

## Enhancing employability to youngsters in the audiovisual field and reduce barriers to cultural participation: Synthesis of the conference

Summary of the conference held on Thursday, 4 December 2025, in Brussels at the premises of SMart Cooperative, organised as part of the [European project, BE-UNIT](#)

### Opening speech

The conference began with a welcome speech by **Gabriela Niculae** (BE-UNIT Youth Team) and **Sanjin Plakalo** (Senior Project Manager, POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ), emphasising the need to create spaces for dialogue at European level, dedicated to a fairer and more sustainable society. The theme of the day – making audiovisual media a lever for youth employment and engagement – led to discussions on a variety of topics: presentation of the BE-UNIT methodology and advocacy, European funding opportunities, the status of artists, the role of cooperatives, and finally a screening of award-winning short films from the Moonstep Festival.



Photo : Claudia Piovano

### The BE-UNIT methodology and advocacy

**Diletta Chiarello** (BE-UNIT Youth Team) and **Francesco Tarantino** (BE-UNIT Project Manager, Cooperativa ORSO) explained that the BE-UNIT project is funded by Erasmus+ and carried out by four organisations in Belgium, Italy and Hungary, with the direct participation of 45 young people. Running from January 2024 to December 2025, it has two main objectives: to improve the employability of young people in the audiovisual sector and to strengthen their active participation. After being trained by the BE-UNIT partners, the young people were actively involved throughout the project, which culminated in a festival and an advocacy campaign.

In Europe, the audiovisual sector remains relatively small, representing only 3.8% of cultural jobs. In each country, young professionals face specific challenges: in Belgium, 13,000 of them work mainly on one-off projects, often in precarious conditions; in Italy, access to employment still largely depends on informal networks; while in Hungary, large international productions favour foreign teams, leaving little room for local talent. In this context, the participants in the BE-UNIT project describe a situation characterised by short contracts, irregular working hours and limited social protection, while technical requirements are becoming ever more demanding.

The precarious nature of early careers, characterized by unpaid internships and collaborations, is a real obstacle to professional integration. This situation is accompanied by limited access to culture: in Italy, in 2021, only 16% of 18-24 year olds went to the cinema, with even lower rates in rural areas. The impact of centralised funding reinforces these inequalities.



Photo : Claudia Piovano

The presentation was illustrated by a video summarising the project, created by **Mohamed Boutuil, Nawfal Ragragui and Luca Settimo Lega** (BE-UNIT project youth team).

The advocacy presentation focused on the findings and recommendations of **Borbála Hajnal, Gabriela Niculae and Jacopo Cantoni** (BE-UNIT project youth team), who emphasised the need to facilitate access to culture and audiovisual participation for diverse audiences. In their view, online communication is not enough: it is essential to physically reach out to audiences, collaborate with local organisations and create truly inclusive spaces. Local festivals, workshops and events are essential for establishing a long-lasting connection with communities that are often isolated from cultural opportunities.

Young people also emphasised the responsibility of public authorities: while citizen organisations provide truly important support, only stable and funded cultural policies can guarantee the continuity of actions. To attract new audiences to the cinema and theatre, greater collaboration with schools, universities and local cultural institutions is required.

The issue of representation was another point of reflection. In Hungary, the Roma community is largely absent from audiovisual narratives; in Italy, despite a different context, significant inequalities persist between central and peripheral urban areas, and young people from immigrant backgrounds still find it difficult to identify with the mainstream media. Belgium, characterised by significant linguistic and cultural

diversity, also faces disparities in access to cinema, particularly for families with fewer economic resources. Participants felt that a paradigm shift was urgently needed to enable cinema to become a genuine tool for social cohesion and civic expression.

Finally, they identified several barriers to entry into the sector: unpaid internships, the lack of cinema education in secondary schools and the high cost of professional equipment. Initiatives such as BE-UNIT and its Moonstep festival, however, show that an accessible framework enables young people to create, experiment and gain confidence. Many described their participation in the project as a deeply transformative experience, in artistic, social and professional terms.

The partners and young people involved in BE-UNIT invited participants and any interested individuals and organisations to read and take up the APPEL advocacy document. The document is available online, for free.



Photo : Ben Abdellaoui



## European funding for your cultural or audiovisual projects

The presentation on the Creative Europe programme, gave by **Stéphanie Leempoels** (Office Manager - MEDIA, Creative Europe Programme), provided a detailed overview of the opportunities for calls for projects, training, support and funding offered by this programme. The main eligibility criteria and deadlines for each current call for projects were set out in the slides.



She also pointed out that several schemes are aimed directly at students and young creators: training courses in animation, post-production or audiovisual production, often combined with mentoring and

international professional meetings. Applicants must meet certain eligibility criteria, such as language proficiency and level of experience. Details and deadlines for submitting applications for these training courses are provided in the presentation material.

She also outlined the financial instruments and cross-sectoral component of the programme, including: the guarantee mechanism to facilitate access to loans (START INVEST in Belgium), the investment fund for cultural enterprises (MEDIA INVEST), support for innovative projects via the Innovation Lab, and calls for proposals dedicated to journalism and the fight against disinformation. The deadlines for submitting applications can be found in the slides.

The session was concluded with a reminder of the services offered by the Creative Europe Desk: personalised advice, assistance with project development and transnational workshops. Participants were invited to contact their national Desk, depending on their country of residence, for any future initiatives.



Photo : Ben Abdellaoui

## Status of artists: working conditions and scope of action

Moderator: **Anna Nardone** (BE-UNIT project youth team)

This session began with three young professionals from the BE-UNIT project, **Karoly Gspann (Hungarian filmmaker)**, **Pietro Campi (Italian director)** and **Xavier Katalay (Belgian photographer)**, sharing their experiences, which often lacked a clear framework for starting out in the creative sector. In Italy, access to the industry largely depends on family or personal networks. Pietro explained that his father, a camera operator, had helped him to find opportunities, but that many young people remain excluded without pre-existing contacts. In Belgium, Xavier highlighted the lack of accurate information on procedures, funding and support structures, making it particularly stressful to get started. In Hungary, the audiovisual sector is dominated by two large companies working for international productions such as Netflix, limiting young people's access to local opportunities. Karoly mentioned the informality of internal practices, the lack of financial transparency, abuses of power, and the lack of career mobility. He called for strict regulation at national and European levels.

The three speakers stressed the need to create safe and progressive environments for learning and experimenting, rather than expecting advanced skills from the outset. Pietro also pointed out the difficulty of changing jobs within the sector, as positions are often filled through networking rather than on the basis of skills. Finally, they drew attention to the limitations of training: in Hungary, some private schools

are expensive and unrecognised, excluding many young people. In their view, increased public investment in arts training would be essential to reduce these inequalities and facilitate young people's entry into the sector.



Later in the conference, **Anna Nardone** asked Thomas Blondeel (Advocacy Officer, SMarT cooperative) about the key role of the network and the cooperative in supporting artists. SMarT has 40,000 members, 20,000 of whom actively use its services, creating a dense ecosystem that promotes exchanges, collaborations and informal meetings. The cooperative provides workspaces and socialising areas, as well as training and support programmes, aiming to strengthen collaboration and promote talent. He emphasised the importance of advocacy: the cooperative, collective and cross-sectoral model remains poorly understood by public authorities and market players. Many support mechanisms for self-employed workers are not adapted to this way of working, requiring ongoing information and awareness-raising efforts at the Belgian and European levels. Success can be measured by the growing visibility of the model, but political and legal recognition remains a challenge.

Thomas Blondeel also presented the status of artist in Belgium, created in the 1990s to secure atypical careers with irregular incomes and project-based activities. This status gives access to social security and unemployment benefits, but is still complex and difficult to obtain, and reforms are expected by 2027. The status of artist as implemented in Belgium is difficult to transpose to other countries, but its fundamental principle is: artistic careers must be recognised, even if they do not follow a linear path. Finally, he reminded the audience that SMarT pools resources and risks, offering administrative and educational services and workspaces. The cooperative model is also a driver for social and ecological transition, reconciling economic activity, democratic governance and respect for workers, while requiring constant vigilance to preserve its collective spirit.





## Conclusion, lunch and projection of short films

The day ended with concluding remarks from **Sanjin Plakalo** and **Gabriela Niculae**, who looked back on the BE-UNIT project: two years of activities, online and face-to-face training, national events in Belgium, Italy and Hungary, as well as the festival and final conference. It was announced that the project's 'APPEL' advocacy document will soon be translated into French, Italian and Hungarian for distribution to partners and European institutions. Acknowledgements were given to all participants, speakers, partners and the young people involved in the project.

The event closed with a convivial lunch, the screening of two award-winning short films from the Moonstep Festival, and an invitation to continue the momentum generated during the project: to cooperate, collaborate, connect and keep alive the collective spirit promoted by BE-UNIT beyond the programme.

The short film that won the jury prize at the Moonstep Short Film Festival 2025, 'Not buried yet' by **Ahmed Al-Kassem**, was introduced by Belgian jury member **Guérin van de Vorst**.

**Marieh Rudzka's** short film 'Square', winner of the BE-UNIT project award, was introduced by **Karoly Gspann**, member of the artistic direction of the BE-UNIT youth team.



## See also :

- BE-UNIT project presentation video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ3wxcVURvE>
- Moonstep Short Film Festival Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9h2PJN1IArA>
- Moonstep Short Film Festival on Instagram: : [https://www.instagram.com/moonstep\\_festival/](https://www.instagram.com/moonstep_festival/)
- Presentation of the BE-UNIT project: <https://pourolsolidarite.eu/project/be-unit-ameliorer-lemployabilite-des-jeunes-dans-laudiovisuel-et-leur-citoyennete-active/>
- Article to Download the APPEL Advocacy Document for the BE-UNIT Project:  
<https://pourolsolidarite.eu/publication/recommandations-visant-a-ameliorer-lemployabilite-des-jeunes-dans-le-domaine-audiovisuel-et-a-reduite-les-obstacles-a-la-participation-culturelle/>