



Short Profile

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BELGIUM - French Community (Wallonia-Brussels Federation)

Short Cultural Policy Profile

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1. Fact and figures

- Political system: Federal parliamentary monarchy.
- Official languages: dutch, french, german.

	<i>Latest available data:</i> 2024	<i>Latest available data:</i> 2019
<i>Population on January 1st</i>	11 817 096	11 455 519
<i>GDP in million EUR</i>	561 413.4 (p)	429 083.3
<i>GDP per capita in PPS Index (EU27_2020 = 100)</i>	117	116
<i>General government expenditure (in % of GDP)</i>	54.1	51.8
<i>Public cultural expenditure in mil- lion EUR</i>	4 462.7 (p)	3 402.6
<i>Public cultural expenditure as % of GDP</i>	0.7 (p)	0.7
<i>Public cultural expenditure per Capita</i>	377 EUR	297 EUR
<i>Share of cultural employment of total employment</i>	4.2	4.5

Sources: Eurostat (2026). Data for Belgium. (p): provisional

2. Cultural policy system

2.1 Objectives

Historically, cultural policies in the French Community of Belgium (which has been referred to in its communications as the Wallonia-Brussels Federation since 2011) have constantly oscillated between the framework of the democratisation of culture and that of cultural democracy. At the turn of the 21st century, the objective of protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions mobilised both public authorities and the cultural sector. The fundamental and underlying characteristic of cultural policies in French-speaking Belgium is the incorporation of human rights ideology into the objectives of cultural policies: individual and collective emancipation through culture, artistic freedom (notably via an 'artist's status'), and the 'right to cultural fulfilment' of the population (Article 23 of the Belgian Constitution).

In this regard, the French Community has implemented policies to fund artistic creation and cultural dissemination. This 'supply-side' policy is complemented by a 'demand-side' policy: enhancing access to culture for all audiences and promoting initiatives in arts education and cultural mediation. Finally, the public authorities have introduced measures aimed at developing cultural entrepreneurship and the economic growth of the cultural and creative sectors and industries.

The current government of the French Community, which took office in 2024, has also set out the following objectives in particular: to encourage the diversification of complementary funding sources such as patronage and to increase the resources allocated to artistic creation; to support the growth of new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), notably through the establishment of a digital cultural strategy and regulations on the protection of copyright and intellectual property; to help increase the presence, visibility and discoverability of artists on online digital platforms; and to promote the influence of the French language, particularly within the Francophonie.

2.2 Main features

Cultural policies in Belgium are deeply shaped by the country's institutional architecture – that is to say, its federalism, which is itself based on linguistic and cultural factors. It is therefore the three Communities – the French Community, the Flemish Community and the German-speaking Community – which, in principle, hold exclusive competence to act in cultural matters; it is they who are primarily responsible for allocating public funding to the cultural sector. It is worth noting, however, that the Belgian federal government and the regions (the Flemish Region, the Walloon Region and the Brussels Region) have been increasingly active in the field of cultural policy over the past thirty years or so. In

the French Community, the funding of culture is based on two essential principles – subsidiarity and pluralism.

The principle of subsidiarity refers to the fact that the public authorities see their role primarily as supporting initiatives originating from the cultural sector rather than creating and managing cultural organisations. Initiatives from the cultural sector therefore significantly shape the tools of public policy. By contrast, the State’s oversight of cultural institutions appears relatively weak and underdeveloped.

The principle of pluralism, for its part, refers to the desire to guarantee a plurality of ideological and philosophical tendencies in the formulation and implementation of cultural policies and in access to cultural infrastructure. It is a principle based on democratic pluralism and guarantees that minority political movements have a presence within public cultural institutions, at least within their governing bodies.

The close association of the “continuing education” sector with cultural policies is undoubtedly one of the most distinctive features of the French Community in this regard, given that this sector comprises associations that are ideologically close to or linked with the various political parties (party youth movements, party women’s movements, party senior’s movements, party cultural and audiovisual movements, etc.).

The principle of pluralism also introduces a participatory democratic dimension into the cultural policy-making process and contributes to the existence of several advisory committees comprising representatives from the cultural sector (sectoral or professional federations).

Although participation in the implementation of cultural policies takes the form of seven advisory committees, composed of experts from the cultural sector, which issue opinions on the appropriateness of funding artists and cultural organisations, the final decision remains in the hands of the Minister for Culture or, for grants above a certain amount, in those of the government as a whole. To summarise the political and administrative characteristics of the decision-making process for cultural policies, we can conclude that the state is relatively weak, and the political parties are relatively strong.

The Belgian federal government still implements a number of direct cultural policies, notably through the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, the Royal Museum of Art and History, the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie (opera), the Belgian National Orchestra, the Palais des Beaux-Arts, and the Royal Library of Belgium. In addition to these major Belgian cultural institutions, the Belgian federal government implements indirect cultural policies, particularly in the areas of taxation, social security and intellectual property.

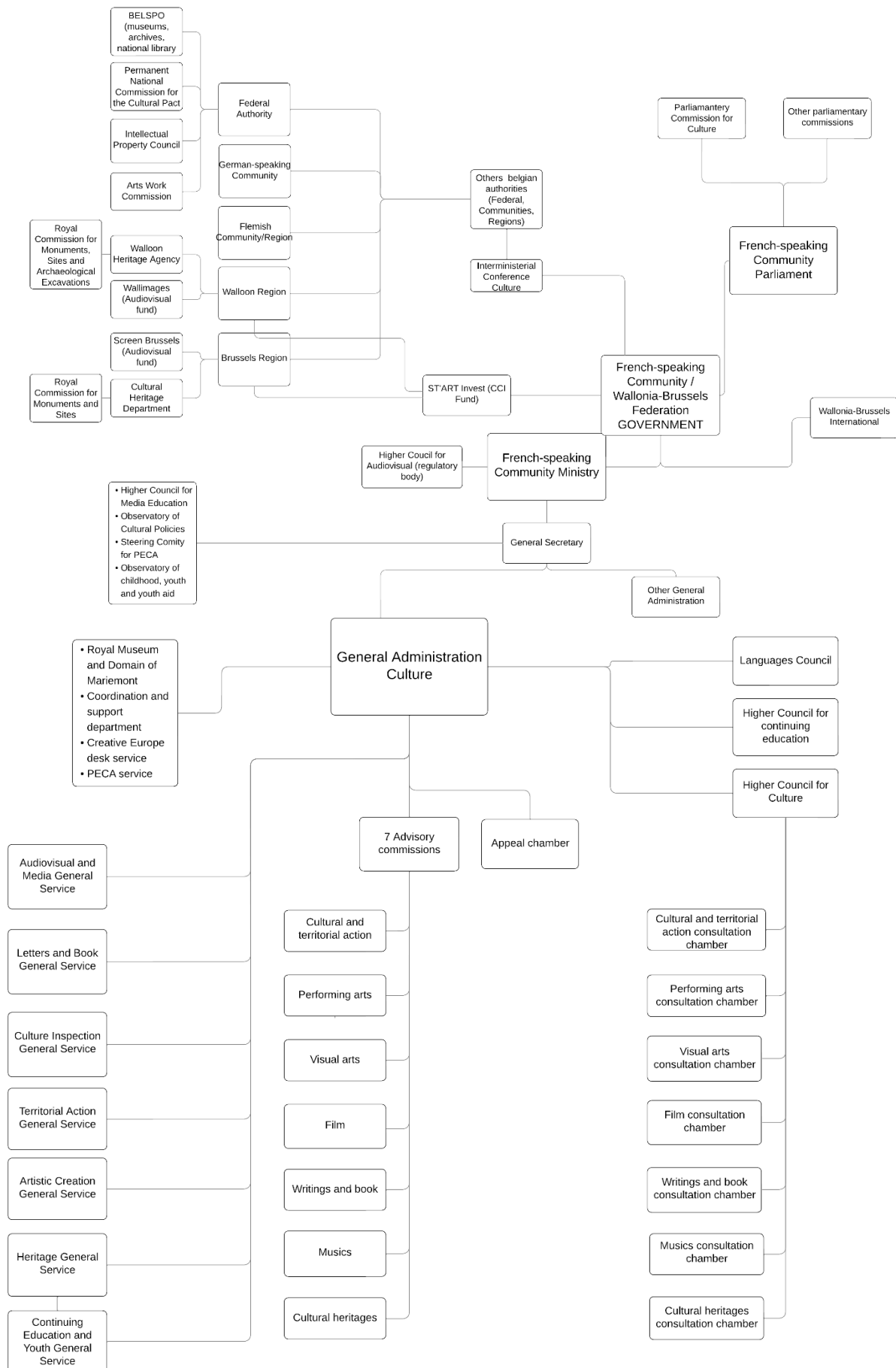
The Walloon Region and the Brussels Region, for their part, primarily implement cultural policies relating to immovable cultural heritage and support for the cultural, creative and digital industries.

Over the past thirty years or so, it has become apparent that the exclusive powers granted to the Communities in the cultural sphere are being eroded. The actions of the federal government and the regions are having an increasingly significant impact on cultural policies. This phenomenon does not appear to be the result of explicit political choices but stems from the growing role of indirect cultural policies implemented by these other public authorities, namely policies on taxation, social security, employment, intellectual property, and economic development.

In practical terms, the instruments of cultural policy have diversified and expanded. In addition to the traditional instrument of direct subsidies, they take the form of employment support; a social status for artists; tax incentives; or even public investment funds in the cultural and creative industries. Gradually, cultural policies are therefore proving to be increasingly shaped by issues of multi-level governance of culture. The cultural policy model is no longer centred solely on state funding of cultural provision; it is now opening up – to varying degrees depending on the sector – to support for cultural entrepreneurship and supplementary funding from the public or the private sector.

2.3 Governance system: Organisational Organigram

BELGIUM									
Federal Authority	3 Communities [mainly competent for cultural affairs]			3 Regions					
	Flemish Community (Dutch-speaking)	French Community (French-speaking)	German-speaking Community	Flemish Region	Walloon Region	Brussels Region			
						Flemish Community Commission	French Community Commission	Common Community Commission	
10 provinces									
Anvers	Limbourg	Flandre Orientale	Brabant flamand	Flandre Occidentale	Brabant wallon	Hainaut	Liège	Luxembourg	Namur
581 municipalities									



2.4 Background

1945–1969

Against the backdrop of the Cold War, cultural policies were developed with a view to democratising culture, through the creation of public institutions symbolising the State's role in the cultural sector, including the National Theatre of Belgium in 1945, which was tasked with educating the public and decentralising the performing arts. The authorities pursued a two-part approach to autonomy: through the creation of a Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1958; and through the partial cultural and political autonomy of the three cultural communities.

1970–1992

1970 marked the institutional creation of the cultural communities: cultural responsibilities were divided amongst the communities, with the exception of the major Belgian national cultural institutions, most of which were located in Brussels. The communities' cultural policies soon experienced a remarkable boom. The French Community devised new support mechanisms, particularly for cultural centres and the performing arts, inspired by the principles of democratisation and cultural democracy.

1993–2001

In 1993, Belgium became, under the Constitution, a federal state comprising three communities and three regions. Since then, there has been a growing trend towards multi-level governance of culture. Fundamental regulatory powers for the cultural sector fall under federal authority, whilst the economic development of the cultural and creative industries is the responsibility of the regions.

This period saw the scope of intervention broaden to include previously unrecognised cultural practices (popular music, circus, etc.) and towards the cultural industries, primarily the film industry. The French Community is gradually formalising its cultural policies through contractual agreements: it is stabilising the work of cultural organisations by awarding multi-annual funding.

2002 – 2026

In a context of cultural globalisation and rapid technological developments, the new issue of cultural diversity has become a key reference point for cultural policies in the French Community.

Issues of good governance have come to the fore in the allocation of public funding, through regulations defining the cultural sector's participation in decision-making as well as obligations regarding transparency, public disclosure, and the management of conflicts of interest.

Educating young people in the arts and culture and the social status of arts workers are

3. Current cultural affairs

3.1 Key developments

Generally speaking, the implementation of cultural policy in the French Community is the result of a collaborative governance approach, formalised by the Decree on Cultural Governance. It is underpinned by permanent bodies that bring together the administration, political representatives and professionals from the sector: the Higher Council for Culture and the Sectoral Consultation Chambers.

A major challenge that the public authorities have had to address in recent years is the Covid crisis, which officially runs from March 2020 to March 2022 in Belgium. Under the Minister for Culture, Bénédicte Linard, substantial budgetary funds have been allocated to support the cultural sector, which, as a whole, suffered the greatest impact after the hospitality sector due to a prolonged closure. The Covid crisis has served as a wake-up call. It has brought to light a significant part of the cultural sector that had remained on the fringes of publicly subsidised culture, and which found itself in difficulty during the period of health-related closures. It has also highlighted the precarious situation of artists.

The French Community's 2019–2024 legislative term also broadened the scope of cultural policies by extending support to new sectors, such as humour and video games, and developed an integrated approach to support through 'sectoral plans' in the book sector.

The 2024–2029 legislative term, under Culture Minister Elisabeth Degryse, begins with the identification of multiple priority areas for action:

- These include the continued roll-out of the PECA in schools, in particular to clarify and enhance the role of artists in schools and to develop the contribution of the Academies.
- The government also wishes to pay greater attention to new technologies and their impact on artistic creation and dissemination. The platformisation of culture raises questions about the presence, visibility and discoverability of local works, as well as the funding of national production.
- The advent of AI is prompting the cultural sector and public authorities to consider the need for regulation, notably through the drafting of ethical charters.
- The dissemination of artistic creation remains a fundamental issue for the arts sector: the government has assessed and revised the decree on support for the dissemination of artistic productions in the French Community from 2025 onwards and intends to give cultural centres a greater role in this area.
- The government also wishes to encourage and develop patronage as a source of supplementary funding.

3.2 Key themes

Launched in 2020, the Cultural and Artistic Education Programme (PECA) aims to provide every pupil with equal access to culture by encouraging engagement with works of art, artists, and cultural venues; the acquisition of knowledge and skills; active artistic practice; and an openness to cultural diversity, with a view to democratisation and personal development. Its aim is to integrate culture into every pupil's educational journey by providing schools with a varied, professional range of activities tailored to local circumstances. It marks a structural shift by fostering a lasting dialogue between the worlds of education and culture.

In the wake of the international 'Me Too' movement, the issue of gender equality in the cultural sector has come to the fore. In several sectors, notably music, the performing arts and cinema, studies have been carried out to examine the situation regarding inequalities in the labour market in general and in management roles in particular. Beyond the strict issue of gender equality, this movement has brought to light and condemned the existence of abusive, and even illegal, situations in employment relationships within the cultural sector (harassment, sexual abuse, abuse of power, etc.). Public authorities have, through various measures, promoted gender equality within cultural policies.

In 2024, the federal government implemented a reform of the 'artist's status', now referred to as the 'arts worker's status'. This amendment to the legal framework was carried out through an unprecedented consultation process with sectoral and professional federations in the cultural sector and, subsequently, with the social partners (trade unions). This gradual reform of social security for arts workers facilitates access to the social protection system, provides more favourable conditions for young artists, extends this protection to workers in artistic-technical and artistic support roles, increases the amounts granted, and grants decision-making power to an 'Arts Labour Commission', half of whose members are representatives of the cultural sector. This new status is to be evaluated in 2027.

The various cultural sectors of the French Community, through their respective consultation chambers, are committed to promoting the responsible and ethical use of AI in light of the rapid rise of these technologies. Stakeholders are invited to weigh up the technological benefits against the environmental, social, societal, economic, democratic and ethical impacts. This is very much a bottom-up approach, with the French Community leaving the initiative to sectoral stakeholders. To date, a Charter for the Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence in the audiovisual sector has been adopted by the professional federations for cinema and the audiovisual sector, along with a Charter for the Responsible Use

of Artificial Intelligence in the writing and publishing sector; other sectors – the performing arts, music, the visual arts, heritage – could follow in the coming months. These ethical charters are intended to complement existing and future regulations.

3.2 International Cultural Cooperation

Wallonie-Bruxelles International (WBI), as the body responsible for international relations, has the mission of strengthening the impact, influence and profile of Wallonia and Brussels on the international stage. It operates through the institutions and organisations falling within the remit of the Walloon Region, the French Community and the COCOF, coordinating their activities in the political, cultural, social, academic, scientific, economic and environmental fields.

WBI is responsible for organising support for cultural dissemination and bilateral cultural cooperation. A reform was carried out in 2024 to provide a legal basis for the grants awarded and to ensure principles of good governance such as transparency and public disclosure.

Cultural promotion is now embodied in five sector-specific agencies: Wallonie-Bruxelles Images for the audiovisual sector, Wallonie-Bruxelles Musiques (WBM), Wallonie-Bruxelles Théâtre Danse (WBTD), Wallonie-Bruxelles Design Mode (WBDM) and Wallonie-Bruxelles Architecture. International outreach is also achieved through cultural venues: the Wallonia-Brussels Centres in Paris and Kinshasa, and the Théâtre des Doms in Avignon, France.

In 2026, the Government is conducting an evaluation aimed at bringing together support mechanisms within a new single agency for international cultural action.

In addition to promoting and disseminating artistic and cultural productions, the French Community pursues cultural diplomacy through bilateral and multilateral relations, within the European Union, or within the framework of international organisations such as the UN, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the Francophonie.

4. Cultural Institutions

4.1 Overview

In the French Community, almost all cultural organisations have private-law status (association, foundation, cooperative, limited liability company), even when they were established by the public authorities or are primarily funded by them. In the French Community, there is only one cultural organisation with the status of an organic public service: the Musée de Mariemont.

During the Covid crisis, the public authorities realised that a significant proportion of organisations in the cultural sector fell outside the scope of cultural policies and have since tended to include them more within their scope of support, and to broaden that scope, for example to include the comedy sector (including one-man shows) or the video games sector.

The French Community's cultural action schemes were long conceived solely through the lens of the voluntary and non-profit sector, with the commercial dimension of the cultural sector being rendered invisible. Since then, awareness of its existence has grown and cultural policies are gradually opening up to a broader section of the cultural sector.

Whilst the French Community's grants are aimed at both commercial and non-commercial cultural organisations, there is also support for cultural entrepreneurship within the cultural and creative industries, in collaboration with the Walloon Region and the Brussels Region.

4.2 Data on selected public and private cultural institutions

Table 1: Cultural institutions, by domain

	<i>Funded by Wallonia-Brussels Federation</i>	
Domain	2025	2020
Continuing Education and Youth	804	1 041
Artistic Creation	1 765	1 841
Territorial Action	481	320
Audiovisual and Medias	552	320
Heritage	164	160
Book and Letters	277	280
Other	301	41
TOTAL CULTURE	4 344	4 003

Source: Wallonia-Brussels Federation (French Community) – General Administration Culture.

5. Cultural Funding

5.1 Overview

The three Communities (Flemish, French and German-speaking) constitute the main level of government responsible for awarding direct funding to the cultural sector. The awarding of such funding must, however, comply with the provisions of the 1973 federal Cultural Pact Act, which guarantees pluralism and equal treatment across ideological and philosophical strands. Funding granted by the French Community is based on decrees that set out the conditions and criteria for awarding grants. Where grants are selective, expert committees provide an advisory opinion to the Minister or the Government, which retains the final decision-making power.

The federal authority directly funds major national cultural institutions, whilst the regions primarily fund immovable heritage and support for the cultural and creative industries. Various public funds offer financing solutions for cultural enterprises (equity investments, various loans for investment or working capital). These include the St'art fund, which supports the cultural and creative sectors and industries (owned by the French Community, the Walloon Region and the Brussels Region); the Wallimages fund, which supports the audiovisual and gaming sectors (owned by the Walloon Region); and the Screen Brussels fund, also for the audiovisual and gaming sectors (owned by the Brussels Region).

Local authorities – municipalities and provinces – also fund the cultural sector. Municipalities are particularly involved in funding the majority of local infrastructure, such as libraries and, in some cases, museums or performance venues. Cultural centres are co-funded on an equal basis by the French Community and local authorities. Each province offers a range of support measures for culture in its own specific areas.

Corporate cultural patronage has not, to date, been subject to any specific incentive-based regulations. At company level, a recent survey by the Observatory of Cultural Policies shows that 84 per cent of them are involved in patronage or sponsorship activities, with 63 per cent of these projects relating to culture. The Prométhéa association, funded by the French Community, is tasked with developing corporate patronage in the fields of culture and heritage.

Patronage by private individuals is currently governed by legislation on donations and gifts. In 2024, a study estimated that 8.8% of Belgians had made a donation to the culture, heritage and arts sector; the total amount of donations across all sectors (NGOs, health, culture, social causes, etc.) stood at 362 million euros in 2022.

The cultural sector also benefits from a tax incentive known as the ‘Tax Shelter’, which is granted to companies that invest in the creation of audiovisual, performing arts or video game works. In 2024, this scheme raised approximately 233 million euros for Belgium, of which around 107 million was raised in the French Community. This tax incentive is now an indispensable source of additional funding for the film and performing arts sectors.

Crowdfunding also contributes to the funding of culture in French-speaking Belgium. Between 2019 and 2024, there were 203,000 individual contributions, representing an average of 104 donors and an average donation of 105 euros per project, with a campaign success rate of 86 per cent. Crowdfunding currently represents a modest market in French-speaking Belgium in absolute terms, but one that is effective.

5.2 Public cultural expenditure by level of government

Table 2: Public cultural expenditure by level of government, in EUR, 2024 and 2019

	2024		2019	
Level of government	in EUR* (p)	% share of total (p)	in EUR*	% share of total
Federal Authority	238 000 000	0.15%	194 900 000	0.14%
French Community (Wallonia-Brussels Federation)	919 400 000	3.47%	664 100 000	3.25%
Flemish Community	1 477 900 000	2.02%	1 147 600 000	2.14%
German-speaking Community	31 200 000	4,50%	13 000 000	2,91%
Walloon Region	66 400 000	0.33%	37 800 000	0.25%
Brussels Region	54 400 000	0.71%	29 500 000	0.52%
French Community Commission (Brussels Region)	15 200 000	2.16%	13 400 000	2.51%
Flemish Community Commission (Brussels Region)	35 300 000	16.95%	46 400 000	24.32%
Unallocated	32 800 000	4.36%	32 100 000	4.21%
Local authorities	1 813 400 000	4.08%	1 369 000 000	4.09%
TOTAL of all public authorities	4 462 700 000 (p)	1.33%	3 402 600 000	1.37%

Source: National Bank of Belgium (2026). Note: (p) provisional.

5.3. Public cultural expenditure per sector

Table 3: Public cultural expenditure for the French Community (Wallonia-Brussels Federation) by domain, in EUR, 2025 and 2020.

	2025		2020	
Domain	in EUR	% share of total	in EUR	% share of total
Continuing Education and Youth	176 532 472	33%	140 878 790	36%
Artistic Creation	172 711 431	32%	124 285 736	31%
Territorial Action	90 891 825	17%	59 340 146	15%
Audiovisual and Medias	63 650 374	12%	50 225 006	13%
Heritage	22 094 926	4%	17 335 231	4%
Book and Letters	5 797 096	1%	3 502 025	1%
Other	6 803 738	1%	764 083	0%
TOTAL CULTURE	538 481 861	100%	396 331 017	100%

Source: Wallonia-Brussels Federation (French Community) – General Administration Culture.

6. Legislation on Culture

6.1 Overview national cultural legislation

The federal government remains responsible for a number of areas relating to the cultural sector, such as legislation on social security (the ‘artist’s status’, which became the ‘arts worker’s status’ in 2024), intellectual property (copyright, related rights, resale rights), salaried and self-employed work, taxation (patronage, tax shelters) and some legislation on language use. It is also within the federal authority that the law guaranteeing the protection of ideological and philosophical tendencies—more commonly known as the Cultural Pact Law—is established; this law sets out the foundations for the funding of the cultural sector, which is implemented at all levels of government.

In the French Community, the regulations, known as decrees, are for the most part sector-specific and set out the various funding mechanisms specific to each sector and, where applicable, to each category of artistic or cultural organisation. During the 2019–2024 legislative term, several new decrees were adopted:

- decree on the cultural and artistic education pathway (PECA);
- a decree on funding for the professional sectors of Languages, Literature and Publishing;
- a decree on grants awarded to strengthen the international dimension of cultural operators in the French Community.

During the legislative term that began in 2024, certain decrees have already been adopted or amended:

- a decree on accessibility requirements for e-books;
- a decree on audiovisual media services and video-sharing services;
- a decree on support for the dissemination of artistic productions in the French Community.

6.2 Overview international cultural legislation

In addition to the federal state, the federated entities, including the French Community, have powers and a significant degree of autonomy in their external relations on the international stage. Belgium is, in particular, an integral part of the following supranational or international organisations: the European Union, the Council of Europe, the United Nations, UNESCO and the OECD; the French Community, for its part, is a full member of La Francophonie – the International Organisation of La Francophonie. Numerous regulations, directives and conventions issued by the European Union, the Council of Europe, the International Organisation of La Francophonie and UNESCO apply in Belgium and in the French Community.

In addition, there is the Council of Europe Convention on the Co-production of Audiovisual Works in the Form of Series – a new international framework for the co-production of audiovisual series. The French Community supports this instrument, which offers real potential for audiovisual policies. However, this text has not yet been signed or ratified by Belgium.

It should be noted that Belgium has not ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities due to an institutional deadlock based on differing interpretations of the concept of a minority.

Belgium, with the French Community playing a particularly active role, participates in the work of the Conference of Parties and the Intergovernmental Committee responsible for implementing the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Belgium is a member of the Intergovernmental Committee for the period 2025–2029. Belgium has also been elected Vice-Chair of the Western Countries Group within the Committee for the Committee's 20th session, which will take place in early 2027.

The French Community is an active member of the GAFU, the Group of Francophone Ambassadors to UNESCO. It brings together representatives of the member states and observers of La Francophonie to promote the French language, defend cultural diversity and coordinate artistic and educational initiatives within the international organisation.