games, to improve skills development, to increase opportunities for technological innovation, and to strengthen public-private collaborations.

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<sup>30</sup> [Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard – Thematic Analysis – Culture and Creative Industries.pdf](#)

<sup>31</sup> [Stocktaking on the energy crisis – Final Presidency note 8649/23](#)

<sup>32</sup> [EU/2024/1275](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Voices of culture brainstorming report: Culture and creative sectors and industries driving green transition and facing the energy crisis](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Creative shifts – Publications Office of the EU](#)

This process helped the Commission to identify key stakeholders in Member States, leading to subsequent consultations relevant to the sector. It also informed the Commission's main market study on video games<sup>35</sup> and gave useful insights into the policy needs of the industry.

In November 2023, the culture ministers adopted the Council's conclusions<sup>36</sup>, agreeing to enhance the video games sector's cultural and creative dimension in Europe and acknowledging its potential to transmit cultural content and the richness of European creation, heritage and history.

Examples of measures taken by Member States to boost the video games sector include tax credits for video games projects and funding schemes. Some examples of these measures relate to projects promoting cultural heritage (museums, sites) and cross-sector collaboration between developers, designers and traditional artists. Non-funding examples include parliamentary reporting on video games policy and dialogue with industry representatives.

#### **6) Stocktaking on the implementation of the Council conclusions on the recovery, resilience and sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors**

In May 2021, a year after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, under the Portuguese presidency, the Council approved conclusions on the recovery, resilience and sustainability of the cultural and creative sectors, underlining the need to take action to support them in times of crisis and beyond. The subsequent stocktaking on the implementation of these conclusions was carried out by the Swedish and Spanish Presidencies, with an exchange between Member States and the Commission at the Council's Cultural Affairs Committee meeting in March 2023 and written input in response to queries by the Presidency.

During the crisis, tailored grants supported live events, digital projects and freelancers across Europe. Meanwhile, streamlined processes, such as non-repayable aid, digital application portals and reduced documentation requirements, made funding more accessible. Creative Europe, for instance, received a 67% funding increase, going from EUR 1.46 billion for the 2014-2020 period to EUR 2.44 billion for 2021-2027, to bolster recovery efforts. National initiatives further strengthened resilience through artist statutes aiming at improved freelance protections, unemployment compensation, tax exemptions and social security moratoriums. Mobility was also facilitated through simplified cross-border travel procedures and tax guidance. Digital event streaming was also supported or incentivised.

Member States have supported the digital and green transitions, as well as the cultural and creative sectors' resilience by making use of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Key measures adopted include reforms, for example of the status of artists; investments in technological upgrades for theatres, museum archives and other cultural operators; support for the digitisation of cultural heritage, for renovations to improve energy efficiency in cultural buildings, for ecological practices and for capacity building. Additionally, some Member States have planned innovative actions to harness the power of culture for social cohesion and well-being<sup>37</sup>. Tools such as the Commission's CultureEU funding guide<sup>38</sup> have improved transparency and accessibility to EU funding. The Commission has enhanced mobility via Culture Moves Europe<sup>39</sup> and shared opportunities through platforms like CreativesUnite.

#### **7) Stocktaking on the implementation of the Council conclusions on reinforcing intercultural exchanges through the mobility of artists and cultural and creative professionals, and through multilingualism in the digital era**

To take stock of the implementation of these Council conclusions in the Member States and at EU level, the Polish Presidency launched online surveys to collect information on relevant measures since 2022.

Nearly all Member States stated that they have in place national schemes, such as residencies, travel grants and scholarships, with the goal of fostering global collaborations in arts, music and literature.

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<sup>35</sup> [The European media industry outlook – Publications Office of the EU](#)

<sup>36</sup> [Council conclusions on enhancing the cultural and creative dimension of the European video games sector](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Recovery and Resilience Facility Thematic analysis: Culture and Creative Industries](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Discover funding opportunities for the Cultural and Creative Sectors – Culture and Creativity](#)

<sup>39</sup> [Culture Moves Europe – Culture and Creativity](#)

At the EU level, the Culture Moves Europe scheme (funded under Creative Europe) has become a leading mobility option for artists, thanks to its accessible rolling calls and focus on emerging talent. Member States and the Commission further promote mobility through peer events and Creative Europe desks. However, challenges remain, including low awareness, fragmented information, economic barriers, visa complexities, administrative hurdles and language gaps, all of which demand tailored solutions. The stocktaking document urges deeper synergies between Erasmus+ and Creative Europe, alongside efforts to bolster multilingualism through education, AI-driven tools like eTranslation, and protections for minority languages to counter digital divides.

#### **4.2. Priority b) Culture for the people: enhancing cultural participation and the role of culture in society**

##### ***8) Culture and promoting democracy: towards cultural citizenship in Europe***

To deliver on this action, the Commission has launched the ‘Culture and Democracy Study and Peer-Learning Project’. This explores how schools, artists and cultural organisations can collaborate through participatory arts and cultural activities to enhance young peoples’ democratic and civic engagement.

Implemented by a consortium of contractors since June 2025, the 27-month project pursues two main aims: first, to collect existing knowledge on effective school/culture collaborations at national, regional and local levels, identifying practical ways to support them as strategic tools; second, to share this knowledge and examples of good practice with policy makers, educators, creative professionals and other key stakeholders, informing policy and practice across the EU. Deliverables will include a study distilling key lessons for policy and practice and a compendium of good practices, expected in mid-2026, followed by four peer-learning workshops (until 2027) for culture and education policymakers. A handbook for practitioners, with concrete guidance on how to establish and run such collaborations, along with a final conference, will conclude the work.

Under the Danish Presidency, the Council adopted the aforementioned conclusions<sup>40</sup> setting out a comprehensive framework for protecting and promoting European values and democratic resilience through culture and cultural heritage, particularly in the context of geopolitical challenges.

Across the EU, culture and democracy have remained an overarching priority, with Member States implementing diverse measures, such as cross-ministerial collaboration establishing structural synergies between schools and cultural institutions. National culture strategies now increasingly incorporate the topic, while flagship institutions are repositioning their missions to foster democratic discourse. Awareness-raising initiatives further complement these efforts

##### ***9) Culture and health***

The growing evidence and recognition of culture’s role in enhancing health and well-being has led to increased attention being paid at EU level to this vital cross-sectoral collaboration.

In February 2024, the Open Method of Coordination Group on Culture and Health began its work. It included representatives from ministries of culture, ministries of health and NGOs across nearly all EU Member States, as well as external experts, including the WHO. Tasked with addressing compelling international evidence, the group examined how participation in cultural and creative activities supports better health outcomes and improved well-being at individual, community and societal level, in particular in terms of health promotion, disease prevention, management and treatment of health conditions (including physical and mental health), and social inclusion and cohesion.

This work gained further endorsement at the end of 2024, when the Council, under the Hungarian Presidency, adopted conclusions on access to culture<sup>41</sup>, while recognising the importance of cultural participation for personal health and well-being. Moreover, the Council conclusions from June 2025

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<sup>40</sup> [Council conclusions on the strategic role of culture, cultural heritage and audiovisual works in upholding European values and democratic resilience](#)

<sup>41</sup> [Council conclusions on improving and fostering access to culture](#)

on promoting and protecting the mental health of children and adolescents in the digital era<sup>42</sup> underlined the importance of cultural participation, libraries and cultural hubs in promoting a healthy lifestyle and providing alternatives to screen time.

The OMC group's report 'Culture and Health: Time to Act'<sup>43</sup>, was launched by Commissioner Glenn Micallef and Ernest Urtasun, Spanish Minister of Culture, at Mondiacult in Barcelona on 29 September 2025. It provides policy recommendations for decision makers at European, national, regional and local levels, as well as for cultural organisations. It envisions a future where everyone in Europe has access to cultural and creative participation as an intrinsic part of their health journey, leading to better health and well-being outcomes and better quality of life for all.

The report's findings highlight global and sectoral challenges – spanning health, culture and their intersection – while identifying 21 opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. The findings are illustrated by numerous good practices from all Member States as well as by cross-border European cooperation. The OMC results have been widely used and have served as an evidence base for integrating culture into health policies, helping to legitimise culture's role in well-being and prevention. This has led to concrete outcomes, such as the development of arts-in-health programmes (including cultural prescription and hospital-based initiatives), strengthened cooperation between ministries of culture and health, and has prompted the inclusion of culture in national mental health strategies. The topic received further political support from ministers of culture, health, and state secretaries attending OMC meetings and the launch of the OMC report in several countries.

Culture for health and well-being remains a priority in the Culture Compass. The Commission, with the support of experts and national contact points, will develop EU guidelines on culture, health and well-being by 2028.

#### **10) Building bridges: strengthening the multiple roles of libraries as gateways to and transmitters of cultural works, skills and European values**

In 2023, an OMC group was mandated to examine how to strengthen and promote the multiple roles of public libraries and to better understand and document the cultural, societal and democratic roles that libraries play in society. The work started in February 2024, bringing together 36 experts from 25 EU Member States, with input from non-EU countries including Norway, Türkiye, Iceland, Georgia, Moldova, Switzerland, Ukraine and the UK. A final Presidency conference is planned in late October 2026, hosted by Ireland.

The resulting report (planned for publication by mid-2026) aims to stimulate a Europe-wide debate on better leveraging libraries' potential in tackling societal challenges. It builds bridges between policymakers and library professionals and offers guidance on fostering innovation, expanding services and strengthening the contribution of libraries to European values and societal goals. It showcases best practice examples of libraries providing local solutions to 10 societal challenges, using an integrated approach aligned with European, national and regional strategies. Among its recommendations, the report identifies six high-level enablers to future-proof public libraries and amplify their impact. This OMC group has contributed to strengthening the recognition of libraries as key social and democratic infrastructure.

On 14-15 October 2024, Hungary hosted a Presidency conference titled 'ReAImparting public collections in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in light of technological developments', which explored key topics, including the digitalisation and technological innovations transforming public collections. At national level, according to the survey conducted to pave the way for this report, Member States have worked on national library laws or amendments expanding library functions. Targeted funding measures – including support under the Recovery and Resilience Plans and Cohesion Policy funds (in particular under the European Regional Development Fund) – focused on investments covering modernisation of public library networks as cultural hubs, inclusive public spaces and programmes aimed at young audiences and heritage discovery.

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<sup>42</sup> [Council conclusions from June 2025 on promoting and protecting the mental health of children and adolescents in the digital era](#)

<sup>43</sup> [Culture and health – Publications Office of the EU](#)

Several EU programmes supported relevant projects, as highlighted in the report ‘The multifaceted role of public libraries’<sup>44</sup>.

### ***11) Protection of children and young people from harmful content on digital platforms***

The Digital Services Act (DSA)<sup>45</sup> aims to create a safer digital space for all users and places the protection of minors online at its core, requiring platforms to ensure a high level of privacy, safety, and security for minors on their services. Between 2023 and 2026, the Commission supported the implementation of the DSA through several workshops and round tables, including (i) an all-day DSA stakeholder event (June 2023), with several workshops covering the protection of minors, to discuss implementation priorities ahead of the full application of the DSA (as from February 2024); (ii) a thematic stakeholder workshop on risk assessments for very large online platforms (April 2025); (iii) two consultation workshops on the preparation of the guidelines on the protection of minors under Article 28 of the DSA (October 2024 and June 2025), and on feedback from focus groups involving children in seven Member States with the support of the Safer Internet Centres; (iv) regular online round tables with civil society organisations (2024-2026) to raise awareness about the DSA, and exchanges of views on developments in research and risk analysis at national and grassroots level; (v) several annual activities under the better internet for kids (BIK+) strategy<sup>46</sup>, with a focus on the DSA.

The Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)<sup>47</sup> sets out sector-specific obligations for video-sharing platforms to protect minors from harmful audiovisual content. The ongoing AVMSD evaluation and upcoming review by Q3 2026 will assess whether the current rules for the protection of minors are fit for purpose, in particular in the online environment, and address potential shortcomings. As part of this process, a call for evidence and a public consultation, as well as stakeholder meetings were organised also covering such protection of minors rules under the Directive.

The BIK+ strategy and the Safer Internet Centres network in Member States continue to play a key role in advising on child safety, education and youth participation. In 2025, the Commission’s annual youth-led Safer Internet Forum focused on ‘Protecting and empowering youth in the digital age’ gathering more than 800 people from over 65 countries. Each February marks ‘Safer Internet Day’ with activities taking place worldwide under the slogan ‘Together for a better internet’. The 2026 EU action plan against cyberbullying<sup>48</sup> was shaped by consultations with over 400 stakeholders and views collected from 6 300 children. To coordinate efforts at EU level, regular sharing of good practice has been organised by the network of Safer Internet Centres which, together with the BIK platform, reaches more than 46 million people in Europe and beyond in 2025. Several Member States have funded projects on safe internet and media literacy.

### ***12) Discoverability of diverse European cultural content in the digital environment***

The work plan underscored the need to strengthen the discoverability of diverse European cultural content online, which led the Commission to commission a study to better understand this complex and increasingly relevant subject.

The study, published on 8 April 2026<sup>49</sup> and focusing primarily on music and books, identifies opportunities arising from digitisation, such as increasing democratisation of, and access to, culture. It also highlights overarching challenges for European works in reaching audiences beyond borders, including language silos and translation gaps, algorithmic opacity and platform dominance. Other factors influencing diversity include algorithmic biases, data limitations, promotion and curation inequalities, capacity gaps and digital literacy – compounded by the rise of AI-generated content. The study concludes that concerted efforts are required to fully tap into the opportunities presented by

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<sup>44</sup> Programmes, such as Creative Europe, Horizon Europe, ERASMUS+ or the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF); [The multifaceted role of public libraries – Publications Office of the EU](#)

<sup>45</sup> [EU/2022/2065](#)

<sup>46</sup> [Better Internet for Kids strategy \(BIK+\)](#)

<sup>47</sup> [EU/2018/1808](#)

<sup>48</sup> [COM\(2026\) 71 final](#)

<sup>49</sup> [Study on the discoverability of diverse European cultural content in the digital environment – Publications Office of the EU](#)

digitisation, address the structural imbalances identified and harness technology to enhance the discoverability of European works.

The recommendations, targeting cultural sectors, digital platforms and policymakers at EU and national levels, address six strategic action areas: (i) fostering collaboration and governance for fair discoverability; (ii) enhancing data collaboration and knowledge; (iii) building digital capacity and tools for creators and cultural organisations; (iv) audience-focused measures; (v) accelerating research and innovation for discoverability; and (vi) bolstering European content supply: funding, curation, prominence and transparency. The study was presented at a dedicated conference with stakeholders and Member States' representatives in Brussels on 20 April 2026.

Following the publication of the study, the Commission committed to continuing to support investments on discoverability of diverse cultural content created in Europe to foster its consumption within and outside the EU, as provided by the Culture Compass.

### **4.3. Priority c) Culture for the planet: unleashing the power of culture**

#### ***13) Cultural statistics – to build resilience in and through culture***

In 2023, Eurostat set up a task force with representatives from the statistical institutes of the EU Member States and observer members from selected key organisations to update the EU statistical framework for culture statistics. Member States adopted the revised framework in spring 2026. In agreement with the Member States, Eurostat prepared an updated guide for cultural statistics, reflecting the revised framework. Following its implementation, first results are expected in 2026, depending on the timing and scope of data collections.

This new EU framework on cultural statistics together with the revision of relevant official classifications such as NACE Rev. 2.1, will enable Eurostat to disseminate more accurate data, including on employment in the cultural and creative sectors, to provide a clearer picture of the field and its different sub-sectors. Building on previous work, as outlined in the Culture Compass, the Commission will develop an EU cultural data hub<sup>50</sup> to collect and analyse cultural data, monitor trends, and pool best practices.

For the period of the work plan, many Member States reported progress in developing cultural indicators and data systems.

#### ***14) Cultural governance***

In early 2026, the Cypriot Presidency organised several 'online workshops' with experts as part of a think-tank process where knowledge from practice, research and policymaking could intersect in a structured yet informal way. These sessions started exploring how cultural governance might address emerging societal and political realities marked by digital transformation, geopolitical uncertainty, environmental transition and rising demands for democratic participation. The final conference, originally scheduled for early March 2026 in Nicosia, was regrettably cancelled at short notice due to the escalating crisis in Iran.

#### ***15) Climate action through culture, including the arts and cultural heritage***

An informal meeting with former members of the OMC group on 'Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change' was held on 17 September 2024. Its aims were to (i) take stock of policy developments at national level resulting from the report's recommendations; (ii) present additional best practice examples from members; and (iii) discuss further action to support the report's dissemination and amplify its impact.

At EU level, a very tangible result of the report is the launch of a European Partnership for Resilient Cultural Heritage (2026) funded by Horizon Europe, one of the 20 flagship actions in the Culture Compass. Internationally, the EU engages on culture-based climate action as a knowledge partner in the Group of Friends of Culture-Based Climate Action. This is a coalition of UN Member States,

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<sup>50</sup> Data on the audiovisual sector will continue to be provided by the European Audiovisual Observatory and the Commission's European Media Outlook Report.

intergovernmental agencies and organisations within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change framework that aims to build political momentum for recognising the critical role of culture in addressing climate change.

The Creative Europe programme has supported the production of tools such as the Greening the Creative Europe Programme report<sup>51</sup> and related Guidelines on quality assessment of green aspects in Creative Europe projects (Culture strand)<sup>52</sup>.

Member States' survey responses point to different measures being implemented on this topic. These include (i) embedding cultural heritage within climate strategies; (ii) assessing cultural heritage climate vulnerability; (iii) incorporating sustainability criteria into public cultural grants and (iv) funding to prevent climate damage to cultural monuments. Other examples of funding involve (i) New European Bauhaus (NEB) initiatives linking citizen engagement with sustainable local development; (ii) the incorporation of cultural heritage into climate resilience strategies; (iii) a CO<sub>2</sub> calculator for museums; as well as (iv) involvement in international training, workshops and conferences on climate change and culture.

### ***16) High-quality living environment for everyone***

In line with the recommendations of the OMC group on investing in a high-quality architecture and living environment for everyone (2021)<sup>53</sup> and with the Council conclusions on culture, high-quality architecture and built environment as key aspects of the NEB initiative (2021)<sup>54</sup>, the European Directors of Architecture Policies (EDAP) gathered under each Council presidency. Their discussions focused on initiatives to achieve a high-quality living environment for everyone (including those living in rural and remote areas, such as the outermost regions), while exploring synergies with the NEB network.

EDAP meetings and related European conferences on architectural policies addressed topics such as (i) policy implementation (from policy to practice); (ii) the quality of tomorrow's housing (quality living in the continuity of architecture); (iii) restoration, renovation and adapted re-use of cultural heritage; and (iv) improvements of architecture competitions and public procurement (spatial quality through public procurement). At the EDAP meeting on 6 May 2026, there was broad support for continuing exchange, peer learning, and policy dialogue among Member States, EU institutions, and relevant stakeholders under the next work plan.

Between July 2023 and November 2024, a Creative Europe-funded peer-learning initiative supported local and regional authorities in planning and delivering high-quality architectural policies and projects. This facilitated peer exchanges across EU cities, regions, EU countries and key stakeholders, focusing on effective processes and good practice. This was outlined in the Commission's NEB Communication and followed up to the Council's invitation to provide opportunities for research, capacity building and peer learning<sup>55</sup>. Announced as one of the flagship actions in the Culture Compass, the Commission adopted a new Communication on the future of the NEB<sup>56</sup> and a related proposal for a Council Recommendation in December 2025<sup>57</sup>. The Council adopted the Recommendation on 11 May 2026<sup>58</sup>.

Member States' measures in this area – as reported in the work plan survey – span legal measures (such as laws establishing quality criteria for architecture), funding actions (such as urban heritage regeneration initiatives, support for architecture and design development projects) and educational and expert activities.

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<sup>51</sup> [Greening the Creative Europe Programme – Publications Office of the EU](#)

<sup>52</sup> [Quality assessment of green aspects in Creative Europe projects \(Culture strand\) – Culture and Creativity](#)

<sup>53</sup> [Towards a shared culture of architecture – Report](#)

<sup>54</sup> [New European Bauhaus: beautiful, sustainable, together](#)

<sup>55</sup> [Council conclusions on culture, high-quality architecture and built environment as key elements of the New European Bauhaus initiative](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Communication on the New European Bauhaus – New European Bauhaus](#)

<sup>57</sup> [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the New European Bauhaus](#)

<sup>58</sup> [Council Recommendation on the New European Bauhaus](#)

### **17) Safeguarding heritage against natural and human-made disasters**

Recurrent crises, from armed conflicts to natural disasters, have underscored the need for strengthened international efforts to safeguard, restore and preserve countries' cultural heritage.

Since 2019, the Commission has funded the PROCULTHER ('Protecting Cultural Heritage from the Consequences of Disasters') projects to support the development of pan-European doctrines especially under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)<sup>59</sup>. The initiative spearheaded the creation of a Cultural Heritage Protection module in the European Civil Protection Pool<sup>60</sup>, integrated cultural heritage protection into EU exercises, and developed a methodology on combining disaster risk management with cultural heritage protection, including through a whole-of-society approach.<sup>61</sup>

Complementarily, the EU-funded project 'Enhancing capacities in Ukraine for cultural heritage first aid and recovery planning' (completed in September 2024 and implemented by ICCROM)<sup>62</sup> trained 23 heritage professionals from 11 oblasts (including five frontline regions) to establish Ukraine's first national team of cultural first aiders. It is now equipped to assess, mitigate and reduce disaster and conflict risks to all types of heritage, and ready to recover and safeguard the nation's invaluable heritage amid Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine.

Another project, 'Safeguarding Cultural Heritage from Disasters, Extreme Weather Events, and Complex Emergencies' (2024-2027)<sup>63</sup>, is a cascading capacity development initiative aimed at enhancing disaster risk mitigation and emergency preparedness at heritage sites and institutions. A first successful round of training sessions was completed in 2025, combining online and on-site sessions, followed by field projects in participants' home countries in early 2026.

The conference 'Safe cultural heritage – European challenges in times of war and crisis', organised under the Polish Presidency in Krakow on 3-4 April 2025, also emphasised the importance of safeguarding heritage both physically and digitally in light of mounting risks.

At national level, Member States have developed national disaster risk prevention strategies and plans, damage assessment methodologies, and applications for recording and assessing damage to cultural heritage. Funding has been directed at interventions, guideline development and monitoring on climate vulnerabilities affecting cultural heritage. Proposals include a pan-European solution for long-term digital cultural heritage preservation, with a working group mapping heritage datasets and cross-border requirements.

### **18) Exchanging information between cultural heritage professionals and competent authorities for cultural goods on the fight against trafficking in cultural goods**

Following up on the 'EU action plan against trafficking in cultural goods' of December 2022<sup>64</sup>, the Commission set up an Expert Subgroup on the Art Market in December 2023<sup>65</sup> to facilitate information exchange and discussions on legislation, programmes and policies related to the protection and trade of cultural goods in the single market, and to foster the sharing of good practice. The subgroup held its fourth meeting in Brussels on 29 January 2026.

Moreover, through the Horizon Europe programme, the Commission funded many different projects fighting illicit trafficking of cultural goods, including RITHMS<sup>66</sup>, a research and innovation project aimed at enhancing the operational capacity of police, customs and border authorities to combat the organised and poly-criminal nature of cultural goods trafficking. It was presented at an event on future

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<sup>59</sup> Through the UCPM, the Commission can deploy advisory missions that provide recommendations on safeguarding cultural heritage in times of crisis. Upon request, it can also support the evacuation of movable cultural heritage at risk. In addition, the UCPM is establishing a pool of experts with specialised expertise in cultural heritage protection.

<sup>60</sup> European Civil Protection Pool - European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

<sup>61</sup> PROCULTHER-4ALL | UCP Knowledge Network

<sup>62</sup> [Enhancing capacities in Ukraine for cultural heritage first aid and recovery planning – ICCROM](#)

<sup>63</sup> [READY track 1: Safeguarding Heritage Collections, Living Traditions and Practices in the face of Disasters, Extreme Weather Events and Complex Emergencies – ICCROM](#)

<sup>64</sup> [COM/2022/800 final](#)

<sup>65</sup> [Subgroup on the Art Market - Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities](#)

<sup>66</sup> [RITHMS Project](#)

policies and best practices ‘Beyond restoration – the role of restorers and conservators in supporting law enforcement in combating the illicit trafficking of cultural goods’<sup>67</sup>, held in Brussels on 4 December 2024. The event explored how restorers can actively contribute to combating such crimes. It featured expert panel discussions, a hands-on workshop and discussions to address the complex challenges restorers and conservators face in their work.

At their informal meeting in Nicosia, Cyprus on 1-2 June 2026, EU culture ministers acknowledged the potential of new technologies, particularly AI, in strengthening efforts against the trafficking in cultural goods, particularly with regards to traceability and due diligence, and confirmed the importance of continued engagement and cooperation among Member States, including within the framework of EU and international standards and regulatory frameworks.

The responses of Member States to the survey conducted in preparation for this report emphasised networking, awareness-raising and cooperation between police, customs and ministries. They confirmed the full implementation of the EU Regulations on the introduction and the import of cultural goods (Regulation (EU) 2019/880 and Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/1079). They also cited specific cases of cross-institutional collaboration that resulted in the return of stolen goods. Some Member States reported that they had signed bilateral agreements on information exchange, joint training for police units, and the use of digital tools to improve traceability and intra-EU notifications. Training activities in this period included training provided by the OSCE Heritage Crime Task Force, national workshops for police and customs officials, and a UNESCO capacity-building workshop in Warsaw and Chişinău focused on combating the illicit trafficking of Ukrainian cultural property.

#### **4.4. Priority d) Culture for co-creative partnerships: strengthening the cultural dimension of EU external relations**

##### ***19) Governance of the EU strategic approach to international cultural relations and framework***

The role of culture and international cultural relations (ICR) as a strategic asset for Europe’s global influence has gained increased recognition. The Commission and the Member States have implemented a series of activities as part of the work plan. Experts from ministries of culture and ministries responsible for external relations have collaborated closely under the OMC. The work started in May 2023 and brought together around 33 experts from 23 EU Member States, with input from internal and external guest speakers. The OMC group met nine times and, with Slovenia and Luxembourg co-chairing the group, produced a comprehensive report with recommendations to improve the governance of the EU’s ICR.

This report provides an overview of the current state of EU international cultural relations, covers key discussions and contributions and makes 65 recommendations. Several of these focus on strengthening the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on International Cultural Relations – the sole EU-level forum where high-level officials from ministries of culture and those responsible for external relations can convene. In particular, the recommendations aim to improve the SOM’s continuity and alignment with broader strategic priorities. These recommendations are expected to inform the revision of the EU strategy on ICR, scheduled for Q4 2027 under the Culture Compass. Beyond this, they offer practical guidance to strengthen the EU’s cultural diplomacy and enhance its international impact, particularly in today’s volatile, fast-changing and tense geopolitical environment.

##### ***20) Preserving cultural heritage and empowering local CCS in Ukraine***

In light of Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, the Commission set up an expert subgroup on ‘Safeguarding cultural heritage in Ukraine’. The subgroup reported to the Expert Group on Cultural Heritage (created in 2019 following the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage), and consisted of 26 international experts, including 6 from Ukraine. Between June 2023 and December 2024, the group met five times. The recommendations published in November 2024 in English and

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<sup>67</sup> [Beyond Restoration: RITHMS policies and best practices](#)

Ukrainian<sup>68</sup> address four priority areas: (i) recognition of cultural heritage; (ii) risk management; (iii) documentation, monitoring and data collection; and (iv) recovery of cultural heritage. High-level participation by Ukrainian authorities, with deputy ministerial representatives engaging in the fourth and fifth meetings, ensured national ownership.

Building on a 2022 mapping of cultural actors and their needs – conducted after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Ukraine’s designation as an official EU candidate country – the Cultural Relations Platform organised activities in 2024 (at the Commission’s request). Aligned with the EU Work Plan for Culture, the Commission launched a dedicated project activity in January 2024 to evaluate the state of the cultural and creative sectors in Ukraine, with a particular focus on EU integration and its potential contribution to Ukraine’s recovery amid Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine.

Since the start of this war, the Creative Europe Programme has provided substantial support to Ukraine. Under the Culture strand, two special calls were launched – EUR 5 million in 2022 and EUR 7 million in 2025 – to support Ukrainian cultural and creative organisations, professionals and artists in tackling the ongoing and future consequences of Russia’s war of aggression, as well as heritage preservation and artistic performance both inside and outside Ukraine, in cooperation with organisations from other Creative Europe countries. Beyond these calls, Ukrainian organisations have secured EUR 7.64 million through other Creative Europe actions since 2022, including European Cooperation Projects and the ‘Circulation of European Literary Works’ scheme. Additionally, Culture Moves Europe (2022-2025) has awarded over EUR 700 000 in mobility grants to 360+ Ukrainian artists and cultural professionals.

Various support initiatives to preserve Ukraine’s cultural heritage have been provided by all Member States, primarily through funding but also via technical cooperation. Building on these efforts, at the Ukraine Recovery Conference in July 2025, the Commission launched the Team Europe Approach (TEA) for Cultural Heritage in Ukraine. The TEA now comprises 76 actions by 24 Member States<sup>69</sup> and the Commission, as well as pledges by Member States to the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Fund. Developed by Aliph in 2025 at Ukraine’s request, the process received technical support from the Commission, including via the ‘Case Studies on Cultural Heritage Funds in Europe’, published in May 2025<sup>70</sup>.

### **21) The role of culture and cultural professionals in the promotion and defence of democracy and human rights in fragile contexts**

The Council conclusions on an EU strategic approach to international cultural relations and a framework for action (adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on 8 April 2019)<sup>71</sup> recognise the need for a cross-cutting approach to culture, while aiming to strengthen the effectiveness and impact of EU foreign policy by integrating international cultural relations into its instruments. They call for better policy coordination among Commission Directorates-General, Member States and cultural organisations, including joint development of local strategies by EU delegations, EU Member States and the Commission. Cultural cooperation has continued to promote common values and Europe’s unique cultural diversity as a cornerstone of the EU’s global influence in the world in terms of fair, equal and long-term partnerships.

‘Unity in Cultural Diversity: a workshop on artistic freedom, human rights and the role of international cultural relations in Europe and beyond’ was organised in June 2024 in Brussels by the Cultural Relations Platform at the request of the European External Action Service. Fifteen speakers from the EU institutions and representatives from Member States and civil society discussed the importance of supporting artistic freedom in shrinking spaces, how to harness cultural diversity for

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<sup>68</sup> [Recommendations from the European Commission-led expert group on the safeguarding of cultural heritage in Ukraine - Publications Office of the EU](#)

<sup>69</sup> AT, BE, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, IE, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, SE

<sup>70</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and European Expert Network on Culture, *Case studies on cultural heritage funds in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/1231060>

<sup>71</sup> [Council conclusions on an EU strategic approach to international cultural relations and a framework for action](#)

dialogue and resilience, the impact of political dynamics on international cultural relations, and fragile contexts and project implementation.

The Slovenian Presidency's event 'Future Unlocked!' (12-15 September 2021) involved the discussion of cultural and creative sectors as agents of change. Organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the event combined the High-Level Conference on Culture in Foreign Relations, Creative Forum Ljubljana, the European Creative Industries Summit and a senior officials' meeting on international cultural relations. The geographic scope also included the Western Balkans, the South Mediterranean and Africa.

Member States addressed this issue mostly through funded initiatives. These include funding for cultural NGO projects involving artists in exile from Russia and Belarus, grants for Ukrainian artists, and arts council programmes promoting artistic freedom, cultural entrepreneurship and social inclusion in fragile contexts, among others.

## 5. LOOKING AHEAD: THE NEXT WORK PLAN FOR CULTURE

In this rapidly shifting (geo)political and global landscape, culture has emerged as a strategic force for a democratic, resilient and competitive Europe, rooted in our shared values, artistic freedom and fundamental rights. Yet the cultural and creative sectors face pressing challenges from AI and digital disruption to economic instability and social dynamics. Europe must empower them to adapt, innovate, and thrive, thereby ensuring that they are future-ready.

This vision is embedded in the **2025 Culture Compass for Europe**, through which the Commission established an ambitious EU strategic framework for policymaking. The Compass sets out key directions to support and strengthen the cultural and creative sectors and to mainstream culture across policies. Backed by concrete flagship actions – many of which are already underway – the Compass provides a foundation for long-term policy ambition.

Building on this and also on the achievements of the work plans for culture, the **2026 Joint Declaration 'Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe'**<sup>72</sup> is a tripartite political agreement between the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the Commission. It enshrines shared commitments and guiding principles for priority areas of EU level cooperation on culture, while fully respecting Member States' competences. Endorsed by all three institutions, this Declaration reinforces the strategic direction set by the Compass and offers a common point of reference for the future.

The next multiannual **work plan for culture post-2026** now offers a key opportunity to translate this collective vision and political consensus into targeted, impactful and time-bound actions. By aligning closely with the new strategic foundation provided by the Compass and the Joint Declaration, the work plan can further enhance policy coherence and foster complementarity with existing or planned initiatives. By focusing on **the most pressing themes and concrete deliverable actions**, the work plan can drive effective collaboration on culture between the Member States at EU level.

This view is supported by the survey findings. Several Member States emphasised the need for a coherent, complementary and efficiently structured work plan that builds on past achievements. The Commission therefore recommends **a more focused and action-oriented approach** for the next cycle, avoiding an excessive number of topics to prevent overloading the agenda and ensure feasible implementation by the Member States and the Commission. Working methods should be carefully calibrated to the topic and objective at hand, with administrative burden kept to a minimum. Member States expressed similar concern and emphasised the need for focus and efficiency.

The **themes that Member States consider the most relevant for the future work plan** largely align with the priorities of the Culture Compass and the Joint Declaration. Responses also highlighted a preference for continuity, while adapting the focus to reflect contemporary challenges. The key priorities for the next work plan, which were also articulated by culture ministers in their policy debate during the EYCS Council on 12 May 2026, can be summarised as follows:

- **AI and the cultural and creative sectors**, given AI's role in enhancing European

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<sup>72</sup> Signed on 18 June 2026. OJ C/2026/3440, 25.6. 2026, [EUR-Lex - C\\_202603440 - EN - EUR-Lex](#).

competitiveness, the need to balance technological adoption with the preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity and creators' rights, as well as AI's ethical, legal and transparency implications for culture. In light of this, the Commission is preparing a dedicated AI strategy, planned for adoption in 2027. The next work plan provides an opportunity to include complementary action to facilitate exchanges on national initiatives as well as dedicated activities to follow up on the recommendations from the study on the discoverability of diverse European cultural content in the digital environment, targeted at Member States.

- **Crisis preparedness, security, resilience in and through culture**, including peace-building and the protection and safeguarding of cultural heritage, are increasingly vital. The urgency of this topic is heightened by geopolitical instability and emerging conflicts, climate change and extreme weather events. As further confirmed by ongoing policy work under the EU preparedness Union strategy<sup>73</sup>, which identifies cultural heritage as one of the 19 core vital societal functions, there is a need to develop and strengthen ad hoc coordination mechanisms at local, regional and EU levels, alongside broad civil society education and awareness. To advance these goals, the Commission considers there to be significant added value for the next work plan in including a focus on cultural heritage risk preparedness, supplementing Member States' efforts through increased coordination and expertise-sharing, including by capitalising on lessons learned from conflict and crisis contexts, particularly in Ukraine. Meanwhile, culture remains essential for fostering social cohesion and resilience, particularly in addressing global challenges. Digital means, such as digital preservation and 3D digitisation, can play an important role, while intergenerational exchange can contribute to safeguarding intangible heritage and traditional crafts.
- **Access to culture and cultural heritage** remains crucial, particularly in underserved territories, for persons with disabilities, and for disadvantaged or marginalised communities. This involves strengthening cultural participation and leveraging cultural infrastructure, such as libraries, museums and cultural centres, as proximity spaces for engagement and engines of local, regional and territorial development. The well-documented importance of cultural access for democratic participation, as well as individual and societal well-being, ensures that the topic stays high on the agenda. In this context, the Commission will propose EU guidelines on culture for health and well-being by 2028. This process will require strong engagement and collaboration among Member States. The next work plan could make a meaningful contribution to this. Additionally, to enhance young people's access to culture and heritage, there is scope for sharing best practices and addressing challenges between Member States related to cultural pass schemes implemented at national, regional, local, or cross-border levels.
- **Strategic investment in culture and innovative financing tools** are essential to expand the resource base of the cultural and creative sectors and unlock the potential of culture in addressing the challenges of today and tomorrow. Instruments such as blended finance, public-private partnerships, philanthropy and tax incentives could be further explored and developed. Future EU-level cooperation under the next work plan could play a key role in providing guidance, sharing knowledge and exchanging good practices, particularly given the diverse national funding models and experiences. This exchange could also cover lessons learned from the use of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and Cohesion Policy support (including the European Regional Development Fund) for culture, particularly with a view to inspiring possible future cultural investments in the proposed National and Regional Partnership Plans.
- **Safeguarding artistic freedom** has gained prominence in EU-level discussion, with a growing consensus on its critical role in democratic and open societies. This is reflected in the Council's work on culture's role in democratic resilience under the current work plan. In the EU, protecting the freedom of artists and cultural workers to create without censorship or intimidation and to express their views on public issues is a collective responsibility. The next work plan offers an opportunity to build on this progress, advancing artistic freedom both as a

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<sup>73</sup> [JOIN\(2025\) 130 final](#)

cornerstone of our democracies as well as a foundational working condition that enables a thriving and diverse cultural landscape.

- **Improving working conditions** for artists and cultural professionals, alongside freedom of artistic expression, remains a key priority that should be carried over and further developed in the next work plan. This would allow for building on the results already achieved and integrating insights from the ongoing work under the Culture Compass, notably the upcoming State of Culture Report and the EU Artists' Charter.
- **The EU's international cultural relations** continue to represent a key area for EU-level work, with scope to foster coherence, strategic alignment and effective implementation of cultural cooperation with partner countries. As highlighted by the recent Open Method of Coordination on the topic, clearer geographical and thematic priorities are needed to avoid fragmented approaches across instruments and projects. For the next work plan, one first step could be a comprehensive study or mapping of existing association and partnership agreements, with a focus on their cultural clauses, alongside improved information-sharing mechanisms with Member States. This would enable more strategic alignment in future negotiations, ensuring that cultural provisions reflect both EU objectives and the realities of Member States' engagement in partner countries, while strengthening the impact of these provisions in full respect of subsidiarity. Moreover, the Commission supports the Open Method of Coordination group's recommendation seeking to improve the continuity of Senior Official Meetings and their alignment with broader strategic priorities.

In light of the above, the next work plan could **consolidate progress and reinforce ongoing workstreams, while addressing emerging priorities in a flexible manner** and avoiding dispersion or duplication of efforts. By collaborating closely, Member States and the Commission can turn shared priorities into tangible, durable policy outcomes at both EU and national levels.

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ANNEX: Survey on the implementation of the Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 – Analysis of replies from EU Member States

## ANNEX

### **Survey on the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026**

#### **Methodology**

A targeted survey of EU Member States on the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 was conducted between 3 February 2026 and 19 March 2026. The survey was distributed to all 27 EU Member States, and 26 replies were received. The questionnaire was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative evidence on Member States' assessment of the current work plan, its implementation, its contribution to national policymaking, the suitability of its working methods, and priorities for a possible next work plan in light of the Culture Compass for Europe and the draft Joint Declaration 'Europe for Culture – Culture for Europe'.

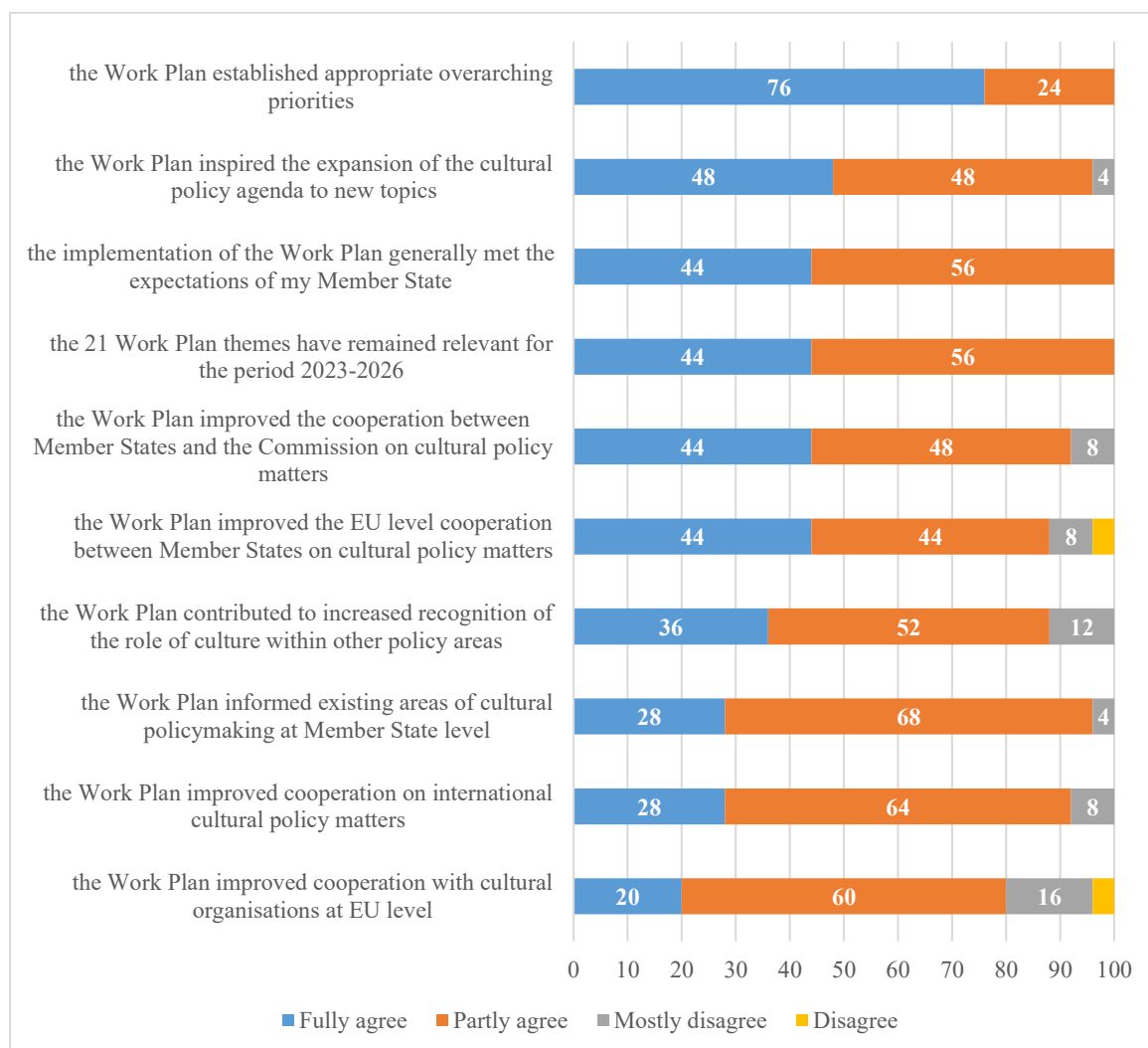
The questionnaire combined closed and open-ended questions. It included rating questions using four-point scales, yes/no questions, multiple-selection questions and open text fields allowing Member States to explain ratings, provide examples, and set out priorities in more detail. The survey covered five broad areas: (i) overall assessment of the relevance and implementation of the work plan; (ii) its contribution to policy development in Member States across the 21 themes and actions; (iii) assessment of the working methods, including the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), dissemination and working arrangements; (iv) reflections on priorities for the next work plan, including thematic and possible sectoral priorities; and (v) final comments.

The analysis combined a descriptive review of the quantitative responses with a thematic assessment of the qualitative material. Closed-question responses were aggregated to identify overall patterns in Member States' assessments and preferences. Open responses were reviewed to identify recurring themes, illustrative examples and explanations of ratings or priorities. The figures produced on the basis of the survey data are presented in this annex.

Preliminary findings from the survey analysis were presented to the Council's Cultural Affairs Committee in Brussels on 27 March 2026, where Member States had an opportunity to provide feedback on the initial results. This feedback informed the further refinement of the analysis presented in this report.

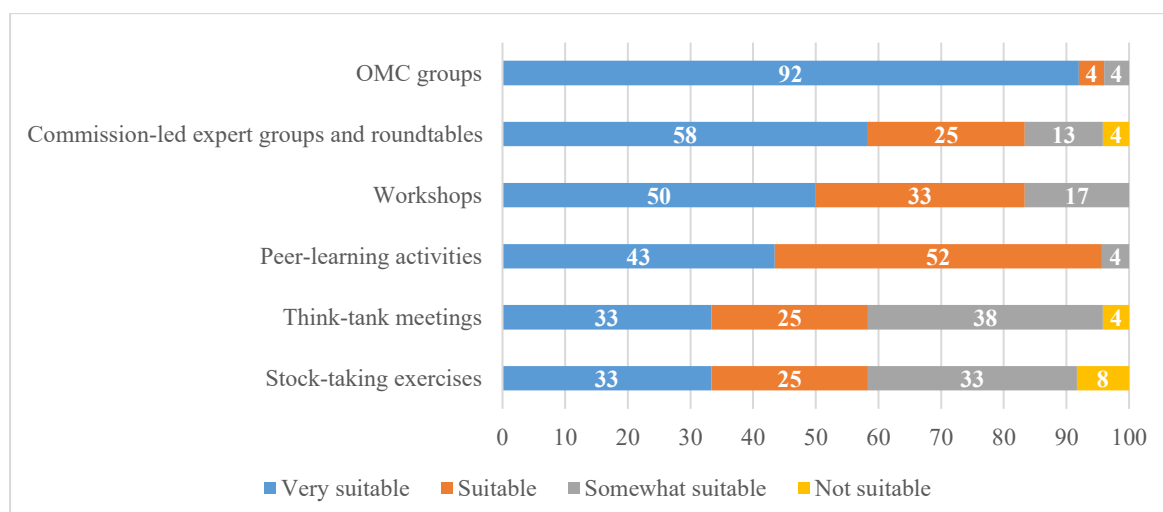
## Analysis of replies from EU Member States

**Chart 1: Overall assessment of the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026 and its implementation (MS ranking of the following statements) (%)**



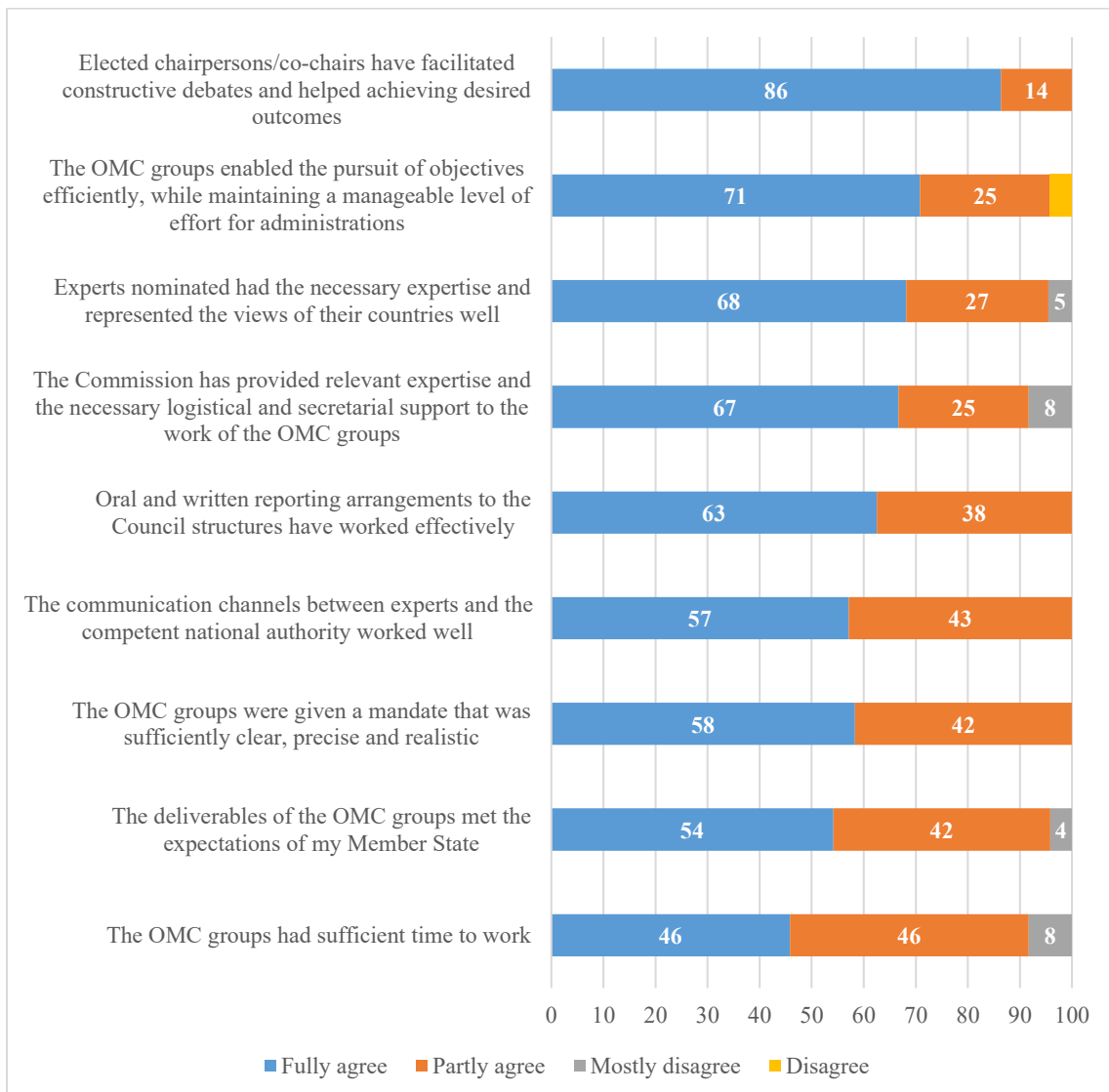
Source: Survey for MS on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, data compiled by Panteia, 2026

**Chart 2: How suitable do you rate the following working methods to achieving the ambitions of the work plan? (%)**



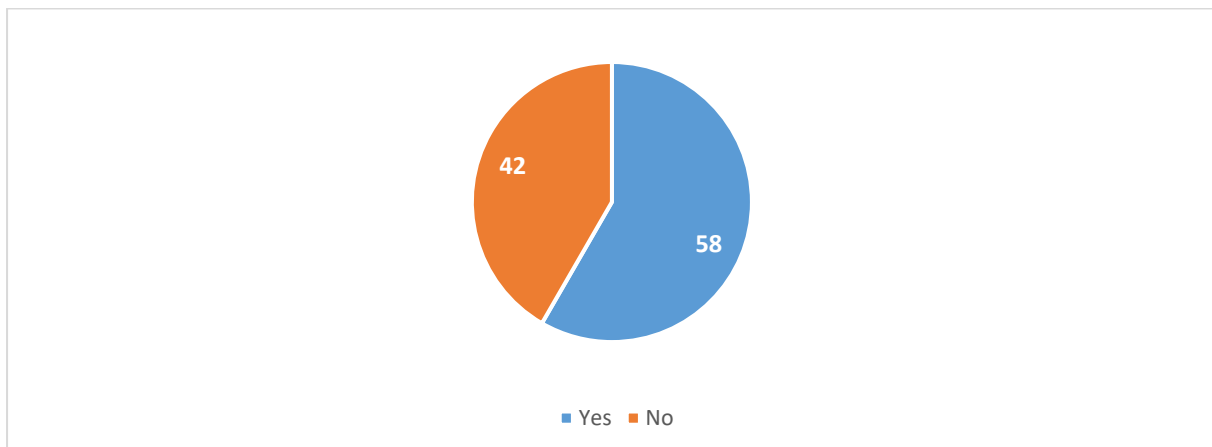
Source: Survey for MS on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, data compiled by Panteia, 2026

**Chart 3: How do you rate the following statements on work arrangements and performance aspects regarding the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) groups? (%)**



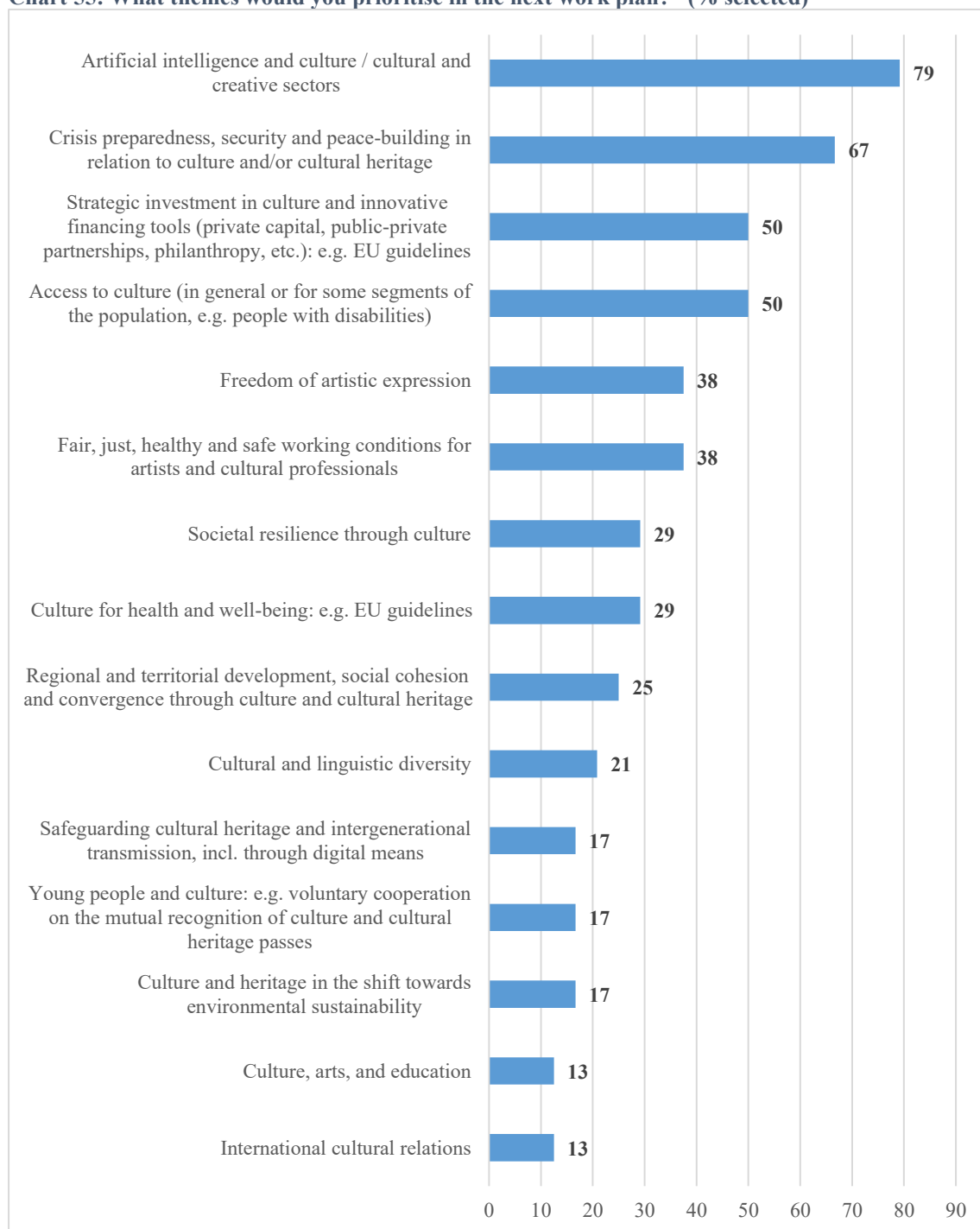
Source: Survey for MS on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, data compiled by Panteia, 2026

**Chart 44: Do you think that the next EU work plan should introduce discussions on specific cultural and creative sectors? (%)**



Source: Survey for MS on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, data compiled by Panteia, 2026

**Chart 55: What themes would you prioritise in the next work plan?\* (% selected)**



(\*) Note: Member States could select up to five themes to prioritise

Source: Survey for MS on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026, data compiled by Panteia, 2026