

BRAND.BRIEF

Europe cannot build digital sovereignty on a foundation that excludes the cultural layer and creative production.

The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) generate up to 4% of EU GDP, and produce €199 billion value added – *a contribution larger than telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, or the automotive industry*. **This industry employs** over 8 million people in 2 million enterprises—**99% of which** are SMEs—and **produces** the content that gives Europe's digital economy its meaning, its democratic culture, and its **global reach** (EY Analysis 2020, Eurostat, EU Commission 2025).

Yet the proposed European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) Regulation mentions CCIs only once across 132 pages – as a single line under the Digital Window, *"complementing the AgoraEU programme."* **No strategic sector designation. No dedicated funding line. No copyright or creator-remuneration framework. No guaranteed seat in the Fund's governance.**

CCIs are not only a sector that produces and protects culture; they turn knowledge into value creation and are a cross-cutting knowledge-valorisation infrastructure that turns research and human insight into products, services and systems across every ECF Policy Window. Artistic Research and Design are the clearest cases where design methodologies are knowledge translation by definition, and the most legible model of what CCIs bring to the FP10 knowledge triangle. This reach is structural – CCIs already work cross-sectorial e.g in tourism, sport, healthcare, mobility, digital infrastructure, public services and manufacturing and linking CCI priority to proposed Policy Windows. Design capability is a measurable predictor of innovation and start-up success: CCIs are the architects of new value propositions, not only cultural workers.

At the same moment, the EU AI Office, the General-Purpose AI Code of Practice, and the implementation bodies of the AI Act are taking shape – and shaping the future income of every European writer, musician, illustrator, filmmaker, journalist, and game designer whose work is being ingested into AI training systems.

We therefore call on the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Member States in Council to adopt the following measures across two coordinated tracks.

Amendments to the European Competitiveness Fund (ECF) Regulation

- *We call for a new approach to build a Future Creative Innovation Infrastructure as the additional content layer for the digital sovereignty: the establishment of the European cultural and creative economy as a broad thematic priority within Pillar II of Horizon Europe, with a dedicated multi-year budget allocation matching the scale of other strategic European priorities, implemented through a **dedicated governance including experts from CCIs** in designing calls and managing project portfolios. Launch a Next-Generation KIC for the creative economy under FP10 – independent of the existing EIT governance, led from across the sector, with design research and methodology explicitly represented – and deploy a CreativeStack layer for digital sovereignty.*
- **Extend Digital, Cultural and Creativity Leadership policy window in ECF:** *We call for integrating of the CCIs by renaming primary Policy Window under the Competitiveness Fund : “**Digital, Cultural and Creativity Leadership**” and to highlight CCIs as an explicit *objective within* the Digital window. This structural inclusion is essential to harness the transformative power of CCIs and integrate their strategic innovation into the core of European competitiveness to support not only digital sovereignty but also the cultural autonomy in Europe.*

Because building new products, services and business models is fundamentally a design task, this is an economic argument, not only a cultural one. **Earmark at least 2% of the National and Regional Partnership Plan (NRPP) to the CCIs and align with the competitiveness funds and cultural compass.**

- **Creative Skills support and Competence building by design not by accident:** We demand that under a renamed Digital, Cultural and Creativity Leadership policy Window for the ECF that Article 30's Skills Guarantee and VET partnership mechanisms be activated for the cultural and creative workforce, covering, to support CCIs transversal transformation competences making CCIs practitioners to be eligible for the Fund's skills support mechanisms, with the same status as the for clean transition, defence, space, and digital sectors. This must include:

- **Skills Provisions and a Skills Guarantee for creative workers** undergoing AI-driven sectoral restructuring;
- **VET partnerships** linking creative SMEs with vocational training providers;
- Coverage of **AI literacy for creators, rights-management training, audiovisual production skills, and digital craft transitions.**

- **Bridge the Gap, License the Future: Fair Play and Pay for Creative Work and Labour.** *Unlocking Public Markets and value-based modern procurement for Creative Innovation and secure future income and fair compensation for Culture and Creatives in the Age of AI.*

We call for the existing ECF instruments to be activated for the cultural and creativity sectors:

- **Pre-commercial and innovative procurement** (already provided for in the ECF Toolbox) must be applied to creative innovation, public service media, and content production – extending the proven logic of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive into a coherent **"Make European" content procurement track**;
- **Article 28(g) on intellectual property valorisation** must be operationalised for creative SMEs self-employed creative professionals as well as Artists, including support for collective licensing infrastructure, rights-management tools, and remuneration mechanisms allowing European creators to participate in – rather than be displaced by – the AI economy;
- The ECF must establish a **creator-rights and licensing framework** addressing the structural silence of the current draft on copyright in the AI era.

- **Guarantee CCI Representation on ECF Governance Bodies.** Guarantee CCIs representation on the ECF Strategic Stakeholder Board/ programme committees and **EU AI Office**, GPAI Code of Practice working groups, and all bodies shaping AI Act implementation.

We call for amendments to Article 14 (Governance and Advisory Boards):

- The **ECF Strategic Stakeholders Board**: add the cultural and creative sectors to the explicit list of sectors and organisation types that must be balanced in the Commission's open call for nominations to the Strategic Stakeholders Board;
- The **Advisory Board on the ECF InvestEU Instrument**, ensuring CCI expertise on the design of financial products affecting creative SMEs and scale-ups;
- The **Investment Committee**, ensuring that "wide knowledge of the sectors covered by the ECF" explicitly includes the creative economy.
- **We ask for at least three members in the Council for European Competitiveness Research**, with *demonstrable cultural and creative sectors expertise*, including senior experience in cultural and creative industrial policy and in artistic research.

- **From Recognition to Regulation: Strengthening the CCIs Across the Union.** *We call for a comprehensive strengthening of the CCIs through targeted amendments to FP10 (Articles 3, 4, and 6) under the ECF Regulation.* We demand that the **transformative power of cultural and creative professionals be formally recognized and named across all EU programs**, ensuring the sector maintains a dedicated strategic home under Horizon (Cluster 2) within the Research and Innovation landscape. By adapting **Erasmus+**, **CERV**, **Creative Europe**, **the New European Bauhaus**, and **the Agora EU** to the actual workflows of artistic research and creative production, Europe can finally bridge the gap between cultural value and economic innovation.

For signing and supporting this initiative, please visit online www.BrandBrief.eu for more information and background material.

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