

Flanders, Belgium

About the area

Belgium consists of three main communities (the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community) and three regions (the Flemish Region, the Brussels Capital Region and the Walloon Region). Each region has their own political and administrative policy structures (parliaments and governments) with increasingly specifically allocated competencies. The designation Flanders can refer to the Region (with territorial competencies) as well as to the Community (with cultural competencies *inter alia*). For example, through the development of specific institutions such as the Flemish Community Commission, much cultural policy for the Flemish Community extends beyond the Flanders Region into Brussels. In general, treatment of demographic or economic characteristics of Flanders usually refers to the description of the Region, unless stated otherwise.

Flanders has an area of 13,625 km² and is one of the most densely populated regions in the world (488 inhabitants/km²). Flanders is characterised by high employment rates (78.5% in 2020) and low unemployment (3.5% in 2020). In 2020, the GDP in Flanders amounted to EUR 34 183 per inhabitant, an increase of EUR 4 000 per inhabitant since 2010. However, between 2014 and 2019 real economic growth decreased by 0.5%.

Flanders is a highly knowledge-intensive region, characterised by high levels of innovation and human capital. The majority of the economy is based around services, with the services sector representing around 73% of Flemish GDP. The Flemish economy is also strongly export-oriented, with exports from the region accounting for around 83% of Belgium's total export volume.

History of CCS policy in the Region

Investigating the cultural and creative sectors in Flanders is complex, given the different political-institutional entities in Belgium which each has its own administrations and associated institutions, agencies, and history.

Belgium transitioned from a unitary to a federal state through the enactment of six reforms beginning in the 1970s. The first state reform in 1970 resulted in the formation of cultural communities, even before a real regionalisation was implemented. With the state reform of 1980, the domain of culture was completely transferred to the communities, with the first appointment of a minister of culture in 1981 in the Flemish Community government. The domain "economy" was (largely) transferred to the regions, and also in 1981 a first ministerial portfolio for economy was assigned in Flanders (in contrast to Wallonia, only one government and one parliament were installed for the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region). In other words, Flanders has had an autonomous cultural policy for more than 40 years (distinguished from the French or German-speaking cultural policy in Belgium) with its own regulations, in which different emphases have been placed.

The Flemish government has played an active role in supporting the culture domain since the 1970s. Until the late 1990s, the support measures were still scattered and fragmented, but from the 2000s onwards a coherent policy was pursued whereby the cultural domain was addressed through a number of large decrees. Emphasis was placed on participation: more participants, more participation of minority groups, and on more coherent cooperation between the different policy levels. Over the past two decades, successive policies focused on the reorganisation of financial resources, sector professionalisation, the development of a sustainable cultural policy with a more diverse workforce, scale enlargement and digital transformation.

Before 2000, Flanders already had various institutions (e.g. Flanders Design, Flanders Fashion Institute) whose aim was to support specific CCS sub-sectors, but an important step was the establishment of Flanders District of Creativity (Flanders DC) in 2004. Flanders DC was given the explicit task of supporting CCS as a whole and making the Flemish economy more competitive through creativity and entrepreneurship. Since then, CCS has been seen as an important part of the innovative economy; agencies have been set up to support companies in the sector and many initiatives have been launched to support entrepreneurs and organisations.

Cultural participation

Flanders has a widespread network of cultural institutions across the entire region and has a particularly wide range of activities, some of which are organised on a recurring basis for the entire region. From an international perspective, Flanders seems to score only moderately high in terms of cultural participation, but its own official surveys show that in 2018 over 8 out of 10 adult inhabitants of the Flemish Region took part in at least one cultural activity. The rate of non-participation has fallen in recent years, from 24% in 2011 to 16% in 2018. Cultural participation is higher amongst those with higher educational attainment and is particularly high for couples with children.

Household spending on recreation and cultural activities in Flanders is around that of the national average, but is lower than in the Brussels capital region. In 2018, 2.9% of household spending was on recreation and cultural activities in the Flemish Region, compared to 3.2% in the Brussels Capital Region and 2.8% in the Wallonia Region. However, household spending in this category increased in the Region from 2.4% in 2011.

The Flemish government has enacted a number of policy initiatives to increase the cultural participation rate in the Flemish Region and for the Flemish Community, including providing financial compensation for cultural participation among various minority groups. Much of this policy work has been framed within the context of the importance of cultural participation for general well-being and personal development.

Jobs and skills

In 2020, around 4% of employment in the Flanders Region was in cultural and creative employment. This is higher than the EU27 average of 3.6%, but substantially lower than cultural and creative employment in the Brussels Capital Region at 8.4%.

In regards to employment in CCS only, there are marked differences between the Flanders Region and the employment in Flemish CCS companies in the Brussels Capital Region. In the Flanders Region the CCS subsectors with the most wage employment are “printing and reproduction of recorded media”, “cultural education”, “creative, arts and entertainment”, and “libraries, archives, museums etc.”. In Brussels, the most frequent wage employment can be found in the subsectors ‘creative, arts and entertainment’ and ‘programming and broadcasting’.

The Flanders Region has seen considerable growth in the proportion of self-employment in CCS, with CCS self-employment increasing by around 48% between 2005 and 2019. This growth is higher than in the total economy. This may point to an increase in self-employed occupations as a secondary occupation, the consequences of digitalisation, and the disappearance of the older age categories with the replacement of flexible jobs filled by younger workers.

The Flemish Community has a wide range of higher education courses that are situated in the creative and cultural sectors. In the 2019/20 academic year, 13.2% of enrolments (34 465 students) were located in one of these creative courses. It is not known how many of these students will be employed in the CCS, but the potential is clearly important.

Entrepreneurship and business support

In 2019, the Flanders Region had 5 071 registered organisations in CCS (including both firms and non-profit), representing around 3% of all organisations in the total economy. When also including Flemish organisations operating within the Brussels Capital Region, the number of organisations rises to 5 694. Growth in the number of CCS organisations in the Flanders Region is lower than the growth in the total economy. The sectors with the largest number of organisations are those specialised in creative arts and entertainment, architectural activities, retail or cultural and recreation goods.

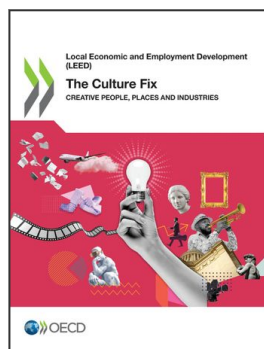
The Flemish government has an extensive general system of business support that companies in CCS can use, e.g. VLAIO – a one-stop-shop for innovation and entrepreneurship support. In addition, specific measures and initiatives have been developed during the past 15 years specifically for the CCS. These range from subsidies to the granting of (micro) credits (e.g. CultuurInvest, Cultuurekrediet), legal support (e.g. FinMIX CS, with VLAIO and Flanders DC), the deployment of experts, the development of a tax shelter for the performing arts and audiovisual arts, and help in finding crowdfunding or business angels. Specifically, within the COVID-19 context, additional resources were invested in the sector. An online tool has also been developed by the Flemish administration for companies to check which support they are eligible for.

Access to finance

Government spending on cultural services from the Regional Flemish government has decreased from 3.8% of total spending in 2011 to 2.5% in 2019. However, spending on cultural services by the Flemish Community government increased from 24.4% of total spending in 2011 to 26.0% in 2019, highlighting both the importance of community-level governance for supporting CCS.

Depending on the various institutional levels, financial resources for CCS are generally allocated through operating credits, project credits and infrastructure credits. Cultuurloket, an agency set up by the Flemish government, works to provide free first line business and legal advice for individuals and enterprises in the cultural sector. Along with this guidance is included vocational training, personal coaching and advice in finding extra finances.

Alongside the opportunities for credit and financial support, the various government agencies (Flanders DC, VLAIO) also offer advice on additional financing. In 2018, the Flemish Government launched a public-private collaboration with Hefboom, a cooperative serving as an intermediary between investors and professional initiatives from the social and sustainable economy. This collaboration was to start a “cultural credits” financing initiative called “Cultuurekrediet.” Cultuurekrediet aims to provide greater support for professionals in the cultural sector, including facilitating access to finance and providing support through counselling and training opportunities.



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