

Flemish Parliament Act of 21 November
2008 on the support of the Circus Arts
in Flanders

Circus in Flanders

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In the federal state of Belgium, cultural policy and its implementation are the authorisation of the Communities. The support of circus arts has a place within that cultural policy. As each community has its own cultural policy, the support of the Flemish circus arts is in the hands of the Flemish Minister of Culture. To carry out its cultural policy, the Flemish community may enact laws which are known as Flemish Parliament Acts.

In Flanders, cultural policy is aimed at ensuring the widest possible offer for the widest possible audience. Over the last decade, circus has become a full part of this policy following the enactment of a special Flemish Parliament Act on Circus Arts. The circus arts, having links with the amateur and professional arts, heritage, socio-cultural work, youth work and also sports, now have their own place thanks to the creation of a separate legal framework. The Act offers new and much-needed opportunities for the further development, strengthening and innovation of the circus arts.

This brochure provides an introduction to the circus policy of the Government of Flanders, with a particular focus on circus policy in the past and the Flemish Parliament Act on Circus Arts today. We also look at the circus landscape in Flanders in more detail.

Long live the circus!

In Flanders, circus policy was given cautious form as from the end of the 1970s when Flemish circuses were included in the list of cultural manifestations by the Ministry of Dutch-language culture.

In the early 1980s, the sector launched the “S.O.S. circus”-campaign. The campaign group aimed to bring about a circus-friendly government policy. Successive Ministers of Culture expressed their interest, but there was no systematic support of the circus arts and a clear vision was missing. At the end of the 1990s, Circus Ronaldo received an important symbolic boost when it was recognised as a Cultural Ambassador of Flanders.

An important turning point in the recognition of the circus arts as a true art form was the establishment of Circusvlo (the Flemish organisation for circus arts) with five youth circus ateliers in 2001. This non-profit organisation aimed to support, encourage and promote the circus arts as an amateur art form. A year later, the Government of Flanders signed a memorandum of understanding with seven traditional circuses as well as increasing its support and launching a promotional campaign to create additional opportunities for Flemish nomadic circuses. This led to a number of structural measures in the following years aimed not only at providing support for the traditional circus but also at creating a framework for new circus art forms. From 2007 onwards, the support of the Flemish circuses was extended to all circus arts under a temporary



regulation. One of the conditions was that circuses could not use wild animals. This condition was subsequently also included in the Act on Circus Arts of 2008.

In recent years, the Flemish circus sector has grown in qualitative and quantitative terms thanks to strong incentives for the creation and diffusion of the Flemish circus arts. In the last few years this has allowed for a new generation of circus artists to emerge alongside the traditional nomadic circuses, pushing the boundaries of circus arts into all types of performing arts, such as theatre, dance, contemporary music, multimedia and so on.

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Circus policy today

With the Act on Circus Arts, policy-makers structurally recognised circus as a real form of art. The *Flemish Parliament Act of 21 November 2008 on the support of the Circus Arts in Flanders* gave the development of the circus sector a breath of fresh air. For the first time, a vision, a dedicated budget and a clear Flemish subsidy framework had been laid down for the circus arts.

With this Act, the Government of Flanders wishes to support, stimulate and promote a diverse and well-distributed range of circus arts in Flanders while also paying attention to the international context. Traditional circus arts and new forms of circus are included in this, regardless of whether they are practised by amateurs or professionals. The Act targeted measures for the production and creation, diffusion, support, promotion of the circus arts, as well as for education and training.

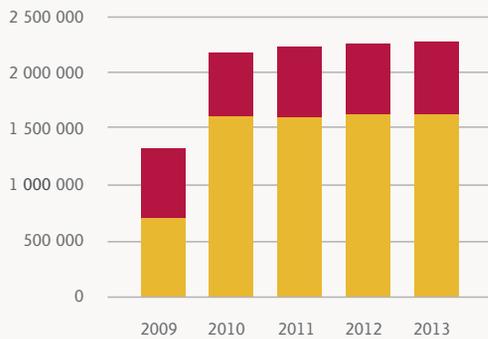
The strength of the Act on Circus Arts is that it focuses on all forms of circus. It is aimed at amateur, semi-professional and professional circus artists and has provided a strong policy framework for attention to their field. With this Act, the Government of Flanders wishes to provide incentives for the circus arts in Flanders and put Flemish circus arts on the map again, both nationally and internationally.



Subsidies for the circus arts

The Act on Circus Arts wishes to provide optimal opportunities to all the circus arts by funding the creation, the diffusion, the professionalisation and promotion of the circus arts. Next to that the Act supports the Flemish Circus Center that takes the interests of the circus arts to heart. In 2013 subsidies to the amount of 2 279 000 euros were granted.

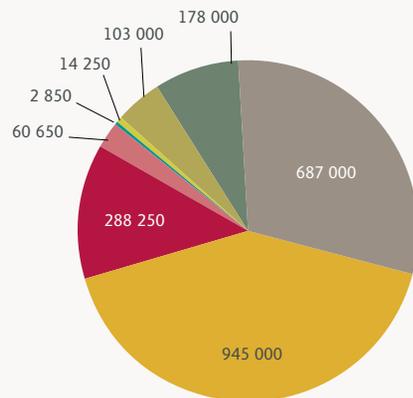
> Chart 1: total amount of subsidies for the circus arts (2009 – 2013)



■ Structural subsidies ■ Project subsidies

Remark: From 2010 three festivals, which previously received subsidies based on the Flemish Parliament Act on the Arts (performing and visual arts), now receive structural subsidies based on the Act on Circus Arts.

> Chart 2: Distribution of subsidies Act on Circus Arts in 2013



- Creation
- Diffusion of a nomadic tour
- International diffusion
- Promotion
- Education and training
- Festivals receiving adhoc subsidies
- Festivals receiving structural subsidies
- Circus Center

Creation of circus art productions

New and experienced circus artists and circus companies can apply for subsidies for the creation of a high-quality production aimed at a wide and diverse audience. The applications are reviewed by a commission of experts. Requests are evaluated in terms of their artistic level and their contribution to innovation or extending the public reach, feasibility, the quality of previous productions and their relation to the Flemish circus field.

Natural persons are also eligible for amounts up to 5 000 euros. A legal identity (for instance a non-profit organisation) is required for higher amounts.



Diffusion of circus art productions

The Act on Circus Arts also provides support for the performance opportunities of the Flemish circus art productions, both in Belgium and abroad.

Nomadic circuses can annually receive subsidies for their **tour in Flanders** in order to safeguard the nomadic nature as part of the circus sector.

The **Flemish festivals** that focus on programming circus arts in a high-quality manner can also receive subsidies for a period of up to five years. Street theatre or related hybrid forms can also be staged at such festivals.

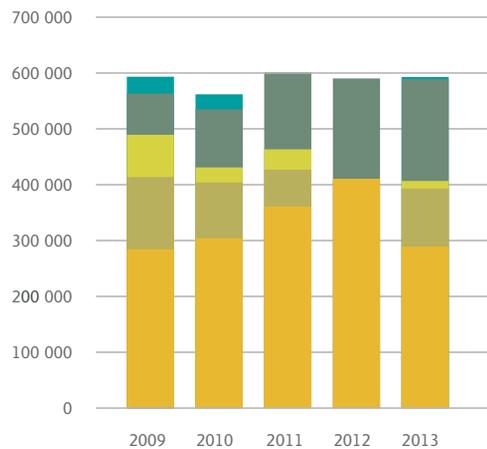
Finally, circus art productions which are staged in **events and festivals with an international appeal out of Flanders** can also apply for subsidies. After all, travelling and crossing borders are eminent characteristics of the circus arts.

These subsidy applications will also be evaluated by a commission of experts. Evaluations are based on criteria relating to the artistic level and the content of the production, the applicant's involvement in the Flemish circus field and the practical feasibility. In the case of tours, the quality of previous tours may also be considered in the evaluation. Additional evaluation criteria for festivals are public reach and international appeal. The event's international appeal, opportunities for networking and exchanges of expertise are also relevant in the framework of international diffusion.

Promotion of circus arts

The Flemish Circus Center (Circuscentrum) serves as a hub for the implementation of this tangible circus policy. Thanks to the provision of support for the production and diffusion of the circus arts, the basis has now been created for a stronger and more diverse circus landscape in Flanders. At the same time, the Government of Flanders can also invest in additional initiatives which contribute to a positive circus image. The Act on Circus Arts provides for the annual support of a maximum of two major promotional projects.

> Chart 3: overview of project subsidies (2009 - 2013)

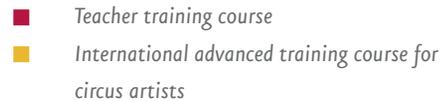
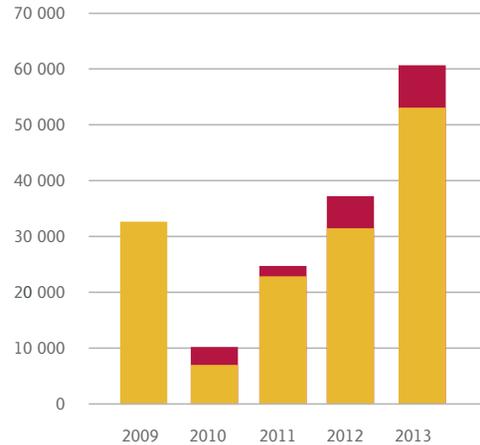


- Promotion of circus arts
- Creation of a circus production
- International diffusion of a circus art production
- Diffusion of a nomadic tour
- Organisation of a circus festival

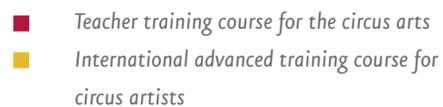
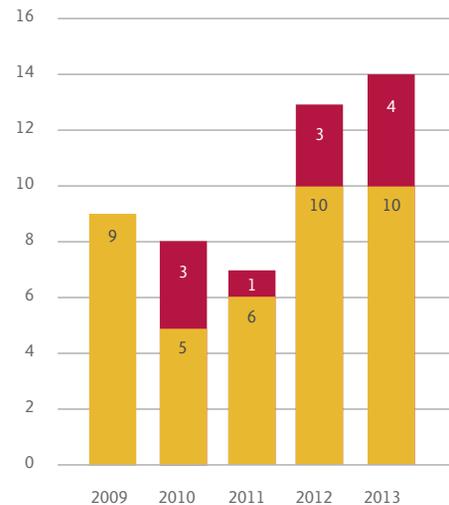
Advanced training courses for circus artists

Circus talent from Flanders is given every opportunity to follow international advanced training courses. Every year the budget provides a margin for sending promising circus artists to international training events or having them take part in a teacher training course for the circus arts. In this way we are investing in the Flemish circus landscape of tomorrow. The subsidy can cover part of the travel and accommodation cost and study costs. The applications are evaluated based on the applicant's involvement in the Flemish circus sector, circus knowledge and skills and the candidate's career perspectives.

> Chart 4: overview of subsidies for international training courses (2009 - 2013)



> Chart 5: number of candidates who received subsidies for an international training course (2009 - 2013)





Establishment of a Flemish Circus Center

The Act on Circus Arts provides for the support of the Flemish Circus Center. The Circus Center wishes to turn Flanders into a flourishing circus region, with wide cultural support and optimum development opportunities through various activities and projects. The Circus Center constitutes the link between the Government of Flanders and the circus field. In the last five years, the Circus Center received an average annual subsidy of 685,000 euros for its operations. The Circus Center's activities are built around five pillars.

- Artistic support. Providing career support to Flemish circus artists - for new emerging talent and established performers alike. Keywords are: creation, artistic advice, diffusion and promotion.
- Training and education. Providing the necessary training for teachers, professional and amateur artists. Monitoring the artistic and educational value of the network of youth circus ateliers.
- Heritage and documentation. Protecting, promoting and honouring Flemish circus heritage. Conserving and providing access to relevant literature and images.
- Promotion and communication. Promoting the Flemish circus sector, Flemish circus policy and the Circus Center itself through various channels. Putting the circus arts higher on the agenda of the media, policy-makers and other art sectors.
- International branding. Positioning the Flemish circus arts as a high-quality brand abroad. Engaging in relevant European networks and projects.



Charter for qualitative circus in the cities and municipalities

At the end of 2012, the Circus Center drew up a charter in consultation with the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG) and the circus sector. Its aim was to reconcile travelling circuses and the cities and municipalities and to regain a place for quality circuses in our local communities.

Nomadic or travelling circuses experience significant difficulties when setting up their tents in our cities and municipalities. Due to bad experiences with circuses that did not comply with made agreements, some local councils are not very keen about having circuses, or demand that they set up their tents on the edge of town.

It is not always easy for travelling circuses to be informed about all the regulations relating to labour conditions, fire safety, animal welfare and local police regulations. The charter wishes to encourage consultation and cooperation between local councils and circuses based on mutual trust. The aim is to achieve a good working relationship, better locations and workable agreements between local councils and the circus world.

Profile of the Flemish circus sector

In the heyday of circus, Flanders had about twenty travelling circus families that would set up their tents in every village square and attract a full house time and again. A circus performance was a highlight in the village. From the 1950s onwards, the emergence of other leisure activities, including television, ate away at their success. The circus sector experienced a real recession, and until the 1980s circuses all over Europe were in crisis. Only a few circuses succeeded in keeping a strong tradition alive. From the 1980s onwards, a few foreign circuses explored new directions and new artistic impulses were created. This international wave of innovation helped strengthen the position of various major circuses across Europe and worldwide (with Cirque du Soleil from Canada as the best-known company), while also creating a margin for smaller companies which perform all forms of circus.

The last decades the circus arts in Flanders changed significantly: from a limited landscape, which was mainly populated by travelling tent circuses, to a comprehensive art discipline with influences from theatre, dance, music and several other disciplines. Circus is no longer limited to the travelling circuses of yesteryear. Several companies and artists perform in cultural centers or at festivals, either indoors or in open air. The policy of the Government of Flanders is to provide strong opportunities for all these circus arts, allowing them to develop their own dynamic identity, in Flanders and beyond.





Nomadic circuses

Today, Flanders still has a number of travelling tent circuses. Originally these were nomadic families who performed a “traditional” programme: a sequence of circus acts, introduced by the ringmaster (often the circus director). Some examples: Circus Barones, Circus Bavaria, Magic Circus, Circus Pauwels, Circus Picolini, Circus Pipo, Circus Rose-Marie Malter and Wiener Circus.

But circus companies working with new forms of circus arts (circus theatre-dance-street theatre) often feel attracted to travelling around with a tent as well. Some examples: Circo Ripopolo, Circus Plusminus, Circus Marcel, Circus Ronaldo, Cirque-Cirquaire, Hendrik & Co, Théâtre d’un Jour, Hoetchatcha and Cie Circ’ombelico.

Indoor and outdoor circuses

Besides the nomadic tent circuses, there are a range of companies and artists performing indoors or out in open air. Indoor performances in particular have a close connection to other performing arts such as dance and theatre. Indoor circus is no longer produced by a few artists; a director, dramatist, set and light designer, choreographer, composer and in some cases even a filmmaker have become equally important. More and more cultural centers are including circus performances in their regular programming.

But circus will always be an art form fit for the open air. The rough and unpredictable nature of the street is perfectly suited for building a performance with elements such as improvisation, humour, interaction with the audience and impressive visual acts. Street theatre festivals and city festivals therefore seem to attract a lot of circus acts.

Festivals

Three major festivals are considered as pioneers for the diffusion and promotion of the circus arts: Theater op de Markt (Hasselt/Neerpelt), Humorologie (Kortrijk) and MiramirO (Ghent).

In recent years, many other festivals have started to focus more and more on the circus arts: Circo Roma (Borgerhout), Cirque Plus (Bruges), Trezart (Mol), the Youth Circus Festival during the Ghent Festivities, Cirk! (Aalst) and the Summer of Antwerp to name just a few.

Moreover, a number of cultural centers are systematically including circus acts in their programming. The growing importance of circus arts in theatre productions and festivals in recent years is also noteworthy, for instance Villanella and the Bronks Festival, Laika, Ensemble Leporello, Luxemburg vzw, HETPALEIS, Theater FroeFroe, les ballets c de la b, and so on.



Training and educational programs

If you wish to follow circus training in your free time, Flanders has several so-called circus ateliers. Every week more than four thousand children, young people and adults attend classes in one of the many circus ateliers operating in Flanders today.

Every year the Circus Center itself also organises a number of interesting courses for hobbyists, young talented performers, teachers and artists with partners from the sector.

Besides the elaborate network of circus ateliers and the Circus Center's initiatives, Flanders also has its own circus training programme at the Atheneum Redingenhof in Leuven. Children in the first two years of secondary education can choose the circus skills option.

Brussels is also an important place for circus art courses: Espace Catastrophe and Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles, both offer training courses for anyone wishing to specialise in circus arts, and the Ecole Supérieure des Arts du Cirque (ESAC) is one of the world's most renowned circus arts universities.

Finally, Flemish students can also study at numerous circus schools abroad.



Contact

The circus policy is being implemented by the Agency for Socio-Cultural Work for Youth and Adults.

For more information about the Flemish Parliament Act on Circus Arts and the subsidy regulations, please contact:

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For more information about circuses in Flanders, about nomadic circuses, artists and companies, circus festivals, circus heritage and circuses abroad please contact:

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