

## REPORT

### **Thinking Ahead on Film Institutions – Spotlight on Young Audiences: Exchange on Good Practices**

by **Young Horizons Industry**

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On 1 October 2025, during the Young Horizons Industry forum in Warsaw in Poland, the **Think Tank “Thinking Ahead on Film Institutions – Spotlight on Young Audiences”** brought together representatives from 14 European film funds and agencies from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom to exchange knowledge and good practices around developing, financing, and promoting audiovisual content for young audiences.

The representatives shared innovative approaches to foster meaningful, relevant, and inspiring film experiences for children and young people. The discussions highlighted the challenges of reaching audiences aged 8–15, film circulation barriers across countries, and the need to balance meaningful content with audience appeal. The participants identified feasible opportunities, including better collaboration across the value chain, using existing structures, such as the European Writers Club (EWC) or the European Producers Club (EPC), and actively involving young audiences in creative processes. The Think Tank emphasised a mindset change, strategic coordination, and optimising resources to strengthen audiovisual content for children and young audiences across Europe.

While not all film institutions have their dedicated programs for youth content, all shared a strong commitment and personal interest in building greater visibility, access, and understanding of this important audience segment. The discussions centred on how to collaborate more effectively, coordinate existing resources, and influence cultural mindsets to ensure that young viewers remain connected to European cinema.

## Objectives

The Think Tank aimed to:

1. Exchange experiences and strategies between European film funds and agencies.
2. Identify common challenges and potential areas for cooperation.
3. Define specific steps to strengthen support for young audience content at local/regional, national, and European levels within the film funds' power.

## Key Suggestions from Participating Countries

### Austria

- Dedicated department within the institute for young audiences.
- Fixed annual budget to ensure consistent support for youth-focused projects.

### France

- The need for better European coordination in investment and development.
- Deeper collaboration between European national and regional film funds.
- An innovative idea to create a short film compilation offering multiple perspectives on youth.

### Belgium

- Bringing together diverse stakeholders across the cinema value chain on a European level.
- Forming a permanent working group or Think Tank dedicated to young audiences.
- Focus on one segment, e.g., on live-action feature films targeting a clearly defined age group.
- The need to support young filmmakers who are also parents.
- A “Winter Special” film idea composed of short films from various regions.

### Poland

- Access to updated insightful research into what young audiences want to see.
- Film funds should balance audience demand with challenging, meaningful content.
- Focusing initially on a specific segment, e.g., live-action films for ages 8–15.

## Questions Raised

- What could we do to change attitudes regarding children's film – ensuring that this is not treated as a mere tick-box exercise in funding?
- Why are we losing the 8–15 age group, and how can we re-engage them with European cinema?

## Challenges Identified

- **Circulation barriers:** There is strong content available, but it rarely travels between European countries.
- **Cultural nuances:** Differences in humour and culture make cross-border appeal difficult.
- **Distribution gaps:** A lack of working distribution structures limits access for young audiences.
- **Identity:** How do we get movies with an identity without being nationalistic?
- **Focus on young audiences:** How can we draw more attention to films for young viewers at festivals such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, etc.?
- **Industry recognition:** There is not much recognition in the industry and at general award ceremonies for young audience content.
  - ☐ Writers, Directors and Producers need to see films for young audiences as Plan A, not B or C.
- **Cinema attendance:** There is a need to keep the European cinema tradition alive by bringing young audiences back into theatres.
- **Fragmented objectives:** Diverse stakeholder interests (producers, sales agents, educators) make cooperation within working groups complex.
- **Perception of “education”:** The term carries a negative connotation for some young viewers.
- **Limited audience understanding:** Few funds have schemes dedicated to audience research and awareness (DFI – Danish Film Institute – cited as a positive example).
- **Festival access:** It is difficult and expensive for European children's films to secure screenings in other markets.
- **Market size and generational shifts:** Smaller markets struggle to sustain consistent visibility.
- **Local visibility:** Local children's films often fail to reach their own national audiences.
- **Transferability:** The Danish model, while inspiring, is difficult to replicate elsewhere due to financial and structural constraints.
- **Coordination challenges:** Europe hosts many initiatives, but better alignment is needed.

- **Broadcaster influence:** Film funds have limited control over broadcasters, who play a crucial role in reaching audiences.

### Possible Solutions

- **Collaborate more effectively** on distribution to strengthen cross-border visibility.
- **Develop a comprehensive strategy** that includes all stakeholders at local/regional, national, and European levels.
- As public funding tightens, **collaboration and shared strategy** become even more vital.
- **Adopt the Danish mindset:** Create working groups similar to Denmark's collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, DFI, and DR (public broadcasters).
- **Leverage existing structures:** Use structures like the EWC or EPC — which already address the shortage of European TV drama — to also advocate for children's content.
- **Improve communication** between film funds to coordinate initiatives and align priorities.
- **Optimise resource allocation:** “We don't necessarily need more money — we need to coordinate and allocate existing funds better”, possibly through quotas or benchmarks.
- **Political advocacy:** Support or attach an association to raise awareness and lobby for policy support for young audiences.
- **Foster local cinema culture:** Encourage children and families to return to theatres and celebrate cinema-going as an achievement.
- **Platform diversification:** Bring high-quality stories and IPs to short-form platforms popular among young people, while keeping cinema at the centre.
- **Audience research/awareness:** foster collaboration with agencies, such as Publikum at Will & Agency, to improve audience awareness and development.
- **Youth participation:** Include young people as consultants to give feedback on projects in development.
- **Closer producer–distributor cooperation** to enhance market reach and sustainability.
- **Institutional capacity building:** Educate staff within national film institutions, establish dedicated youth departments, and encourage cross-departmental collaboration to ensure children's content receives consistent attention.

### **Possible Allies and Existing Good Structures Shared by Participants**

- Success depends on the right people in the right positions to drive initiatives forward.
- In Croatia, cinema clubs are supported by the Croatian Audiovisual Centre with equipment and resources.
- The Polish Producers Alliance (KIPA), together with Netflix as a commercial partner, runs film workshops for young people in underdeveloped areas, showcasing a variety of industry roles beyond directing or cinematography.

### **Common Discussion Themes**

#### **1. Focus on What Funds Can Control**

Participants emphasised the importance of working within existing frameworks, adjusting institutional priorities, and ensuring sustainable funding for children and youth content.

#### **2. Exploring New Opportunities**

The group discussed practical strategies, such as shared development programs, research initiatives, and creative collaborations.

#### **3. Shared Vision**

All participants agreed on the importance of making local content more visible and accessible and nurturing a European mindset towards children and young audiences.

### **Three Most Feasible Opportunities Identified**

#### **1. Using Existing Structures**

Leverage networks such as the EWC and EPC to foster a stronger mindset and exchange around children's films.

#### **2. Collaboration Across the Value Chain**

Build a European-level working group gathering film funds, producers, distributors, broadcasters, educators, and youth representatives.

#### **3. Including Young People in the Creative Process**

Involve young audiences directly in idea development, testing, and feedback to ensure authentic and engaging storytelling.

## Next Steps and Goals

- **Knowledge Sharing:** Encourage ongoing exchange of best practices and adapt existing strategies rather than reinventing new ones.
- **Eurimages Quotas:** Explore setting quotas for family and youth content within the Eurimages framework.
- **Utilize Existing Tools:** Build on existing resources, such as the Kids Kino Toolbox from Sweden, to enhance the cinema experience for the small visitors and adapt them across countries.
- **Foster Co-production:** Support international co-productions, especially involving local broadcasters and distributors.
- **Pilot Funding Structures:** Create funding schemes, including those for pilot projects targeting young audiences.

## Defining Goals for Film Funders to Adapt

1. **Establish Quotas**  
Introduce targets for children & youth-oriented films and animation (e.g., minimum of three productions per year).
2. **Change Institutional Mindset**  
Integrate children's film as a strategic priority in funding calls and program design.
3. **Annual Reporting**  
Include a dedicated section on children's and youth films in institutional **annual** reports.
4. **Support Circulation and Access**  
Facilitate cross-regional sharing and distribution of quality children's films to reach wider audiences.

## Conclusion

This Think Tank marked an important step towards building a shared European strategy for young audience content. By emphasising collaboration, inclusivity, and the intelligent use of existing frameworks, film institutions across Europe can ensure that young people have access to high-quality, culturally rich cinema that speaks to their experiences and imagination. Film funders can become the right advocates for young audiences. The discussions highlighted that

supporting young audiences is not only a matter of funding, but of shaping a mindset and fostering a pan-European creative ecosystem that values the next generation of film viewers and storytellers.

As a first step, the Think Tank brought together European film funds and agencies to exchange insights and define shared priorities. The next step will be to expand this dialogue by involving a broader range of stakeholders across the entire cinema value chain — from producers, distributors, and broadcasters to educators and audience experts. Establishing another Think Tank dedicated to young audiences would allow these perspectives to come together, shaping concrete next steps and common goals for the future.

The Think Tank has been carried out with the support of the Polish Film Institute.