

When Circus Becomes Policy

The Case of Flanders

*Case study on the recognition of circus
as an official cultural policy*

09.07.2025
MICC
Montréal

circus
centrum



Flanders
State of the Art

circus
in flanders



circus
centrum

Welcome

Noemi De Clercq

Séverine Van der Stighelen

Circuscentrum



Since 2021 support & expertise
organization for the development of
circus arts in Flanders

Official link between the government
and the sector

Main functions:

- Platform

- Sector support

- Research & Development

- Promotion

When Circus Becomes Policy The Case of Flanders

Presentation

Circuscentrum

Panel discussion

Jonas Vermeulen, Circumstances

Stefan Gevaerts, Rode Boom

Séverine Windels, Department Culture, Youth & Media

Noemi De Clercq, Circuscentrum

Moderated by Aaron Marquise

Flemish cocktail

presented by Circuscentrum and
the Delegation of Flanders to the USA



‘Opening Up New Markets for the Circus Arts’



PARTNERS



Avec le soutien de / With the support of



Focus Canada:
*Technicians with braces
and expensive containers
from Europe
by Liv Laveyne*

Meet the Flemish delegates



Hazel Lam



Iliana Atamaniuk
Company ATA



Jonas Vermeulen
Circumstances



Stefan Gevaerts
Rode Boom



Katrien Debois
Frans Brood Productions



Anne Elst
Rode Boom



Lies Coppens
CC De Factorij



Séverine Windels
*Department of
Culture, Youth & Media*



Paul Hegge
*Delegation of Flanders
to the USA*



Noemi De Clercq
Séverine Van der Stighelen
Circuscentrum

Focus Flanders

Flemish pitches
Circus Ronaldo – Sono io?



Focus Flanders

Flemish pitches Circumstances - EXIT



Focus Flanders

Flemish pitches Rode Boom – Unknown Evidences



Focus Flanders

Flemish pitches
Company ATA – (H)OOPS





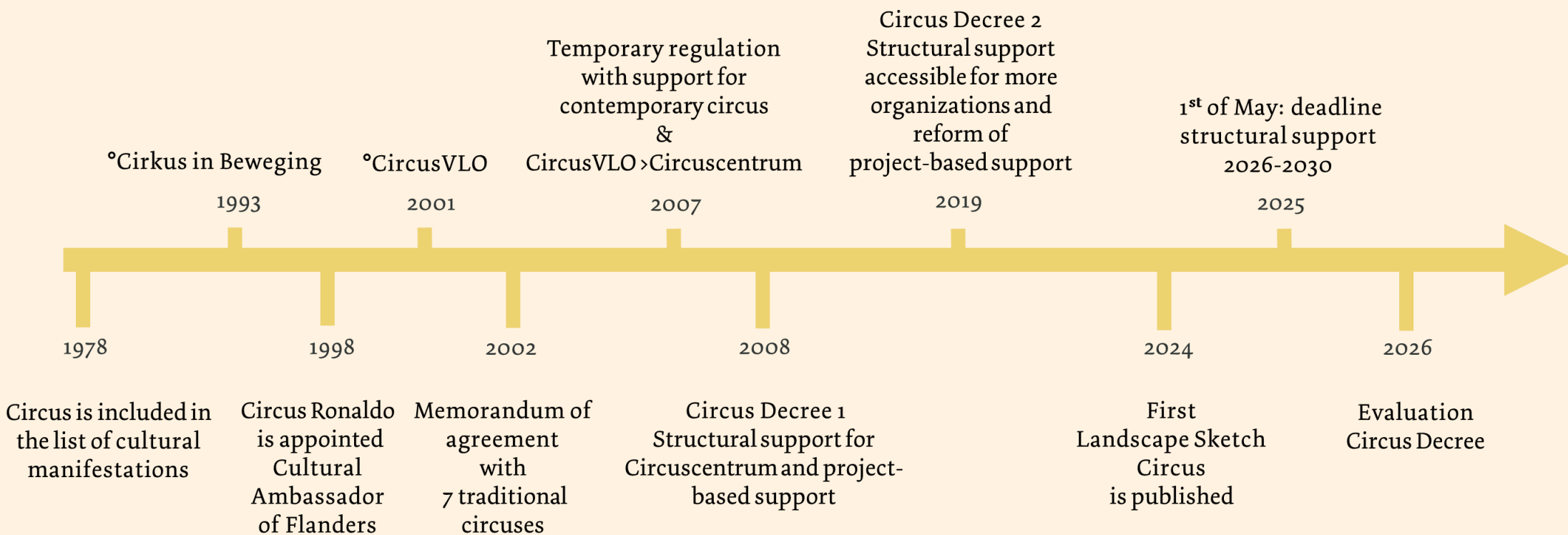
Flanders – a region in Belgium



- Flanders is the northern part of Belgium
- Mainly Dutch-speaking
- 13,624 km²
- Official capital: Brussels
- Consists of five provinces: Antwerp, Limburg, East-Flanders, Flemish-Brabant and West-Flanders



History of the Circus Decree



Circus Policy in Flanders

Circus Decree 2

Implementation :
01/01/2021

Project funding
yearly calls

for artistic projects,
festivals, development
grants and
international travel
costs

Structural funding
call every 5 years

circus companies,
circus creation
spaces, youth
circuses,
1 support centre

Total budget:
+/- 6.000.000 € per year



Evolution of the budget

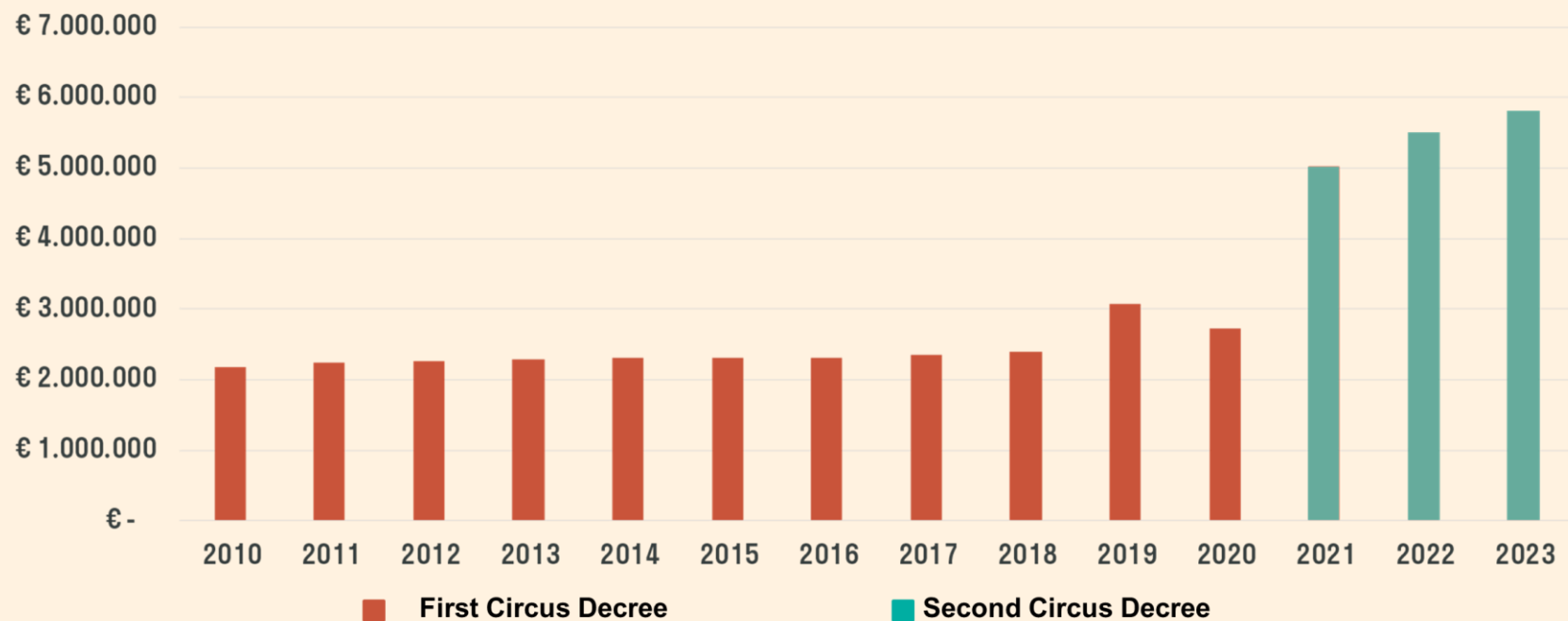


Chart 1 – Data DCJM – Subsidy figures – Evolution of the budget Circus Decree 2010 – 2023, without indexation



Evolution of the budget

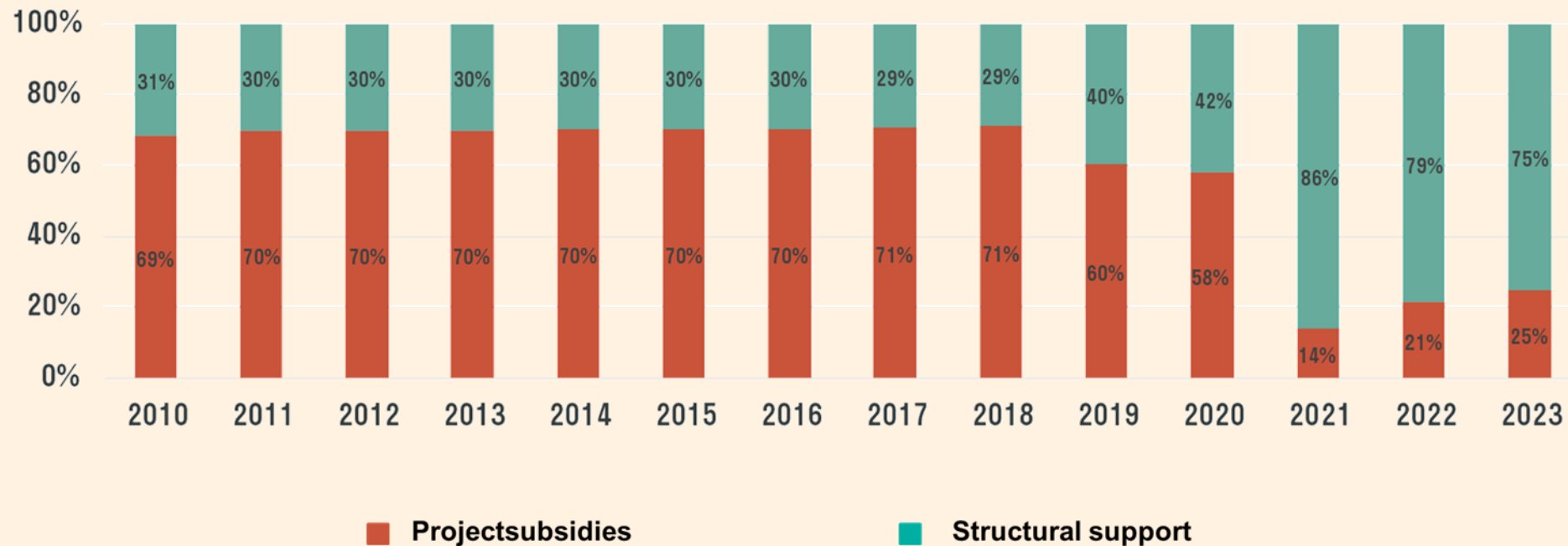


Chart 2 – Data DCJM – Subsidy figures – Evolution of the ratio of structural support to project subsidies Circus Decree 2010 – 2023, without indexation



How is the budget divided?

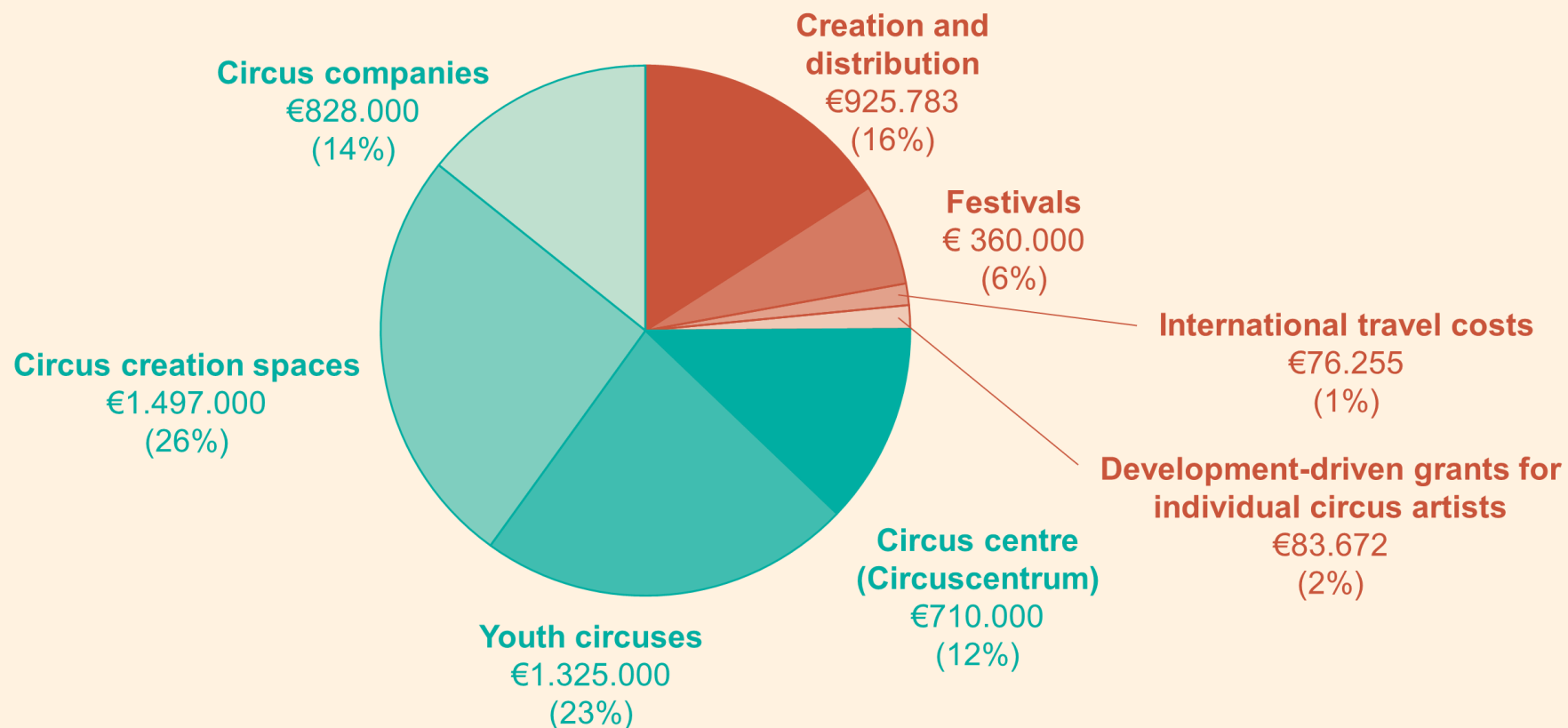


Chart 3 – Data DCJM – Subsidy figures – Amount awarded per type of subsidy in 2023

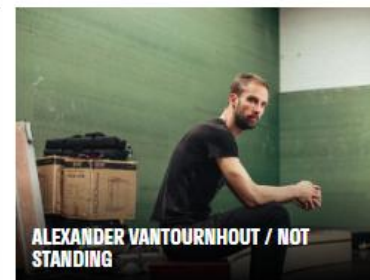


Flemish circus sector today – a diverse ecosystem



The sector has many different (types of) actors, each with their own dynamics, history and operation

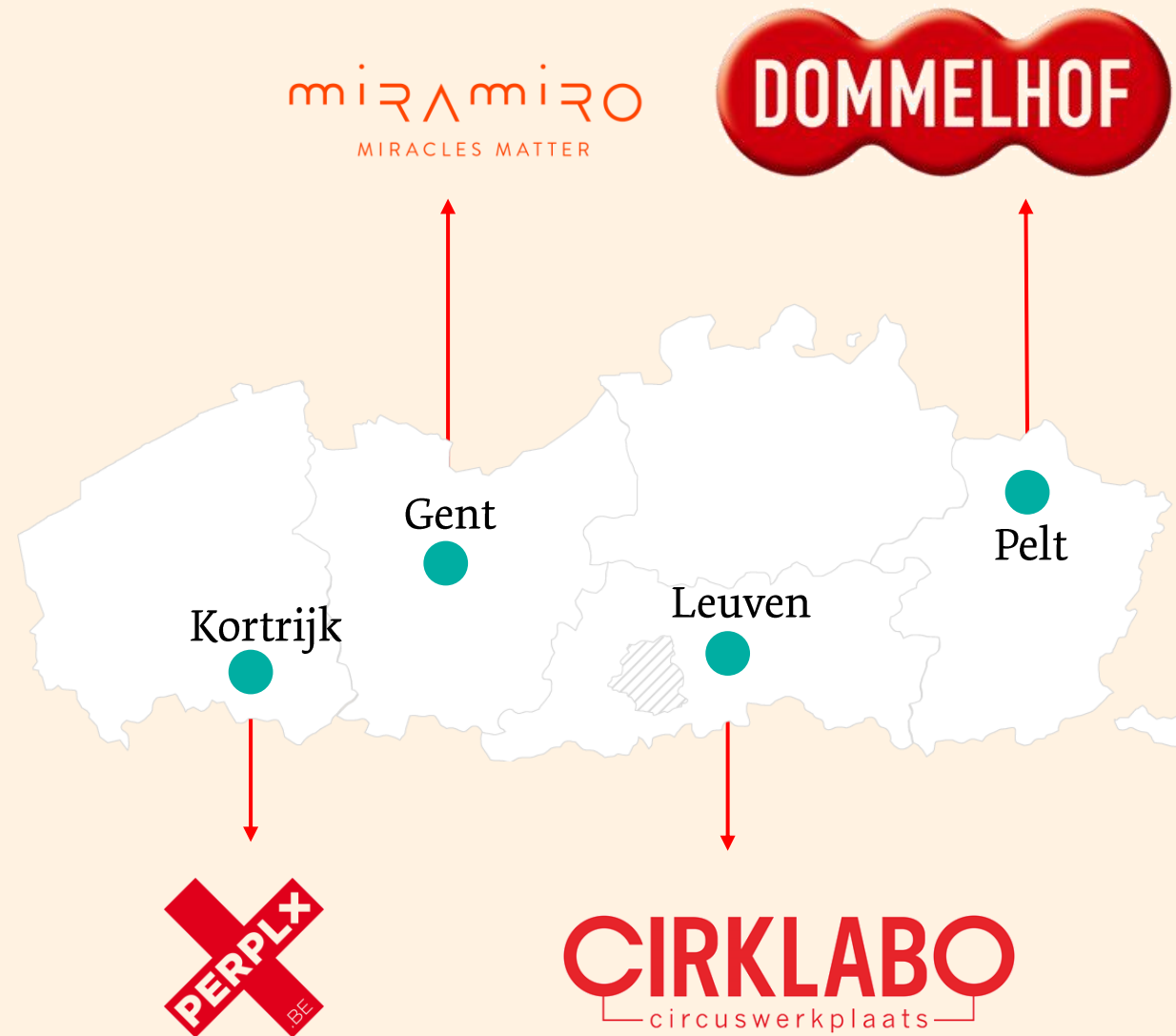
COMPANIES



www.circusinflanders.be

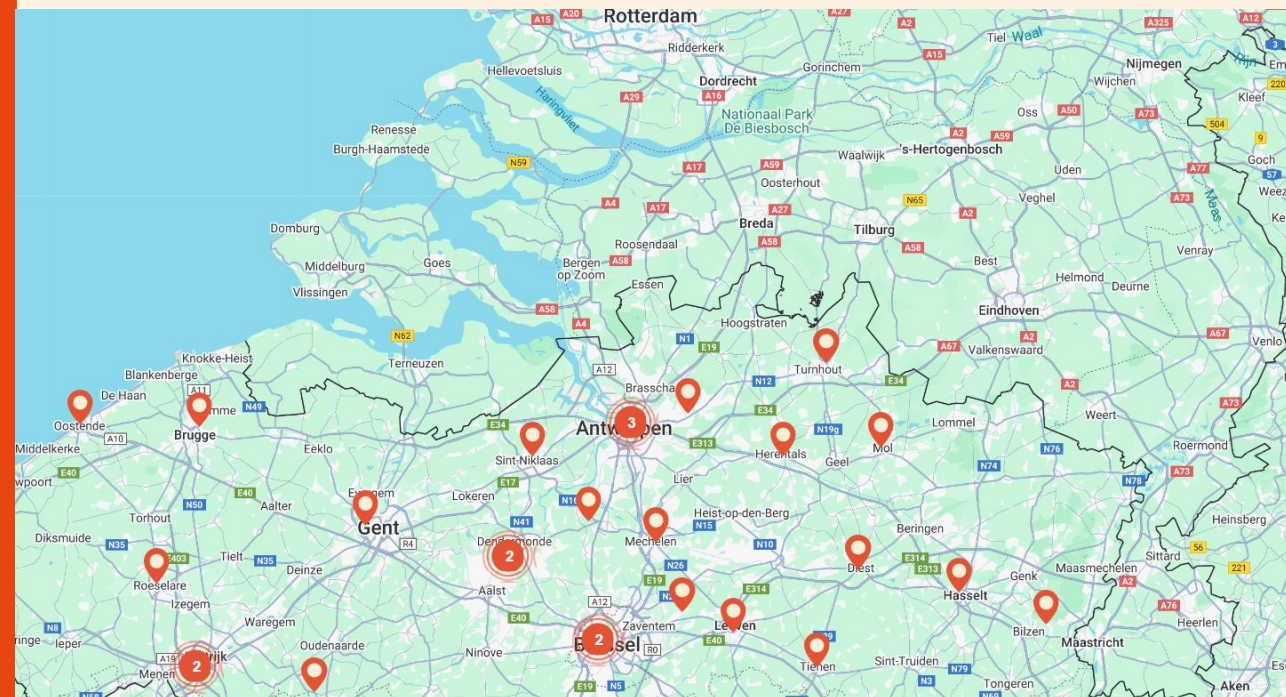
4 circus creation spaces with structural support

a number of festivals, cultural centers and youth circuses also offer spaces for training and/or creation



19 youth circuses

'fertile soil' of the Flemish circus sector



8

Youth circuses with structural support



Discover circus all year round!

Flanders may be a rather small place – 13,624 km², to be exact – but there is circus to be experienced all across the region and all throughout the year.

Whenever you visit Flanders or Brussels, you can return to this overview to find out what's happening near you. Hold onto it for future reference: the festivals take place during the same periods each year, so this calendar should remain timeless. To read about the programmes for this year's festivals, see the corresponding festival websites.

circus
in flanders



JANUARY

Smells
like Circus
* Ghent



FEBRUARY
*

MARCH

Festival Up!
* Brussels

APRIL

MAD Festival * Antwerp
De Gevleugelde Stad * Ypres
Hopla! Festival * Brussels
Hors Pistes * Brussels

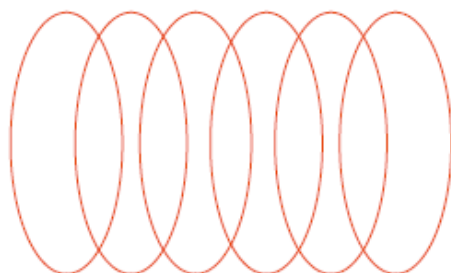
MAY

Cirkl * Leuven
Theater aan Twater * Boom

* * * * *

JUNE

Vitrine Perplx * Kortrijk
Sinjor Circo * Antwerp
Cirkerle * Zaventem
Visueel Festival Visuel *
Sint-Aghata-Berchem



JULY

De Donderdagen * Ninove
Theater aan Zee * Ostend
Miramiro * Ghent
Circus Boelaere * Borgerhout
Cirque Plus * Bruges
Zomer van Antwerpen * Antwerpen

AUGUST

Internationaal
Straattheaterfestival * Beveren
CIRK! * Aalst
Theater op de Markt * Hasselt
Strapatzen * Sint-Pietersleeuw

SEPTEMBER

Sirk Masjiek * Ronse
Boulevard * Dendermonde
Plein de Cirque * Turnhout
De Groote Stooringe * Roeselare
Brouwsels op Straat * Nazareth-Eke

OCTOBER

Vitrine
Perplx *
Kortrijk

NOVEMBER

Theater
op de Markt
* Pelt

DECEMBER

Cirklabo
Festival
* Leuven





Flemish circus in facts and figures

More than **80**
circus companies

4 circus
creation spaces
with structural
support

30 festivals with a strong
focus on circus, without
structural support

3 circus companies
with structural support

more than **250** circus
artists

1 circus centre

19 youth circuses

8 youth circuses
with structural
support

6 booking agencies &
distribution agencies, without
structural support

2 pedagogical circus
trainings

1 circus humanities

1 national service provider for
performing arts heritage (including
circus)



Flemish circus in facts and figures

€ 1.077.000

total amount of project subsidies for creation and distribution in 2024

€ 828.000

yearly amount of structural support for circus companies

46 of the **64** applications within the subsidy type 'creation and distribution of a circus production' were approved

€ 491.641

total amount of project subsidies for the organisation of circus festivals in 2024

more than **200** residencies,

100 presentation moments at 4 circus creation spaces in 2023

€ 1.497.000

yearly amount of structural support for circus creation spaces

738 performances of

196 circus companies at

20 Flemish circus festivals in 2023

€ 1.325.000

yearly amount of structural support for youth circuses

10.500

unique participants at 8 youth circuses with structural support, of which

31% over 12 years old



Landscape Sketch Circus: Actors and developments



Descriptive:

actors, relationships and dynamics in the
entire ecosystem in Flanders

Future-oriented:

trends, developments, needs
and challenges

1st Landscape Sketch Circus:

a zero measurement

Shared development path

Instrument for sector and organizational development



A self-reflection that sets in motion



Sustainable development – Landscape Sketch Circus



01

Professionalisation

02

Working internationally

03

Space & infrastructure

04

Safety

05

Inclusion

06

Ecology



Professionalisation



Professionalisation in the circus sector is about creating **future-proof careers for artists and organisations**, where they can make a living. The interpretation of professionalisation varies: for an **emerging maker** it means something different than for an established **circus company**, a **circus creation space** or a **youth circus**.

Sustainable careers

Remuneration
systems

Funding models

Organisational
models

Advancement

Business expertise



Professionalisation



Financially sustainable careers



Staying vigilant for a potential Matthew effect



Circus professionals combine different roles



Need for business expertise and knowledge



Diverse and healthy financing mix for circus organisations



The circus sector is a close-knit but closed network



Working internationally



Flemish circus actors function in **transnational ecosystems**:

- **companies** are internationally composed, tour across borders or go on residency abroad;
- **circus creation spaces and festivals** host international companies;
- **distribution agencies** build a strong (inter)national network;
- **programmers** go on prospecting abroad;
- **youth circuses** work with international teachers and organise youth exchanges.

Networks and subsidy
opportunities

Employment

Composition of companies

Creation and distribution

Programming

Circus education



Working internationally



Making better use of international funding opportunities



The ecological footprint of international mobilities



The complexity of international law



Sustainable approach in collaborations



Sustainability of working internationally



Multilingual approach and sensitivity to diversity



Continued development: challenges



Optimalisation of Circus Decree is needed

Human and economic sustainability

Space for circus

Sustainable international strategies

Room for experiment and reflection

Slow progress on perception of circus

Advocacy



PANEL DISCUSSION



Noemi De Clercq
Circuscentrum



Stefan Gevaerts
Rode Boom



Séverine Windels
*Department of
Culture, Youth &
Media*



Jonas Vermeulen
Circumstances





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Closing Word

Paul Hegge

Delegation of Flanders to the USA

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