

A Culture Compass for Europe

Response to call for evidence

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Introduction

Pearle*- Live Performance Europe is the European federation regrouping through its members over 13,000 organisations and companies in the music, performing arts and live event sectors.

Pearle* has taken note of the Commission's invitation to a call for feedback on its plans to present a Culture Compass for Europe and a Joint Declaration of the EU Institutions. As a general principle, Pearle* strongly welcomes the Commission's initiative to develop the Culture Compass as a strategic framework for EU cultural policy. The need for a coherent, long-term cultural strategy that reflects the multiple dimensions of culture in European policymaking is timely and necessary. In this respect, it will also allow an alignment with the new priorities of the Council and the Commission, presented in 2024.

The recent Eurostat figures show that the Creative, Arts, and Entertainment Sectors represent 27,4% of a total of 2.03 million cultural enterprises, which is the highest portion of cultural enterprises, whilst the added value they are able to generate is significantly lower than manufacturing-related cultural sectors. This observation alone shows that the live performance ecosystem requires targeted policy initiatives. **We also welcome the Commission's recognition of a need for a more coherent and interconnected framework, supported by regular monitoring, data collection, and sustained stakeholder engagement.** This process must remain ongoing.

Comments

The call for evidence refers to five core dimensions which are expected to generate a positive impact: culturally, socially, economically, environmentally and externally. Pearle* supports this view, whilst it needs to be underlined that it requires a careful balancing, as the core principle should remain the intrinsic value of the arts, the cultural diversity, the freedom of the arts and access to culture, and the value of those human rights. These dimensions are deeply interconnected, and any positive measures on one will inevitably reflect on the others.

In this regard, we like to share the following points:

- **Culture as a foundation for Europe**

Culture must sit at the heart of the European Union's political priorities. The Culture Compass should be a guiding foundation for how future EU and Member States' policies are shaped and how their impact is assessed.

Europe is shaped not only by its economy or the strength of its borders, but by the values it upholds and the rich cultural diversity it brings together. Through language, performance, music, heritage, and the visual arts, culture tells the story of who we are as Europeans—and how we connect with one another. As it was learned from the pandemic, for citizens, being able to participate physically in a live event is a need that is deeply rooted in the well-being of people and of society.

The Culture Compass must ensure that this cultural richness is not only celebrated but fully supported and safeguarded across all areas of EU policymaking. Whether in education, youth, regional policies, digital policy, sustainability, mobility and free movement of services and workers, taxation, social protection, or other areas, culture must be a consideration from the outset. **When policies overlook the various dimensions and realities of cultural work, the entire ecosystem suffers. Importantly, the Culture Compass presents an opportunity to address this.**

Whilst the EU can provide added value by complementing cultural policies in the Member States, the role of cities, regions, and local authorities should also be acknowledged. Culture is often rooted in local communities, shaped by place-based identities, and supported through municipal infrastructures and networks. **Recognising their contribution is essential in line with the principle of subsidiarity and to ensure a coherent link with cohesion and regional development policies.**

- **Sustaining Europe's Strength through Cultural Investment**

A strong and secure Europe begins from within. While responding to geopolitical shifts and investing in external priorities are important, the EU should safeguard its strengths coming from its values, its way of life, and its sense of community, and all of these are strongly linked to its culture. **Investing in culture is not separate from economic growth and defence—it is within its intrinsic cultural value, an important part of it.**

Cultural diplomacy is also a key element of the EU's external action, building bridges with other societies and promoting mutual understanding. Live performance, in particular, plays a powerful role in connecting people across borders, conveying European values, and showcasing the diversity and creativity of Europe's cultural expressions on the global stage.

Culture fosters belonging, dialogue, and democratic resilience. **The future Multiannual Financial Framework must reflect this. While we acknowledge the pressures on the EU budget, cultural investment must not be deprioritised. Pearle* fully supports the call for 2% of the EU budget to be allocated to culture, reflecting the various dimensions and positive impacts of culture.**

In addition to protecting culture, the Culture Compass must unlock its full potential as a strategic asset. The performing arts and wider Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) already contribute to sustainability, innovation, social inclusion, well-being, education, and regional development. **Culture should be systematically considered across EU policy portfolios—from**

the Green Deal and digital transformation to cohesion and social policies—with consistent, accessible funding streams to match.

The economic and competitive dimension of the sector must also be clearly recognised. Cultural and Creative Industries (CCI) are drivers of European growth, employment, and exports, particularly through SMEs. In 2022, over 2 million cultural enterprises in the EU generated €199 billion in value added, representing 2.0% of the total business economy. However, Creative, Arts and Entertainment activities—although highly labour-intensive and representing the largest share of cultural enterprises (27.4%)—generated only 11.4% of this value added. The recent data from Eurostat demonstrates the number of micro- and small enterprises which require specific and targeted consideration. Indeed, 78% of EU workers in creative, arts and entertainment activities were employed by micro-enterprises with fewer than 10 employees. The compliance costs and burdens on such organisations are therefore much higher than bigger enterprises, and often disproportionate. With a targeted set of initiatives that reduce or eliminate compliance costs, but replace those with incentives, the live sector that suffered most during the pandemic and ensuing energy crisis, will be able to thrive.

A strategic framework must also support the potential, recognise the different needs of sectors through funding instruments, by fostering innovation and its research dimension, entrepreneurship and international representation, and incentivising cross-border collaboration between bigger and smaller organisations, public and private organisations, and between sectors.

Barriers to greening—such as lack of financial resources—must be taken into account when designing EU support tools and programmes, including operational needs concerning reducing travel and transport costs, supporting circular production methods, and promoting the use of energy-efficient infrastructure.

- **Protection of artistic freedom and working conditions**

The Culture Compass must include as a key principle the recognition of **artistic freedom as the cornerstone of democracy and a basic condition for both creating and experiencing culture**. It should be clearly protected—not only as a cultural right, but also as a value that is part of the rule of law and democratic life. When artistic freedom is under threat, wider civic freedoms and social cohesion are also at risk. The EU should take concrete steps to protect and promote artistic freedom, including through legal and policy tools such as the **Annual Rule of Law Reports**.

Citizens are entitled to access to culture, and artistic freedom is an essential precondition for citizens to exercise this right. According to the latest Eurobarometer survey, 88% of Europeans say that artistic freedom matters to them, and 77% believe that artists can freely express their ideas and opinions. This demonstrates that citizens across the EU recognise the importance of protecting freedom of expression through the arts as part of Europe’s democratic fabric.

In addition, the working conditions of artists and cultural professionals can only be addressed with full consideration and understanding for the specific characteristics of the sector and sub-sectors. One-size-fits-all solutions will not work. Policies need to be co-developed with those working in the field to ensure they are realistic, effective, and fit for the future, and take into consideration the entire eco-system and economic context in which all players are part of the circle. The role of social partners (i.e. employers and trade unions) in the respective

Member States must be acknowledged and further supported. A specific reference in the Declaration of the EU institutions in the Annex to the Communication can highlight this role.

In addition, removing barriers to mobility and the free movement of workers and services should receive priority. Cultural organisations working across Member States often face administrative burdens and uncertainty about which rules apply. These obstacles undermine the European cultural space and limit cross-border collaboration. With more than 450 European rules affecting the live performance sector, including related compliance costs, we urge the Commission to coordinate action across relevant DGs so that EU rules on employment, taxation, mobility, and cross-border provision of services, as well as visas and work permits for third-country nationals, do not have unintended negative effects on the cultural and creative sector.

Finally, the digital transition, including the development and use of artificial intelligence, poses new challenges and opportunities. **We believe the Culture Compass must empower the sector to navigate the digital shift.** This means investing in training and digital literacy for artists and cultural professionals, promoting access to technology and digital tools, and supporting innovation that respects artistic integrity. Creators should be equipped to understand and adapt to evolving technologies, including AI, and to benefit from their use, rather than be excluded or exploited by them. At the same time, it is essential to increase knowledge among artists on how to safeguard their rights in this new context of AI, especially regarding how their works and personal data are used in digital environments. This includes clear rules on authorship and consent in AI-generated content, transparency in how platforms use cultural content, and strong enforcement of copyright towards such platforms, including fair remuneration.

Furthermore, cybersecurity is becoming a growing concern when using technical equipment in live events, which may have serious consequences for the protection of audiences.

Conclusion

Pearle* welcomes the ambition behind the proposed Culture Compass and fully supports the Commission's efforts to provide a strategic, coherent, and inclusive framework for EU cultural policy. We agree that it is time for a renewed vision that recognises culture as a cross-cutting policy area, by starting from the intrinsic value to the role it plays in economic development, as well as democracy, sustainability, innovation, diplomacy and international relations.

We particularly welcome the commitment to improved alignment between EU-level cultural policy and broader political priorities. To ensure that the Culture Compass delivers tangible results for the sector, we underline the following priorities:

- Culture, thanks to its intrinsic value, must be embedded across all relevant EU policy fields from the outset.
- Artistic freedom must be protected as a democratic value, and the Rule of Law must be upheld as its foundation.
- Policies must be tailored to the specific working realities of the sector as a whole and to the different sectors where needed, co-developed with relevant stakeholders.
- Cultural sectors must be supported in adapting to digital transformation and artificial intelligence.

- Mobility and cross-border work must be made simpler and more consistent across Member States.
- Public investment in culture should be maintained and reinforced, especially through a clear, accessible, and well-coordinated funding landscape across the EU budget.
- The Culture Compass must remain a living tool—supported by structured dialogue, regular evaluation, and shared ownership between institutions and the cultural ecosystem.

Reflecting on the five core dimensions identified in the Commission’s initiative, we believe that by acting on these priorities, the Culture Compass can become a long-term commitment to protecting and growing Europe’s cultural fabric, in all its diversity, creativity, and potential, which will reflect:

- **Culturally:** in the reinforcement of artistic freedom and the intrinsic value of cultural expression as essential pillars of European identity and democratic life;
- **Socially:** in increasing inclusion, cohesion, and participation by removing structural barriers, supporting the working conditions of cultural professionals, and ensuring broad access to culture across all communities and for the benefit of all citizens;
- **Economically:** in stimulating growth and innovation by recognising the specific characteristics and needs of SMEs and micro-enterprises in the cultural and creative sectors, enhancing access to funding, and encouraging entrepreneurship and cross-border cooperation;
- **Environmentally:** in supporting the green transition in the cultural sector by promoting sustainable production models and innovation;
- **Externally:** in the strengthening of international cultural relations, through cultural diplomacy, artistic exchange, and the promotion of European values and cultural diversity abroad.

This integrated approach confirms that cultural policy is not isolated but inherently connected to the broader policy agenda. A strategic framework that takes these interdependencies into account will be essential for ensuring the lasting impact of the Culture Compass across all dimensions.