

# THE ROADMAP FOR SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE SECTOR OF BELARUS IN 2026-2028

## GENERAL CONTEXT

There are about 266 independent active culture organizations and initiatives, at least 10-15% of them operate exclusively in Belarus and continue to create and disseminate artistic products, organize events, mostly of underground nature. They register commercial and semi-commercial entities, such as cafes and bars with a “cultural” component; create online projects (blogs, podcasts, micromedia, etc.), manufacture clothing and merchandise related to traditional culture, implement heritage preservation projects. New youth bands have appeared in the music industry, and modern technologies help them find their listeners.

The cultural sector plays an exceptionally important role for Belarusians, as it is directly responsible for preserving and developing national identity – the primary target of both the repressive practices of the Belarusian regime and the ideology of the “Russian world”. The lack of systemic support for independent Belarusian culture at this stage would mean a defeat in the struggle for a European and independent future for Belarus, and, more broadly, the tragic fate of the Belarusian people’s assimilation. This is evidenced by a number of factors:

- **Cultural consumption within Belarus is more and more dominated by Russian actors.** In order to influence Belarusian society and draw it into the geopolitical conflict on its side, Russia uses tactics of manipulating history and destroying Belarusian culture. The Belarusian state started the process of rewriting history and imposing “patriotic” pro-Russian views on society through education and culture.
- **The Belarusian state is strengthening control over culture** through widespread censorship, restricting access to online

The document was prepared within the framework of the Needs Assessment of the civil society sector for 2026–2028, commissioned by DG ENEST and the Coordination Council of the Belarusian democratic movement. The main contributors are the Belarusian Council for Culture, the Office for National Revival of the United Transitional Cabinet, the Tutaka Foundation, the Free Belarus Museum, the Hodna public organization, and other sectoral cultural organizations and initiatives.

resources, and the labeling of consumption and support for “banned” cultural products, artists and institutions as “extremist activities.” Thousands of Belarusian cultural figures face violations of cultural, socio-economic or civil rights, 156 of them are recognized as political prisoners.

- **Through the use of Belarusian language** in independent literature, cinema, theater, and music, the Belarusians continue to express themselves and resist, even when other forms of civic activism are close to impossible.

## IMPACT OF USAID CUTS

According to the special survey, conducted among Belarusian organizations of the cultural sector, **the budget of 54.8% of cultural organizations included funding from US foundations.** It made up from 5 to 100 percent of the total budget.

In particular, about 10% of cultural organisations had US funding of more than \$150 thousand/year,

- about 20% - \$75-150 thousand/year,
- about 25% - \$25-75 thousand/year,
- and about 45% - less than \$25 thousand/year.

**Only in 10% of cases, the loss of US funding did not affect the activities** of the organization, the rest had to reduce their activities, switch to a volunteer format of work or even close down. It demonstrates the high level of dependence of the Belarusian cultural activities on the support of the western funds and their vulnerability to any decrease in financing.

## CHALLENGES

- **Difficulties in access to sufficient financing tools.** This applies both to the limited amount of available financial support and to shortcomings of the distribution system of that support, which does not take into consideration specific needs and production cycles of some sub-sectors (cinema).

- **Insufficient management and promotion capacities** of the Belarusian culture, art figures and entities due to poor-quality education in culture inside Belarus, lack of financial support to participate in European educational opportunities and lack of developed partner networks for international cooperation.
- **Maintaining Belarusian context** for cultural actors operating in immigration and in preserving connections between cultural actors in and out of Belarus.
- **Arranging a full-fledged professional infrastructure** for the production, demonstration, and distribution of Belarusian cultural products outside Belarus or in a transborder way. There is no system of legal and social support for cultural figures, both within the country and outside it.
- **Independent Belarusian culture outside Belarus is suffering from lack of active leaders** of cultural niches who would unite or connect certain areas of cultural activity. Sectoral networks, institutes and professional associations are still at the very beginning of their development and do not have organizational stability.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The most critical among our priorities are:

### **Priority 1. Strengthening the capacity of cultural actors and improving access to resources in all thematic subsectors of Belarusian culture**

This priority could be treated as 70% of core support for the culture sector. Critically important here is to support financially:

- Art, culture and heritage projects in Belarus, in trans-border format and abroad (production of movies with high potential for vast audiences, theatre).
- Institutions and spaces, which ensure the production cycle of all the culture sub-sectors.
- Capacity building, access to education for culture figures and managers.

Very important is promotion of philanthropy, private patronage, and support of culture among business representatives; development of crowdfunding platforms.

**However, all the strategic directions and priorities of the Road map for the Culture Sector development are interconnected.** The other critical needs constitute around 30% of core support for the culture sector:

**Priority 2. Increasing the impact of cultural sector on societal processes in Belarus**

The most critical here is the financial support to:

- Countering Russian propaganda: construction and dissemination of contemporary Belarusian culture narratives, promotion of Belarusian art and culture.
- Audience development measures: advertising, outreach, arts and culture education/awareness raising for different social and age groups.

**Priority 3. Supporting and developing cultural diversity and ensuring the realisation of the cultural rights**

The most critical here is the financial support to:

- Preservation and dissemination of the Belarusian language.
- Addressing audiences with special needs.
- Legal assistance to cultural figures in the field of copyright, social assistance for culture figures of old age and with disability.

**Priority 4. Facilitating the preparation and implementation of (common) cultural policies, cooperation and coordination among Belarusian cultural actors**

The most critical here is the financial support to:

- Knowledge production and sharing: research, studies and policy analysis in culture, monitoring of cultural rights, analysis and expertise on the impact of the cultural products and practices on political, social, economic fields in Belarus.

- Strengthening coalitions, networks and platforms for coordination.

### **Priority 5. Integration of Belarusian cultural actors into the European cultural processes and the development of international cooperation**

The most critical here is the financial support to:

- Collaborative multicultural projects created by Belarusians in cooperation with foreign partners/executors;
- Culture mobility;
- Translations (in and from the Belarusian language, incl. fiction and non-fiction literature, subtitles for films and theatre performances).

## **SECTORAL ADAPTATIONS/RESTRUCTURING**

In a context of declining available funding, the cultural sector must prioritize:

- (a) building its own sustainable support infrastructure,
- (b) fostering cross-sectoral projects, and
- (c) for those in exile – accelerating integration into both European and national systems for cultural development and support.

Key areas of focus include expanding philanthropy and private patronage among the Belarusian business community abroad, developing crowdfunding platforms, and scaling innovative funding models – such as the “Belarusian Magistrates” initiative or the creation of shared cultural spaces. Achieving these goals requires cooperation; therefore, it is essential to strengthen existing associations, build new platforms and networks, and actively engage with international cultural networks. Cultural actors and institutions in exile need assistance in gaining access to international funding mechanisms such as *Creative Europe*, *Eurimages*, and to the national sub sectoral financing tools. This includes political support, capacity building, and facilitation of partnerships. A strong and organized diaspora can also play a crucial role in sustaining and supporting cultural life within Belarus.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) *Political*: we recommend to consider support for Belarusian culture and identity from a broader framework and perspective - counteracting the escalation of the Russian world, and achieving security and resilience in the region, alongside with education and media.

(2) *Operational, financial*: it is necessary to increase the maximum amount of funds 60K for one project, since some important projects in the cultural sphere obviously require a higher funding threshold and duration of implementation to achieve the visible impact.

## QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE NEEDS

Estimated total volume of support needed for the culture sector:

	Current annual needs (mln EUR)	Cumulative needs for 2026-2028 (mln EUR)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>8.64</b>	<b>25.92</b>

Compared to last year's needs assessment, the total amount for the three years and the annual funding allocated to the cultural sector have been increased due to:

- 1. The need for significantly greater investment in the production of cultural content (particularly in the film sector, which was virtually uncovered previously) that could be also partially covered by such programs like Creative Europe if the Belarusian culture could be considered as a special track;
- 2. A substantial reduction in other sources of funding (notably, US support);
- 3. The growing negative impact on national identity from the Belarusian regime and the "Russian World", which requires an asymmetric response through cultural means.