



# European Museum Academy

## How are museums doing in Europe?

*The European Museum Academy Reports on The Museum Temperature by the end of 2025.*

The European Museum Academy is proud to present for the eighth year in a row the following more subjective inside views about how museums are doing and what the museums' current challenges are, be it political, financial, in legislation, organisational or something else.

We all think we know something about how museums are doing in our own country, and we know that we can find statistical information produced for specific research projects and in continuous statistical series from our governments, the European Union, the Council of Europe and even UNESCO.

But what is going on beneath the numbers? Politically? Financially? Museologically?

We would like to thank all our dedicated representatives across Europe who make it possible for our independent network to present this report.

Enjoy reading it!

European Museum Academy

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## How were museums in Europe doing in 2025?

– an analytical summary by Henrik Zipsane

The European Museum Academy has the great honour and privilege to present an overview of how museums are doing in Europe. This is the eighth edition of our report and as before it is based on reports from the many representatives of the Academy around Europe who have simply been asked: ‘How were museums doing in 2025 and what is going on?’ The simplicity and the broadness of the question gives representatives the freedom to interpret as they wish, and this does of course mean that the many national reports which follow are heterogeneous. This reflects the individuality of the representatives but probably also the perspective which is the typical and almost natural approach to the question in their own country. What is an important issue in one country may not be highest on the agenda in another country and what is on the mind of one rapporteur may not be the same for a colleague in another country. We consider this reflects the richness in differences in the museums, and of course the rich diversity in Europe.

When I look closer at trends in the following pages, it is indeed remarkable to realise the reality of European ‘unity in diversity’. There are some trends which are shared by almost all and there are obvious specific preconditions in some countries which offer reasonable explanations for a diverse situation from the main overall European trend.

It is also important to realise that this is not a report which covers only museums in member countries of the European Union. With great help from representatives and colleagues in our EMA Pool of Experts we wanted to have coverage of the whole continent, which means that we have the ambition of being represented in 46 countries. We do not work in Russia or Belarus as we follow the guiding principles from the Council of Europe. With this in mind, our current coverage by representation in 39 countries provides a unique opportunity to monitor the situation. The reports make it possible to see how global trends as we know them from, for example, our friends in the International Council of Museums ICOM and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD, are received and have impact on the whole continent. Of course, we also see how guidelines and ideas from within a European policy context and especially the European Union are spreading across the continent. The trends are often mediated for the museum sector by our friends and colleagues in organisations like Europa Nostra and the Network of European Museum Organizations NEMO. In short, the European ‘unity in diversity’ is very visible when we look at the museum situation across the continent. In the following I will give special attention to a number of issues which I hope may reflect on both trends which somehow have global influence and those which can more specifically be seen as European.

## **The museums are in general back on track for growing popularity**

In general, an overview of the European museum situation at the beginning of 2026 offers both very positive and some worrying signs. Let us begin by the observation that it appears that overall, visitor numbers are going up. In reports from previous years visitor numbers were highlighted in almost all countries, but that is not the case anymore. That may of course be explained by visitor numbers being less prioritised now, but I don't think that is the case as both international and European politics on museums are even more focused on the value of museums and the outreach of museum than ever before. The reports from Albania, Croatia, Estonia, Italy, Moldova, Germany, Romania, and Spain mention the rise in visitor numbers as significant and not least triggered by a growth in tourism. But in some major cities like Brussels the visitor numbers are slightly down compared with 2024. In Denmark the rise from 2024 to 2025 is especially significant as already the numbers in 2024 were at a record high. It is even more fascinating that the visitor numbers to museums in Ukraine are rising and even higher than in pre-Covid times. As the Ukrainian report states, this may illustrate that people perceive museums not only as a living proof that normal life goes on, but also as humanitarian and cultural hubs, which provide both intellectual and physical assistance to refugees, veterans and everyone in need.

There is, however, also a different story to tell here. In The Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom visitor numbers are slightly down in 2025 compared with the previous year. These countries share concerns about lacking public funding and even experiencing cuts. They also share the misfortune of lacking investments in museums. For The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, visitor numbers are not back to pre-Covid levels. An interesting study from the latter indicates that it is especially people aged 65+ who are at present more difficult to attract. There may be many explanations for that, but it is not helping if the funding is under pressure. Museums naturally need the resources to attract their visitors. The report from Belgium shows that the use of the annual museum card which offers lower entrance fee is very popular in exactly the group which in the UK is difficult to attract. The noteworthy Romanian example is in this aspect interesting to follow, with successful national programmes and co-financing for cultural projects granted by the National Cultural Fund Administration or other public and private entities.

## **Sustainability and access are key in modernisation**

The general modernisation of museums is seen through actions in many countries. The trend is double as we both have a general focus on improving access and other key priorities in museums during some years now as in Albania, Bulgaria, Italy,

Montenegro and Türkiye. Alongside this stream of modernisation initiatives there are some interesting actions to further develop and maintain levels of improvements from modernisation, as in Norway where the establishment of a national research school for museums and cultural heritage signals a long-term commitment to research-based practice and professional development. In Germany the museum association, together with partners from science and certification, has developed a museum-specific sustainability certification that is being tested in practice as part of a project. The aim is to offer museums a sustainability certification tailored to their needs and to anchor ecological sustainability in museums in a lasting and measurable way.

The boost in digitisation and creating wider access through digital means to the high levels we saw during the pandemic time appears to be maintained and in some countries there are new national initiatives for common digitisation systems which should cover all museums like Luxemburg and Montenegro. Several countries, for example Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland and Slovenia, appear to be focusing on further stimulating the advantages for wider access. In a few countries - Germany and Norway - the use of artificial intelligence as a tool in everyday museum work is spreading rapidly.

The level of digitisation is high everywhere and so is the will of museums to explore its potential. The growth in the number of exhibitions using XR technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, holography, 360°, etc. continues, as does the focus on their possible implementation in museums that continue to offer an analogue experience, as reported in Spain. At the same time, it is reported from Germany that the sustainable implementation of digital offerings requires considerable investment and permanently qualified specialist staff. The competence of the staff is key to get the full potential of digitisation, Artificial Intelligence, and all sorts of technical developments, but it does not stop there. The need for often expensive competences in this area is then, as reported from Portugal, added to a continuous lack of trained professionals to curate collections and especially to communicate them, be it by means of education or communication. It is even critical for European and international collaboration as illustrated by examples from Albania.

## **The balance of professionalism and community participation**

Museums are popular and there are important trends in outreach from museums in local communities. In Sweden a study was recently published showing that 13 percent of all work done in museums is carried out by volunteers. The number is higher in smaller museums and lower in the larger museums. We don't know if this is a special situation for Sweden but the engagement by the public in museums is doubtlessly important for connecting to the community and the people we serve. This is shown in an extreme example where in Ukraine the relocated museums which lost their

collections due to the extremely fast occupation of their regions by the Russian army, must form new collections in their new locations, primarily in Central Ukraine. They are gathering artefacts and oral history from the internally displaced people of their region, not only renewing their collections but re-uniting their community of people of all ages around the local cultural identity they long to preserve. We can all learn from this example of true dedication of museums to the role of creating cohesion through community engagement.

Museums in Europe are important in international and cross-border relations work and that is recognised by both politicians and the museums themselves. There are several examples mentioned in the reports for Albania, Cyprus, Montenegro and North Macedonia, of how specific exhibitions including travelling exhibitions and even business promotions, are among the activities in this area.

Museums have for some recent years attracted funding for investing in new grand buildings and that is still the case as seen in Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Spain and Switzerland, but a concern is growing about the long-term condition of heritage, particularly museum and gallery buildings that need extensive restoration, as pointed out in several countries, among them the United Kingdom. Investments are one thing and maintenance and running costs are something else.

### **Continuous constraints on public funding but no end to public interest**

Except for museums in Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, and Luxembourg, all other countries are apparently seeing museums facing harder economic situations. In some cases, the unstable funding, lower funding, or funding which does not compensate for the higher inflation in 2023-2024 has been compensated in part by allocating funds from the European Union Recovery Funds. But otherwise, the situation is hardening for maintenance and running costs. It is particularly worth noting the remarks from colleagues in Norway and Sweden about the lack of experience and competence in the museums there to attract private funds, and if that situation does not change the museums will be economically paralysed.

The message from Italy is more optimistic in this aspect as museums have learned in 2025 that a rise in visitor numbers also can have the side-effect that the revenue linked to visitor attractiveness is important and can be significant. These observations in Northern and Southern Europe may of course very well be caused by cultural management traditions and different political history. That does, however, not change the fact that museums all over Europe have challenges with financing their work and

maybe are meeting the challenges too slowly because many are lacking the skills and attitude needed to overcome them.

Even though it looks very much like there is a clear but uneven European shift in the way that investments, maintenance, and running costs for museums are financed, the political interest in governing museums one way or another is still there and 2025 is no exception. In several countries - Albania, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Moldova, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain - there has been major legislation or government regulation initiatives for museums but in general all of these are contributing to mainstream museum developments in Europe. It is notable that there are several countries where museums even without political directives are prioritising provenance research as in Switzerland and decolonial perspectives, decolonisation and repatriation as in Latvia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France and Spain.

One issue is relatively new in the work of museums and is spreading rapidly, which is the safety situation for museums and their collections. In several countries there are initiatives at different political levels and in the museums themselves. This is a sad necessity and naturally a response to the general security situation and the war in Ukraine in particular.

## **Natural and man-made disasters hit museums and our common heritage**

It appears to be a growing ingredient of the daily news to hear about natural disasters of earthquakes, flooding, heavy storms, volcanic activity, and so on. This does of course also have an impact on museums. In countries heavily marked by natural disasters like Croatia and Türkiye the restoration of museums which have been destroyed in part, or totally in the case of earthquakes, is taking its part of resources in the field.

As mentioned above, such developments are recognised in politics and in museums and is a serious incentive to begin or to strengthen the work on safety. With this in mind, it appears to me to be even more disturbing that museums unfortunately need to find resources for man-made catastrophes.

In 2025 we were all shocked by the theft of the itinerant Dacian treasure from the National Museum of Romanian History at the Drents Museum in The Netherlands, including the irreparable loss of the Coțofenești helmet and the Dacian bracelets. Also in 2025 we experienced the theft of the French Crown Jewels in the Galerie d'Apollon of the Louvre in Paris. The symbolic value and importance for humanity and shared heritage is threatened by such thefts and even in smaller ways we see exploitation of the popularity and importance of museums as when activists, for whatever good reasons, glue themselves to paintings, chain themselves to museum buildings, or use

spray paint on museum artefacts. Such man-made disasters in museums are not only disrespectful but also putting pressure on museums to spend even more resources on safety, with clear consequences for other activities and making access harder for everybody in times when museums are working so hard to broaden access on public demand. As is debated in France, such thefts may also be regarded as indicative of a deeper malaise and an attempt by museums to reconcile security, accessibility, and budgetary balance.

## **Arms-length principles and over-ruling museum professionalism**

The reports on political pressure on museums which we saw in 2024 has continued in 2025. One quarter of the national reports address this, which means that the trend is slightly growing in comparison with the previous year. The signals of political influence on themes addressed and stories presented by museums are especially serious in the Czech Republic, Georgia, Lithuania, Serbia and Slovakia, but several countries experience clearly expressed attempts to influence their activities. In Georgia and Lithuania the reports are showing how museums are active in public efforts to maintain freedom of expression. The Lithuanian Museum Association officially announced that it is joining the cultural community movement, inviting museums to participate in campaigns, other initiatives, and express their civic position.

Political interference and confrontation take very diverse expressions. In The Netherlands examples include political questions about the removal of VOC flags – the historical merchant company regarded as the company par excellence that epitomises colonialism and the slave trade - or criticism of artworks about sensitive international conflicts. As a result, museums are increasingly having to navigate between their social mission and political or financial constraints.

In Sweden the government has, with inspiration from a similar initiative a few years back, presented what they call a Cultural Canon which consists of 100 books, buildings, inventions and phenomena with which the population should be familiar. Like similar initiatives, the example in Sweden has a clear tendency of attempting to define Swedish identity from above. The discussions have mainly dealt with how the cultural canon is to be implemented. The proposal is that a permanent exhibition should be built at a large museum, and a foundation should be installed for the purpose of spreading the canon. The latter has not found any solution yet.

As mentioned in the report from Finland there may also be a tendency to narrow the themes museums are working with and have self-censorship, as funding is otherwise difficult to attract. That may be difficult to realise when we as guests enjoy the exhibitions and programmes, but if difficult or contested stories are not told we will all be poorer.



Politics and museums are of course related and the balance between museum professionalism and political priorities is sometimes easy and at other times difficult to define. Sometimes the balance is quite delicate as in the discussions, decisions and now realisation of exhibiting the thousand-year-old Bayeux tapestry in London. The situation for museums in Europe at the beginning of 2026 is indeed no less challenging than in previous years.

**Henrik Zipsane**

European Museum Academy

## COUNTRY REPORTS

### ALBANIA

By the end of 2025, the Albanian museum sector demonstrates gradual modernisation amid structural constraints, with national museums and selected local institutions leading the way. Key trends include digitisation, reinterpretation of historical narratives, and modest growth in community engagement, alongside increased visitor numbers at UNESCO heritage sites such as Berat, Gjirokastër, and Butrint. Major museums are undergoing reconstruction or development, while new initiatives expand Albania's cultural infrastructure. Challenges remain in professional education, continuous training, and integration into European programmes, which are critical for fostering sustainable development, innovation, and international collaboration.

#### **Overview**

The museum sector in Albania continues to evolve within a context of institutional transition, gradual modernisation, and structural challenges. Museums remain central to cultural policy, heritage preservation, and national identity, though development is uneven and dependent on state priorities, local capacities, and international cooperation. 2025 reflects a gradual shift toward professionalisation, digital engagement, and audience-focused practices, though progress remains project-based.

#### **Trends and Developments**

Digitisation and online engagement are growing, with virtual exhibitions, digitised collections, and educational content on social media, signaling recognition of museums as hybrid physical–digital institutions. Historical narratives are increasingly reinterpreted, particularly regarding the communist period and World War II, through inclusive and critical approaches.

A notable positive trend is the increase in visitors at UNESCO heritage sites (Berat, Gjirokastër, Butrint), highlighting public interest and the potential of museums to contribute to cultural tourism. Community engagement is modestly expanding, with museums strengthening links to schools, universities, and local communities.

## **Institutional developments**

**National Historical Museum, Tirana:** Closed for reconstruction and reconceptualisation, revising historical narratives and stimulating debate on memory and pluralism.

**National Archaeological Museum, Durrës:** Focused on collection protection and conservation amid infrastructural challenges.

**Museum of Jewish History, Vlorë:** Consolidated as a key memory institution, engaging in education, commemoration, and cultural diplomacy, increasingly aligned with European Holocaust remembrance frameworks.

**Museum of the Armed Forces:** Began active operations, presenting military and Cold War history.

New initiatives: Include the **Naval Museum in Shkodër**, **Museum of Islamic Art and Heritage** in Tirana, and restoration of historic buildings, enhancing infrastructure but requiring further professional capacity-building.

## **Structural challenges and European Integration**

Formal education and systematic training in museology remain limited; the only provision is a short module at the University of Tirana. Continuous professional development opportunities are scarce, though the Museum of the National Bank of Albania organises an annual conference on museology. Museum publications largely focus on historical content rather than contemporary museological practices. Participation in Creative Europe and Horizon Europe remains limited, due to institutional capacity constraints, project-writing experience, and national coordination, limiting opportunities for innovation, research collaboration, and sustainable development.

## **Conclusion**

By the end of 2025, Albanian museums are characterised by institutional restructuring, new foundations, and infrastructure investment, alongside ongoing challenges in funding, professional training, and European integration. Addressing these priorities will require sustained public investment, strategic national planning, strengthened professional capacity, and deeper engagement with European museum networks, including continued collaboration with the European Museum Academy.

**Dorian Koçi**

## AUSTRIA

In 2025, Austria once again hosted numerous exhibitions, special exhibitions, and renovations. The **Austrian National Library**, for example, highlighted “A Century in Pictures: Austria 1925–2025.”



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The **Vienna Technical Museum** has redesigned its “Material Worlds” exhibition. This is the largest redesign in 25 years in the field of heavy industry, covering an area of 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> and featuring 440 exhibits, 300 of which are being shown for the first time.



© Technisches Museum Wien/ Sebastian Weissinger

The **Nordico City Museum Linz** was awarded the Austrian Museum Prize 2025. The jury justified its decision with the wide variety of topics covered, which address central aspects of everyday urban life, architecture, and city history in Linz. This makes the city museum a place of learning and education where research and publications are produced, socio-political topics are addressed, and a diverse range of visitor groups are engaged through its educational formats.

**Salon Stolz** in Graz has received the European Museum Academy's DASA Award 2025 for its innovative use of dance and music, creative design, and special educational projects.



© Edi Haberl

In Styria, the “**Steiermark Schau 2025 – Ambition & Illusion**” attracted visitors to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Eggenberg Palace. Despite its success, the Steiermark Schau will be suspended in 2027 due to a lack of funds.

The Universalmuseum Joanneum alone is short of €5 million. As a result, the Universalmuseum must also discontinue its popular museum academy, which offers workshops, conferences, and training courses for Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. The reasons for this – not only in the case of the Universalmuseum – are high inflation and rising personnel, energy, and operating costs, with which many museums are struggling.

### **Financial situation in Austria in 2025**

The estimated increase in payments of EUR 12 million for 2025 compared to 2024 resulted mainly from an increase in basic compensation for the federal museums/Austrian National Library (+EUR 5 million) and the federal theatres (+EUR 10 million).

Furthermore, payments for the extended preservation obligation in monument protection rose by €4 million. In contrast to these increases, a decline in arts and culture funding to €233 million was planned for 2025, which is €10.5 million less than in 2024. These cuts mainly affected the independent art scene.

(<https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/budgetdienst/untergliederungsanalysen/B-D-UG-32-Kunst-und-Kultur-Budgets-2025-und-2026.pdf>)

Numerous funding priorities have been set for 2025 in the field of contemporary art in order to strengthen the visibility of Austrian artists abroad. In the context of awarding grants, attention was paid to gender equality in the allocation of funding.

([https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr\\_2025/pk0523?](https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/pk/jahr_2025/pk0523?))

**Nikola Kroath**

# BELGIUM

## 1.1 General overview

In order to understand the complex web of museums in Belgium, i.e. the political and administrative levels and decrees they rely on, one would need a comprehensive overview of those structures, which is alas not possible within the limits of this contribution. In what follows I will highlight networks, strategy cycles, evolutions and initiatives for museums in Flanders, in Brussels and in Wallonia in 2024, making largely abstraction from which political level is responsible.

As the museum scene in Flanders is my natural habitat, news from this front will stand out in comparison.

## 1.2 ICOM België/Belgique

Belgium hosts two national sub-sections of the International Committee of Museums (ICOM-International): ICOM Belgique/Wallonie-Bruxelles (<https://icom-wb.museum>) and ICOM Belgium Flanders ([www.icom-belgium-flanders.be](http://www.icom-belgium-flanders.be)). Together they form the ICOM Belgium Committee. Alexandre Chevalier is currently chair of ICOM Belgique/WallonieBruxelles, Isabelle Vanhoonacker is his counterpart at ICOM Belgium Flanders.

## 1.3 museumPASSmusées

museumPASSmusées is the largest museum pass in Belgium. Museums in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels are pulling together for the project, which is quite unique in the Belgian context. The purpose of the pass is twofold: to raise the visibility of the institutions on the one hand and to lower the threshold to culture on the other. The management of the pass sits with the recognised cvso museumPASSmusées established by four organisations: the Brussels Museums Council, the Flemish Museum Network, ICOM Belgique/Wallonie-Bruxelles/Musées et Société en Wallonie and publiq vzw. Director is Erika T'Jaecx.

Pass holders get one-year access to all participating Belgian museums. That means visiting the permanent exhibitions of 270 museums for free. One can also visit temporary exhibitions for free or at a substantial discount.

In 2025 the museum pass generated 1.300.000 museum visits, the same as in 2024. The portfolio now includes 270 participating museums (2024: 255). The pass ended 2025 with 235.000 active passholders (2024: 210.000). The largest group of cardholders are early retirees (aged 66-75), followed by the category just below that: those aged 56 to 65. More information via: [www.museumpassmusees.be](http://www.museumpassmusees.be).

## **1.4 The War Heritage Institute (WHI)**

The WHI is a parastatal institution that was established in 2017 and functions as a federal scientific institution for military heritage. The War Heritage Institute sites, spread across Belgium, welcomed a record number of 328,122 visitors in 2025. Apparently the memory of the Great War lives on, even though the commemorative years are now behind us. The WHI attributes this to high relevance in uncertain times combined with a strong programme and a ditto communication strategy.

The Passage of the Dead in Diksmuide and the Command Bunker in Kemmel, both in Flanders, showed particularly strong growth figures.

The Army Museum in Brussels recorded its best year since 2018 with 114,894 visitors in 2025, while the Bastogne Barracks in Wallonia also recorded a record number of visitors.

## **2 Museums in Flanders**

### **2.1 General overview and funding**

In Flanders one can distinguish between the following categories of museums subsidised by the Flemish Government:

- cultural institutions (standing out internationally);
- national museums;
- supralocal museums;
- Flemish cultural institutions (co-organised by the Flemish government).

Apart from that the Flemish landscape counts local museums ranging from small city or village museums to museums that are cared for by local heritage organisations. Some of them are subsidised or sustained by a local authority.

All of the above museums, except those at the local level, are powered by the Flemish Ministry of Culture and its administration, the Department of Culture, Youth and Media.

For the cultural institutions, the national museums and the supralocal museums in Flanders 2025 was the second year of a new five-year strategy cycle: 2024-2028. The Flemish cultural institutions – KMSKA, M HKA, Mu.ZEE, Kasteel van Gaasbeek and Roger Raveelmuseum – follow a separate application procedure and timing (2026-2030).



Next to the subsidised circuit there exist private museums or museum-like initiatives such as, for example, the Cobra Depot, created by top-ranked entrepreneur Fernand Huts and his wife, Karine Vandenheuvel, both collectors.

## **2.2 Reorganisation Flemish cultural institutions**

In 2025 the then Flemish cultural institutions – KMSKA, M HKA, Mu.ZEE, Kasteel van Gaasbeek and Roger Raveelmuseum – submitted their strategy plans 2026-2030 for evaluation. Flemish minister of Culture Caroline Gennez decided to use the outcome of the evaluation to reshuffle the landscape of the Flemish cultural institutions.

Firstly, she ruled that the M HKA museum of contemporary art in Antwerp would no longer be a museum but an arts centre, that its collections would be transferred to the SMAK Museum in Ghent - which would become henceforth the Flemish cultural institution on contemporary art - and that the new museum building M HKA had been planning for 10 years would be off the table. Secondly, she clustered the activities of KMSKA, Kasteel van Gaasbeek and Museum Hof van Busleyden with a focus on fine arts, at the same time granting Museum Hof van Busleyden the position of Flemish cultural institution. Thirdly, she created a new cluster on modernism as Mu.ZEE and Roger Raveelmuseum are to be joined by Felix Art & Eco Museum, which will also gain the status of a Flemish cultural institution.

The newly laid out plan led to strong reactions in Belgium and internationally, both in the arts, culture and heritage sectors as well as in the Flemish parliament. The discussion touched upon international agreements as ownership and mobility of collections, the added value of museums for their heritage communities, hybridity as a conscious choice over pigeonholing, etcetera. The minister has promised a dialogue with the museums involved. The outcome of that dialogue will further unfold in 2026.

## **2.3 Forced closure of Museum Eperon d'Or**

In September 2025 the city council of Izegem announced the closure of the supralocal museum Eperon d'Or. Although positively evaluated and subsidised for another five-year cycle by the Flemish government, the city council announced its closure as of 2026 due to financial difficulties. Despite numerous protests from subsidising agencies, the museum sector as well as the local public, the decision was not reversed and will be effective as of January 1, 2026. It is yet unclear what the effects will be on the museum collections. There is growing concern that this decision might set an unfortunate precedent in how local or other authorities can make drastic decisions affecting museums and other cultural organisations.

## **2.4 Subsidy cuts**

In 2025 the Flemish Ministry of Culture announced subsidy and other cuts in the arts and culture budget worth €23 million to meet the austerity programme worth €1.5 billion the Flemish Government is implementing, to balance the budget by 2027.

Also, the supralocal museums in Flanders see their annual subsidy cut by 5%. The cancellation of a new building for the M HKA museum will free up €130 million, which will be partly reinvested in the new museum clusters minister Gennez plans to install (cf. 2.2). The supralocal museum Sportimonium loses not only its subsidy from the Flemish Ministry of Culture but also that from Sport Vlaanderen, which is a heavy blow for the museum that has been trying to reinvent itself for some years now.

## **2.5 The Flemish Museum Network**

The Flemish Museum Network is an informal network of professionals working in museums and umbrella heritage organisations in Flanders. FARO, the Flemish Institution for Cultural Heritage, facilitates and supports this network. Autumn 2025 longtime chair Patrick Allegaert, former artistic director of the Guislain Museum, announced his retirement from the post.

The procedure to fill in the vacant position resulted in a new structure with Karen Moeskops (director Red Star Line Museum) as chair and Sigrid Bosmans (director Audience Museum M) and Eline Van de Voorde (co-director Guislain Museum) as vice-chairs.

The Flemish Museum Network was established 13 years ago. It started from a small network of museum directors in Ghent, Antwerp, Bruges, Zemst and Bokrijk and expanded gradually. Since the pandemic in 2020, the Flemish Museum Network has been growing rapidly. Currently, ca. 50 museums participate in the XL meetings. There is a very broad representation of the Flemish museum sector (ca. 85%). This strong involvement of the museums underscores the importance of this consultation and ensures its future role. The participants in the consultation belong to the management level of museums (general director, business director, artistic director, communication manager). The goal is to exchange experiences, insights and Q&A. During these meetings shared policies and museological issues, challenges and opportunities for collaboration are discussed. In 2025 the Flemish Museum Network organised several meetings, of which XL online meetings with all museums recognised by the Flemish community (both basic recognitions, supralocal and national recognition). The emphasis in these digital meetings was on sharing information. In addition, there were IRL meetings with the directors of the national museums.

All meetings were supported substantively and methodically by FARO, the Flemish Institution for Cultural Heritage. As good in terms of deepening the content of the operation as in terms of supporting via reporting and offering meeting infrastructure, FARO gave a support highly appreciated by all participants.

## **2.6 Flemish Virtual Museum**

March 12, 2024, FAAM, or: Flanders All Around Museum, was launched. FAAM is a digital project from the Flemish Government 2019-2023 that shares content from Flemish museums and other heritage organisations large and small with a broad audience via both a website and an app. Museums are encouraged to share their content and create experiences that are attractive to a broad audience and/or specific target groups (<https://www.faam.vlaanderen/nl>).

Minister of Culture Caroline Gennez has decided however, as part of the budget cuts, to merge the app of FAAM, Flanders' virtual museum with FARO's Heritage App. This decision would result in a single platform for digital heritage stories in Flanders.

## **2.7 New developments and exhibitions**

In 2025, several significant events and developments in the Flemish museum scene captured attention, ranging from notable exhibitions to new initiatives and museum openings. March 2025 saw the opening of Abby in Kortrijk, a museum that defines itself as “a playful, accessible and multi-voiced museum of visual arts”. Well visited expositions in 2025 were a.o. ‘Hans op De Beeck: Nachtreis’ en ‘Magritte. La ligne de vie’ (KMSKA), ‘Stephan Vanfleteren. Transcripts of a Sea’ (MSK Gent), ‘GIRLS. Over verveling, rebellie en opgroeien’ (MoMu), ‘Rococo Reboot’ (Modemuseum Hasselt) en ‘Moederziel’ (Bokrijk).

## **2.8 Restorations, refurbishments, closures**

In Ghent the Design Museum was still closed due to a major restoration and Mu.ZEE in Ostend closed its doors end of 2024 for a major restoration procedure as well. In 2025, Musea Brugge continued to build BRUSK, a new art gallery for temporary exhibitions of world-class calibre, which will also house the BRON research centre, and that will open in 2026.

## **3 Museums in Brussels**

### **3.1 General overview**

The museums in Brussels counted 5.000.000 visitors in 2025, slightly down from 2024. These good figures require some nuance: while some museums recorded a rise in visitor numbers, others experienced a drop. Established events such as Museum Night

Fever also contributed significantly to the number of museum visits. Exhibitions focusing on Art Deco and Art Nouveau attracted large audiences, thanks to the Art Nouveau Pass with art deco extension.

Factors possibly contributing to the 2% decrease include extensive roadworks, public transport strikes, an overall decrease in purchasing power and, last but not least, financial uncertainties regarding funding due to the absence of a government since the June 2024 (!) elections.

### **3.2 Brussels Museums**

Brussels Museums ([www.brusselsmuseums.be](http://www.brusselsmuseums.be)) is the federation that brings together circa 125 museums in the Brussels Capital Region.

The central mission of Brussels Museums is to:

- connect museums by facilitating meetings, exchanging good practices and passing on up-to-date sector information;
- represent and defend the interests of museums as the reference partner, examining the impact and challenges of the sector (cf. Brussels Museums memorandum);
- increase the visibility of museums through public events and communication actions, such as Museum Night Fever and Nocturnes projects;
- guide museums towards greater accessibility, inclusiveness and sustainability with initiatives such as Open Museum and Green Museum.

### **3.3 New developments and exhibitions**

The museums that attracted the highest number of visitors in Brussels in 2025 were the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, the Parlamentarium, Bozar (with its exhibition 'Khoros' on Berlinde de Bruyckere), the Institute of Natural Sciences and the Meise Botanic Garden. Attendance remained stable at the AfricaMuseum and the Brussels City Hall. Visitor numbers increased at the Royal Military Museum with its virtual exhibition on Napoleon, and at the Royal Museums of Art and History (Cinquantenaire).

## **4 Museums in Wallonia**

### **4.1 General overview**

Museums in Wallonia can be grouped into various categories based on their management, funding, and/or thematic focus. The key organisational structures include:

- public museums: museums supported by the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, which provides funding, guidelines, and recognition.

- provincial and municipal museums: many museums are managed at the provincial or local level, receiving support from Walloon provinces or city councils.
- private and independent museums: run by non-profit organizations, foundations, or private entities. For example, smaller regional museums focusing on local heritage.

The Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB - [www.culture.be](http://www.culture.be)) officially recognises over 150 museums under the umbrella term 'Musées de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles', ensuring quality standards in management, conservation, and education. For more information, see:

<https://patrimoineculturel.cfwb.be/reconnaissances-subventions/musees>

#### 4.2 New developments and exhibitions

The Museum of Tapestries and Textile Arts in Tournai (TAMAT) reopened mid-January 2025. The museum aims "to make the history and current status of tapestry intelligible, a living creative discipline and material culture that bears witness to major artistic, cultural, social, societal and economic issues. It approaches this field by highlighting Tournai tapestry from the 15th and 16th centuries, placed in a national and international context."

Successful exhibitions in Wallonia in 2025 were a.o. 'David Hockney. The Song of the Earth'(CAP/ BAM Musée des Beaux-Arts Bergen). The P.A.R.C. Museum Network Launch, a collaborative network encompassing eight museums has in the meantime proved its worth. Behind this acronym of 'Pôle des Arts en Région du Centre' are the following institutions: the Daily-Bul & Co Centre, the Centre de la Gravure et de l'Image imprimée, the Domaine du Château de Seneffe, Keramis, the MILL, the Museum of Mining and Sustainable Development on the Bois-du-Luc mining site, the MUMASK and the Royal Museum of Mariemont.

**Hilde Schoefs**

## BULGARIA

In 2025, several museums in Bulgaria were renovated, and other significant existing exhibitions were changed. With the help of national and European funding, the museums in Lovech, Targovishte and Pavlikeni renovated historical exhibitions, and the museum in Pleven gave a new reading to the theme of the wars for national unification in the 20th century, placing Man at the centre of the story. This exhibition was supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation, with whose help the training in the creation of the exhibition was implemented. The National History Museum in Sofia renovated two key halls that present part of Antiquity. One tells the story of the Iron Age and the time of the Thracians, and the other the establishment of the Roman Empire in these lands. The two halls are leading topics such as Thracian treasures and the Danube Limes, which is part of the UNESCO tentative list since 2016.

Some museums have enriched their digital collections and built new digital products that sometimes seem self-serving. VR, AR, 3D, photogrammetry, scanning and modelling were carried out in some places, and the results seem to serve to impress the visitor, rather than to preserve and present the forms of cultural heritage and specific artefacts in museums.

In 2025, the budget of the Ministry of Culture for implementing museum policy and designing new exhibitions was smaller. This year, the amounts reach 30,000 euros per project, without the need for co-financing. In this way, museums are stimulated to be active, and many of them took advantage of the opportunity provided to them. The results of these competitions will be published next year, when the activities will be implemented.

The exhibition "Iglika Kilim Fest" with nearly 1000 Bulgarian carpets by the Dutchman Jacob van Beilen, located in the meadows in the village of Iglika, aroused undoubted interest - not only in the festival and the collection, but also in the topic of ethnography in general. The collector also held a meeting with the Minister of Culture, and a possible carpet museum in which this collection could be exhibited was discussed. There was no subsequent result from the meeting.

A new museum has appeared in the city of Plovdiv - the Iron Museum, which is part of the Ethnographic Museum in the city. A collection of over 1,000 irons from different periods is presented, and the exhibition is of the open storage type. This is only the second such museum in our country, but it shows good thinking in this direction. The Natural History Museum in Plovdiv has also expanded some of its exhibitions by

adding exotic animal species. This shows a systematic museum policy of the local municipality, and such support in our country is rare.

The possibilities for financing museum activities, as well as for digitising museum exhibits shared on a common platform, which are tied to the EU's Next Generation Recovery and Resilience Plan, supported by the European Commission, have not yet been realised.

The analysis for 2025 shows that museums are trying to change, above all, their exhibitions, but they are having difficulty finding methods for working with audiences. Of course, the renovation of old exhibitions is imperative, but the search for modern approaches to communicating with heritage and engaging visitors is also an important condition for the fulfillment of the functions of modern museums.

**Nikolay Nenov**

## CROATIA

2025 will not be remembered as a year of new museum openings or permanent exhibitions. However, **a number of innovative exhibitions and museum projects** made for a vibrant year for museums in Croatia.

The consequences of the 2020 Zagreb earthquake are still limiting some of the museums' functions. While the exhibition areas have been restored to a certain degree, there is still **a significant issue with storage areas**. In February 2025, a roundtable discussion titled "Museums and Museum Spaces" was organised, primarily focusing on museum storage areas. Most deposits are still located in museum buildings, which are usually historical structures, and storage spaces rarely have adequate conditions for storing museum objects. Space limitations are an issue for 93% of Croatian museums. In addition to the storage rooms, the discussion revolved around how to renovate historical buildings, which most often house Croatian museums, in a way that allows them to retain their monumental properties while meeting the minimum spatial and technical conditions prescribed by museum legislation, as well as modern requirements for energy efficiency, building sustainability, accessibility for people with disabilities and seismic resistance. Even the Museum of Contemporary Art (MSU), the only purpose-built museum in Zagreb built in the 21st century, is struggling with problems such as leaks in the storage areas and parts of the façade falling off the building. This is all because funds were not secured for the maintenance of the new museum building. At the roundtable discussion, the Vice Mayor of Zagreb announced that the city will soon propose a location for a central storage facility for its museums.

In a survey conducted by the Museum Documentation Centre at the beginning of the year, **the most visited museum** for the 10th consecutive year was the Archaeological Museum of Istria in Pula, with 641,000 visitors last year. This museum includes collections in the Amphitheatre, the Temple of Augustus and the Small Roman Theatre. It achieved a 15% increase in attendance compared to the previous year. This is probably due to the city's tourist attractiveness and attendance, as well as the Roman Amphitheatre's particular appeal. For similar reasons, the Dubrovnik museums ranked second, with 517,000 visitors last year — a 25% increase from the previous year. Nine out of ten visitors to these museums are foreign tourists, so the significant increase in attendance is largely due to the increase in tourist overnight stays in Dubrovnik County, which increased by 514,000 in 2024. The Nikola Tesla Technical Museum in Zagreb came in third with 377,000 visits. The Split City Museum and Diocletian's Cellars together attracted 288,000 visitors. The Museums of Croatian Zagorje came in fifth with 283,000 visits.



Zagreb had the most museum visitors, with 912,000 visits, which was a 28% increase compared to the previous year. However, the **continued decline in preschool and school-age visitor numbers** is concerning. There were 14% fewer young visitors than last year and 18% fewer than in 2019. This raises questions about how well museums integrate heritage into educational processes and adapt their topics and content to the interests of future generations.

The "**Museum Zone**" **opened in the Franjo Tuđman Airport passenger terminal**, and the exhibition "Stars of Croatian History: The Sky is the Limit." Meet Them!" presents individuals who have left an indelible mark on Croatia and the world through their work and achievements. The exhibition uses a modern, interactive approach to engage passengers at Zagreb Airport. It is the first concept of its kind in Croatia. The Museum Zone is a specially designed exhibition space where the Croatian History Museum can exhibit its valuable holdings while its two buildings undergo complete renovation. Travellers leaving Croatia can get acquainted with 24 notable figures, including Slavoljub Penkala, the inventor of the mechanical pencil; Ivan Vučetić, the originator of dactyloscopy; Andrija Štampar, the co-founder of the World Health Organisation; Leopold (Lavoslav) Ružička, the first Croatian Nobel laureate; Ivan Meštrović, the celebrated sculptor; Milka Trnina, the opera singer; Dražen Petrović, the first Croatian basketball player in the NBA; and Franjo Tuđman, the first Croatian president and namesake of Zagreb Airport.

When it comes to **online content**, online collections in 2024 had 376,785 visits (39 responses), a 33% decrease compared to the previous year; virtual/online exhibitions 134,575 (41 responses), an increase of almost 60%; virtual museum tours recorded a 38% decrease, while educational online programmes - despite a decrease in the number of responses (from 19 in 2023 to 17) "exploded" by more than doubling - by almost 118%. For live online events, only ten museums provide data (7 fewer than the previous ones), but they also show a strong growth trend of 162%. Although 28 newsletters are published by two museums more than in 2023, the readership of museum news decreased by almost 420,000 or 54%.

The 70th anniversary of the **Museum Documentation Centre** was also marked - a specific institution crucial for the development of the museum profession in Croatia. It systematically collects data on the development and operation of museums, organizes exams for advancement in the museum profession, publishes a professional journal and other publications, organises professional gatherings, etc.

When it comes to **new buildings and new museum exhibitions**, it is worth highlighting the new building of the Fisherman's Collection in Vrboska on the island of Hvar, which it moved into 53 years after its founding.

After a long-term comprehensive renovation that followed the Zagreb earthquake, the Zagreb Atelier Meštrović, the famous world-renowned sculptor Ivan Meštrović, opened in December 2025 with the first new permanent exhibition in sixty years. This institution is not only the guardian of the legacy of the great artist, but also a centre for research, education and cultural dialogue.

In 2025, several **conferences related to museums** were organised, one of which was "Participation in Art/Museums," in Zagreb which promoted the idea that art should be open to all members of society. The conference focused on cultural democracy and its practical applications, which provide broad segments of the population with access to culture and its content. These applications also allow people to actively participate in culture and artistic expression. Through this participation, people can create a common space for social, creative, political, and artistic dialogue.

Among the conferences dedicated to heritage interpretation, the 3rd National Forum of Heritage Interpreters stands out. Held at the end of 2025 in Trakošćan Palace, the forum addressed the topic of "New Heritage Dress: Possibilities and Values of Live Interpretation in Cultural and Natural Heritage." The forum was organised by Interpret Europe – Croatia and is intended for curators, interpretation centre employees, and people involved in managing cultural destinations and projects.

In **the international context**, Croatian museums were quite visible. The Museum of Contemporary Art from Zagreb presented itself with an exhibition at the MoMA Museum in New York, which gave global visibility to the Croatian cultural scene.

On the European Museum Academy (EMA) Awards ceremony, The House of Halubje Bellringers were finalists for the Luigi Micheletti Award. The Forum of Slavic Cultures awarded the same Institution with the prize for Sustainability, while the main Živa prize went to the Natural History Museum in Zagreb.

At the General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) during the Triennial Conference in Dubai, the results of the election for the new leadership of the world's largest museum organisation were announced, which for the next three years will be led by a museum curator from the United States, Antonio Rodriguez, as the new president, while Dr. Goranka Horjan, director of the Dvor Trakošćan Museum, was elected treasurer of ICOM, which reaffirmed the Croatian museum community's strong visibility and reputation on the international scene.

**Lidija Nikočević**

## CYPRUS

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union provided Cyprus with a strategic opportunity to promote and highlight culture as a tool of dialogue and diplomacy. Within this framework, museums and cultural institutions, both private and state museums, have been working since early 2025 to showcase Cyprus' cultural heritage through temporary and travelling exhibitions, joint curatorial projects, special programmes and a variety of cultural events.

A large increase to the Deputy Ministry of Culture's annual budget for 2026 (€2,4 million funded by the European Union to support Cyprus' cultural programme through EU Council Presidency) presents the importance of intercultural dialogue, education and soft diplomacy. As announced by the Deputy Minister of Culture during the presentation of the annual budget to the House Finance Committee, most of the funds will directly support artists and cultural professionals.

The Deputy Ministry of Culture joined forces and collaborated with selected cultural institutions that would support its important role during this period and would deliver high-standard exhibitions, both in Cyprus and abroad.

Regarding the Leventis Foundation's museums –the A. G. Leventis Gallery and the Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia– two travelling exhibitions are fully funded by the Deputy Ministry of Culture:

'George Pol. Georghiou – Timeless Cyprus' is presented at the Hellenic Centre London by the A. G. Leventis Gallery in March 2026.

In 2019 a large number of emblematic artworks by the Cypriot artist George Pol. Georghiou, which had been lost since 1974 and remained in occupied Famagusta, were given back to the artist's family. These works were returned in the framework of cultural exchanges between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities and were first exhibited in Nicosia in February 2020 at the emblematic Ledra Palace Hotel and then at the State Gallery of Contemporary Art. They were then studied in depth and a thematic exhibition followed, organised by the A. G. Leventis Gallery in November 2022, entitled *George Pol. Georghiou – Timeless Cyprus*.

In collaboration with the artist's family, other collectors and institutions, the A. G. Leventis Gallery is now preparing a memorial exhibition for London, dedicated to an artist who considered it his duty to record the significant moments of history and the traditions of the island of Cyprus.

'Sector 2: Nicosia', a parallel presentation of the main exhibition taking place at the Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia, is being planned in Athens from March to

May 2026, at the exhibition space of the former Public Tobacco Factory, under the auspices of the Hellenic Parliament.

The presentation in Athens carries particular importance, as it offers an opportunity to bring to the forefront aspects of Cyprus' and especially Nicosia's complex and difficult history, allowing international audiences to engage with the island's multifaceted cultural identity and historical experiences. By extending the exhibition beyond Cyprus, the initiative provides a platform for dialogue and reflection on issues of memory, resilience and continuity – values that resonate deeply within the broader European narrative. It also highlights the Leventis Municipal Museum of Nicosia's role in contributing to the history of Cyprus and heritage and to the ongoing exchange of knowledge and museological expertise between Cyprus and Greece. In doing so, the project underlines the enduring power of culture to foster understanding and illuminate shared human experiences.

Besides the cultural programme presented in many European cities, mainly co-organised and funded by the Deputy Ministry of Culture, here in Cyprus:

The long-term project for the new Cyprus Museum continues, aiming to a high-end cultural installation in the centre of the capital to host one of the largest collections of Cypriot archaeology, projecting the history and the culture of Cyprus into international scope. The construction began in 2023 and its completion is expected by 2030. In the meantime, the newly refurbished permanent collection exhibition area in the current Cyprus Museum was inaugurated in January 2026, allowing the enrichment of the exhibitions with supporting material, new lighting solutions and display cases.

A new temporary exhibition is also presented at the State Gallery of Contemporary Art 'Agropoetics: Soils/Bodies', featuring works by more than 40 Cypriot artists, engaging with the themes of agricultural and ecological practices.

Also, in 2025 an advisory committee has been appointed by the Deputy Ministry of Culture for the establishment of the Cyprus Museum of Contemporary Art. The committee's task is to make crucial recommendations and actions to create a state-funded art museum and prepare the mission and vision of the new museum. Mrs Loukia Loizou Hadjigavriel, Director of the Anastasios G. Leventis Foundation has been appointed as president of this committee.

Another important development is a large-scale project worth €1.86 million launched in the very heart of Paphos. By 2026, the city will welcome two new museums: the George C. Tornaritis Museum of Natural History and Art and the Multi-Thematic Museum, will showcase art and historical collections, both set to become major cultural attractions of Cyprus.

The cultural programme, a joint effort between all cultural institutions and professionals of the island, through Cyprus' Presidency strengthens the country's international cultural profile, by enhancing the visibility of Cypriot culture within the European Union and forming the basis for long-term international collaborations.

**Despina Georghiou Hadjinicolaou**

## CZECH REPUBLIC

In October 2025, the Czech government approved the document **State Cultural Policy 2026–2030+**, which focuses on increasing the accessibility of culture in the regions, inclusion, education and creativity, modern physical and virtual infrastructure with an emphasis on ongoing digitisation and, at the same time, digital data security, innovation and research and, last but not least, fair remuneration for employees in the cultural sector, which has never been achieved before.

Museums and galleries are defined in this document as **key memory institutions that play a vital role in strengthening social cohesion and national identity**. The priority is to make cultural heritage **accessible and promote it through digitisation**. The aim is to reach visitors who cannot physically visit the institutions and at the same time motivate them to participate in person in the future. The state emphasises **systematic support for projects linking museums with areas such as education, mental health, and social affairs**. Museums are seen as pillars of **sustainable cultural tourism**. The policy seeks synergy between culture and tourism, including reinvesting profits back into infrastructure. The new concept defines culture as a tool for a resilient and stable society. **Museums should help reflect on the past and respect the interests of minorities**.

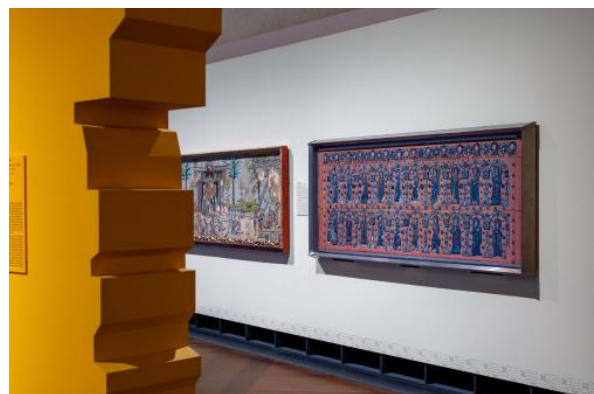
In October 2025, parliamentary elections were held, which were won by the opposition. Since December 2025, a new minister has been at the helm of the Ministry of Culture. Some of his priorities coincide with the 2026+ state cultural policy, such as stability and financing, remuneration of employees in culture, and regional accessibility. He criticises artistic activism and professes his support for traditional art and folklore, even though he himself was for many years one of the front men of the innovative and groundbreaking music group J.A.R. (Jednotka akademického rapu = Academic Rap Unit).

**Museum activities were very diverse, with a whole range of exhibition projects and numerous publications**. However, if we take a closer look at the Czech museum scene, we discover one interesting fact, namely that in 2025 a whole series of projects were launched that **focused on women**. These projects were very well prepared, even by international standards. We can speculate about the reasons for this. One common denominator is the fact that the institutions that organised exhibitions about women were often headed by female directors. Let us hope that such exhibitions will have a positive influence on Czech society, which will move further towards better gender balance. However, a shift in thinking has probably really taken place in society, as a record 67 female MPs, often young women, were elected to the Chamber of Deputies in the parliamentary elections. This is one third of the total number of 200 MPs.

## **Women, Masters, Artists (1300–1900)**

### **National Gallery, Prague**

This exhibition uncovered a second, lesser-known story of art history. It focused on the characteristics of the environment in which female artists worked and the themes they explored. It presented the stories of female artists who created despite institutional barriers (such as being banned from studying at academies). Among the biggest attractions were works by Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi, and the embroidered works of Empress Maria Theresa. The exhibition did not show women only as exceptions but placed them in their historical context and social ties. A comprehensive catalogue was published to accompany the exhibition.



## **Parisian Women: Czech Female Artists and France**

### **North Bohemian Gallery of Fine Arts in Litoměřice**

Regional museums and galleries in the Czech Republic also do excellent work, North Bohemian Gallery of Fine Arts belongs to the best of them. The exhibition 'Parisian Women' presented fine art from 1890 to 1990 created by women, artists, well-known and lesser-known painters and sculptors of Czech origin. The aim was to capture as comprehensively as possible the breadth of inspirational sources that influenced their work, including their direct experience of France, their artistic training, contacts, and the recognition and success they achieved in France. 25 women were selected, whose work was documented with representative pieces. Over 30 lenders contributed to the preparation of the exhibition. As many of the artists had faded from public consciousness, extensive research was carried out to rediscover a number of them.



## **Liběna Rochová: Touches** **Moravian Gallery in Brno**

This extensive exhibition presents the work of Liběna Rochová (\*1951), an icon of Czech fashion and design from the 1990s to the present day and offers a comprehensive view of her work, which has never succumbed to the dictates of seasonal trends, but rather elevated clothing to the status of sculpture and cultural statement. She thought about women differently than other fashion designers. Women were not just clothes hangers, but co-creators with their own personalities.

The project is divided into seven rooms, each representing a different layer of her story and philosophy of touch. Liběna Rochová is a woman who has managed to change the perception of fashion in the Czech Republic. Her clients included people from the fashion industry, intellectuals, artists, businesswomen and men and even pop singers.

Her unrelenting desire led her to found her own academy, and she later ran an atelier at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague, where she trained many designers who belong to the most successful fashion designers in the Czech Republic and elsewhere.





## **Eva Švankmajerová: Woe to the Painting** **DOX Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague**

The whole world is very familiar with the work of her husband, Jan Švankmajer, a Czech director of animated, puppet, and live-action films, animator, writer, playwright, and visual artist. Eva Švankmajerová (1940–2005) collaborated on many of his projects. At the same time, she was intensely creative in her own right. Her works, with their ironic and sometimes ruthless exaggeration and humour, explore the female body and the female condition, as well as the struggle for emancipation in a male-dominated society. Using a variety of techniques, she explores the imaginative possibilities of the image, and themes such as eroticism, humour, alchemy and nature, The household, family, and female roles also permeate her entire oeuvre.



## **The Second Life of Venus Regional Museum in Mikulov**

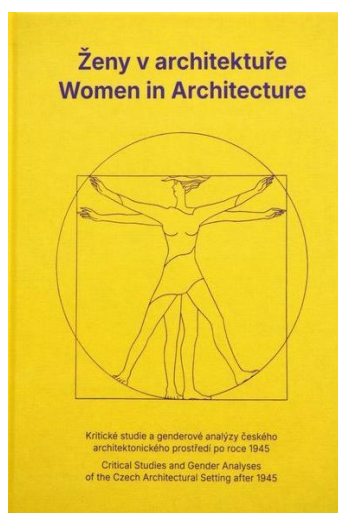
The oldest ceramic sculpture in the world, 25 000-30 000 BCE, was discovered in Dolní Věstonice in southern Moravia in 1925. It instantly became an icon that fascinated archaeologists, artists, politicians, musicians, nutritionists, and, more recently, gender specialists. The exhibition offers not only a journey into history, but also a dialogue with the present, showing that the small clay statue still appeals to and inspires people even a hundred years after its discovery.



**Klára Brůhová, Helena Huber-Doudová (eds.), Women in Architecture. Critical Studies and Gender Analyses of the Czech Architecture Setting after 1945, National Gallery in Prague, 2025**

Czech museums and galleries are also intensively involved in scientific tasks. One of those addressing the issue of women's position in society is the research project "Women in Architecture," supported by the Czech Science Foundation and institutionally headed by the National Gallery Prague and the Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design in Prague. The project focuses on comprehensive mapping and interpretation of women's creativity in architecture between 1945 and 2000. The project is, in essence, very critical. The publication contains studies that are not pleasant to read. They show how gender-unequal the world was in which our grandmothers and mothers lived, and to a large extent, how it still is today. In addition to the publication, a website has also been created:

<https://zenyvarchitekture.cz/homepage-en/>.



**Martina Lehmannová**

## DENMARK

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of visitors to Danish museums. Last year, there was not the same growth, but museums are still very popular. The number of visitors is around 17.6 million, which is high considering that there are approximately six million inhabitants in Denmark.

In 2025, a new museum law was implemented in Denmark. At the same time, changes were made to how museums interact with government authorities.

The reform covers the 95 state-recognised museums that receive support from the Ministry of Culture, with the exception of the five museums that are run directly by the state. Total state support for state-recognised museums has been increased to DKK 565.7 million annually and is distributed according to three elements.

The subsidy now consists of three elements.

- 64.2% of the funds now go to a basic subsidy, which is determined on the basis of an assessment of the museums' collections in relation to the provenance of the objects. Here, the museums have been divided into five categories with subsidies ranging from DKK 1.5 million to DKK 23 million.
- 23.9% of the funds are currently distributed as incentive grants based on visitor numbers, the proportion of visitors under the age of 18, the museums' other income and the number of peer-reviewed publications.
- The remaining 11.9% constitutes priority grants, which are distributed based on purely political priorities.

There has been considerable debate about the reform, with the distribution of basic grants in particular coming under criticism.

Alongside the new grant model, changes were made in 2025 to the collaboration between museums and the Ministry of Culture. Previously, museums were able to apply for funding from a number of grants administered by the Danish Agency for Culture for projects in areas such as research, digitization, collection management and sustainability. These grants have now been replaced by a smaller development grant targeted at museums with the lowest basic grants.

In addition, the comprehensive quality assessments of museums, which previously took place at least every 10 years, have been abolished. These assessments included a review of the museum's research, storage facilities, exhibitions and educational initiatives, and on the basis of these assessments, recommendations and requirements

were made regarding the museum's practices. Instead of these assessments, museums must now report auditor-certified data on visitor numbers, finances and scientific publications, which then form the basis for calculating the incentive subsidy. However, museums can still request dialogue and a new assessment if they disagree with the size of the basic subsidy.

The museum reform has been several years in the making, and the political goal of the reform has been to make the state's contribution to museums simpler and more transparent. Museums have also been "freed" from bureaucracy, which should probably be seen more as a saving for the state, among other things because there is no longer a need for in-depth dialogue through quality assessments. At first glance, the changes can be interpreted as an increased degree of self-determination for museums, but there may be a risk that the lack of bureaucracy and dialogue with the civil service will make museums more vulnerable in terms of how their work is assessed and rewarded politically.

**Martin Brandt Djupdræt**

# ESTONIA

## General

According to Statistics Estonia, there are 101 museums in Estonia with 160 visitor locations, all of which contribute to the storage, interpretation and mediation of our memory. In addition, there are approximately 102 expositions – i.e. museum rooms, hobby museums, antique collections and private collections. Museums are also owned by local governments (43 local government museums) and private individuals (18). About 1500 people work in Estonian Museums.

In 2025, the museums in Estonia focused a shift towards contemporary social themes such as accessibility and environmental sustainability.

## Attendance and Popularity

Estonian museums continue to rank among the top in Europe regarding visits per capita.

- According to Statistics Estonia data from May 2025, over 2.6 million visits were made to Estonian museums—a 6.5% increase compared to the previous year. The growth in interest from foreign tourists was particularly notable (nearly 20%).
- The Museum Card continued its success, serving as a vital engine for bringing local visitors into museums.
- The traditional major event Museum Night held on May 17, 2025 was entitled "There are Books in the Night!", celebrating the Year of the Estonian Book. Nearly 200 memory institutions participated in the programme.

## News

The year 2025 saw several large-scale projects, many supported by the "Museum Accelerator" (Muuseumide kiirendi) programme.

- Football Museum: An experiential branch of the Estonian Sports and Olympic Museum was opened at the A. Le Coq Arena in Tallinn.
- Brotherhood of the Blackheads: The Tallinn City Museum celebrated the 625th anniversary of the brotherhood with a grand exhibition that opened in November at the Tallinn City Life Museum.
- International Cooperation: Kumu Art Museum opened the large-scale exhibition "Spiegel im Spiegel," bringing together masterpieces of Estonian and German art, from Lucas Cranach to Arvo Pärt.

## Funding and Policy

The development of the sector was guided by strategic decisions from the Ministry of Culture and support measures from the National Heritage Board.

- In 2025, 19 projects received funding over €845,000 from the Museum Accelerator. The focus was on self-sustaining services, digital solutions, and updating permanent exhibitions.
- The National Heritage Board conducted a study on the impact of the Accelerator grants to evaluate the effectiveness of the allocated funds in developing the sector.
- At the end of 2025, a sharp discussion emerged in the Estonian cultural and educational sectors when the Ministry of Education and Research's strict reinforcement of the "free school education" principle began to unexpectedly hinder group visits to museums and theatres. Since many municipalities and school budgets lacked sufficient lines for "educational outings," school leaders and teachers began cancelling bookings en masse. They were no longer permitted to ask parents for contributions, yet the schools themselves lacked the funds to cover tickets and transportation. In the final quarter of 2025, several museums reported a drastic decrease in bookings for educational programmes - in some cases by as much as 30–40%. This crisis highlighted a critical need to make the funding of cultural education systemic, ensuring that the slogan "free education" does not result in "education without culture" in practice.

**Triin Vaaro**

## FINLAND

According to preliminary data collected by the Finnish Heritage Agency, professionally managed museums in Finland received a total of 8,595,422 visits in 2025. Visitor numbers increased slightly compared to the previous year. In recent years, museum attendance has reached an all-time high, and museums continue to enjoy strong popularity.

The Finnish Museums Association highlighted three important themes for the 2025 regional and municipal elections: 1) Museums create vitality, 2) Well-being from museums, and 3) Museums for children and young people. Museums maintained by municipalities are highly valued in Finland. Alongside the state, municipalities are the most significant source of funding for Finnish museums. They account for 33 per cent of museum funding, while the state's share is 38 per cent.

In 2025, the Museum and Cultural Heritage Professionals' Union MAL publicly emphasised the importance of securing stable funding for museums, so they have sufficient resources to address difficult histories while ensuring the well-being and occupational safety of their employees.

The MAL and the Historians Without Borders Association conducted a survey in 2024 to learn about the experiences of museum professionals and historians working with difficult histories and heritage. More than half of the respondents reported feeling stressed at work, and some respondents reported being targeted. Some museum professionals also reported experiencing political pressure or threats of violence related to the difficult histories that museums address.

There is a risk that work pressure, harassment of professionals, or political pressure will lead to difficult histories and heritages being silenced. Some of the historians who responded to the survey on difficult history said that they already limit their treatment of sensitive topics in their work. Museum professionals also reported avoiding difficult topics or limiting their treatment in museums.

**Johanna Enqvist**



## FRANCE

Among the events that marked the year 2025 in France was the theft of jewellery from the Louvre Museum on October 19, 2025. After climbing onto a freight elevator to reach the first floor of the museum, the burglars broke a window with an angle grinder to enter the Apollo Gallery and loot several display cases. The four-person team left with nine items on their motorcycles. Among these items, the crown of Princess Eugénie, wife of Napoleon, was found by the authorities near the museum. The missing items mainly include royal jewellery, such as a tiara worn by Empress Eugénie and the necklace and earrings that make up the sapphire set worn by Queen Marie-Amélie.

The affair has deeply shaken museum professionals. As Emilie Girard, President of ICOM France, stated in the daily newspaper *Le Monde* on November 8, 2025: "Many have been affected by the sometimes harsh and unfair criticism directed at the Louvre's presidency and staff, to whom we offer our full support. This affair plunges them harshly into the almost schizophrenic dilemma that stems from their mission: to exhibit while preserving, to show original works to as many people as possible while ensuring the longevity of public collections. This is what distinguishes a museum from a vault: accessibility."

In the debate among museum professionals, the case has taken on unprecedented proportions. For some, this theft is indicative of a deeper malaise and an attempt by museums to reconcile security, accessibility, and budgetary balance. For Jean-Michel Tobelem, Associate Professor at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, "It is not budgetary constraints that threaten museums, but their insufficient integration into public policy" (*Le Monde*, November 7, 2025). For Jérôme Kohler, an expert in the philanthropic sector, museums under budgetary pressure need the support of corporate sponsorship. But their interests often diverge from those of these private groups. In an op-ed in *Le Monde*, the philanthropic sector expert highlights the risk of open competition (*Le Monde*, November 7, 2025).

In Paris, the closure of the Centre Pompidou (National Museum of Modern Art) on September 22 for at least five years is a significant event. Opened in January 1977, the building needs major renovation work. A major renovation project is underway, with the primary goal of bringing this iconic museum up to today's standards. This involves completely removing asbestos, making it fully accessible, and replacing all its façades to reduce its energy consumption by 40%. In addition to this project, the interior of the Centre will be completely redesigned, and a huge terrace will be created on the seventh floor.



In the regions, the news concerns the reopening of several iconic museums, such as the Strasbourg Zoological Museum (September 19), the Bonnat Helleu Museum in Bayonne (November 27), and the Le Havre Museum (December 13). Cities such as Marseille and Strasbourg, both of which have shared museum networks, have also recorded high visitor numbers. In 2025, 884,000 visitors passed through the doors of Marseille's museums, all establishments combined. This figure marks a historic record, up 200,000 visitors from the previous record, set in 2023 with 684,641 visitors. The success of temporary exhibitions contributed significantly to this result. In Strasbourg, with 696,174 admissions, up 7% compared to 2024, museums set a new attendance record.

With regard to collections, the draft framework law on the restitution of property acquired by France under abusive conditions was examined by the Senate on September 24. Promised since 2017 by Emmanuel Macron during his speech in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, this framework law aims to amend the heritage code for property that entered the national collections illegally. The law was unanimously passed on first reading by senators in January 2026. The text must now be debated in the National Assembly.

**Samuel Cordier**

## GEORGIA

### Political and Cultural Context in 2025

Throughout 2025, the museum and cultural sector in Georgia continued to operate under significant pressure and institutional uncertainty. The consequences of the 2024 so-called “foreign agents” legislation and the suspension of the country’s EU accession process remained deeply felt across civil society, affecting cultural institutions and independent organisations.

Restrictions on foreign funding and increased administrative scrutiny persisted, complicating international partnerships that have historically supported professional development, conservation projects, and digitisation efforts. During the year, the regulatory framework governing foreign support became increasingly restrictive, with announced legislative amendments broadening the definition of “grants” to include certain forms of technical assistance, expertise, and in-kind support, alongside stricter approval procedures and potential criminal liability. These developments created additional legal and administrative uncertainty for organisations reliant on international cooperation.

As a result of the evolving legal and political environment, many foreign donors and international organisations significantly reduced or suspended their operations in Georgia. Several major international funding streams that had previously supported museum development, heritage protection, and cultural initiatives were placed on hold or discontinued. The European Union’s *Creative Compass Georgia* programme halted new grant opportunities for municipalities, with the suspension continuing to affect local cultural projects into 2025. Multiple projects supported by the USAID were reported closed, while broader EU and US government funding streams faced freezes or long-term suspension. In parallel, legislative changes adopted in April 2025 introduced requirements for prior government approval for receiving foreign grants, effectively restricting or delaying access to international financial and technical assistance.

Together, these developments substantially reduced resources available for institutional strengthening, training, conservation, and digitisation initiatives across the museum and heritage sector. Many museums consequently faced reduced operational budgets, delays in planned programmes, and the cancellation of capacity-building activities. Cultural professionals reported ongoing concerns regarding sustainability, self-censorship, and political interference in programming and public narratives.

At the same time, civic activism permanently continued across the country. The scale and persistence of the crisis significantly limited the cultural sector’s capacity to respond. Many institutions, particularly non-governmental organizations, reduced

programming, postponed development initiatives, and concentrated on maintaining core functions under growing legal, financial, and operational constraints. International professional networks continued to express solidarity with Georgian cultural workers and advocated for the protection of institutional independence and freedom of expression.

### *Key Activities in 2025*

#### **Community Engagement and Public Programmes**

Despite limited resources, museums across Georgia continued to prioritise accessible, community-centred programming that reinforced their role as spaces for learning, memory, and civic dialogue. The Tbilisi Museums Union and Ajara Museums Union expanded outreach through digital tools, youth workshops, school partnerships, and small-scale local exhibitions.

On April 5-6, Georgia joined *International House Museum Days*, coordinated by the National Association of Houses of Memory in collaboration with ICOM-DEMIST and partner committees. Nine Georgian house museums organised tours, lectures, and public events, strengthening the visibility of memorial museums and reinforcing international connections.

On May 18, ICOM Georgia coordinated nationwide celebrations of International Museum Day 2025 under the theme “*Museums’ Future in Rapidly Changing Societies.*” Up to 200 museums participated with free admission days and diverse public programmes, highlighting museums’ contributions to education, community well-being, and sustainable development. These collective initiatives broadened public engagement and demonstrated the continued social relevance of museums despite difficult operating conditions.

#### **Research and Professional Development**

*Enhancing Museum Documentation Project* - A major initiative of 2025 was the project *Enhancing Museum Documentation: Overcoming Challenges and Building Capacity*, led by ICOM Georgia in collaboration with ICOM COMCOL and with expert consultation from CIDOC. The project is being implemented within the framework of the *Solidarity in Times of Crisis* grant programme of the International Council of Museums.

The project aims to analyse the current state of museum documentation and collections management in Georgia, support professional development in museum documentation, develop ethical and crisis-oriented approaches to collections management, and strengthen regional cooperation between Georgia and Azerbaijan.

The first results were presented during the ICOM 2025 General Conference within the joint ICOM Georgia–COMCOL session, a nationwide study assessed existing documentation systems, institutional challenges, and available resources. The research

identified key needs, including inconsistent standards, limited digitisation, insufficient staff training, and the absence of coordinated methodological guidelines. The project leaders anticipate that its successful implementation will serve as the basis for a broader, large-scale programme aimed at addressing documentation challenges and improving collections management practices across museums throughout Georgia and further in the whole South Caucasus.

Despite the significant reduction of large-scale international funding programmes, only a limited number of small-scale research initiatives supported by the European Union remained active in 2025, contributing to knowledge production within the museum and heritage field. Among these, within the framework of the Horizon Europe ARACNE project, a historical study on the Silk Road in Georgia was conducted. Based on the research findings, the bilingual publication *The Silk Road in Georgia* was prepared in Georgian and English. The project was implemented with funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme under a dedicated grant agreement.

### **Global Engagement - ICOM Dubai 2025**

In November 2025, the International Council of Museums held its 27th General Conference in Dubai, UAE, under the theme “*The Future of Museums in Rapidly Changing Communities*,” bringing together more than 4,500 museum professionals, leaders, and policymakers worldwide.

Georgia was represented by a six-member national delegation from ICOM Georgia, who actively engaged in the Scientific Programme, international panels, and committee sessions. The delegation shared insights into the challenges and perspectives of Georgia's museum sector, positioning national experiences within global discussions on innovation, community engagement, sustainability, and ethical governance.

Key outcomes included:

- the election of Georgian professionals to official positions within ICOM committees and governance structures, strengthening Georgia's representation and participation in international museum decision-making
- the presentation of interim results from the project *Enhancing Museum Documentation: Overcoming Challenges and Building Capacity*
- active participation in sessions addressing artificial intelligence, ethics, crisis preparedness, and collections protection
- the establishment of strengthened professional partnerships and new opportunities for international cooperation

The conference reaffirmed global strategic priorities for 2025-2028 - including sustainability, digital innovation, youth engagement, and ethical museum practice - closely aligning with Georgia's professional development goals.

## **Conclusion**

The political and legal developments of 2025 continued to profoundly affect Georgia's museum and cultural sector. Expanding regulatory restrictions on foreign funding, increased administrative oversight, and growing legal uncertainty further limited the ability of cultural institutions to operate independently and to maintain international partnerships. The reduction or suspension of programmes supported by foreign donors significantly weakened access to financial resources, professional expertise, and capacity-building opportunities that had long contributed to the development of museums and heritage institutions.

As a result, many organisations - particularly independent and non-governmental institutions - were forced to scale back activities, postpone strategic initiatives, and focus primarily on sustaining essential operations. Professional development, large-scale restoration-conservation projects, and digitisation efforts were frequently delayed or discontinued, leaving the sector in a fragile and constrained position.

Despite these challenges, Georgian museum professionals continued to engage in research, documentation, and community-oriented work where possible, while maintaining connections with international networks and peers. Participation in global initiatives and professional forums demonstrated the ongoing commitment of the sector to uphold ethical standards, preserve cultural heritage, and remain connected to the international museum community.

Continued solidarity and support from global partners remain essential for the survival and long-term sustainability of Georgia's museums, enabling them to protect collections, maintain professional practice, and preserve the country's cultural heritage for future generations.

**Lana Karaia and Nana Meparishvili**

## GERMANY

Despite ongoing crises, museums in Germany continued to demonstrate their efficiency and willingness to innovate in 2025. The use of artificial intelligence, ecological sustainability and participatory museum work were important topics and trends in 2025. Increasing politicisation and demographic change posed particular challenges. Overall, the museum landscape in 2025 is structurally tense. The positive visitor development and the high social relevance of museums are offset by growing pressure from staff shortages, financial uncertainties and increasing demands.

The use of artificial intelligence as a tool in everyday museum work is spreading rapidly. In 2025, many museums are using artificial intelligence productively – especially in documentation and collection, as well as education and communication. Digital collections, hybrid communication formats and virtual offerings are increasingly perceived as a natural part of modern museum work and are expected in particular by younger visitor groups. This development opens opportunities to expand reach, promote inclusion and strengthen links with educational and research institutions. At the same time, the sustainable implementation of digital offerings requires considerable investment and permanently qualified specialist staff.

In order to further strengthen activities in the field of ecological sustainability in the museum sector, the German Museum Association, together with partners from science and certification, has developed a museum-specific sustainability certification that is being tested in practice as part of a project. The aim is to offer museums a sustainability certification tailored to their needs and to anchor ecological sustainability in museums in a lasting and measurable way.

The power of museums as actors in democratic society and their role in times of political polarisation and increasing influence was the focus of numerous discussions and was the main theme of the annual conference of ICOM Germany and the German Museums Association. Participation and discussion formats on site and in the digital space, outreach formats and increasing participation by actors and social groups were identified as means of countering polarisation, emotionalisation and hostility to democracy and realising social participation.

In 2025, the ongoing shortage of skilled workers proved to be a risk for museum work, particularly in the areas of education, restoration, collection management and administration. In many cases, vacancies could not be filled for long periods of time, leading to a noticeable additional burden on existing staff. This development must be seen against the backdrop of demographic change, a tight labour market and limited

financial resources. In the long term, there is a risk of a decline in quality in key areas of museum work.

The financial situation remains tense for many museums. Rising personnel, energy and material costs are offset by shrinking public budgets, which finance the majority of museums. This poses existential challenges, especially for small and medium-sized museums.

Despite multiple crises, visitor numbers have stabilised in many institutions and confidence in museums remains high.

**Marion Grether and Dietmar Osses**

## GREECE

In Greece, 2025 was a year studied with bold new exhibitions in the country's museums and cultural institutions.

The National Archaeological Museum's "Exhibit of the Month" initiative aimed to explore religion throughout different eras, as depicted in ancient art and written accounts from the past. Twelve "biographies" of objects from the museum's permanent exhibitions, one on the 25th of each month of 2025, were presented to our online followers, inviting them to come and see these objects up close in the museum. Each "biography" bore the signature, personal style, and scientific authority of the archaeologists of the National Archaeological Museum. Each "biography" was accompanied by rich photographic material and a bibliography in two languages, Greek and English.

Another exhibition that attracted considerable interest and public response was Stories behind the HELLENIC NATIONAL COSTUMES Publication. The exhibition, a collaboration between the Benaki Museum and the Historical Archive of the National Bank of Greece, recounted the long-term preparation of the Benaki Museum's emblematic publication Hellenic National Costumes, that was a milestone in the study of Greek costumes. This was a personal project of Antonis Benakis, who was responsible for the editing of the two volumes (1948-1954) and selected the contributors: the painter Nicolas Sperling, a Russian émigré whom Benakis met in Egypt in the 1920s, the folklorist Angeliki Hatzimichali, already renowned since the same decade, and the Corfiot Graphic Arts Industry Aspiotis-ELKA, which already had 30 years of successful operation when the publication was assigned to it. Publishing works began in 1930, a year before the Benaki Museum opened its doors to the public. Its preparation spanned part of the interwar period and reflected the ideology and aesthetics of the society of the time; a society that, among other things, was "discovering" Greek folk art and investing in the concept of Greekness.

To celebrate fifty years of the Basil Papantoniou Foundation and its founder's research, publishing, displaying and preserving culturally significant objects, the WEFT AND WARP exhibition picks up the threads of the history of costume to connect the past and tradition with the present and tomorrow's innovations and challenges. The BPF's extraordinary collection of artefacts and exceptional archive serve as the exhibition's lodestar. Since its foundation by Ioanna Papantoniou in 1974, the BPF has planned and implemented diverse activities. Like the weavers who warp the weaving loom in preparation for working on the textiles, the Foundation weaves the rich and multifaceted history of modern Greek clothing and material culture. The exhibition



highlights essential parts of this activity through a historical review of the work of the Basil Papantoniou Foundation and its founder and a journey through different aspects of the garment.

The National Historical Museum inaugurated the second part of the exhibition "From Greater... to Contemporary Greece". The aim of the exhibition was to present the refugee phenomenon as fully as possible, through the issues that have always concerned people who found themselves in the predicament of having to abandon their ancestral homes. Human stories illuminate facets such as forced flight, the difficulties of travel, reception, settlement, trauma management, integration in the new homeland, and memory.

The exhibition presented photographs, historical documents and objects from the Museum's collections, accompanied by testimonies, quotes from sources and press articles. A large number of institutions and private individuals, perhaps the largest of any Museum exhibition, have donated archival documents and relics. The exhibition was curated by Ms. Natasa Kastriti and Ms. Regina Katsimardou in collaboration with Ms. Iphigenia Vogiatzi, Ms. Androniki Markasioti and Ms. Anna Kandia.

**Nadia Macha**

## HUNGARY

The European Museum Academy (EMA) held its Annual Conference & Awards in Budapest from September 25-27, 2025, co-hosted by the Hungarian Money Museum, bringing together museum professionals for workshops, presentations, and awards like Heritage in Motion and the DASA Award, celebrating digital innovation in culture.

### *Green Museum Criteria in Hungary*

Our daily lives are no longer just affected by the – mainly negative – effects of climate change, almost every aspect of our activities must be influenced by a mindset that feels responsible for the future of our planet. Instead of climate anxiety, we need to find methods and practices that can help us move forward on the path to sustainability through our everyday actions and the conscious operation of our museums.

The publication comprehensively presents the theoretical and practical issues of sustainability and the possibilities for the green transition of museums: from institutional management and strategic decisions to museum pedagogy, event organisation and communication, all the way to visitor reception. In addition to international examples and domestic research results, the volume presents the Green Museum criteria system, which offers Hungarian public collections a framework for environmentally conscious operation.

<https://mokk.skanzen.hu/admin/data/file/20251103/mi33.pdf>

### *Security and Technology*

The year was also marked by the issue of museum security following the international art thefts. As a result, museum security issues are increasingly prominent in strategic planning, with a special focus on emergency management. This is why ICOM Hungary has launched a new international project. ICOM Hungary is pleased to announce its participation in PRISM – Prevention, Research, Investigation and Security in Museums, a three-year international initiative coordinated by the Heritage Protection Department of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Paris. Its overarching aim is to develop new practical tools and methodologies that improve the understanding and prevention of the illicit trafficking of cultural goods across Europe.

### *Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Ukrainian refugees in Hungary: inclusive community practices*

In war conflicts, heritage elements are often endangered, be it natural, built, material or even intangible heritage. ICOM's new museum definition also emphasises the role

of intangible heritage in museums. The consequences of the war in Ukraine affect not only Ukrainian museums, but all of us. As a bordering country, Hungarian museums have an obligation to participate in the mitigation of damage. We created a project to support the intangible cultural heritage of Ukrainian citizens who found refuge in Hungary.

The primary aim of the project is to preserve the intangible cultural heritage of Ukrainian displaced persons' communities in Hungary through various collaborative cultural activities. The core of the programme is five pilot projects implemented with the active participation of Ukrainian communities linked to different Hungarian museums and their collections. The projects focus on five important elements of the Ukrainian cultural heritage: textile work and refined handicraft, traditional folk dances, traditional music and singing, religion and feasts, and gastronomy. The pilot projects are connected to one or more cultural heritage elements inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List of Ukraine until 2022, meanwhile offering the Ukrainian displaced persons' community a possibility of contemporary cultural reinterpretation of the heritage elements filtered through their personal experiences and perspectives. During the project activities the displaced persons can develop new communication and cooperation skills and feel a raising awareness of their valuable Ukrainian cultural heritage that may help their integration in case they stay longer outside Ukraine and reintegration with community building in case they return to their homeland in the future.

### *Museums and AI*

How can artificial intelligence (AI) process, digitise, metadataise museum collection data and explore the relationships between artefacts? And what role can it play in scientific research, process support, big data analysis and content development?

The above questions also underline that the museum world cannot escape the increasing popularity of artificial intelligence today. All this has drawn attention to the development of digital competencies of museum professionals, especially the effective use of AI-based tools and applications. The emergence of intelligent technologies and new platforms and tools for digital content production necessitate the continuous renewal of further training and teaching materials for museum professionals.

The Hungarian Open Air Museum – Museum Education and Methodology Center has developed and will launch its further training entitled The Potential for Application of Artificial Intelligence in Museums in 2025 along these lines.

### ***Salaries in museums***

The issue of museum workers' wages was one of the major problems in the sector in 2025. Wages, which had been stagnant for several years, lost value significantly due to high inflation. Several protests were organised in the second half of the year. The government announced a 15% wage increase from January 2026.

**Zsolt Sári**

## ICELAND

Museums in Iceland continue to operate in a dynamic and sometimes demanding environment shaped by tourism, digital transformation, and evolving cultural policies. The sector remains highly professionalised under the Icelandic Museum Act and the accreditation framework overseen by the Museum Council, but practical realities differ significantly between large national institutions and small regional museums.

One of the strongest trends is the increasing focus on digital access and audience engagement. Many museums are expanding online collections, virtual exhibitions, and multilingual interpretation, often driven by both national funding mechanisms and European collaborative projects. This reflects growing expectations for openness and accessibility, particularly for international visitors and increasingly diverse local communities.

Sustainability and climate awareness have become more visible in museum practice. Institutions are addressing environmental responsibility in exhibitions, operations, and public programming, while also confronting the vulnerability of collections and heritage sites to natural hazards such as earthquakes, volcanic activity, and extreme weather. Museums are increasingly recognised as contributors to national discussions on sustainability and responsible tourism.

Tourism remains both a vital opportunity and a significant pressure, especially for regional museums. Cultural tourism strategies towards 2030 increasingly recognise museums as key actors in regional development and place-making. While visitor numbers provide essential income and visibility, they also strain staffing, infrastructure, and interpretive resources. Smaller museums often rely on seasonal staff and limited funding, which makes long-term planning and research difficult despite high professional standards and community commitment.

In policy terms, ongoing discussions about major national cultural infrastructure—such as improved facilities for the National Gallery—signal growing political awareness of the needs of museum collections and research. Municipal support for cultural institutions has also increased in many regions, although funding remains fragmented and project-based rather than structural.

Overall, Icelandic museums in 2025 demonstrate strong community engagement, international collaboration, and a gradual shift toward digital and sustainable

practices. Persistent challenges include infrastructure, staffing, and funding stability, particularly outside the Capital region. Nevertheless, museums continue to play a central role in education, regional identity, and cultural tourism, and are increasingly recognised as key factors in Iceland's cultural and social landscape.

**Anita Elefsen**

## IRELAND

In general, Irish museums have been spared some of the political pressures reported by colleagues elsewhere in Europe. Changes at Government level saw museums move under Minister Patrick O'Donovan's Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, resulting in a focus on regional touring of the National Collections. The Department extended the State's basic income Scheme for Artists (€325 per week) to include 2,000 new entrants in 2026, when it will become permanent. Ongoing issues impacting on museums are the increased cost of living, inflation, soaring energy costs and, of course, climate change and concerns about flooding. Immigration continues to be a headline with our rising population placing housing and health firmly on top of the political agenda.

Another trend is the issue of addressing long-standing policy gaps and investment in the capital building programme. Final investment approval and/or commencement of building works is in train across a number of national cultural institutions that are overdue development. This is partly the outcome of an expanded Heritage Council and also the reestablishment of the Northern Ireland Executive. 2025 saw the publication of the National Committee report on women's representation, together with a repatriation and restitution report which was submitted for ministerial approval. In Northern Ireland, the Heritage, Culture and Creativity (HCC) Programme Framework was published and is likely to impact across the island, notably when the new museum policy for Northern Ireland is finalised.

The Irish Museums Association/IMA report on Public Funding in Museums (66 cross-island museums surveyed) showed the sector's experience of public funding. Irish museums depend heavily on public investment to survive and grow. Grants are critical and are credited with enabling transformative capital works, new projects, and audience development. Museums cross-island were agile in pursuing opportunities, while displaying entrepreneurial approaches to sustain operations and deliver programmes. Respondents cited c. 2.1 (NI) and 3.5 (ROI) approaches to create 215 funding engagements over 28 programmes, illustrating a sector that is making the most of its opportunities. As a result of the report, the theme of the IMA Symposium in 2025 was *Funding the Future of Museums*.

Updates: The new *IMA annual Membership Award* supporting the volunteer and community-led sector went to The Museum of Childhood and the *IMA Institutional Award* to Moynalty Steam Threshing Museum, James Joyce Tower Museum and Allihies Copper Mine Museum.

*The prestigious European Museum Academy Art Museum Award* was won by the Irish Museum of Modern Art for outstanding commitment to exploring contemporary issues like decolonisation and conflict, while pioneering diversity, inclusion and civic dialogue.

Construction began on the *North Atlantic (DNA) Museum* in Derry, a £15m project celebrating the rich maritime, cultural and industrial history of the North-West of Ireland.

*The Little Museum of Dublin* reopened following a €4.3 million redevelopment. 175,000 new historical records were made available online on the *Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland* marking the 103rd anniversary of the Four Courts blaze that destroyed the Public Record Office of Ireland.

*The International Centre for the Image* opened in Dublin's North Docklands. It is operated by PhotoIreland and will focus on photography and the visual arts.

**Marie Bourke**



## ITALY

The trend of the **number of visitors** remains positive over the year 2025 for most Italian museums, consolidating a trend that began after COVID-19; ticket revenues increase even more than visitor numbers<sup>1</sup>, due to the rise in ticket prices and an increase in paying foreign tourists <sup>2</sup>.The private funding for culture in general are increasing too.<sup>3</sup>

While public resources remain stable or are being cut<sup>4</sup>, in 2025 Italian museums are still benefitting from the resources from Italy's Recovery and Resilience Facility Plan, financed by UE through **Next Generation EU**.

In 2025 the results of the implementation of the RRF, which will end mid-2026, is beginning to yield significant results. The Italian Ministry of Culture (MIC) is in charge of the implementation of three main investments that are widely **reshaping national, public and private museums in a more digital, inclusive and sustainable way** through RRF funded projects<sup>5</sup>: the work is progressing and in many museums the outputs are already there to be seen.

Especially in terms of **Accessibility and Inclusion**, museums have seen an increase in awareness, thanks also to significant Next Gen EU investment through the *Scuola del Patrimonio* in training and professional development for all staff<sup>6</sup>.

In 2025, the year of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the MIC, the ministry saw a 9% increase in its budget allocation compared to 2019, which was essentially unchanged when inflation is considered.

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<sup>1</sup> The available data refer to 2024, but they witness a positive trend: according to **the** Italian Ministry of Culture (MIC) Report, in 2024 the number of visitors of the National Museums is higher than ever, over 60 million people, up 5,3% in 2023, and the total income is about 400 million euros, up 23% in 2023.

<sup>2</sup> According to MIDA Ticket Report, in 2024, two visitors out of three in Italian National Museums are foreigners. According to "Minicifre della cultura" Report in Italy only 34 citizens out of 100 have visited a museum or an exhibition in 2024.

<sup>3</sup> The available data refer to 2024, characterised by the highest amount of Artbonus donations ever recorded since the introduction of the incentive (+23% compared to 2023). The 5×1000 share of income tax returns allocated to cultural heritage is also substantial (+24.6% compared to 2022). Banking foundations' donations to the cultural sector are growing steadily and continuously (+4% compared to 2019).

<sup>4</sup> The National Fund for Development and Cohesion (FSC), 80% of which goes usually to Southern Italy, has been cut by 90% in 2025.

<sup>5</sup> M1C3 Investment 1.1 **Digital strategies** and platforms for cultural heritage (500 millions €); M1C3 Investment 1.2: **Removing** physical and cognitive **barriers** in museums, libraries and archives to enable access and participation in culture (300 Millions €); Investment 1.3: **Improving energy efficiency** in cinemas, theatres and museums (100 Millions € only for National museums).

<sup>6</sup> Online and onsite training for more than 900 hours in total is being delivered, with four online courses and 40 in-person courses spread throughout Italy, for front office, educational but also managing staff from public and private museums.

**Alessandro Giuli**, in charge of the Ministry since September 2024, is carrying on the reform inside the Ministry started by his predecessor and is continuing to allocate funds for the **seismic retrofitting of structures**, in partnership with the Ministry of Civil Protection<sup>7</sup>. While the ICOM Italy 2025 Annual Conference, in Brescia, was dedicated to the social impacts of the museum, the Government has established the **‘Therapeutic Culture and Social Care Fund’** in the Finance Law, starting in 2026.

No new museums were opened or reopened in 2025 in Italy, but some private foundations opened<sup>8</sup> and several public museums partially reopened. The MUNDANational Museum of Abruzzo Region, for example, just reopened 14 rooms on 2 floors on the occasion of the **2026 Italian Capital of Culture**: it was closed since the tragic earthquake of 2009 in **L'Aquila**. For the shared European Capital of Culture **Nova Gorica (SLO) - Gorizia (IT)**, the Great War Museum reopened in 2025 with trilingual labels. In 2025-2026 Italy is hosting the **Winter Olympics**: in March the city of Turin has hosted the Special Olympics, and end of 2025 Milan-Cortina is hosting the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. The exhibition programme of museums in Piedmont, Lombardy and Trentino focuses on the event, and some museums are directly involved in the programme<sup>9</sup>.

The debate about post-colonial heritage has produced in 2025 the birth of **MIPAM - the Italian network of museums that conserve World Heritage**, that counts 26 museums engaged in promoting dialogue, the sharing of best practices and transparent and informed management of global cultural heritage. The brand-new **Museum of the Futures network**, a partnership between ICOM Italy and ASVIS (Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development), includes 40 museums from different fields in order to "discover the futures that lie ahead of us, exploring them, discussing them, so that each of us can build the future we desire". In November, the first **“Queering the museum”** workshop was held in Bologna, in order to bring reflection, training and exchange on the inclusion of queer communities in museums and cultural organisations.

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<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Culture has financed approximately 425 interventions for €374 million to deal with the effects of the earthquakes. Five storage facilities for movable heritage, known as ‘Recovery art’, are planned to house works of art in areas affected by disasters, for the total cost of €150 million.

<sup>8</sup> Two new contemporary art foundations opened in 2025: D’Arc Foundation in Rome and Sonnabend Collection in Mantua opened from the famous gallery owner and collector Ileana Sonnabend’s collection. Contemporary art and social issues are the focus of two new museums: MUDY Museum of the collection of contemporary art from Dynamo Art Factory in Dynamo Camp, part of the Serious Fun Children’s Network, in the mountains in Tuscany and Foundation Museo Broggi, dedicated to outsider art, opened near Milan. The Giovanni Falcone Foundation opened in Palermo the new Museum of the Present, a place to reflect about the legacy of the fight against the Mafia.

<sup>9</sup> Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation and Triennale Milano have been identified as cultural hubs for Special Olympics and Winter Olympics, but benefits are expected for all museums in the areas involved.

Also in November, **CIMAM Annual Conference** – International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art – took place in Turin, bringing updated debate about the evolving role of contemporary art institutions in an increasingly complex global context.

**Irene Innocente**

## LATVIA

The year 2025 was a complex period for the Latvian museum sector, characterised by both notable achievements and persistent challenges. Museums operated under financial constraints, structural reforms, and geopolitical uncertainty, yet continued to contribute significantly to cultural preservation, public engagement, and international recognition. This overview summarises the key developments shaping the professional and institutional reality of Latvian museums.

Latvia's museum sector operates within a decentralised governance model under the Ministry of Culture. Policy development is guided by the Latvian Museum Council, an advisory body composed of sector representatives, which supports decision-making regarding national museum strategy, management, and the development of the National Museum Collection. By the end of 2025, the country had **133 accredited public museums** holding over six million objects of national significance. Of these, **22 are state-owned**, while the majority are managed by local governments, universities, or other autonomous institutions. Numerous private museums operate outside the accreditation system, with no comprehensive statistical data available. Professional coordination and advocacy are further supported by NGOs, including the Latvian Museum Association, ICOM Latvia, the Society for the Promotion of Museology in the Baltics, and the Think Tank Creative Museum.

Heritage protection and risk management remained a priority throughout the year. In February, the Ministry approved the **Plan for the Protection and Rescue of Cultural Heritage in Crisis Situations**, providing a roadmap for safeguarding cultural assets, defining stakeholder roles, and outlining measures through 2027. Museums were required to assess risks, identify priority objects, and develop internal emergency plans. National and local training programmes strengthened expertise in disaster preparedness, extreme weather, and crisis response. In May, the Ministry hosted a high-level expert meeting in Riga with ICCROM and the European Commission to launch the first phase of the **READY project**, focused on protecting cultural heritage from disasters and complex emergencies. Practical follow-up training for Latvian professionals took place in August, complemented by specialised workshops on collection prioritisation organised with the National Library of Latvia and the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office. These efforts were reinforced by disruptions in digital information systems, including the joint catalogue of national museum collections, highlighting vulnerabilities in infrastructure and the sector's dependence on reliable digital tools.

Legislative and administrative changes also shaped the sector in 2025. Amendments to the **Museums Law** formally incorporated the ICOM definition of a museum, aligning national legislation with international standards. Other changes included the introduction of a **state indemnity scheme** for accredited museums, supporting international exhibitions, and simplified management processes, granting directors greater autonomy over pricing and operational decisions. A notable precedent was the **Rundāle Palace Museum**, which gained operational independence, reflecting evolving governance models. From 2026 onward, tendencies toward centralisation and resource consolidation are expected in the public sector.

Public debate on ownership, accessibility, and management of heritage intensified. The proposed transfer of the **Mežotne Palace** complex into private ownership sparked sectoral and community discussions, ultimately resulting in its management being assigned to the Rundāle Palace Museum. This case illustrates the growing role of civic engagement in heritage decision-making and the importance of public responsibility for nationally significant sites.

Despite structural and financial challenges, museums continued their core functions of collection care, research, and public engagement. The **500th anniversary of the first known Latvian-language book** provided thematic frameworks for exhibitions exploring early printing and bibliographic heritage. The **13th Latvian School Youth Song and Dance Festival**, involving over 38,000 participants, inspired exhibitions linking intangible heritage to historical interpretation. The **SongSpace permanent exhibition** at the Latvian National Museum of Literature and Music, created to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the first Latvian Song Celebration, became a platform for dialogue, education, and reflection, and was nominated for the European Museum of the Year Award. Museums also engaged contemporary cultural audiences, notably through exhibitions connected to the internationally acclaimed animated film **Flow**, which attracted high visitor numbers and highlighted the sector's role in interpreting modern cultural phenomena.

Infrastructure development remained uneven but important. Investments continued in museum buildings and storage facilities, including a modern centralised storage complex in Riga. Several museum projects received recognition in national architecture and design competitions. In 2025, the **Latvian National Museum of Literature and Music**, on its centenary, opened a renovated exhibition space featuring **Procrastination and Creation**, an immersive exploration of the creative processes and lives of 98 Latvian writers and musicians from the late 19th century to the present. Museums remain key partners in cultural education, with the **Latvian School Bag**

**programme** providing over 230,000 children and young people annually with access to cultural experiences, about half delivered by museums.

Financial pressures persisted, leading to restructuring and mergers of smaller municipal and autonomous museums. In response, professional development and research gained prominence. The **21st Baltic Museology Summer School** was organised in Klaipeda in cooperation with partners in Klaipeda, Lithuania. Thirty museum professionals from all three Baltic countries participated in the training session "Museum Accessibility and Audience Development.". The Latvian Academy of Culture implemented the **MEET project**, funded by the Latvian Council of Science, exploring participatory museum practices and their social and cultural impact. The sector also highlighted the ethical and human dimensions of museum work, exemplified by the **Cabinet of Ministers Award for Lifetime Achievement** presented to historian Mārgers Vestermanis (born 1925), founder of the Jews in Latvia Museum, for his contribution to preserving memory of the Jewish community and the Holocaust.

Among the museum sector events of 2025, particular attention was drawn to the **conference "Decolonial Perspectives on Cultural Heritage in the Baltic States and Ukraine"**, held on 5 September at the Art Museum Riga Bourse (MMRB), with participants from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Ukraine. The conference addressed a significant regional and international theme, highlighting the need to decolonise knowledge, challenge Eurocentric perspectives in exhibitions and research, contextualise collections, critically evaluate sources, and engage communities, while also drawing on the experience of Ukrainian museum professionals working under wartime conditions to resist historical revisionism and reflecting on the legacy of the Soviet occupation in the Baltic region.

Agrita Ozola

## LITHUANIA

In 2025, the country's dynamic and changing political life sparked active social campaigns, which were initiated by Lithuania's cultural community. The 19th Cabinet of the Republic of Lithuania, which began its work on December 12, 2024, resigned on August 4, 2025, and on September 25, 2025, the 20th Cabinet of the Republic of Lithuania, a coalition of centre-left political parties, was sworn in. In September–October 2025, political decisions made regarding the activities of the Ministry of Culture, particularly those related to the influence of the populist party “Nemuno Aušra” (Dawn of Neman) in the ruling coalition, and finally the appointment of a minister from this party as Minister of Culture prompted the formation of the Cultural Assembly <https://kulturosasambleja.lt/information-in-english>. This led to the development of a new form of movement, which grew out of the cultural community's dissatisfaction with political decisions and its desire to participate more actively in public and political life. Its emergence testifies to the strengthening of civic positions in the cultural sector, the desire to defend professional interests and cultural autonomy, and to promote open dialogue with government institutions. The Assembly's activities are not limited to protests but also include attempts to form a long-term civic movement that could influence cultural policy and strengthen the role of culture in the democratic society.

The Lithuanian Museum Association officially announced that it is joining the cultural community movement, inviting museums to participate in campaigns, other initiatives, and express their civic position. During the campaigns, museums and the museum community acted as active participants in civil society, responding to threats. Lithuanian museums did not settle for a passive observer position, but acted on the basis of values, culture, and historical memory, choosing different protest strategies to reveal their identity, using culture not only as an object but also as a means of political reflection.

Museums actively participated in protests, using symbolic measures (playing music recordings, turning off building/exhibition lighting, educational events, artist performances) to draw attention to the importance of culture.

On October 5, 2025, a warning strike took place. Initiated by the Cultural Assembly and supported by cultural workers, creators, and artists, the warning strike "This May Be the Last Time" took place throughout the country with events in city centres, squares, and cultural spaces. A unifying action – at 2 p.m., at the climax of the protest, the symphonic poem "The Sea" by the famous Lithuanian composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis was played in many places and became a symbolic protest

anthem. The MO Museum in Vilnius <https://mo.lt/en/>, together with the Dance Theatre, organised a movement protest on its steps as a symbolic expression of position. The Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania Museum <https://www.valdovurumai.lt/en/> invited visitors to a free lecture titled "How States Are Destroyed: The Case of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth," dedicated specifically to the day of the protest. This educational event was intended to encourage reflection on the historically fateful risks of cultural and political decisions. After the lecture, the campaign "Without Culture – Darkness" took place in the evening, symbolically turning off the lighting of the museum building to draw attention to the "consequences of cultural loss". Many cultural institutions throughout the country joined this campaign.

The most significant event in Lithuanian cultural life in 2025 was the 150th anniversary of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (September 22, 1875 – April 10, 1911), one of the most prominent Lithuanian artists of all time. The anniversary was commemorated with 150 events and initiatives throughout Lithuania and in various countries abroad <https://ciurlioniui150.lt/en/events>. Many of the events were linked to the exhibitions and initiatives of the M.K. Čiurlionis National Art Museum <https://ciurlionis.lt/en/exhibitions> and initiatives, one of the most significant being the international exhibition "From Amber to the Stars. Together with M. K. Čiurlionis: Then and Now," which ran from March 21 to October 12, 2025. The exhibition explores the two main sources of inspiration for the artist – the sea and space – presenting his work in the context of contemporary art. The exhibition features more than 70 works from Lithuanian and international collections, including works by modern artists and historical pieces.

In 2025 the impact of the war in Ukraine remains significant for the political, economic, social and cultural life of Lithuania.

Lithuanian museums and museologists still were actively involved in the organisation of support for Ukraine or joined public initiatives. This year, the efforts of Lithuania's most active museum professionals have been recognised with Ukrainian state awards.

On November 26, 2025, Dr. Arūnas Gelūnas, Director General of the Lithuanian National Museum of Art (LNMA), was awarded the Ukrainian Order of Merit by President Volodymyr Zelensky. The award was given for his significant contribution to the preservation and promotion of Ukrainian culture and support. A. Gelūnas considers the award to be a recognition of the achievements of the entire LNMA community, symbolising solidarity with Ukraine, the preservation of its culture, and the strengthening of cultural ties.



The Lithuanian National Museum <https://lnm.lt/en/> commissioned the sociological research centre “Vilmorus” to conduct a survey on public trust in museums between November 6 and 16, 2025.

The survey shows that museums are among the most trusted institutions: the public trusts firefighters (92%), museums (72.8%), the police (66.1%), and the military (60.7%).

There has been a noticeable increase in young people's trust in museums. In the age group up to 29 years old, as many as 83.1% of respondents said they trust these institutions!

According to Dr. Rūta Kačkutė, Director General of the National Museum of Lithuania, such confidence indicators show not only a strong connection with society, but also that museums are becoming an important space for education, critical thinking, and cultural dialogue.

**Gita Sapranauškaite**

## LUXEMBOURG

The year 2025 marked significant progress for Luxembourg's museum sector, beginning with the official launch of Museonet by the Minister of Culture. Following the integration of pilot museums in 2023 and 2024, the network opened to new members in 2025, welcoming Musée A Possen in BechKleinmacher, focused on folklore and rural life, and the Musée d'Histoire(s) Diekirch, dedicated to the history of Diekirch in northern Luxembourg. These additions enriched the database with nearly 13,000 objects, contributing to a total of 30,000 new entries created by Museonet collaborators in 2025. Museonet represents an important step toward the digitalisation of Luxembourg's cultural heritage, offering smaller, regional museums a unique opportunity to showcase their collections despite limited resources compared to larger institutions. Although the platform is not yet publicly accessible, it lays the foundation for an open online platform in the coming years, aiming to make Luxembourg's museum collections visible internationally.

Another milestone of 2025 was the first Professional Museum Day ("Journée professionnelle"), organised by ICOM-Luxembourg on March 24, 2025, at the National Museum of Resistance and Human Rights (MNRDH) in Esch-sur-Alzette. Under the theme "Museums Care", the event explored the evolving role of museums as social actors committed to inclusion, community support, and well-being. Through participatory programmes, inclusive exhibitions, and social mediation, museums are redefining their mission beyond object display to become spaces of dialogue and cultural understanding. The event, which brought together approximately 85 participants from across Luxembourg, was a success and is poised to become the cornerstone of an annual tradition.

In parallel with the discussions on social engagement following the journée professionnelle, Luxembourg's museums also continued to prioritise young audiences. In 2025, the National Museum of Archaeology, History and Art (MNAHA) in Luxembourg City introduced a new kids' guide for its temporary exhibition "Land in Motion". Illustrated by Luxembourgish artist Lynn Cosyn, this educational guide will serve as a model for future kids' guides at the museum. Similarly, the Kannermuseum PLOMM in Wiltz - the country's first children's museum, inaugurated in April 2024 - continued to expand its offerings for young audiences by introducing creative workshops and the "Ideal Exhibition", a free-form creative space inspired by French artist Hervé Tullet's concept "La expo imprevisa."

By placing research at the heart of their collaborative projects, museums in Luxembourg ensure that residents and the wider population remain actively involved

in their initiatives—helping cultural institutions stay relevant and connected to their communities. In 2025, the Museum A Possen and the Wäinhaus in Ehnen launched an exciting collaborative project with the University of Luxembourg consisting of the creation of a small research group dedicated to publishing an annual scholarly journal, *Les Cahiers Mosellans*. This new publication highlights research across cultural, linguistic, ethnological, artistic, historical, and geographical fields, specifically focusing on the Moselle region shared by Luxembourg, France, and Germany.

Finally, for the fourth consecutive year, the Ministry of Culture launched its “Project Support for Museum Institutions” call for proposals, extended in 2025 to cultural sites of national heritage interest. Beneficiaries included the National Conservatory of Historic Vehicles in Diekirch, the Rural and Craft Museum of Peppange and the Albert Hames heritage site in Rumelange. As in previous years, Luxembourgish museums took part in collective events such as the Luxembourg Museum Days and Heritage Days.

**Julia Kohl**

## MALTA

Malta's museum ecology is generally divided into public, religious, and non-governmental/private sectors, with each sector representing about one-third of the overall museum landscape. The national museums and heritage sites are administered by Heritage Malta, the national institution for cultural heritage. The Catholic Church manages museums and sites associated with Catholic cultural heritage, which are primarily run on a voluntary basis, except for the Cathedral Museum in the Old City of Mdina. The private museum sector, comprising foundations and non-governmental organisations, includes two major NGOs, as well as several house museums and military historical sites from the British period. New museum projects emerging from the private sector are also increasing.

Heritage Malta, governed by the Cultural Heritage Act (2002) and its subsequent amendments, serves as the central authority on cultural heritage in Malta. However, the ecosystem still lacks long-overdue policies and regulatory frameworks. Among these, tailored museum legislation and a museum accreditation scheme to oversee the operations of private and non-governmental museums are of utmost importance. Malta currently lacks a dedicated museum law and a national museum association. These deficiencies hinder the sector's essential sustainable development.

Discussions of this necessary legal framework and vision have also been absent from this year's conversations. Museums are missing from [Envision2050](#), the Government's vision document for the next 25 years. Feedback has not been specifically about museums, but more about cultural infrastructure. However, there has been an initial attempt to assess the situation regarding ecclesiastical museums, which are particularly vulnerable with respect to standards, staffing, resources, and funding. This initiative was also supported by a revamped ICOM Malta committee which now includes the younger upcoming generation of museum professionals.

The national network continues to receive adequate funding, and funding for the culture sector has increased, but it remains predominantly public. The state allocates significant resources to culture each year—for example, Heritage Malta's estimated recurrent funding for 2025 was expected to be in the range of €10 million, with an additional €13 million from other revenue. Small museums and the rest of the ecosystem do not have such access to funds and, more often than not, remain heavily dependent on ticketing money with limited access to government funding sources. In 2025, public discourse around museums in Malta largely framed them as essential cultural infrastructure. Museums were increasingly presented not simply as exhibition

spaces, but as year-round institutions requiring sustained operational planning and investment. This also largely refers to national museums, which enjoy much greater visibility than the non-governmental, mostly smaller ones. A series of talks held at the Palazzo Falson Historic House Museums has sought to critically review Malta's museum ecosystem through a range of thematic lenses. Exhibitions have also evolved to align with current topics and themes, underscoring an underlying social dimension. This is the case of an exhibition of Francisco de Goya's *Disasters of War* print series.

A second recurring focus was access and audience engagement, understood in practical and operational terms. References to extended opening hours, free-entry initiatives, and dense annual programming underscored a shift toward service design and inclusivity as core operational priorities. This is still a question of intent, as accessibility would rank very low on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. With its top-down museum management approach that is considered the practice across the entire ecosystem, citizen participation, including co-creation and co-production of museum content, ranks very low.

The primary challenges faced by the Maltese museum ecosystem are its independence from political influence and its long-term sustainability. There is a growing need for more effective and decisive implementation of the arm's-length principle at both the political and managerial levels, particularly within the national museum network and with respect to funding for private institutions. The press has been highlighting a series of ever-increasing conflicts of interest that are a matter of concern. One of these concerns the chair of the national agency curating an exhibition for the party in government.

Addressing the absence of a legislative framework and a bespoke museum law would ensure the adoption of best practices, recognition of expertise, and a significantly more resilient sector.

**Sandro Debono**

## MOLDOVA

No extraordinary events occurred in the museum life of the Republic of Moldova in 2025. However, it can be said that it was a successful year – museum projects and programmes were implemented.

1. It's important to note that the number of visitors increased even though the entrance fee increased from 10 MDL to 30.50 MDL in 2025. Starting in 2025, museums have the right to independently set prices for the services they provide (including entrance fees) without a government decision, only with the consent of the Ministry of Culture.

2. In 2025, the museum accreditation process, which began two years ago, was largely completed. Most public museums received accreditation. The conclusion of those involved in this process was as follows: all forms of information technology used in museums no longer delight the public; they provide a certain amount of information, but visitors still prefer original, authentic heritage. I would add artificial intelligence is the last human invention and the end of modern civilisation.

3. Some changes have been made to the legislation in this area:

- the notion of a virtual museum was introduced.
- the definition of public museum has been amended to align with the latest ICOM definition from 2022.

**Elena Plosnita**

## MONTENEGRO

During the reporting period, the level of museum visits in Montenegro remained at the same level as in 2024. Museum institutions organised numerous domestic and travelling exhibitions, both within Montenegro and internationally. Particular emphasis was placed on participation in international exhibitions and projects, financed through museums' own resources as well as through international funds dedicated to cross-border and international cooperation.

Museum practice in Montenegro continues to be aligned with European museum standards, with special attention given to ensuring that exhibitions and permanent displays are accessible to persons with disabilities.

In parallel with exhibition activities, work has been carried out at archaeological sites throughout the country, as well as conservation and restoration activities related to museum collections, in accordance with applicable professional and ethical standards.

A significant institutional advancement was achieved through the establishment of a new, modern database within the National Museum of Montenegro, which operates as the main museum institution. The purpose of this database is to consolidate and systematise data from all museums operating within the territory of Montenegro, thereby improving the management of museum documentation and strengthening institutional coordination at the national level.

During the current year, museums have been intensively engaged in preparations for the marking of several major anniversaries scheduled for 2026, including the 130th anniversary of the adoption of the first Law on Museums and Libraries, the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the State Museum, and the 20th anniversary of the restoration of Montenegrin independence in 2006.

All museums in Montenegro operate in accordance with the museum regulatory framework established in the previous year, and no amendments to the existing legislative framework were introduced during 2025.

**Isidora Kovačević**

# THE NETHERLANDS

## Introduction and basic data

The Netherlands (41.500 km<sup>2</sup>, 18 million inhabitants), has a richly diverse museum system with **621 museums**, 479 of which are affiliated with the Museum Association. In 2024 **32 million visits** were made. Although the first reports of some museums are positive and indicate an increase in visitor numbers in 2025, it is expected pre-corona figures will not be met. Research indicates especially a down in the age group of 65+.

## Museum card successful

The Dutch '**Museumkaart**' continues to grow in popularity. The system basically is a simple one: for an annual € 75,-- a cardholder can visit freely the associated museums (72%). The total income is to be shared according to the total amount of visits. Museum card holders made more than 9.7 million visits to participating museums in 2025, a new record. On average, a cardholder visited a museum 6.5 times in 2025, almost three times more often than people without a card.

## Museums under pressure

Despite the positive visitor figures, the sector is under **financial pressure**. Although the sector's total turnover rose to 1.31 billion euros, costs rose faster to 1.34 billion euros. This resulted in a combined operating loss of 30.5 million euros, with 45% of museums ending the year in the red. Museums are struggling with skyrocketing costs for personnel (69% of total costs), energy, IT and insurance, while subsidies often do not fully compensate for this inflation.

By 2025, the focus on **resilience and security** will have increased significantly due to the deteriorating international security situation. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science warns of an increased risk of hybrid conflicts, combining digital attacks, foreign interference and economic pressure. Museums are being called upon to update their security plans, conduct scenario exercises for power failures or cyber attacks, for example, and draw up priority lists for securing collections ('indispensable and irreplaceable') in emergency situations.

The sector is experiencing increasing **politicisation and social polarisation**. Although Dutch museums operate autonomously in terms of content, this independence is coming under pressure. Examples include political questions about the removal of VOC flags or criticism of artworks about sensitive international conflicts. As a result, museums are increasingly having to navigate between their social mission and



political or financial constraints. At the same time, museums are also facing pressure from various activist organisations such as Extinction Rebellion.

### **Professional quality**

**Sustainability** is a priority for an increasing number of Dutch museums. Among the large museums, this figure is almost 100%. However, barriers remain: 50% of museums that are less active in this area cite a lack of staff, while a similar proportion lack financial resources. Only 7% of museums have actually had their ecological or carbon footprint measured.

An important development is the launch of the **revised Museum Standard 2025**, which will come into force on 1 January 2026. The standard is the quality framework for registered museums in The Netherlands and is a test for admission to the Museum Association and the Museum Card. This standard has been made more user-friendly by reducing the number of criteria from 17 to 12 and is more closely aligned with the current ICOM museum definition, with more attention to sustainability, inclusion and social engagement.

### **Sector highlights**

- **ICOM 2028:** Rotterdam has been chosen as the host city for the triennial ICOM General Conference in 2028, with the theme '*Building Bridges*'.
- **Museum Prize 2025:** The Bakery Museum [De Oude Bakkerij](#) (Medemblik) won the national VriendenLoterij Museum Prize 2025 (€ 100.000) with over 12,000 votes.
- **Suriname Museum** (Amsterdam) opened. This museum tells and shows the Surinamese-Dutch history in a 1,300 m<sup>2</sup> building.
- **The FENIX Migration Museum** (Rotterdam) opened in a converted harbour warehouse with a spectacular 'tornado' on the roof. The art museum focuses on migration themes.
- **Repatriation of the Dubois collection:** the Dutch government has decided that the world-famous collection of circa 30.000 fossils, including remains of *Homo erectus*, will be returned to Indonesia. This decision was made on the advice of the Colonial Collections Committee, which, after extensive research, concluded that the collection never became the property of The Netherlands and that it is likely that the fossils were taken against the will of the population. The most important objects were returned in December.

- 2025 shocked the world with the **brutal robbery** of valuable objects of the lost Dacian civilization in the Drents Museum, on loan from the Romanian National History Museum in Bucharest. The stolen objects are still missing, although some accomplices are in prison.
- The **Rijksmuseum** announced a **new branch** in southern Netherlands city of Eindhoven.

**Hans Dautzenberg and Dirk Houtgraaf**

## **NORTH MACEDONIA, REPUBLIC OF**

Museum activities for 2025 in the Republic of North Macedonia are realised as usual through the Annual open call of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, financing more than 90 percent of the annual activities related to museums, bearing in mind that North Macedonia has no registered private museums. The activities of the museums are dependent on the funds allocated through this annual call.

Systematic archaeological excavations, as well as the conservation of architecture and mosaics of archaeological sites but also the conservation of frescoes in churches and monasteries throughout the country are actively being carried out. What is worth mentioning in the field of museology for 2025 are the activities of the National Archaeological Museum in Skopje, the opening of the permanent exhibition. For one month, 36 curators, conservators and documenters, 15 external collaborators with the help of the rest of the museum staff, worked around the clock to prepare the new permanent exhibition in the Museum. On an area of 6,000 m<sup>2</sup>, through the exposed 5,000 artefacts distributed in 18 departments, the story of the national history is presented. One of the exclusivities will be found in the Archaic necropolis of Korošiste, near the city of Struga, which excited the domestic and international public two years ago. The main goal of the National Archaeological Museum and what they strive for is to create a museum that exists for visitors, not for the people who work in it. That's why they concentrate on those aspects that most directly contribute to attract and satisfy visitor actively to experience the museum and its contents. Through the museum projects in 2025, the role of museums continues in the educational process, and raising awareness among young people about the values of cultural heritage and Macedonian traditional culture is particularly emphasised.

Generally, the activity of the museums in 2025 in North Macedonia was mainly focused on exhibitions realised on a national level. Museum institutions from North Macedonia actively worked on the realisation of actual and new projects for cross-border cooperation using EU funds, especially highlighting the cooperation with the R. Greece but also with R. Albania. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in cooperation with museum institutions from the country and abroad, is also actively working on the business promotion of Macedonian cultural heritage with the aim of targeting North Macedonia as a top cultural tourism destination in South-East Europe.

**Gordan Nikolov**

# NORWAY

## Overview

The Norwegian museum sector in 2025 was characterised by stability. Museums operated within a largely unchanged policy framework while navigating sustained economic pressure, expanding responsibilities related to sustainability, accessibility, research, and ethics, and ongoing debates about the role of museums in a democratic society.

## Policy Framework and Funding

Public funding for culture increased only marginally in the national budget in 2025, and no overarching new museum policy initiatives were introduced. As in previous years, rising costs related to energy, conservation, and maintenance reduced museums' room for innovation and flexibility.

Museums continued to be encouraged to strengthen self-generated income through sponsorships, partnerships, and commercial activities, while at the same time facing explicit expectations not to increase ticket prices. This unresolved tension between financial sustainability and broad public accessibility remains a structural challenge across the sector.

Voluntary engagement continued to be a defining strength of the Norwegian museum sector, particularly in regional and local museum contexts.

## Sustainability and Building Conservation

Climate change and sustainability concerns became even more pressing in everyday museum work during 2025. At the same time, an ever-increasing backlog in the conservation of historic buildings remains a major challenge. Museums and conservation organisations are in the process of organising joint pressure on the government, calling for clearer and more predictable funding mechanisms for building conservation, including dedicated maintenance or reserve funds. This will be important to follow in 2026.

## Collections and De-accession

A notable development in the Norwegian museum sector was increased national cooperation on collection development. With growing recognition that many museums hold similar objects from the same periods and cultural traditions, there was broader acceptance of de-accession as a legitimate and necessary tool.

### **Accessibility and Inclusive Practice**

Accessibility became both a clearer expectation and a more prominent area of work for museums in 2025, following the incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) into Norway's Human Rights Act. This encompasses physical accessibility, digital access, and inclusive interpretation, requiring museums to adopt more systematic and long-term approaches.

### **Museums, Democracy, and Public Debate**

Debates concerning museums' civic and political roles continued throughout the year. International conflicts and democratic challenges triggered internal reflection and public discussion around freedom of expression, neutrality, and social engagement. While institutional positions varied, these discussions underscored a shared awareness of museums' responsibility to foster democratic values and critical reflection, alongside continued adherence to the arm's length principle.

### **Digitalisation and Artificial Intelligence**

Digitalisation is an integral part of museum operations, particularly in collection management systems, digital access, and hybrid forms of mediation. In 2025, artificial intelligence emerged as a significant topic of professional debate, addressing issues such as ethics, authority, copyright, and transparency. AI is widely regarded as an important tool for museums, but one that requires a shared professional understanding, clear guidelines, and responsible governance structures.

### **Research and Knowledge Production**

Research collaboration within the museum sector was strengthened through increased co-funded research projects and the introduction of additional publicly supported PhD positions. The establishment of a national research school for museums and cultural heritage signals a long-term commitment to research-based practice and professional development.

### **New and Upgraded Museum Facilities**

Several publicly funded new or upgraded museum facilities opened in 2025. The national museum for Forest Finn culture in Finnskogen officially opened, presenting the history and heritage of a recognised national minority. A new conservation and interpretation building for the authentic ship **Holvikjekta** opened in Vestland. A new branch of the North Norwegian Art Museum opened in Bodø, alongside new museum buildings in Hardanger.

### **Major Ongoing Development Projects**

Several major museum development projects continued during 2025. Most notably, the new Viking Age Museum at Bygdøy progressed significantly. On 10 September 2025, the Oseberg Ship was successfully moved approximately 100 metres from the old Viking Ship Museum to the new building. The operation took around 10 hours, at a speed of approximately 25 centimetres per minute, and marked a major milestone in the project.

In the State Budget for 2026, Museene Arven was granted money for a renovation and building programme in preparation for the national jubilee in 2030, commemoration the 1030 Battle of Stiklestad and the legacy of St. Olav.

### **Hanna Mellemsether**

## POLAND

In 2025, the activities of Polish museums, like all other public institutions, were influenced by the potential threat of war or terrorism and the methods used to prevent them. Poland's geographical location and geopolitics compel us to seriously consider this issue. For museums that means working on such subjects as preservation of collections, decision for future steps: evacuation or on-site security, ensuring the safety of the visitors and the museum staff. There is also the financial focus on this subject, so consequently there is a lack of extra financial support for some more expensive museum projects, e.g. bigger exhibitions with many foreign loans.

Another subject important for Polish museum community is the need to amend the Act on Museums and other connected regulations. It seems necessary due to social, legal and even technical changes in current museum work. This issue, as well as the need for discussion and integration of the community, became the basis for the efforts to organise the 2nd Congress of Polish Museum Professionals (planned for the beginning of 2027) and other smaller conferences on these subjects.

An interesting exhibition trend is the tendency of museums to try to organise exhibitions with immersive parts. This is directly related to the awareness among museum staff that multimedia kiosks and similar installations are no longer attractive to today's audiences. The need to introduce changes in audience segmentation has also been noted, including the growing group of children being home schooled, for whom museums must develop entirely new educational programmes.

**Joanna Grzonkowska**

## PORTUGAL

In 2025, museums in Portugal faced a complex time. Not due to new legislation, nor to any special trends (apart from some contemporary art museum visitors, critics and museum professionals' debate on some WOKE curatorial choices, reported as authoritarian and exclusive). The central issues for 2025 were, on the one hand, the renewal of buildings and collections — including, on the last days of the year, the announced creation of a new venue to host the State Contemporary Art Collection (a new museum, in reality) — and, on the other, the maintenance of the status quo, concerning bureaucracy and a continuous lack of financial and human resources in museums.

On the first issue, the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP) represented an important answer to major risk potentials, improving the physical conditions of national heritage sites (museums, monuments and palaces) and their collections, promoting the rehabilitation and preservation of Portuguese cultural heritage. Such action is still ongoing, and it concerns 84 actions, in state museums, monuments, and palaces, nine of which were necessarily closed to visitors (eight of them still are), due to the dimension of the works in process. One of these museums (the National Music Museum) benefitted from a major change: the adaptation of part of the National Palace of Mafra as its new venue, thus allowing the museum to reemerge from the ashes, after a provisional installation (for 29 years) that kept it in some inadequate rooms at the Metro Station of Alto dos Moínhos, Lisbon. Despite this conquest (that comprehends new museography and the use of new tools such as AI), that inspires a justified hope for the future for this museum's important collection, the general spirit for state museums in Portugal is of being on hold.

This paralysing feeling does not merely concern the temporary closing of buildings, due to RRP much needed interventions. It especially has to do with the everlasting underfinancing of museums, the maintenance of exponential bureaucratic procedures, on the one hand; and, on the other, to the continuous lack of trained professionals to curate collections and, especially to communicate them, be it by means of Education or Communication. Indeed, despite a wide range of studies produced in Portuguese Academia — some of them by museum professionals — concerning all these important needs, museums still lack professionals with such competences. The scarcity of renewal in conservation and curatorial departments (with a vast majority of professionals reaching retirement age in the next couple of years), undermines the quality and quantity of research and attractiveness to different and renewed audiences. The central transmission of knowledge concerning collections, buildings, and scientific connections is compromised.

If the Education sector is regarded as needed (even if most museums merely have one person for the job), Communication is mostly centralised by MMP (Museums, Monuments, and Palaces — the governmental entity that rules over 37 museums, monuments and palaces in Portugal). The vast majority (if not all) of the museums and historical sites does



not have a Communication expert, thus can't develop a tighter and more participatory connection with their visitors. Plus, the same is perceived by professionals in other museums in Portugal, even in the private sector (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, MAC/CCB, to name but two). Most professional art educators, albeit central to the development of pedagogical strategies, report being reduced to a vehicle of curatorial thought, never heard during the process of curatorial strategies. Indeed, for most museums in Portugal, Education is merely conceived by curators as a minor asset that is meant to work with school and family groups. As for Communication, it is also seen as a "mere" way to deal with the press, and never as a strategic approach to the creation of inclusive policies or a specific identity, by each museum/palace/site.

Inclusion is also a significant problem in most Portuguese museums. Cognitive inclusion is mostly ignored (there is a continuing use of academic jargon in texts — either in catalogues, or in the exhibition circuit; and an almost absolute absence of tools for people with visual or auditive disabilities, due to a lack of competences within the museum teams and of an absence of financial means to overcome this situation with outsourcing).

Nevertheless, museum professionals continue to debate and network to maximise their potential. And in museums (such as those under Lisbon's municipality) which have pursued values of renewal, overall inclusion (cognitive, mental health, human rights) by putting the visitor first (using all tools at hand, including new technologies and AI), the results have been rewarding.

**Emília Ferreira**

## ROMANIA

Romanian museums experienced situations at opposite extremes in 2025, specific to our system. The vast majority of museums in Romania are public institutions, subsidised from central or local funds. A small portion of museums open to the public are fully financed from private funds, consisting of contributions from founders and fees for various services offered. Due to the dependence on subsidies for public museums, specific problems also arise. Access to subsidies offered by ministries or local authorities (county, municipal, or communal) is becoming increasingly restricted due to the macroeconomic situation.

Romania is the European Union member country with the largest budget deficit relative to gross domestic product, with government loans for paying salaries and pensions becoming almost unsustainable. This is the main reason why the government change also brought fiscal and financial measures that directly affected museums and their employees. Net salary incomes were reduced in the second half of the year by capping the bonus for harmful working conditions, which many of the nearly 7,000 employees in Romanian museums benefited from, at a fixed amount of 30 euros per month. Starting in October, material expenses for all public institutions were capped at the monthly average for the January-August 2025 period. In practice, simultaneously employee incomes in museums decreased and operational expenses were significantly reduced.

Regarding private museums, activities continued that have established institutions such as the Museum of Immersive New Art (MINA) or the Museum of Recent Art (MARE), but there was also a spectacular change in the administrator of Romania's most famous castle, Bran. It returned to direct administration by the owners, with the company that had managed the castle until 2025 being withdrawn from management.

Museums generally had a higher number of visitors, on a natural upward trend, against the backdrop of full recovery from the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and emotional adaptation in relation to geostrategic instability (proximity to Ukraine at war with the Russian invader) and economic instability (devaluation of the national currency and major inflation). Contributing to this stage success are successful national programs such as "A Different Kind of Week," "Green Week," "Night of Museums," "Researchers' Night," "Night of Museums in Villages," or co-financing for cultural projects granted by the National Cultural Fund Administration or other public and private entities.

The year 2025 did not record the appearance of new museums in Romania. Although several important temporary exhibitions took place for national or local culture and art, the most notable event for Romanian museology is the nomination of the ASTRA National Museum Complex in Sibiu for one of the Europa Nostra Awards. However, we cannot fail to mention here the unfortunate theft of the itinerant Dacian treasure from the National Museum of Romanian History at the Drents Museum in The Netherlands. The irreparable loss of the Coțofenești helmet and the Dacian bracelets represents the most negative event in the recent history of Romanian museums and unfortunately fits into a dark series of museum thefts in 2025, such as the one at the Louvre. It is appropriate for museums to allocate adequate resources for the safety and protection of heritage in Romania and Europe.

**Valer Rus**

## SERBIA

During 2025, the museum sector in Serbia largely reflected developments and conditions from the previous year. Nevertheless, the overall functioning of the museum community was significantly influenced by an unstable political environment, which affected all segments of society. This situation resulted in observable stagnation within the sector, reduced professional motivation, insufficient operational funding, and an increased level of political interference.

A particularly sensitive issue in the political context was the discretionary interpretation of the Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage by state authorities in relation to the General Staff complex in Belgrade. This action prompted strong reactions from numerous professional and expert associations within the fields of heritage protection.

Despite these challenges, several previously initiated national-level projects continued. These include the planning and design processes for the new Natural History Museum, the Nikola Tesla Museum, the Museum of the City of Belgrade, and the Historical Museum of Serbia. In addition, a decision was adopted at the level of the national government to proceed with the construction of an Archaeological Museum in Belgrade.

Outside the capital, investment efforts were maintained in museums located in smaller cities, particularly those already undergoing reconstruction or modernisation. At the end of 2025, the Museum of the Archaeological Institute was officially opened at the Viminacium site, one of the most significant Roman archaeological locations in Serbia. Furthermore, the city of Leskovac—recognized for its established museum institution—was designated as the European Capital of Culture for 2026. Inter-museum cooperation at the regional level was predominantly focused on collaboration with museums in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From a sector-wide perspective, two institutions distinguished themselves through notable international recognition in 2025. The Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade was awarded the Europa Nostra Grand Prix 2025 in the category *Civil Society Engagement and Raising Awareness* for its exhibition “*Hedgehog’s Home – Inventing a Better World.*” Additionally, the Gallery of Matica Srpska in Novi Sad was shortlisted among the five finalists for the Luigi Micheletti Award, presented by the European Museum Academy (EMA). The Gallery also received a special commendation from the EMA for its new permanent exhibition project entitled *REvision*. In the accompanying statement, the Academy emphasised that the exhibition conveys a strong message highlighting the

deep and inseparable connections between Serbian art and culture and the broader European cultural context.

These two European-level awards represent an important stimulus for the Serbian museum sector. They encourage other institutions to further align with contemporary European museological standards and practices, as well as to strengthen and expand inter-museum cooperation at the European level.

**Lidija Milašinović**

## SLOVAKIA

In 2025, a series of significant changes affected the operation of museums and galleries in Slovakia, particularly state-administered heritage institutions. The most substantial developments concerned the Slovak National Museum and its organisational units, as well as the Slovak National Gallery.

At the Slovak National Museum, repeated changes in senior management occurred during the year, affecting several branches and specialised museums. These changes concerned director-level and senior managerial positions and were implemented without the completion of standard selection procedures or the public disclosure of professional criteria underlying the decisions. The changes had a direct impact on internal organisational arrangements, the continuity of professional and research activities, and the functioning of expert departments.

In several branches of the Slovak National Museum, the decision-making autonomy of professional staff was curtailed, particularly with respect to collection management, exhibition activities, and the application of professional methodologies. Decisions concerning interventions in permanent exhibitions, the planning of reconstructions, and the handling of collection objects were taken through administrative procedures, without the involvement of the specialists responsible for the relevant collections or subject areas. This approach affected long-established exhibitions and collection holdings of national significance.

In 2025, attention also focused on the Slovak National Gallery, particularly regarding the procedure for selecting its senior management. The selection process was conducted in a manner that raised concerns regarding transparency, continuity of governance, and respect for the institution's professional autonomy. The procedure had a significant impact on the stability of the gallery's operation and on its professional direction.

During the year, state museums also addressed specific interventions involving collection objects. One of the most prominent cases concerned the relocation of a Renaissance marble bust from the Spiš Museum in Levoča, an organisational unit of the Slovak National Museum. The relocation was carried out in May 2025 pursuant to an administrative decision, outside the framework of a standard professional consensus. The action gave rise to disputes regarding the professional assessment of the intervention, the handling of the artefact, and the extent to which relevant experts were involved in the decision-making process. The case illustrated the handling of collection objects of high cultural and historical value without the publication of comprehensive professional documentation.

Developments in 2025 also included changes to working conditions within state museums and galleries. Employees faced increased job insecurity, pressure to express professional opinions, and changes to organisational structures. These circumstances resulted in labour disputes and the departure of experienced professionals from the museum sector, with direct consequences for the continuity of professional work.

In the second half of 2025, changes in the governance and organisation of state museums and galleries, including the Slovak National Museum and the Slovak National Gallery, continued without the publication of comprehensive conceptual documents outlining their professional, methodological, or legislative rationale. These changes were implemented through individual personnel and organisational decisions with immediate effects on the functioning of the institutions concerned.

**Zuzana Palicová**

## SLOVENIA

The year 2025 in the Slovenian museum sector has been most strongly marked by discussions on amendments to the principal legislation governing museum activity in the country, the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (ZVKD-1). A new act (ZVKD-2) has been in preparation, introducing quite far-reaching changes to certain areas of museum work and to the competences of museums and related professional fields. Museum professionals - particularly a group of museum directors - have been advocating for legislation dedicated exclusively to museums, modelled on the Archives Act and the Library Act, whereas the Cultural Heritage Protection Act regulates the entire field of cultural heritage, both movable and immovable.

Despite this, museum professionals participated in expert working groups during the drafting of amendments to the existing legislation and subsequently in the preparation of comments and remarks. Although the first draft of the new act was already under discussion in January 2025, the legislative process has not yet been concluded. While the draft legislation introduced several modern and beneficial innovations (such as provisions for the protection of cultural heritage in emergency situations and even free admission to all public museums for children and young people up to the age of 18), it also attracted numerous critical responses from experts. In the field of archaeology in particular, professionals expressed concern that the new act weakens investors' obligations regarding archaeological research and facilitates the removal of immovable remains that could otherwise be designated as cultural heritage. The debate on the legislation is still ongoing.

One of the main trends among Slovenian museums in 2025 has been the increased focus on accessibility, which is also an important criterion in relation to the principal funder of the public service of safeguarding movable heritage, the Ministry of Culture. Accessibility is understood on several levels, ranging from physical to digital. In terms of digital accessibility, steps have been taken towards the implementation of a national register of movable cultural heritage, intended to bring together collections from all Slovenian museums within a single, unified database. Regarding access to exhibitions, museums are increasingly introducing free-admission schemes. One such example is the collaboration of several Ljubljana museums within the so-called Golden Museum Pass, which allows retirees unlimited free entry to selected museums in Ljubljana.

Museums in Slovenia are also increasingly collaborating with the non-governmental sector, particularly in the areas of interpretation and accompanying programmes. Sponsorship funding remains limited, as current legislation does not actively encourage corporate sponsorship. Funding from the state and local authorities remains stable and sufficient to ensure regular operation, but not to support more



ambitious projects; for these, museums have been largely successful in securing funding through European projects.

**Blaž Vurnik**

# SPAIN

## Some visitor numbers

Spanish museums have maintained high visitor numbers, especially those with the largest audiences. This is due to the fact that the number of tourists visiting Spain continues to grow: 97 million in 2025, three million more than the previous year.

Some museums have broken attendance records, such as the Prado National Museum and the National Archaeological Museum. Here are some figures:

- The Prado Museum has once again achieved the highest number of visitors in its history, exceeding 3,513,000 visitors. The Museum is alert to overcrowding and has announced measures, still in development, not to grow but to improve the visitor experience.
- The Reina Sofía Museum received more than 1,600,000 visitors at its main site, an increase of more than 4% over the previous year. 62% of visitors entered free of charge.
- The Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum was visited by 1,003,455 people, an increase of 5.4% compared to 2024. This is the second highest figure for this museum.
- The 16 state museums under the Ministry of Culture received 2,878,631 visitors, a slight decrease compared to 2024, when they recorded their highest ever figure (3,121,418 visitors). It should be noted that several museums are undergoing total or partial renovation, including the Sorolla Museum, which has been closed since October 2024.

The National Archaeological Museum stands out with 864,201 visitors, an increase of more than 37% over the previous year, surpassing its previous record set in 2014 when it reopened after a complete renovation.

- The Guggenheim Bilbao, with 1,305,003 visitors, has seen a slight increase in attendance.
- Barcelona's municipal museums received a total of 3,800,000 visitors, slightly less than in 2024 (4,754,500). As in previous years, the Picasso Museum topped the rankings with 1,021,500 visitors, followed by the Barcelona History Museum with 949,500 visitors.
- The Carmen Thyssen Museum in Malaga once again exceeded 200,000 visits, and the Picasso Museum, also in Malaga, was once again very close to 800,000 visitors.
- Valencia's main museums experienced an increase in visitors. Among them was the Valencia Museum of Fine Arts, which grew by 5% with 250,949 visitors.

In all cases, and according to data from the museums themselves, the proportion of foreign visitors has increased, which is consistent with Spain's success as an international tourist destination. This has led to an increase in their own revenues, which has improved the finances of Spanish museum institutions. This situation is particularly evident in the case of the top 20 museums, which receive more than 60% of tourists.

However, most Spanish museums are local museums with varying figures, depending on whether they are located in tourist areas and on the programming of exhibitions and activities they have carried out. These museums, which are dependent on local administrations, struggle to survive thanks to the dedication and commitment of their professionals.

### **Renovation of permanent exhibitions**

The Ministry of Culture presented the museographic programs for the renovation of the permanent exhibitions at the National Museum of Anthropology and the Museum of America. The new approaches seek to question and overcome Eurocentrism. These programs have been preceded by some public debate and are of professional interest due to their methodology and objectives. The new museographies are scheduled to be completed in 2028.

The growth in the number of exhibitions using XR technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, mixed reality, holography, 360º, etc. continues, as does the focus on their possible implementation in museums that continue to offer an analog experience.

### **Training and debate events**

Public administrations and other organizations have organized conferences and seminars on current issues. For example:

- ♣ Sustainability: ICOM Spain dedicated its 4th Museology Conference to “Stored collections: (re)defining and (re)organising. The challenge of environmental and social sustainability.” Similarly, the 8th Cultural Heritage Conference organised by the Catalan Cultural Heritage Agency focused on “Sustainability and climate transition.”
- ♣ Accessibility, digital strategy, and artificial intelligence: The 10th Conference of the Observatory of Audiences of Catalonia’s Cultural Heritage was dedicated to new

hybrid audiences and digital and face-to-face coexistence in museums. “Smart Museums” was the title of the 4th International Congress on Museums and Digital Strategies, organized by REMED and the Polytechnic University of Valencia. The 6th Confluences Space promoted by the Network of Local Museums of the Barcelona Provincial Council was entitled “Museums in the era of fake news: combatting misinformation from heritage institutions.”

♣ Intercultural mediation and participation: The Provincial Museum Network of Lugo dedicated its edition of Digital Strategies in Social Museology to reflecting on diversity and intercultural dialogue. The Gabeiras Foundation dedicated its 4th Autumn Conference on Cultural Law to the participation of communities in museums and other cultural institutions.

♣ Other social functions: Conference on “Museum Initiatives and Healthcare” organised by the Ethnological Museum of Valencia and the University of the Basque Country.

♣ Decolonisation: The 25th Conference on Museums and Education at the Maritime Museum of Barcelona was dedicated to “Tools for the Decolonisation of Museums.”

The Prado National Museum has launched a Comprehensive Museum Management Programme, which will run for the first time in the 2025-2026 academic year.

Although in a broader thematic context, it is worth noting that Mondiacult 2025 was held in Barcelona.

**Carmen Valdés**

## SWEDEN

In 2025 19,6 million visitors came to museums in Sweden, with a population of 10,6 million people. However, this is 1,8% less than in 2024. On the other hand, the number of visitors to museum websites and the number of people searching and using online collections and databases increased.

In the debate two topics have been in focus; financing of museums and a cultural canon. The government has argued that museums should try to increase their own financing, by seeking sponsorship from private businesses, donations, or entrance fees. Many museums find this difficult. There is no tradition in Sweden for private sponsorships, very few private sources from which to apply, and few companies are willing to sponsor culture. The habit is to sponsor sports events. The national budget for culture is also low, 0,62 per cent of the total budget, which is the lowest level for 20 years. Many museums are struggling with their finances. On the positive side, the situation concerning the buildings of a few national museums seem to be getting better. This was a huge topic in 2024, when museums were forced to close due to lacking maintenance or high costs for rent. There are now discussions to find new ways of calculating rent for some large cultural institutions. For many smaller museums the situation is still severe.

A canon for culture was presented in 2025, which consists of 100 books, buildings, inventions and phenomena with which the population should be familiar. The discussions have mainly dealt with how the cultural canon is to be implemented. The proposal is that a permanent exhibition should be built at a large museum, and a foundation should be installed for the purpose of spreading the canon. The proposal has mainly been met with criticism, for example claims it is against the museum law to decide what kind of exhibition a museum must establish, or criticism against the funding of the implementation, which will be taken from the budget for culture.

An interesting report published during 2025 came from the national authority for collecting statistics for culture. They published a report about volunteers in museums. It concludes that 13% of all work in the museum sector is carried out by volunteers, corresponding to 894 full-time employees. This reflects engagement and enthusiasm of many people for museums, in particular many small museums which are often entirely run by volunteers. Larger museums have fewer volunteers.

During 2025 the focus of the government has also been on merging different governmental authorities, in order to have fewer authorities and less administration. From January 2026 the Museum of Modern Art is merged with the Museum for

Architecture and Design, and the Museum for Transport and Maritime Life is merged with the Museum of Military History. The reorganisation has caused some concerns.

Another event which caused discussions was six climate activists who glued themselves to a painting at the National Museum of Fine Art. They were then acquitted of the charges, since their intention was not to harm the painting. This caused debate and worry among museums, since they fear other activists might do similar things, knowing that they might not be punished for what they do.

**Anna Hansen**

## SWITZERLAND

### **Provenance research**

The Swiss parliament created – finally – an independent national commission for historically problematic cultural heritage, which will reinforce the efforts of museums to make provenance research. On this subject, the tensions about the Bührle Collection at the Kunsthaus Zürich and its provenance research have reached another level, at least a deeper round of provenance research and a new presentation of the collection are planned. The tensions between politicians, museums, foundations and the interests are a frequent subject in the press, the foundation is even considering leaving the Kunsthaus as an option. Otherwise, provenance research is ongoing in many museums.

### **New and reopened museums**

The Jewish Museum of Switzerland in Basel moved to a new building, with much more space for its permanent collections and temporary expositions. Two major cultural institutions of the “Museum city of Winterthur” reopened after extensive renovations: the Museum Reinhart am Stadtgarten in Winterthur, an important art museum, which is now also hosting the masterpieces of the former Museum Briner und Kern, and the Museum of Photography. The Swiss Shooting Museum (Schützenmuseum) in Bern gives a much fresher overview over the history of shooting societies in Switzerland, nevertheless the vast majority of its huge collections disappeared in the storage while an online inventory is lacking, which is unfortunately a major problem in many museums. A positive exception is the Foundation for Art, Culture and History (SKKG), which made its entire collection public through an online database.

### **Museum support and continuing education**

ICOM Switzerland together with the Swiss Museums Association offers a vast choice of courses for people working in museums. The annual conference focused on the impact of digital transformation. Other institutions complement the large choice of courses, among them the Swiss Institute for Art History (SIK), the Foundation for Art, Culture and History (SKKG) as well as several universities, especially Neuchâtel. Once per year, Cultura Suisse, a fair for museums and cultural heritage conservation, takes place over three days in Zürich.

**New free guidebooks for museums edited by Swiss Museums Association VMS  
(printed version and online on [www.museums.ch](http://www.museums.ch))**

(1) Fundraising for museums.

(2) Integrated Pest Management

**Christian Hörack**



## TÜRKİYE

In recent years, museum practice in Türkiye has undergone a qualitative transformation rather than a quantitative expansion. Museums are no longer limited to displaying collections; they are increasingly evolving into cultural platforms that strengthen social memory, encourage participation, embrace multiple voices, and engage with contemporary issues.

This transformation has acquired a distinctive character through Türkiye's deep historical background, its strong tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and the expanding cultural policies of local governments.

### **Participatory and Community-Based Museum Practices**

In Türkiye, museums - particularly those operated by municipalities and private institutions - are increasingly moving away from an authoritative narrative position and instead creating space for narratives co-produced with local communities.

Oral history projects, local memory initiatives, and voluntary contributions have become integral components of museum content. This approach transforms museums from institutions that merely narrate the past into living and shared spaces of memory.

One of the strongest examples of participatory and community-based museum practice in Türkiye can be observed in oral history and local memory-focused exhibitions developed within city museums. In such projects, the museum ceases to be the sole producer of content and instead functions as a collaborative platform working together with local residents, craftspeople, citizens from different generations, and volunteers. In one such application, narratives related to everyday life, working cultures, and social relationships of the city were collected through interviews with local participants, personal archives, photographs, and memories. While the exhibition was framed within a curatorial structure, the experiences of city residents were placed at the very centre of the narrative. Visitors were not positioned merely as observers of the past, but as active participants invited to share their own stories.

This approach shifts the museum away from being an authoritative narrator of history toward a meeting space where social memory is collectively produced. At the same time, the museum assumes the role of a public space that fosters dialogue between different generations and social groups and strengthens a sense of local belonging.

Such practices demonstrate that participatory museology in Türkiye is not merely a theoretical discussion but has become - by 2025 - a sustainable and evolving practice with concrete manifestations in the field. The memory centre initiatives developed by

the Hrant Dink Foundation, which focus on memory, human rights, and social dialogue, stand among the strong and qualified examples of this approach in Türkiye.

### **The Central Role of Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Intangible cultural heritage has become one of the strongest and most distinctive components of museum practice in Türkiye. Traditional performing arts, crafts, rituals, oral narratives, and everyday life practices are addressed through exhibitions, workshops, performances, and educational programmes. This approach prioritises not only the preservation of cultural heritage but also its transmission through living practice. Türkiye's experience in this field offers a closely observed laboratory for European museum practice.

By 2025, intangible cultural heritage has moved beyond a supporting role in museums and has become a central element of exhibition-making and programming. One of the most notable examples of this transformation is the reinterpretation of the traditional shadow theatre Karagöz within the museum context.

In Karagöz-focused museum practices implemented in 2025, this tradition was not presented merely as a historical object or stage art. Instead, it was approached as a living cultural practice through master-apprentice relationships, live performances, workshops, and educational programmes. In this process, the museum space was conceived both as a learning environment and as a meeting point, enabling intergenerational transmission.

Such practices address the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, not as a passive documentation process, but as a sustainable transmission based on experience, participation, and interaction. The Karagöz example demonstrates how museums can bring traditional knowledge and narratives together with contemporary museological approaches and reinterpret intangible cultural heritage within today's social context.

### **The Growing Role of Local Governments in Museum Practice**

In recent years, local governments in Türkiye have increasingly approached museums as integral components of urban policy. Urban identity, collective memory, social inclusion, and relationships with public space have become fundamental elements of museum projects. This perspective positions museums not merely as exhibition venues, but as actors that directly influence the cultural and social life of the city.

One of the most visible manifestations of this transformation is the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sites as cultural and artistic spaces. Particularly in large cities, former production, energy, or transportation facilities have been refunctioned by

municipalities into museums and cultural centres, contributing both to the preservation of historical continuity and to the reactivation of public spaces. Examples such as Hasanpaşa Gazhanesi and Çubuklu Silos in Istanbul stand out as notable cases where industrial heritage has been reinterpreted through contemporary museological approaches.

This new approach adopted by local governments is not limited to the transformation of physical spaces. Through exhibitions focusing on urban history, neighbourhood-scale narratives, and everyday life, local stories are made visible, and museums become places where residents can connect with their own histories. The adoption of contemporary exhibition techniques and interdisciplinary approaches further strengthens museums' accessibility to diverse social groups.

By 2025, these museum practices developed by local governments in Türkiye demonstrate that museums are being positioned not only as sites of cultural production, but also as strategic tools for urban transformation, revitalisation of public space, and enhancement of social interaction. These examples reveal that local governments have become key actors in shaping urban vision through museology.

### **Interpretive Use of Digital Tools**

In Türkiye, digital technologies are increasingly being used in museums not as visual “spectacle,” but as interpretive tools that support historical narratives and strengthen the relationship between the visitor and the site. Rather than overshadowing exhibition content, digital elements function as complementary layers that facilitate the understanding of historical context.

This approach is particularly significant in terms of accessibility and pedagogical impact. Visual and auditory forms of narration make content more comprehensible for different age groups and learning styles, contributing to the creation of inclusive learning environments in museums.

As of 2025, video mapping applications designed for historic buildings and urban narratives stand out as concrete examples of the interpretive use of digital tools in Türkiye. In these applications, digital technology is employed as a temporary, content-driven narrative medium that reveals the historical layers of architectural structures and enables visitors to establish a meaningful connection with place.

### **Resilience, Trauma, and Museums**

In this context, museums are increasingly perceived not only as structures in need of protection, but also as spaces that support social resilience and collective recovery.

Accessibility and environmental sustainability remain ongoing and evolving areas of discussion within museum practice in Türkiye. Beyond physical access, increasing importance is placed on making content understandable and inclusive for different age groups and social communities. Particularly in museums housed in historic buildings, efforts are being made to develop new approaches that balance conservation requirements with accessibility needs.

## **Conclusion**

Rather than directly replicating global museum trends, museum practice in Türkiye increasingly reinterprets international museological debates through its own historical, social, and cultural context. This adaptive approach enables museums to respond to local needs while remaining engaged with broader European and global discussions.

The developments observed in participatory practices, the central positioning of intangible cultural heritage, the expanding role of local governments, the interpretive use of digital tools, and the growing emphasis on resilience and accessibility collectively indicate a structural transformation within the museum field in Türkiye. Museums are increasingly positioned as spaces of dialogue, learning, and social engagement, rather than as static sites of display.

In this sense, Türkiye offers a dynamic and valuable field of practice for examining inclusive, community-oriented, and resilience-based museum approaches. The experiences emerging from Türkiye contribute meaningfully to European museum discourse by demonstrating how global frameworks can be translated into locally grounded and socially responsive museological models.

**Dilek Yıldız Karakaş**

## UKRAINE

Unfortunately, despite all the hopes of the Ukrainian museum community, the year 2025 has not brought significant positive changes, moreover there were 34 museum institutions destroyed by the Russian army within a year, which is the biggest number since 2022, making it a total of 133 museums damaged or destroyed since the start of the full-scale invasion. Thus, the museum work continues to focus on various vectors, with evacuation of the collections being the highest priority. In 2025 the small team of up to 10 people from the Kharkiv Historical Museum named after M. Sumtsov, being the regional scientific and methodological institution, managed to evacuate 24 museum collections, while the evacuation of Zaporizhzhya and Dnipro local museums is still ongoing. The Ukrainian army is providing extraordinary assistance in this process, as there are numerous museum workers - archaeologists, historians, restorers among the soldiers, helping evacuate the Steppe artefacts - ancient sculptures, located in the open air, which belong to the local communities of the frontline territories, and are a part of the state Museum Fund of Ukraine. The process of evacuation has become slightly easier and more organised, as the museum community has analysed and acknowledged the mistakes made in the chaos of 2022, and the shift of the frontline was more predictable in 2025.



At the same time all the museums, including the relocated ones from the temporarily occupied territories, continue their exhibition work, engaging the communities, and while it is more or less comfortable to do this in the museums of the Western and Central Ukraine, as their collections remain safeguarded, yet on site, the relocated museums which lost their collections due to the extremely fast occupation of their regions by the Russian army, have to form new collections in their new locations,

primarily in Central Ukraine. They gather artefacts and oral history from the internally displaced people of their region, not only renewing their collections but reuniting their community of people of all ages around the local cultural identity they long to preserve. For example, the twice relocated Luhansk Museum of local lore, while presenting an exhibition of the few artefacts they've managed to collect during the evacuation of the team, met the representatives of the internally displaced community from Luhansk, which started bringing family relics they took with them in exile, after learning that the whole collection was lost. In 2025 that gave a start to an international project "Museum in a suitcase", that tells the stories of the relocated families and their family artefacts, demonstrating the thousand-year-old continuity of the Ukrainian culture and history in the Eastern Steppe part of the country, which Russian imperialistic propaganda tried to appropriate throughout centuries.

The destroyed and damaged museums, located on the Ukrainian territory close to the forefront, continue their work by transforming the rest of their premises into cultural hubs for local communities. For example, the Okhtyrka history museum, completely destroyed in 2022, with the support of the World Monuments Fund (USA) restored their basement, making it a safe shelter for the locals, and since 2023 has been organising exhibitions, discussions, lectures and even a big documentary film festival on the location. Others, with their teams dispersed all over Ukraine as internally displaced citizens, shifted their focus to online promotion of their local history and art, sharing their digitised collections via the internet and conducting series of lectures, raising the awareness of Ukrainians regarding the Ukrainian essence of the Eastern Ukrainian lands.





Unfortunately, the museum community of Ukraine has suffered a great loss in 2025 - the head of the collections department of the Galagan Art Museum (Chernihiv) Maryna Hrytsenko was killed in August in the line of duty while trying to evacuate two wounded Ukrainian soldiers. She was most highly recognised by her peers, as in 2022, while the city of Chernihiv was for over a month under siege by the Russian army, her museum was continuously attacked by missiles and because the museum director was not in the institution, she moved into the museum to live there with her underage daughter in order to safeguard the collection, with no security, electricity, water or heat. She managed to dismantle the exhibits and hide them in the basement, nevertheless, one of the attacks damaged numerous valuable paintings. After the de-occupation of the region, she made sure all the damaged artefacts were restored by the National Research Restoration Centre of Ukraine and afterwards she mobilised as a paramedic. In 2025 the museum community of Ukraine, represented by the Ukrainian Museum Association, applied for the Europa Nostra Heritage Champions Awards for her achievement to be recognised by her European colleagues.



Overall, the museum life in Ukraine continues, despite all the challenges, through blackouts, when museum workers conduct guided tours with flashlights, under continuous, almost everyday missile and drone attacks. And we are extremely pleased to state that the number of visitors in many museums has increased even in comparison with the pre-Covid times, as people perceive museums not only as living proof that normal life goes on, but also as humanitarian and cultural hubs, which provide both intellectual and physical assistance to refugees, veterans and everyone in need.

**Milena Chorna**

## UNITED KINGDOM

Many of the themes from this report are familiar from previous annual updates; despite many good news stories, the museums and heritage sector in the UK continues to face significant financial challenges with visitor numbers still below pre-pandemic levels, particularly in non-national museums. A report based on Arts Council's Annual survey of accredited non-nationals for the period 2019 – 2024 revealed visitor numbers down 10% with 3 in 10 reporting a drop of more than 25%.

National Museums, largely funded by central government are better able to attract support from funders and sponsors – institutions such as the Science Museum and the London Museum received substantial multi-million-pound donations in 2025. Government support supports free admission to these museums, something many museums outside the capital are not able to offer; local authority museums are still largely free, although 2025 saw many councils debating the introduction of charges. It is probably true to say that London, where most national museums are situated, has recovered better in terms of inbound tourist traffic from overseas.

Museums and galleries also continue to face increased energy and insurance costs along with changes to government tax contributions borne by employers which have added to running costs. The result has been reduced opening hours, some closures and job cuts. Even national museums have had to make staff redundant – the Science Museum, Tate and Royal Academy all announced job cuts, English Heritage, which runs a number of high-profile museums and sites including Stonehenge also reported that they were reducing headcount by 500 in the second half of the year. Several museums have closed, the highest profile being the River & Rowing Museum at Henley, and others have made changes to governance, the most significant being at the pioneering Ironbridge Gorge Museum which has been transferred into the care of The National Trust, from its previous independent Trust status.

A major concern in the UK (and across Europe) is the long-term condition of heritage, particularly museum and gallery buildings that need long term restoration. Simon Thurley, Chair of the [National Lottery Heritage Fund](#), which has invested more than £8 billion in projects since 1994, highlighted the need to renew museums, galleries and sites, argued that physical infrastructure is in a worse condition than it has been for 50 years when he announced a new strategy to invest a further £3.6 billion in the next decade. In addition to his support, Arts Council England has pledged to support museums with further funding through its MEND (Museums Estate & Development Fund)



[Interesting research undertaken in 2024 and 2025](#) has revealed changes in visitor patterns and motivation; value for money is not surprisingly very important, with a focus on creating memories rather than dwell time. Creating unique experiences and connections and generating stories that resonate is valued, and for many families, museums that provide children and adults with a great day is a vital element. On a micro level, people book later than in previous years, with 44% waiting until 48 hours before visiting. These changes in behaviour are prompting museums and galleries to look closely at not only their visitor offer but also their public facing programmes and ticketing models.

Despite all the challenges facing UK museums currently it is pleasing to report that across the sector, from large nationals to small volunteer-run sites, the stream of new exhibitions, events and activities continues. A number of projects came to fruition in 2025; [Birmingham's flagship museum and art gallery](#) reopened after major work, with exciting new content supported by a groundbreaking community engagement programme that will support the museums future development. This model of co-curation and collaborative work with local communities is a significant and growing feature of museum development; the SS Great Britain in Bristol, community researchers and an advisory group are working to support an exciting [new exhibition](#) due to open in July 2026 that marks a paradigm change in the way the museum develops new content. Another exciting redevelopment project that was delivered in 2025 was the amazing transformation of [Norwich Castle](#).

Examples of the ongoing work being done by museums at a regional level can be found in the report of [Museums Development South West](#), one of the strategic support networks supporting small and medium size museums and galleries outside the big cities.

Other issues that remain high on the agenda for museums in the UK and elsewhere are repatriation and decolonisation and workforce diversity along with the growing role of AI which is a topic of concern across Europe. The use of AI to assist museums in completing funding applications has been the subject of debate, along with its role on social media and no doubt this debate will continue on an international level for some time to come!

The last topic of note in this report is one that has already had reverberations across Europe, that of a historic loan of the Bayeux Tapestry, agreed following a state visit by French President Emmanuel Macron in 2025. The tapestry is to be displayed at the British Museum, and treasures from all four UK nationals will provide items to be exhibited in France. The proposed loan was discussed previously in 2018 but abandoned after concerns about the fragility of the textile. [Similar concerns have been voiced on both sides of the Channel](#) along with worries about the safe transport of this

iconic item, with artist David Hockney describing the plan as 'madness'. Plans continue to be developed with a projected opening date for the exhibit of the tapestry being September 2026.

**Tim Bryan**