VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!

Festival Report & Evaluation

Our fabulous journey
to let your heart be heard!

LET YOUR HEART BE HEARD

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!

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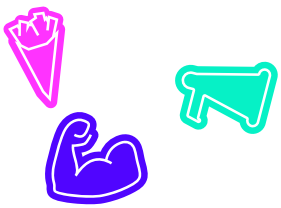
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INTRODUCTION

In 2023, on the third day of the Bologna Festival, I remember telling a friend from another choir that I was starting to feel tired because I was rushing about all over the place so as not to miss a thing at the festival: from one venue to another, from the centre of Bologna to the Village, from a concert by my favourite choir to a chance discovery in the street... At the same time, I had to cope with all the emotions that came with seeing old friends again, meeting new ones, sharing moments of joy, and the emotions stirred by a song or a performance...

She said to me, 'It's like being in a washing machine!'

Various Voices turns us inside out. We come out of it drained, exhausted, wrung out. But what could be more unique or enjoyable than such an experience taking over our lives for five days!

What Various Voices means cannot be put into words. It has to be experienced. From inside the washing machine.

The Brussels Team has just spent six years inside the washing machine. It has been an adventure full of twists and turns. There has been laughter; there have been tears. There has been impatience; there has been stress. There has been the joy of making a dream come true; there has been the fear that it might turn into a nightmare.



Today, we invite you to dive back into the washing machine with us. You'll relive familiar moments, and no doubt discover many things you did not know.

Because to make these five festival days a reality, it took years of work. A lot of work, but also a great deal of commitment, passion and love for our LGBTQI+ choir community.

Join us on this fabulous journey!

Christophe Cordier
Festival Chair


BEFORE
THE
FESTIVAL

BIDDING PROCESS

For some members of the Festival Team, organising the festival started ten years ago.

It was in 2016, when we were still singing in a different choir, that the idea of hosting the festival in Brussels took shape. Several of us embarked on the bidding process for Various Voices 2022. Long story short (we could write a hundred pages on this subject...), this project fell through a few weeks before Various Voices Munich 2018 and ultimately led us to set up Sing Out Brussels! a few months later.

In March 2020, as Belgium went into lockdown due to Covid, Legato launched the call for applications for Various Voices 2026. The Board of Sing Out Brussels! set about preparing an 'Expression of Interest' – a brief four-page document that already laid the foundations for our vision for the festival. This document was submitted to Legato in June 2020.

In October 2020, Brussels and Barcelona were invited to prepare the full application. Legato provided us with feedback on our initial proposal, and we revised our vision based on this feedback. Preparing the application file took nine months of work (a real labour of love!) to provide the most detailed picture of our project in terms of budget, funding, programme, pricing, artistic vision, festival venues, accommodation, partnerships, sustainability, legacy and so on. We were 'fortunate' to be able to carry out this work whilst Belgium was in lockdown, which meant we could easily free up time from our respective jobs to organise online meetings and prepare the application with the various potential partners.



In preparing the bid, we received support from the Convention Bureau at visit.brussels (the tourism promotion agency) and, in particular, from Margaux Huvelle. We benefited from the visit.brussels Support Programme, which aims to attract international events to Brussels. We were awarded a grant of €10,000, which enabled us to fund the design of the festival's logo, tagline and visual identity by Kidnap Your Designer (see the chapter 'Communication / graphic

identity'), as well as the production of the layout of the final bid-book and of the promotional video. The video was directed and edited by Julie Janssens, a member of Sing Out Brussels!, with a distinctly human and personal approach. Around ten members of Sing Out Brussels! featured in the video, which was filmed at various locations across Brussels, notably Bozar. This inspiring and joyful video, filmed in a single day in May 2021, played a major role in winning support for the festival.

We were also put in touch with MCI, a company specialising in conference organisation. Our contact, Dorothée Flament, helped us draw up an initial budget and a 'reverse schedule' detailing what needed to be done by when.

Our application and promotional video were submitted to Legato in June 2021. The Legato Board awarded our application an exceptional score of 98 per cent. In August, Legato's member choirs voted and overwhelmingly chose Brussels as the host city. Brussels' selection was officially announced in October 2021.

By this stage, we had already devoted 18 months' work to the festival without any certainty that we would be organising it. The adventure could now truly begin!

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026 ASBL

In March 2022, the Board members of Sing Out Brussels! officially established the non-profit organisation (ASBL – Association Sans But Lucratif) Various Voices Brussels 2026.

It took a few months of consideration to reach this point. Initially, we had hoped that the non-profit organisation Sing Out Brussels! would organise the festival. However, Legato required the creation of a separate legal entity. This was necessary to sign the contract and did cause some tension: we did not see the point of creating a second organisation made up of the same people, and we were concerned that we would not be able to benefit from the reputation of Sing Out Brussels!, which was already well-established with the public authorities providing funding.

In the end, Legato was right: organising the festival is a task in its own right that needed to be kept separate from the running of the choir. The budgets managed by the two organisations were incomparable. So was the workload.

Initially, the choir and the festival shared some Board members, but over time this quickly proved unmanageable for those involved, and from 2023 onwards, the associations had two clearly separate Boards. After a year of operating in this way, it became apparent that this was causing problems, as the choir and the festival were developing along different paths. We therefore decided that every meeting of each non-profit organisation should be organised in the presence of a Board member from the other organisation. This did not go without its difficulties: the Festival Team was entirely focused on a project that seemed distant to the other team but which was incredibly close for them, while the Choir Team was swamped by the day-to-day running of the choir and the planning of its own projects.

We often felt that there was 'the choir' (and its projects) and 'the festival' (which was a project that seemed to have little or no bearing on the choir). A few months before the festival, a particularly intense meeting took place between the two Boards, revealing a great deal of frustration, disarray and exhaustion amongst the Various Voices Festival Team. Following this, the two teams worked more closely together. But by then we were just three months away from the festival.

01

TO FUTURE TEAMS

We feel it is particularly important to pass this information on. Running a choir involves preparing concerts, managing recruitment and planning musical seasons, sometimes one or two years in advance. But the results of this work are quickly visible to the singers and bring immediate recognition. Running a festival involves working behind the scenes for years on a project that remains abstract and invisible to members (all the more so as new members join the choir every year and have never taken part in Various Voices). There is a significant risk of losing the link between the two projects, even though it is always one or more choirs that form the basis of the bid. Joint meetings, constant communication and regular presentations and workshops involving choir members are essential for maintaining this link.

PARTICIPATING CHOIRS

The number of LGBTQI+ choirs and music groups is constantly growing in Europe. Legato currently has **163** members! This growth is having an impact on the Various Voices festival, with each edition hosting more choirs than the last.

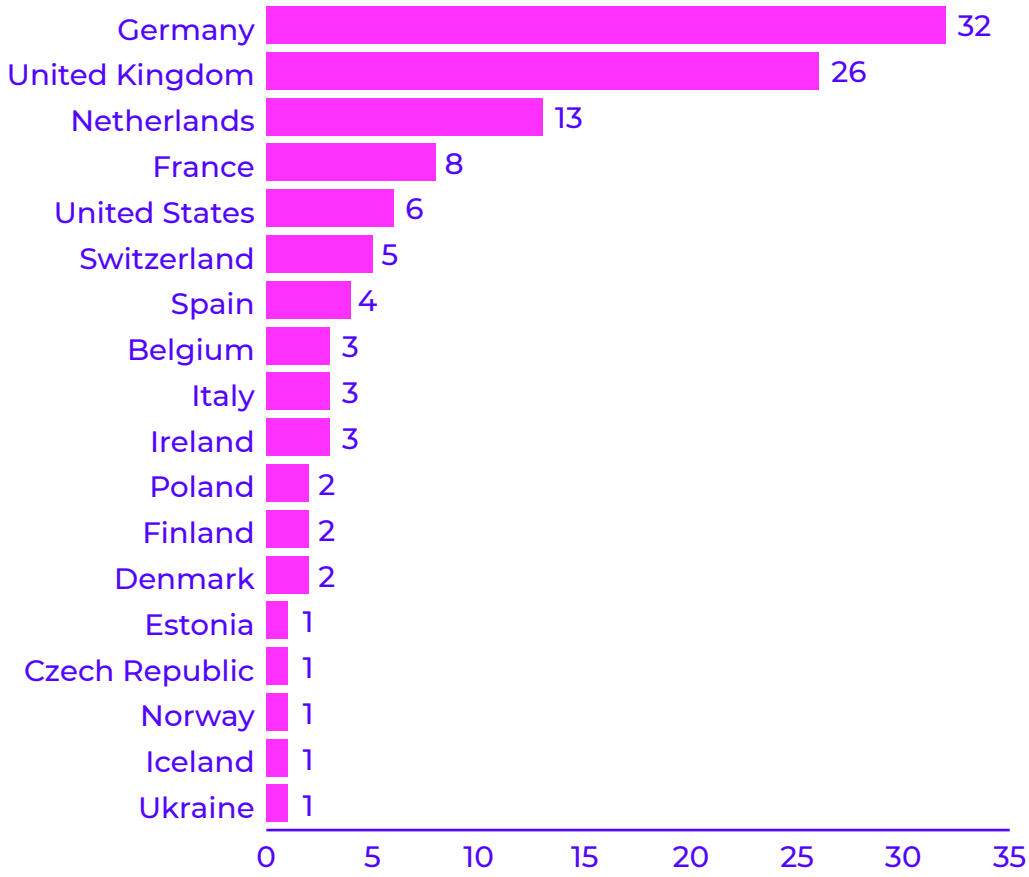
In 2023, **105** choirs took part in the Bologna festival. We estimated that Brussels could host just as many. To be on the safe side, given the planned duration of the festival and the number of venues our budget allowed us to hire, we set the maximum number of participating choirs at **120**.

Choir registration at the *Early Bird* price was possible from 1 September to 31 December 2024. Choirs were very enthusiastic as soon as registrations opened, with **46** signing up in September (over 30% of the festival's capacity). The pace then slowed. As we expected, there was a rush in December, with choirs rushing to register in time to benefit from the *Early Bird* rate. The festival's maximum capacity (120 choirs) was reached a few days before 31 December 2024. On the same day, we opened a waiting list. Over the weeks, **12** choirs joined the waiting list. Later, several choirs cancelled their registration for various reasons (too high participation fee for their members, ageing of the choir, reorganisation or dissolution of the choir...), meaning most of the choirs on the waiting list were able to register at the *Regular* rate. Those who didn't just decided not to take part.

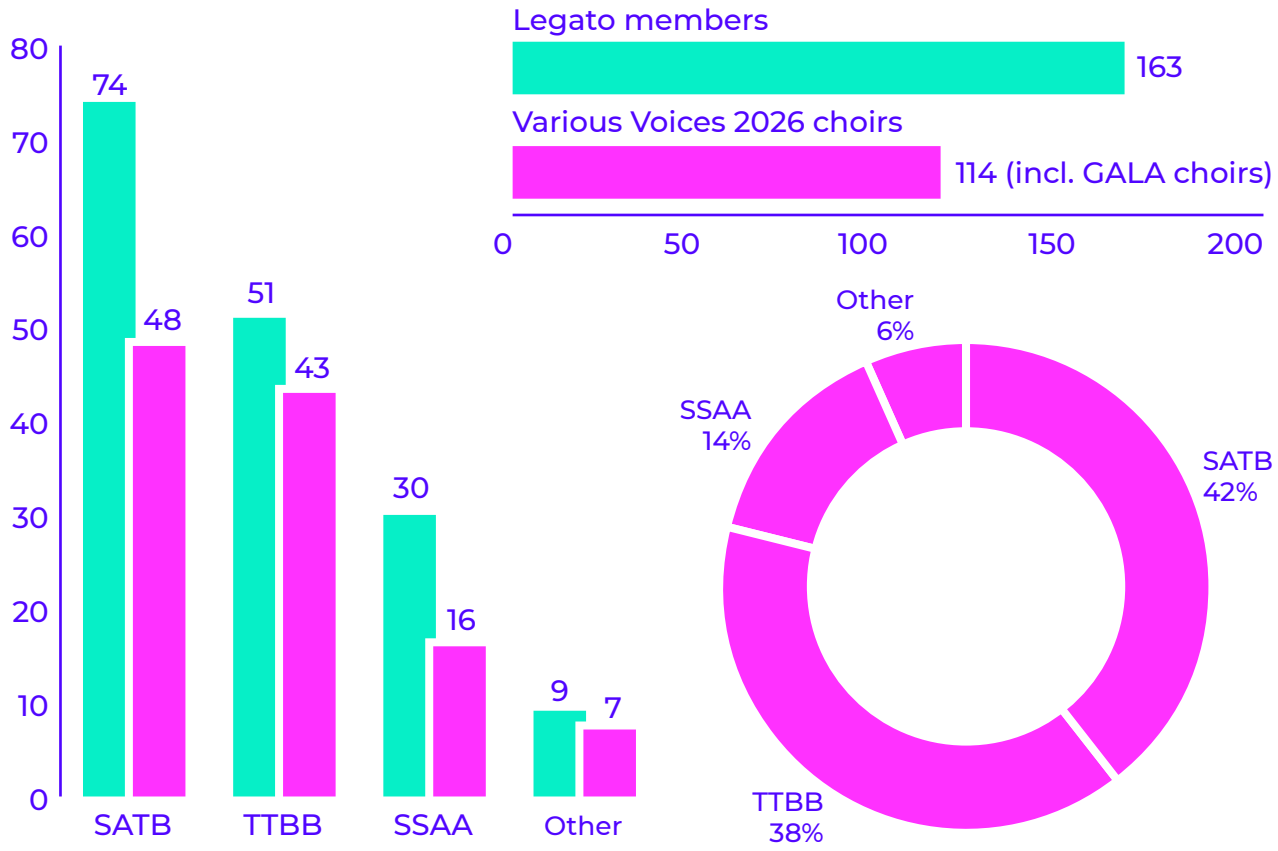


The Festival Team spared no efforts to increase diversity within the festival. In mid-November 2024, once the number of **60** registered choirs had been reached (half the festival's capacity), we sent personalised emails to around **60** choirs: choirs from missing countries, SSAA choirs, LGBTQI+ choirs that were not Legato members in missing EU countries, choirs bringing together transgender people, choirs from other continents. We informed them of our wish to see them participate in order to strengthen diversity within the festival. We also asked them what obstacles might prevent them from taking part in the event (price, date, etc.) and offered to meet them virtually. Unfortunately, we received very few responses.

Participating choirs by country



Choirs by vocal type





We also systematically invited the choirs that had joined Legato since registration opened to take part in the festival (**20** choirs). Most of them (**16**) actually signed up. However, we note that, among the **14** choirs that cancelled, **6** are choirs that joined Legato very recently, with the intention of participating in the festival. We noticed that, generally speaking, they were very poorly informed about what the festival is and how it's organised. Some choirs didn't understand why their members had to pay a registration fee. Some choirs wanted to finance the entire trip for their members (registration fees, transport and accommodation), which is totally unrealistic. Other choirs requested that their transport costs be covered by the festival, which is financially impossible within our budget. We sometimes had the impression that some choirs see the festival as a well-established professional organisation, whereas it's managed with a small team of volunteers that change every 4 years and has very limited resources!



Finally, for the waiting list management, rather than allocating places in chronological order, we awarded points on the basis of various criteria to enhance the diversity of the festival. Choirs that met the following criteria received more points: New Legato member; Never participated in the festival before; SSAA or 'Other' choir; Country not represented at the festival.

In the end, **114** choirs took part in the festival, whilst **14** choirs that had originally registered withdrew. **22** choirs (17% of the total) took part in the festival for the first time: **20** from Europe and **2** from the United States.

The registered choirs came from **18** countries, with most coming from Germany (**32** choirs), the United Kingdom (**26** choirs) and the Netherlands (**13** choirs). The vast majority of the participating choirs were European and we also welcomed **6** American choirs.



In terms of types of choir, most of the **114** choirs were SATB, followed by TTBB and SSAA. The remaining 'Other' choirs did not identify with this kind of nomenclature. If we compare this data with the Legato data, we can see that TTBB choirs were slightly over-represented at the festival and that SSAA choirs were under-represented. This bias was accentuated by the presence of GALA choirs.

01

TO LEGATO

Each new choir now has a buddy, a member of the Legato Board available to provide guidance and answer any questions about Legato. We recommend that the buddy also clearly informs new member choirs about how the festival is funded and organised.

02

TO FUTURE TEAMS

We recommend using the same methods (proactive email contact, offering an information session, criteria other than order of registration for managing the waiting list) in an attempt to increase the diversity of the festival.

PARTICIPATING DELEGATES

Delegate registration at the *Early Bird* rate took place from 01/01/2025 to 30/06/2025.

Based on the number of choirs registered by 31/12/2024, we estimated the number of potential Delegates at 4000 (80% of the total number of members of the registered choirs), instead of the 3500 initially budgeted.

In the overall festival budget, we had planned for a total of **2747** *Early Bird* registrants. In the end, **3348** Delegates finalised their *Early Bird* registration!

This exceptional number was both good and bad news. On the one hand, it demonstrated a very high level of interest in the festival. On the other hand, it meant that we had to revise our budget forecasts, because with the same total number of festival-goers (4,000), we would be losing money (€30.000) because of the lower number of registrations at the *Regular* rate.

Most Delegates waited until the last minute to register. At first, growth was steady: 51% from March to April, and 83% from April to May. Then June hit with a massive 330% spike.

Delegate registrations at the *Regular* rate took place from 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2025. The statistics for *Early Bird* rate registrations suggested that 90% of the members of each choir would register for the festival. We therefore revised our forecasts, increasing the number of expected festival-goers to 4,200 instead of 4,000, which also responded to a financial need to compensate for the loss caused by the excessive number of *Early Bird* registrations. We also decided that **4,200** was the maximum number allowed to guarantee festival-goers an optimal experience, taking into account the capacity of our venues. We clearly communicated this maximum limit, hoping to generate an acceleration in registrations, which did not happen.

As of 31 December 2025, the festival had **3,932** Delegates. The number of Delegates was therefore lower than our forecasts. This represented a further shortfall in revenue, estimated at around **€16,000**. As a result, we decided to keep registrations open at the *Regular* rate until our financial target is reached, which represents approximately 70 registrations. At the end of January 2026, the target of 4000 registrations was reached.



We then switched to the *Late* rate, until the end of March 2026. We didn't expect to have more than 15 registrations. But we actually received **144** more registrations even at that rather high price! This was of course a saving grace for our budget.

On the opening day of the festival, taking cancellations into account, the festival had **4,040** Delegates. Delegates from **18** countries took part in the festival. However, the Delegates were mainly from the United Kingdom (28%), Germany (21%), the Netherlands (10%), France (7%) and the USA (6%).

A distinctive feature of the festival is that it brings together all generations, which is to be commended in an LGBTQI+ community that often places a premium on youth. All age groups between 25 and 65 years have roughly equal representation, with people over 65 present (13%), too. Only the youngest generation is almost absent (1%). The estimated average age of the Delegates is **49** years.

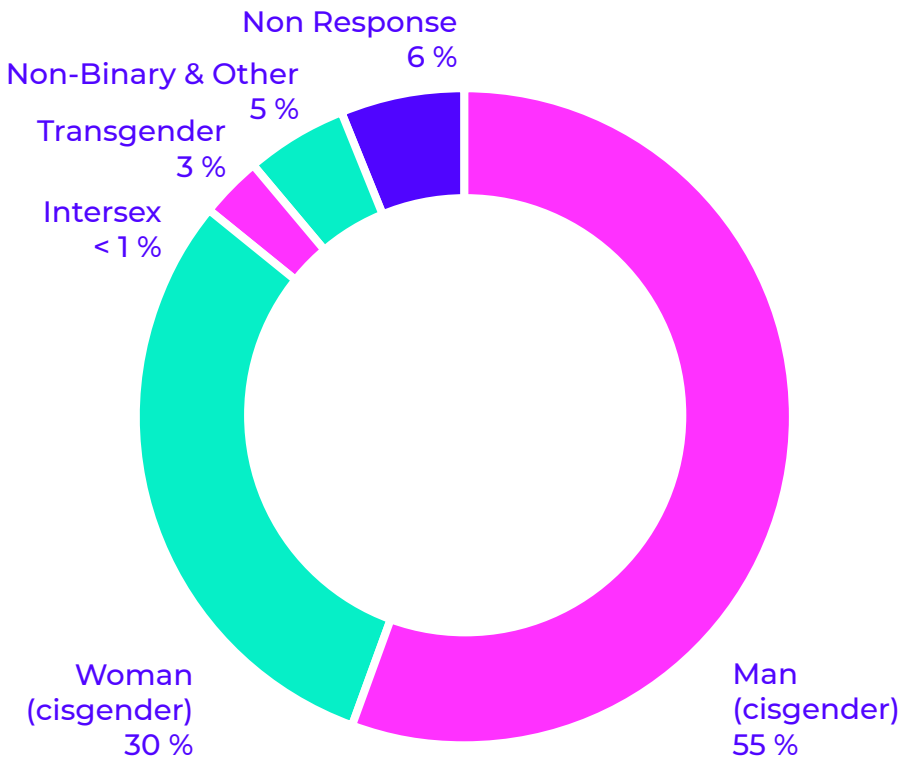
However, not all our choirs are diverse in terms of age. 15 choirs have an average age of under 40, while at the opposite end, another 15 have an average age of over 60. The two central classes are equally represented: 48 choirs have an average age between 40 and 50, and 42 choirs between 50 and 60.

The socio-economic profile of festival-goers is very homogeneous. **79%** of festival-goers are employed, **13%** are retired, and **3%** are students. The level of education is very high. **81%** of Delegates have completed higher education, while this percentage is **34%** in the EU general population aged 24-74.

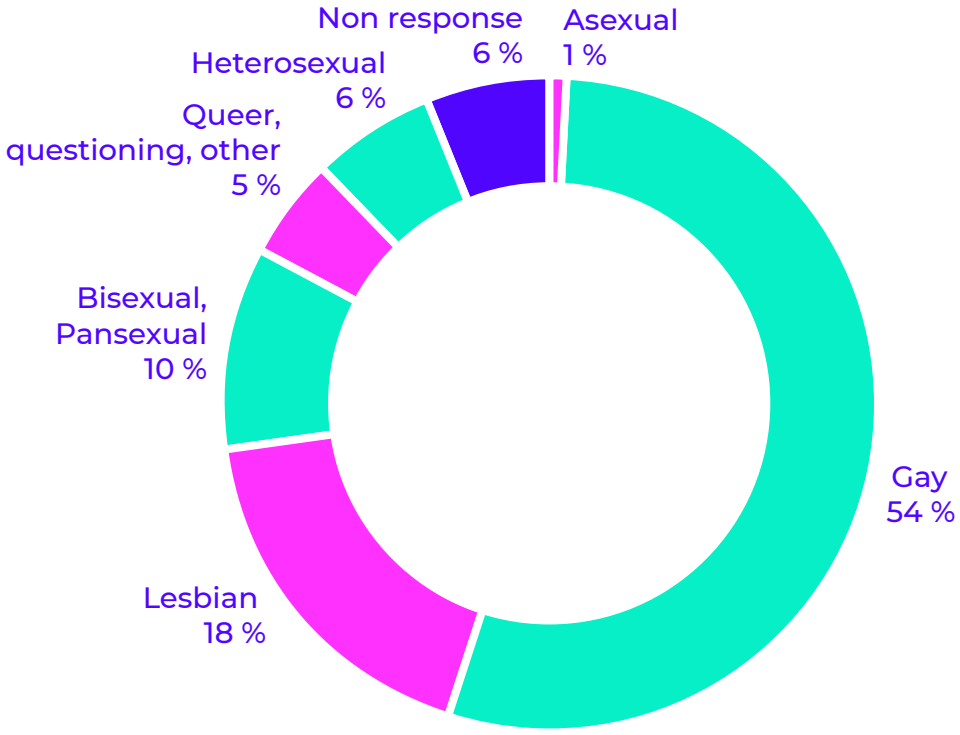



STATE PRISON
STATE PRISON

Delegates by gender*

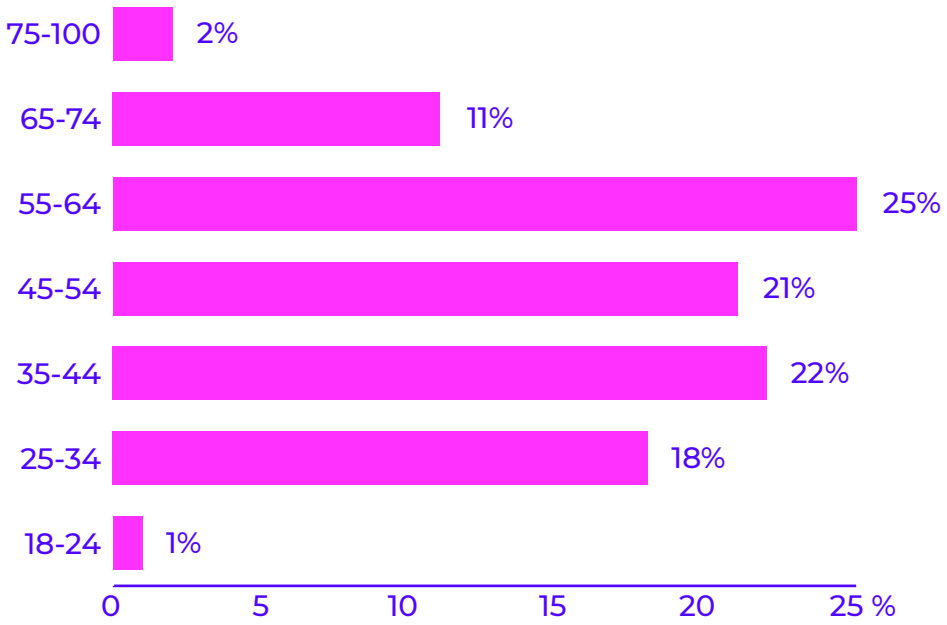


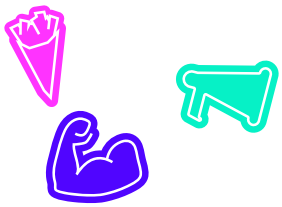
Delegates by sexual orientation*



* Answers grouped
by main categories

Delegates by age classes





In terms of gender identity and sexual orientation, the Delegates reflect the European LGBTQI+ choral landscape, where TTBB choirs are more numerous and have more members than SSAA choirs. The festival therefore remains overwhelmingly male-dominated (**55%**). Women account for **30%** of Delegates. It is interesting to note that **9%** of Delegates are transgender, non-binary or intersex. In terms of sexual orientation, **54%** of Delegates identify as gay, **18%** as lesbian, **10%** as bisexual or pansexual, and **6%** as heterosexual. **5%** are queer or questioning, and **0.8%** are asexual. It is interesting to cross-reference this data with age: the majority of transgender and non-binary people are under **44**, whilst those who are bi, pan, queer, questioning or asexual are under **34**.

REGISTRATION PLATFORM

The Integra platform was not the Festival Team's first choice.

In 2022, our organisation signed a contract with MCI, a Professional Congress Organizer. One of this company's roles was to set up the festival's registration platform.

In 2023, we realised, in the course of preparing the registration platform for choirs and Delegates, that MCI was not in a position to develop the 'planning' part of this platform, i.e. the part enabling choirs to enter their repertoire, technical requirements, etc., and enabling the festival organisers to plan concerts in the various venues. Furthermore, the high amount charged by MCI on each registration (as stipulated in the contract) was not really in line with the inclusive pricing sought by festival-goers and the budgetary control sought by our organisation. This led to the breach of contract with MCI in February 2024.

As an alternative for the planning part, we contacted Integra Planner (the platform used by Various Voices Munich 2018 and the festivals organised by Gala Choruses in the USA), as well as the Various Voices Bologna 2023 Team.

We first wanted to buy the platform used for the Bologna festival for the registration part. With a few adjustments to be made, we felt that this was the best choice to enable us to plan the festival as effectively as possible. The main reasons were the price, the maintenance service offered and the up-to-date design of the site. Against all expectations, a few days before signing the contract in March 2024, the person in charge of developing the Bologna platform finally decided not to work with us. We explored other options for setting up our own platform in Belgium, but we ran out of time. We therefore had to turn to the last possible option, Integra, which was the only one that was financially realistic and tenable given the very short deadline for the opening of registrations.



Contrary to what many festival-goers probably think, Integra does not belong to Legato, but to the American federation Gala Choruses. Gala makes the platform available for a fee. The fee is quite high. We had to negotiate the price. The final cost of the platform was **€16.000**, an amount we paid in two installments.

The tool is outdated and hasn't been updated for years. Consequently, it's not very flexible and it has a lot of bugs. We regularly had to call on support in the USA to resolve technical problems. Furthermore, the people who trained us and monitored our work with the platform changed over time (it is worth noting that, unlike Legato, Gala Choruses employs paid staff). There was also a change in management, which led to complications as the new Director attempted to charge us for adjustments that fell within the scope of maintenance. These discussions were far from straightforward and resulted in a great deal of wasted time and energy.

We received a lot of complaints from festival-goers who found the platform difficult to use. But we were just users ourselves, and we too had to put up with the limitations of this outdated tool on a daily basis.

TO LEGATO

02

We highly recommend investing in a tool specific to Various Voices and other European festivals, to be funded by all the choirs, developed by Legato and made available to the choirs organising future festivals. This tool would have the advantage of being local (European) and could be regularly updated. The cost of this tool would also be more easily amortised if it were made available to Legato, Various Voices and even local festivals organised in Europe.

FESTIVAL PRICING

Pricing for Choirs

Our pricing policy was inspired by Various Voices Munich 2018 rather than Bologna 2023 because the economic situation in Belgium and Germany is fairly similar.

The registration fees for choirs varied according to the date of registration, the number of members and the country of origin. This comparison below shows that our prices were slightly below inflation (price trends over the last 8 years), except for the largest choirs. We stand by the decision to ask these choirs to contribute more, which has also enabled us to limit the increase in prices for Delegates.

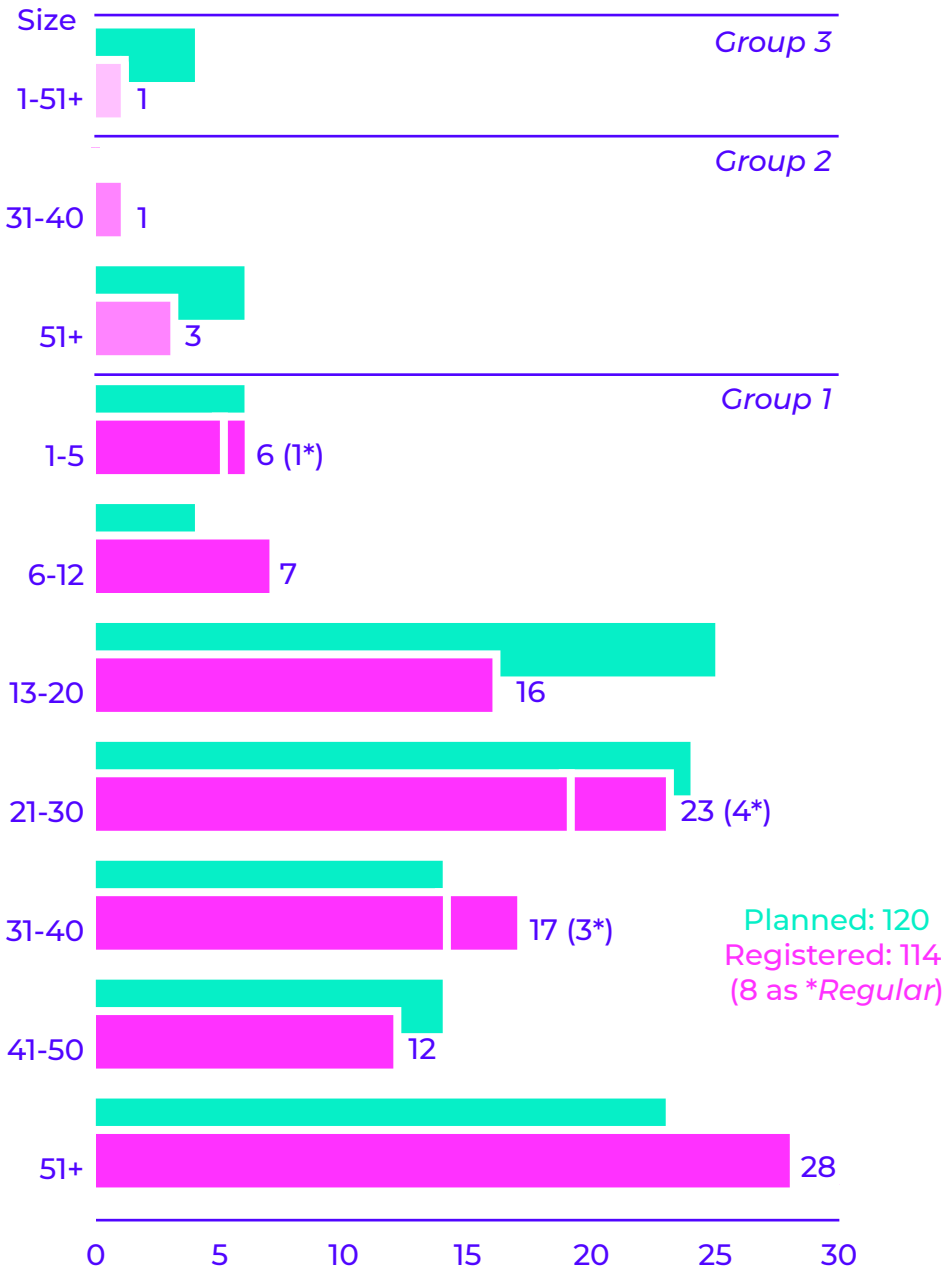
Traditionally, choirs pay a registration fee based on the number of members taking part in the festival. We decided to adopt another system, inspired by the Hand in Hand Festival, which gathers choirs from Ireland and the United Kingdom.Hand in Hand choir's fee is based on each choir's total number of registered members. This system is more practical because it takes better account of the choir's actual financial situation.

Munich-Brussels choir registration fees comparison

	Munich choir size	Munich registration *Early Bird* fees	Munich fees adjusted for inflation*	Brussels registration *Early Bird* fees	Brussels similar choir size
S	1-6 p.	€100	€126	€80	1-5 p.
M	16-35 p.	€330	€415	€380	21-30 p.
L	36-55 p.	€440	€553	€600	41-50 p.
XL	56+ p.	€550	€691	€900	51+ p.

*inflation sept-16/sept-24 = 25,7%

Planned & registered choirs



For many choirs, it is difficult to estimate the number of participating members almost two years in advance in any case. We therefore relied on the figures declared by each choir to Legato in the summer of 2024.

The table across shows the difference between final registrations and what we had planned on the basis of data from Legato and experience from previous festivals. Thanks to the higher-than-expected number of large choirs, we got more money from choirs than expected.

In most cases, the system worked well. However, we encountered problems with 12% of the choirs:

- Some choirs paid based on the number of members they were going to send to Brussels. This was often an honest mistake (a habit developed at previous festivals).
- Some choirs declared a much lower number than the one declared to Legato, explaining that the figure provided to Legato was incorrect.
- Each choir in this situation was contacted sympathetically in order to obtain explanations and, where appropriate, payment of the balance.
- Some choirs which had 41 members in the Legato data suddenly had only 40 at the time of payment (lower price range in our payment scale). This gave us an unpleasant impression of dishonesty.
- After the Delegates registration opening, we noted that three choirs exceeded the number of singers registered for the category in which they were entered. In the interests of fairness to the other choirs who paid the right price, we charged these choirs the participation fees corresponding to their category.

Here are a few points we would like to pass on to future teams:

03

We believe that communication is the key to a successful registration campaign. Our communication was based on the limited number of places for choirs (120), when in fact the number of places had never been so high. This undoubtedly encouraged many choirs to register more quickly.

04

It is very important to plan the festival budget according to the size of the choir, based on the entries for previous festivals. There is a huge difference between the price paid by a small choir of 5 people and a large choir of 60 people.

05

A *Regular* rate that is much less attractive than the *Early Bird* rate is also a powerful incentive for choirs to sign up early, which is essential for pre-financing the festival.

06

Asking a significantly higher price for very large choirs (900 euros for choirs with more than 51 members, 600 for choirs with between 41 and 50 members) is a deliberate choice on our part. We felt that the larger choirs could contribute more to the financial effort, given that they receive more subscriptions in principle. It was pointed out to us that, compared to the number of members, there was a huge difference between a 50-member choir and a 55-member choir. In the future, festival organisers might consider continuing this gradual gradation (51-60, 61-70 etc.).

07

We already knew from previous festivals that the majority of choirs book at the *Early Bird* rate. It is very important to take this into account in the budget. The *Early Bird* rate for choirs should not be a discount on the total cost of the festival. On the contrary, it's the *Regular* rate that should be higher than the total cost of the festival, and which will allow you to collect a little extra money.

08

The decision to base our pricing policy on the size of the choir, rather than the number of singers taking part in the festival, seemed fairer to the choirs and was well received. To avoid any problems, we recommend that each choir be clearly informed of the price it will have to pay before registering.

03

TO LEGATO

We based our revenue budget estimates on the Legato 2024 data in the belief that they were robust. But in reality they are not: on the one hand, these figures fluctuate from season to season; and on the other hand, Choir Administrators reported different sizes to the festival in September 2024 than they reported to Legato in August 2024. For the future, it is essential to identify a robust basis for those who will organise future festivals, in order to avoid the risk of overestimating revenue.

Pricing for Delegates

The pricing structure for Delegates sparked a great deal of debate within the Festival Team. One of the conclusions reached by the members of Sing Out Brussels! following Bologna was that it was important to make the festival's pricing more inclusive.

Three proposals arose: the classic *Early Bird*/*Regular*/*Late* system, the 'à la carte festival' proposal (basic price and additional costs for each event, as chosen) and the 'free and conscious price' proposal. None of these proposals received the full support of the Festival Team.



We finally kept the *Early Bird*/*Regular*/*Late* proposal but put in place various solutions to facilitate the Delegates registration, like the possibility to pay in three monthly installments or the *Solidarity Fund* application (a new innovation for our edition of the festival).

Like for the choirs, our pricing policy was inspired by Various Voices Munich 2018. This comparison shows that our prices were slightly below inflation (price trends over the last 8 years).

There were fewer technical problems and questions from Delegates than our team had feared. The main subject of questions concerned the registration of partners and friends, who had to register as Delegates.

Munich-Brussels delegate fees comparison

	Munich Delegates registration fees	Munich fees adjusted for inflation*	Brussels Delegates registration fees
Early rate	€160	€201	€190
Regular rate	€190	€239	€240

*Inflation sept-16/sept-24 = 25,7%

Payment Procedure

For payment on the Integra platform, the Festival Team carried out a market survey to identify the most cost-effective provider. We chose Stripe because this payment solution offers lower rates than Paypal, as well as an efficient and responsive technical support service. The budget estimates for gross and net registration revenue were based on Stripe's costs. Choirs and Delegates were therefore to use Stripe with their credit or debit card.

Stripe costs differ depending on the country of issue of the credit/debit card. When estimating our budget, we included Stripe's costs in the rates for choirs and Delegates, based on the

countries represented within Legato, and we chose to offer the same price to choirs and Delegates, whatever their country. As the Legato data does not always correspond to reality, we faced higher costs, particularly due to the over-representation of choirs and Delegates from the United Kingdom and large choirs from the United States.



At the request of certain choirs, we began testing payment via SEPA Direct Debit in October 2024. The main drawback is the delay. It took around ten days from the time the payment was made to the time it was recorded on Integra and reached our account. The main advantage is the cost. Transaction and conversion costs are much lower than with a credit/debit card, both for the choir/delegate and for the festival.

We encouraged choirs and Delegates from SEPA countries to use this payment solution, which is particularly interesting for those from European countries whose currency is not the euro because with SEPA, currency conversion costs are reduced compared to credit card transactions. People from all countries in the European Economic Area and the United Kingdom can pay by SEPA, even if they have a currency other than the euro, resulting in a significant reduction in Stripe costs. Note that the system does not work with the USA and that we had some issues with payments from certain countries (Poland and United Kingdom in particular).

Stripe fees by country

Countries	Stripe fee (Standard card)	Currency conversion fees
European Economic Area	1.5% + 0.25	2%
United Kingdom	2.5% + 0.25	2%
Other countries	3.25% + 0.25	2%

We also looked at commercial solutions for payment in installments, to allow Delegates to spread out the payment of the registration fee and thus soften the cost of the festival. We found these solutions to be excessively costly. In the end, we opted for Stripe's 'subscription' option, which can be adapted to allow payment in installments. This payment method was helpful for Delegates in need but required a lot of manual work, because it was not possible to adapt INtegra to manage these payments. **239** Delegates used this option.

09

TO FUTURE TEAMS

This information is technical but important. It is essential to include transaction costs, which can be very high, in your budget forecasts. For example, when an American choir pays €900 for its registration plus €18 exchange commission, Stripe takes €30, and the festival receives only €870. We advise the next organising team to consider the possibility of establishing the rates for choirs and Delegates on the basis of their country, in order to accurately offset the costs of paying for transactions.

Cancellations

One of the first tasks undertaken by our Festival Team was to draw up the festival's *Terms and Conditions*. This administrative document sets out, amongst other things, what happens in the event of the festival being cancelled, or in the event of a choir or Delegate withdrawing from the festival. This document also stipulated that the transfer of registrations from one Delegate to another was prohibited, a measure recommended to us by both Gala Choruses and previous organising teams, for reasons of privacy and to ensure the traceability of registrations on the platform.

In drafting these *Terms and Conditions*, which were signed by all choirs and Delegates upon registration, we drew inspiration from the *Terms and Conditions* of Munich and Bologna, as well as a template document provided by MCI, the Professional Congress Organiser we worked with at the start of the project.

All choirs that cancelled (**14**) were reimbursed in accordance with these *Terms and Conditions* (75% of the registration fee for cancellations before 31 December 2024, 50% before 31 December 2025, nothing from 1 January 2026). All Delegates that cancelled were also reimbursed in accordance with these *Terms and Conditions* (75% of the registration fee for cancellations before 30 June 2025, 50% before 31 March 2026, nothing from 1 April 2026). A minority of them chose to donate the refunded amount to the Festival's *Solidarity Fund*.



We recorded **233** cancellations. This high number came as a surprise to our team. The impact on the festival's budget is considerable. The reasons for cancellation vary (financial reasons, health reasons, leaving a choir, etc.). In general, these cancellation procedures went very smoothly. We have always ensured strict compliance with our *Terms and Conditions*, even in the rare cases where we faced disputes (misunderstanding of the ban on

transferring registration to another person, dispute over the percentage of registration fees retained by the festival, complaints from a few people who had registered before 30 June but had not paid their registration fees and whose fees were therefore adjusted to the *Regular* rate). No further refunds were possible after 31 March 2026. We got some complaints about this but it was really crucial for the festival budget, which needed stability as the festival came closer.

10

TO FUTURE TEAMS

To avoid endless debates about individual cases that may or may not warrant a refund, we can only recommend taking great care in drawing up your own *Terms and Conditions*.

Support Programme

Legato provides the organising team of each festival with a list of countries eligible for what Legato calls the *Support Programme*. The *Support Programme* defines three groups of countries. Countries in *Group 3* receive full support (free registration for the choir and Delegates, coverage of transport, accommodation and meal costs). In Brussels, only the Ukrainian choir was eligible. Countries in *Group 2* receive partial support (reduced-rate registration for the choir and Delegates). In Brussels, the choirs from Poland, Estonia and the Czech Republic were eligible. Countries in *Group 1* receive no support.



To define the list of countries eligible for the *Support Programme*, Legato uses the Rainbow Index and the Human Development Index. We do not recognise the relevance of these indices in developing a programme of financial support, because neither takes into account the factors that determine the financial capacity of choirs and Delegates. We are talking here about indicators such as the cost of living, purchasing power, the unemployment rate or average salaries. For example, Spain scores well in the two indexes used by Legato, but has the highest unemployment rate in the European Union. Following complaints received from the Spanish and Italian choirs, and after the cancellation – for financial reasons – of the only Slovenian choir that had registered, we decided to carry out a detailed financial analysis.

In the following table, we have adapted the price of the Delegate *Early Bird* rate (**€190**) according to the Price Level Index in the

countries[1]. We can see that participation in the festival costs twice as much for a Spanish Delegate as for an Estonian Delegate, after applying the *Support Programme* reductions. The countries in green are those currently benefiting from the *Support Programme*. This would seem to show that some countries (Italy, Spain and Slovenia) are in great need of support.

We also evaluated the cost of attending the festival in relation to adjusted disposable income[2]. We can also see here that participation in the festival represents a much higher cost for Italian, Spanish and Slovenian Delegates. With the exception of Portugal, the other countries currently in the *Support Programme* would need greater support.

1 – Using Eurostat dataset Purchasing power parities (PPPs), price level indices and real expenditures for ESA 2010 aggregates [prc_ppp_ind]

2 – Using Eurostat dataset Non-financial transactions – annual data [nasa_10_nf_tr]

Registration fee affordability

Corrected with Price Level Index	€
Estonia	101
Switzerland	103
Portugal	111
Iceland	113
Czechia	115
United States	128
Ireland	131
Croatia	132
Denmark	133
Norway	140
United Kingdom	144
Finland	149
Poland	150
Netherlands	155
Sweden	156
Belgium	160
Austria	161
Germany	173
France	177
Italy	191
Spain	202
Slovenia	209

Adjusted Disposable Income	%
Norway	4,1%
Switzerland	4,4%
Denmark	5,8%
Sweden	5,9%
Portugal	6,1%
Ireland	6,6%
Germany	6,6%
Finland	6,7%
Netherlands	6,8%
Belgium	7%
France	7,1%
Austria	7,1%
Czechia	7,6%
Estonia	8,6%
Croatia	8,8%
Italy	8,9%
Poland	9,3%
Spain	10,4%
Slovenia	11,7%

Even though we have received few direct messages about our pricing policy, we feel that several choirs and Delegates felt that the prices for the Brussels festival were too high. This feeling should be seen in the context of the figures above, which show that the cost of registering for the festival does not have the same impact on the personal budget depending on the country of residence.

We therefore make the following recommendations to Legato:

04

Legato should proactively inform the choirs concerned of any changes to the list of countries eligible for the *Support Programme*. The list is drawn up by Legato, not by the festival organisers. This will avoid misunderstandings and provide clear information to choirs before the application process begins.

05

On the basis of the above tables, we invite the Legato Board to re-evaluate the indexes on which the *Support Programme* is based. The indexes must take into account the factors that determine the financial capacity of choirs and Delegates, in order to determine the list of eligible countries.

06

Legato should play a more active role in the *Support Programme* by raising resources to fund the *Programme* in general, and to meet specific demands in particular. It seems very important to increase the diversity of the participants.

07

It is also up to the Legato Board to decide whether or not to extend the *Support Programme* to countries outside Europe, taking into account the impact on the budget of future festivals.



Taking into account the number of cancellations and the number of choirs who didn't register, it seems that the Legato *Support Programme* is not adapted to the reality of choirs. Some of the choirs in *Group 1* have very small budgets, either because they've only been around for a short time or because they cater for a queer audience with limited financial resources. Other choirs face huge costs to travel to the festival because of the distance involved. In parallel to the *Solidarity Fund* created by our association for the Brussels festival in order to financially support *Group 1* Delegates, we think it would be interesting for an internal Legato *Solidarity Fund* to be created in order to financially support *Group 1* choirs that cannot afford the registration fees. This would greatly enhance the diversity of the festival.

Finally, we received requests for support from Asian choirs and a Mexican choir (covering transport costs and/or reducing registration fees). It is important to remember that the festival is entirely self-financed. It is financially impossible to provide the requested support to these choirs, at the risk of jeopardising the organisation of the festival. The *Support Programme* budget (financed entirely by the registration fees of the choirs and Delegates) provides for the full travel costs of the choirs from *Group 3*. There are no non-European countries in this group. We have informed these other choirs of the existence of the *Solidarity Fund* (see below) and we have invited them to set up their own fundraising activities in order to reduce their travel costs.

Solidarity Fund

The Legato *Support Programme* only takes into account differences between countries. But we know that there are big differences in affordability between regions, and especially between social groups and individuals.

For the first time in the history of Various Voices, to take account of these many difficulties, a *Solidarity Fund* was set up to reduce the registration fees of *Group 1* Delegates facing financial difficulties.

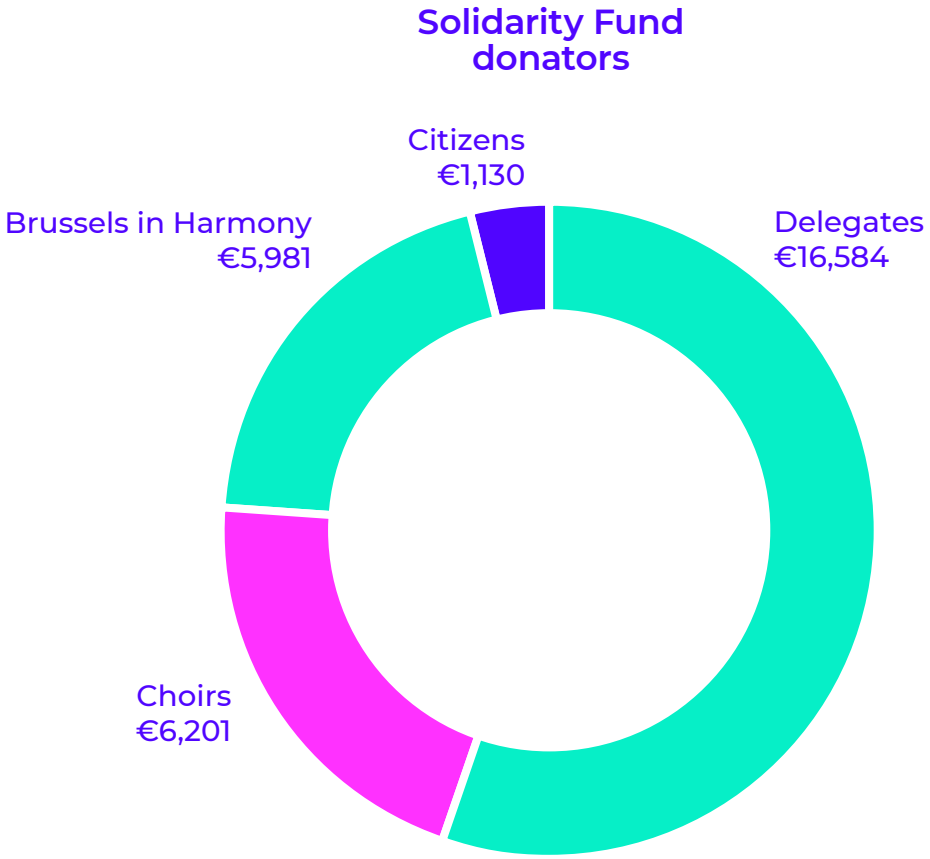
This *Solidarity Fund* was an initiative of our team, which placed the financial inclusivity of the event at the heart of its work. It

was financed by donations from choirs, Delegates, and audience members when buying tickets, as well as fundraising activities.

At the time of registration, when the rates were displayed, Delegates were offered the possibility of benefiting from the *Solidarity Fund*, if the amount of the registration fee represented an obstacle for them. In this case, the Delegate was asked to pay a reduced rate (same price as the *Group 2* Delegates). Our goal was to give each Delegate the same support, up to a maximum of **€95**.

We achieved this goal: we were able to provide support to the **225** Delegates who applied for it (5,6% of the Delegates). The total amount of support amounted to €21,375. As the *Solidarity Fund* had raised **€29,837**, the surplus (€8,462) was used to fund accessibility improvements (see the Accessibility chapter).

This amount comes mainly from the generosity of the Delegates. One in five Delegates made a donation, averaging €22. Their donations account for **55%** of the *Solidarity Fund*'s revenue. The Brussels In Harmony fundraising event, held in March 2026 with the four Brussels-based LGBTQI+ choirs, raised **20%** of the *Solidarity Fund*'s revenue. The remainder comes mainly from donations from the choirs.



It should be noted that the Italian and Spanish Delegates were, as a percentage of the number of Delegates from these countries, the most in need of assistance from the *Solidarity Fund*. 34% of Italian Delegates and 31% of Spanish Delegates asked for help, which confirms that these two countries should be included in the *Support Programme*.

TO FUTURE TEAMS

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Given the success of this initiative, we can only encourage you to set up your own *Solidarity Fund*.

Accommodation

Finding accommodation for festival-goers was not part of our team's remit. However, aware that the cost of accommodation could be a barrier to attending the festival, we sought to offer solutions through two options: affordable accommodation for our festival-goers and homestay accommodation.

In 2024, we formalised a partnership with the Brussels Booking Desk (BBD), which had set up a hotel booking platform for the 'Rendez-vous à Bruxelles' on a trial basis. BBD set up a larger platform for the festival to enable individual or group bookings at favourable rates. However, this selection of hotels remained too expensive for most of our festival-goers, who often sought out better deals themselves or negotiated directly with hotels.

The assessment made by BBD, which is more accustomed to managing conference-style events, is nevertheless positive: there were **170** bookings via the platform, averaging **4** nights' stay, at an average price of €196 (breakfast included). All the hotels booked were within a 5-minute walk of Bozar. BBD received many group enquiries, but these were mainly for youth hostels, with which the platform does not work.

At the same time, we decided to offer homestay accommodation, giving priority to members of the Ukrainian choir, followed by Delegates from the Legato *Group 2* choirs, and finally to other members. We were confident in our ability to find a sufficient number of host families. This ultimately proved to be much more difficult than anticipated. We had undoubtedly underestimated the length of the festival (four nights) and the availability of rooms in a large city where most people live in small flats. We were counting heavily on the support of Brussels' network of LGBTQI+ organisations, which unfortunately proved to be very unhelpful (there was little sharing of our calls for volunteers). In the end, we closed the accommodation applications in December 2024, by which time we had nearly **50** applications and only around 20 available hosts.

Matching guests with hosts then proved particularly difficult given the number of specific requests (pet allergies, accessibility needs, a desire to share a room with a specific person or, conversely, not to share a room). As we went through this matching process, we discovered that many festival-goers had in the meantime found accommodation on their own. Some never replied to our initial contact. Once the matching was complete,

some festival-goers pulled out because the accommodation was too far from the city centre or decided to rent a room in a hotel without informing the host. At the last minute, we had to relocate accommodation to someone whose host had sent them messages containing sexual innuendo...

Ultimately, the time spent managing this accommodation is inversely proportional to its impact on the festival, as only **29** people were actually accommodated in the end.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

Whilst this is obviously beneficial for those who benefit from it, we would urge to think twice about organising homestay accommodation, given the considerable amount of time and effort involved in finding and allocating accommodation. In the countries where it's possible, we recommend partnering with a hospitality organisation. In some countries (mainly English-speaking ones), accommodation is often available at universities. This is not the case in Belgium.

Transport

We agreed a partnership with Eurostar in the autumn of 2025. The *Conference* fare was available to festival-goers whose details had to be entered manually onto the Eurostar website by the Festival Team. **762** people completed the dedicated form and **360** actually booked on the Eurostar website. The *Conference* fare was available around the festival dates. Despite our requests, we did not receive any statistics from Eurostar regarding the number of bookings made.

We also entered into a partnership with the Lufthansa Group, to which Brussels Airlines belongs. A booking platform with discounted flights was available for Delegates from mid-July 2025. It was not run by the Festival Team. Reduced prices were available for festival-goers around the festival dates. Despite our requests, Lufthansa has not provided us with any figures on the number of bookings made.



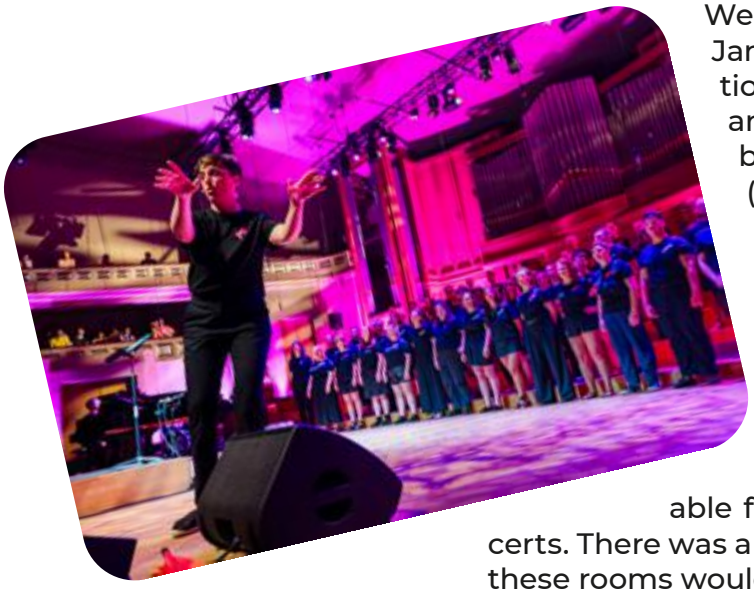
FESTIVAL VENUES

Indoor Venues

Right from the start of the project, we wanted to hold the festival in Brussels city centre to make it easier for festival-goers to get around and to ensure the city benefited from the festival's economic impact.

In our bid, we proposed holding the festival at the Square Meeting Centre and Bozar. The Square Meeting Centre is that large, square, glass-fronted building which you no doubt spotted on the Mont des Arts, just a stone's throw from Bozar, to which it is connected by a tunnel.

Bozar has two main concert halls. The Square has three conference rooms and a multitude of smaller rooms that could have been used as dressing rooms, meeting rooms or rehearsal spaces. A large space was also available inside to host the Festival Village and the evening parties. This solution, the most practical in terms of accessibility and centralisation of the event, had seemed financially viable to us based on the quotations received when we submitted our bid. We visited Square on several occasions and established excellent contacts with the managers.



We were therefore in for a nasty shock when, in January 2024, we received the revised quotations, which included security costs, staff costs and other associated expenses that had not been disclosed to us initially. The cost of Square (468,000 euros) was more than twice that of Bozar (200,000 euros). The combined cost represented more than 50% of the festival's total budget.

At the same time, our Musical Director, Emily Allison, who had visited the venue, warned us that the Square's rooms are conference rooms, not concert halls. They are not suitable for concerts, and certainly not for choral concerts. There was a high risk that the technical costs of fitting out these rooms would be prohibitive, with no guarantee of an optimal experience for the choirs.





This was followed by a hiccup on another front. In December 2023, the European Union turned down a grant application we had spent weeks preparing. It was for a large sum (**€400,000**) to fund a project to create a tool to raise awareness of LGBTQI+ inclusivity in European choirs, in collaboration with Legato and RainbowHouse Brussels. This grant was also intended to finance some of the festival's events (in particular the large outdoor stage for the 'Let your heart be heard' show), as well as a job at the RainbowHouse to support the festival's preparation. This hard blow led us to rethink our budget and our grant forecasts. That's why we decided to look for alternatives, while maintaining our objective of holding the festival in the city centre, in accessible venues.

After contacting or visiting nearly 20 different venues, the choice finally fell on Bozar (Salle Henry Le Boeuf – **1800** seats and Salle M – **465** seats), the Cirque Royal (**1700** seats), the Madeleine (**740** seats) and Auditorium 490 (Royal Museums of Fine Arts, **490** seats). We also approved the rental of C12, the nightclub located underneath the Central Station, to host the parties.



Whilst this increased the number of venues, it had the advantage of keeping the festival in the city centre, in venues that could easily be reached within a few minutes. At the same time, we also approved the principle of organising the 30-minute concerts in four venues rather than five, in order to reduce our costs and avoid an 'empty venue' effect, given that not all festival-goers attend all the concerts. This also reduced the total cost of the venues to around €300,000, which is half of what it would have cost us to hire Square and Bozar.

We signed all the contracts between June and November 2024. Bearing in mind the difficulty of pre-funding the festival, as we did not know at the time how quickly the choirs would sign up, we negotiated and obtained the following financial agreement in order to spread out the payments and keep the festival budget under control: 10% on signing, 15% in January 2025, 25% in June 2025 and 50% in May 2026.

In March 2025, at the request of the festival's Artistic and Technical Directors, we decided to hire these venues for an extra day (D-1) to install the technical equipment. This investment, which was necessary for the comfort of our teams and choirs alike, naturally added to the festival's budget, and had been made possible by the upward revision of our Delegate registration forecasts (from 3,500 to 4,000).

Finally, we rented several small rooms belonging to the RainbowHouse in Brussels, as well as Sing Out Brussels' usual rehearsal room. These rooms were available for hire to choirs wishing to hold rehearsals during the festival.

Outdoor Venues and Alternative Plans

Our bid proposal also included plans to organise several open-air concerts, notably in the European Quarter or Grand-Place. As we were unable to obtain permission for these projects, we shifted our focus to Place de l'Albertine, at the foot of the Mont des Arts, where the Brussels Pride stage is set up every year. The Place is close to Bozar and the other festival venues.

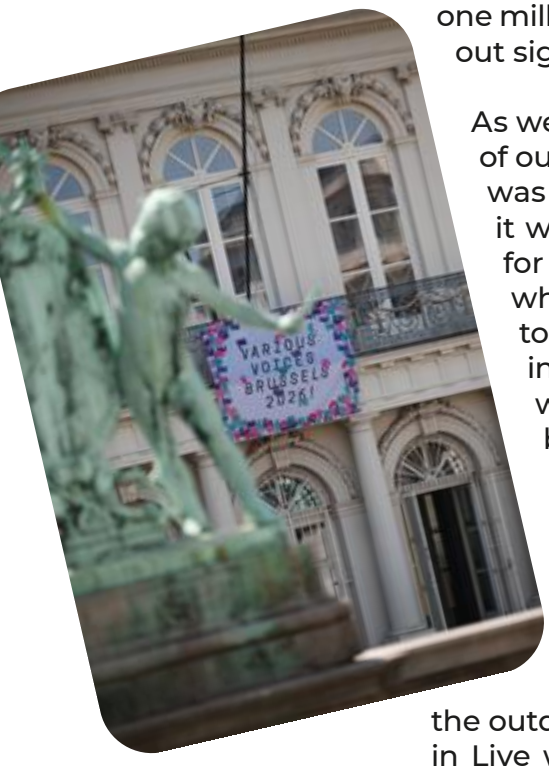
The aim was to stage the 'Royalties' show there on Friday and the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' show on Saturday, with a day set aside for set-up on Thursday. Given that no venue in the centre of Brussels is large enough to accommodate 4,000 people, we thought it was a nice idea to bring all the festival-goers together in front of this outdoor stage.

For this project, given its impact on the festival's visibility within the city, we worked with visit.brussels, which is responsible for promoting tourism in Brussels. At the end of June 2024, visit.brussels confirmed that the outdoor site was now under option to the City. Our Artistic Director Simon Paco made contact with the visit.brussels Team and their technical consultant Step in Live, in order to define all our technical requirements. Unfortunately, this consultant was slow to provide us with quotes. Despite our insistence for over a year, we only received a quote at the beginning of June 2025.



We had budgeted €200,000 for the outdoor stage at the Mont des Arts. The price we received was close to **€300,000**, mainly because of the explosion in security costs (one third of this cost). Even if we limited the outdoor stage to just one day rather than two, the price was still prohibitive, especially as this budget did not take into account a series of ancillary costs. We therefore took the difficult decision to abandon the outdoor stage project.

With the festival now less than a year away, we had to quickly activate Plan B. We decided to relocate the show scheduled for Friday 26 June on the outdoor stage to the Cirque Royal, for a double show, and to rent La Madeleine one more day (Friday) to schedule 30 minute concerts there instead of Cirque Royal. We relocated the event scheduled for Saturday 27 June to the ING Arena, which is the largest concert hall in Brussels. The venue is far from the city center, but the underground train leads directly to it and we thought it might be attractive for the festival-goers because it's located just a stone's throw from the Atomium, one of our city's most emblematic monuments, and also because we remembered the nice experience of the concerts around a lake, outside the city, at Various Voices Munich 2018. Saturday's event became the only one at which it was possible to bring all the festival-goers together in one place at the same time. In July 2025, we signed the contract and paid the full rental fee for the ING Arena. In the end, the total cost of the venues came to **€387,000**, whereas the combined cost of hiring



Square, Bozar and the outdoor stage would have been nearly one million euros! We would have been unable to fund this without significantly increasing festival-goers' registration fees.

As well as saving us money, this location also alleviated some of our concerns: accessibility was guaranteed (seating, which was not possible outside), weather risks were limited and it was possible to sell tickets to the public, which was vital for us and uncertain outdoors because we didn't know whether the City of Brussels would grant us permission to privatise the public space in order to organise a paying event. Now that we know the circumstances under which the festival took place, this decision was clearly the best one, because any outdoor event would automatically have had to be cancelled due to the storm that was looming that day.

As the Square project had been scrapped, we also looked for an alternative location for the Village. Our first choice was to set it up on the Place du Musée (the large car park in front of Auditorium 490). Like for the outdoor stage, the costs proposed by visit.brussels and Step in Live were more than triple what we had planned (**€70,000** instead of €20,000). We've looked for alternatives to the planned space in order to reduce our costs. Visit.brussels finally offered the alternative of hosting the Village on its premises, by letting us use the Cour d'honneur, the Salle des Guichets and various other rooms to accommodate our volunteers and the festival office. This solution had the advantage of being centrally located in relation to the festival venues and of being much cheaper in terms of security, as the Village did not need to be guarded at night, when the gate to the Cour d'honneur is closed. This reduced the cost of the Village to €40,000.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We would like to let you know that these decisions were not easy to make. They demonstrate that there is a significant gap between our dreams and reality. They caused a great deal of stress and uncertainty about the best course of action. However, we remained true to our original objective: central venues and controlled costs. You must be able to adapt, to make decisions whilst prioritising the interests of festival-goers, and to stand by the decisions you have made.

THE 'LET YOUR HEART BE HEARD' PROJECT

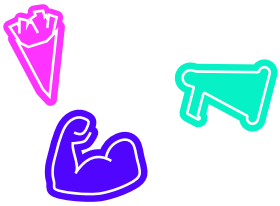
We were convinced of the importance of organising a moment of communal singing during the festival. This also responded to a strong demand expressed by the participating choirs. In Dublin in 2014, a one-off festival choir was formed. In Munich in 2018, we performed Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* together. In Bologna in 2023, we sang *I Am What I Am* to bring the gala concert to a close. We wanted to set ourselves apart and offer something new: a piece written especially for the festival.

We asked Simon Finn, former member of Sing Out Brussels! and now a member of the Pink Singers, to write a song called *Let Your Heart Be Heard*, which is the Brussels festival slogan. We already knew Simon's work from when Sing Out Brussels! made a studio recording and music video of his composition *In These Heels*, a song written in the wake of the homophobic massacre in an Orlando nightclub in 2016.



Simon Finn took part in one meeting about the festival identity, which helped him to shape the song as a positive, fun and liberating choral piece to not only bring our choirs together physically, but also symbolise the joy of singing together and our shared dreams.

We asked Philippe Maniez to arrange the song for choirs. Composer, drummer, arranger and teacher, Philippe Maniez had already arranged several songs for Sing Out Brussels!, including *In These Heels*. Philippe Maniez wrote the arrangement in various formats (4-part, 8-part and 16-part). We received the scores and audio recordings of the separate vocal parts.



These resources were shared with the choirs and festival-goers from May 2025 onwards. We invited all participating choirs to learn the song in preparation for the festival, with the goal to perform the song together at the end of the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' show at the ING Arena. As we wanted the festival to be open to the city and its inhabitants, we decided to involve

Brussels and Belgian choirs, inviting them to learn the song and sing with us. The aim of the project was not only musical. We also wanted to provide Belgian choirs with good practice and tools to promote the inclusion of LGBTQI+ people.

We were very ambitious but, unfortunately, received little interest. Was it prejudice against the project's LGBTQI+ nature? A lack of interest given the choirs' already busy schedules? The song itself? A fear of overshadowing other choirs' projects? A lack of awareness of the Various Voices festival, which is largely unknown outside the European LGBTQI+ choral community? We do not know.

We tried on numerous occasions to establish a partnership with A Choeur Joie, the Belgian Francophone Federation of Amateur Choirs, without success (we even received a reply tinged with homophobia). We had more success with Koor & Stem, the Flemish equivalent, whose team responded enthusiastically. We established a partnership with this organisation, which has helped to fund our communication projects and has played an active role in raising awareness of the project within its network.

In September 2025, Sing Out Brussels! recorded the song in the studio and shot a video clip, with three objectives in mind:

- To get the members of Sing Out Brussels! actively involved in the preparations for the festival
- To have a powerful communication tool for festival-goers, the general public and all our potential partners.
- To encourage festival-goers to learn this anthem in preparation for the festival.

The project was co-produced by the non-profit organisations Various Voices Brussels 2026 and Sing Out Brussels!. The festival's Musical Director, Emily Allison, supervised the commissioning and corrections of the arrangement by Philippe Maniez. She also recruited the musicians, conducted the choir and approved the final mix. The festival's Artistic Director, Simon Paco, put together a small team of volunteers from within the choir to develop the script for the video, in collaboration with La Horde Productions, a Brussels-based audiovisual company run by queer people, and supervised the filming and editing of the video.



The Sing Out Brussels! choir used this project to promote the integration of its new members, recruited during the summer of 2025. Each audition candidate had to learn the song *Let Your Heart Be Heard*. The first rehearsals of the season were devoted to this project, generating excitement around the festival.

The studio recording and filming of the video took place during the same weekend in September 2025. The song was recorded during one afternoon at Jet Studio in Brussels, with the film crew in attendance. The next day, we shot the video in various iconic locations around the city (Grand-Place, La Bourse de Bruxelles, Brussels Park, Saint-Jacques neighbourhood – Brussels' 'gay' district).



The song was released at the end of October on all music platforms (Spotify, Apple Music, etc.), where it's still available. The video was released in mid-November and was widely shared on YouTube and our social media channels.

We submitted several applications for public subsidies for this project and we did receive support from the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (Equal Opportunities), the National Lottery and Rainbow Visibilities, a joint project run by Cocof (French-speaking Community Brussels) and RainbowHouse Brussels. The amount raised covered all the costs (approximately €15,000) of this project, which therefore cost neither the two associations nor the festival-goers anything.

The 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' project continued in 2026, as a prelude to the festival. We finalised a partnership with Bozar to organise rehearsals ahead of the festival, with the aim of getting the people of Brussels singing.

Three rehearsals took place in April, May and June 2026 on the stage of the magnificent Henry Le Boeuf Hall. We set up a registration system for these rehearsals, for a nominal fee of €5, as the aim here was not to make money. Everyone was welcome, regardless of prior experience. 85 people signed up for the rehearsals, each of which was attended by around 50 people, including members of Sing Out Brussels! who were there to provide support and help with the learning process. The participants came from a variety of backgrounds: Brussels choirs, the LGBTQI+ community... Some had never sung in a choir before and really got a taste for it.

Initially, the plan was for these people to perform the anthem from the audience on 27 June, but given their commitment and the bonds that gradually formed between them and amongst themselves, we invited them to join us on stage at the ING Arena. Thirty people seized this opportunity to perform this powerful anthem as allies, alongside our LGBTQI+ choirs.

Once again, this participatory project cost festival-goers nothing. Bozar provided the rehearsal room and also paid the Musical Director, Emily Allison. RainbowHouse Brussels included one of our rehearsals in the programme for 'Brussels Pride Week' in May, which enabled us to secure funding to cover the pianist's fees.

Whilst the participatory project reached only a limited number of people, it went a long way towards opening the door



to media coverage for us. We gave several radio interviews about this project thanks to our communication strategy centred on 'the biggest choir ever seen in Brussels' (see the 'Communication' section).

At the same time, a survey revealed that there was little enthusiasm amongst the choirs registered for the festival for learning the song, for various reasons (difficulties for non-SATB choirs in learning the piece, excessive complexity, lack of time). Our Artistic Director and Musical Director therefore contacted the choirs scheduled to perform during the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' show to encourage them to learn the song, which most of them did.

During the festival, Emily Allison led two rehearsals held at Bozar, each of which brought together around a hundred Delegates for a session of group singing.

The anthem was performed by Sing Out Brussels! at the opening ceremony, and then on 27 June at the ING Arena by around **500** singers spread across the stage and the side aisles.

This project took up a great deal of our time and energy. We regret that it did not generate more enthusiasm, either amongst Brussels choirs or amongst those registered for the festival, which contrasts with the requests from many festival-goers for an opportunity for collective singing. Nevertheless, we are very pleased with the high standard to which this project was carried out, its media impact and the role it played in boosting the motivation of Sing Out Brussels! members towards the festival.

COMMUNICATION

Graphic Identity

Right from the start, we wanted to give our festival a strong identity. A great deal of work went into identifying the values we wished to promote: interaction, creativity, inclusion, joy, sustainability, openness, advocacy, solidarity and diversity.

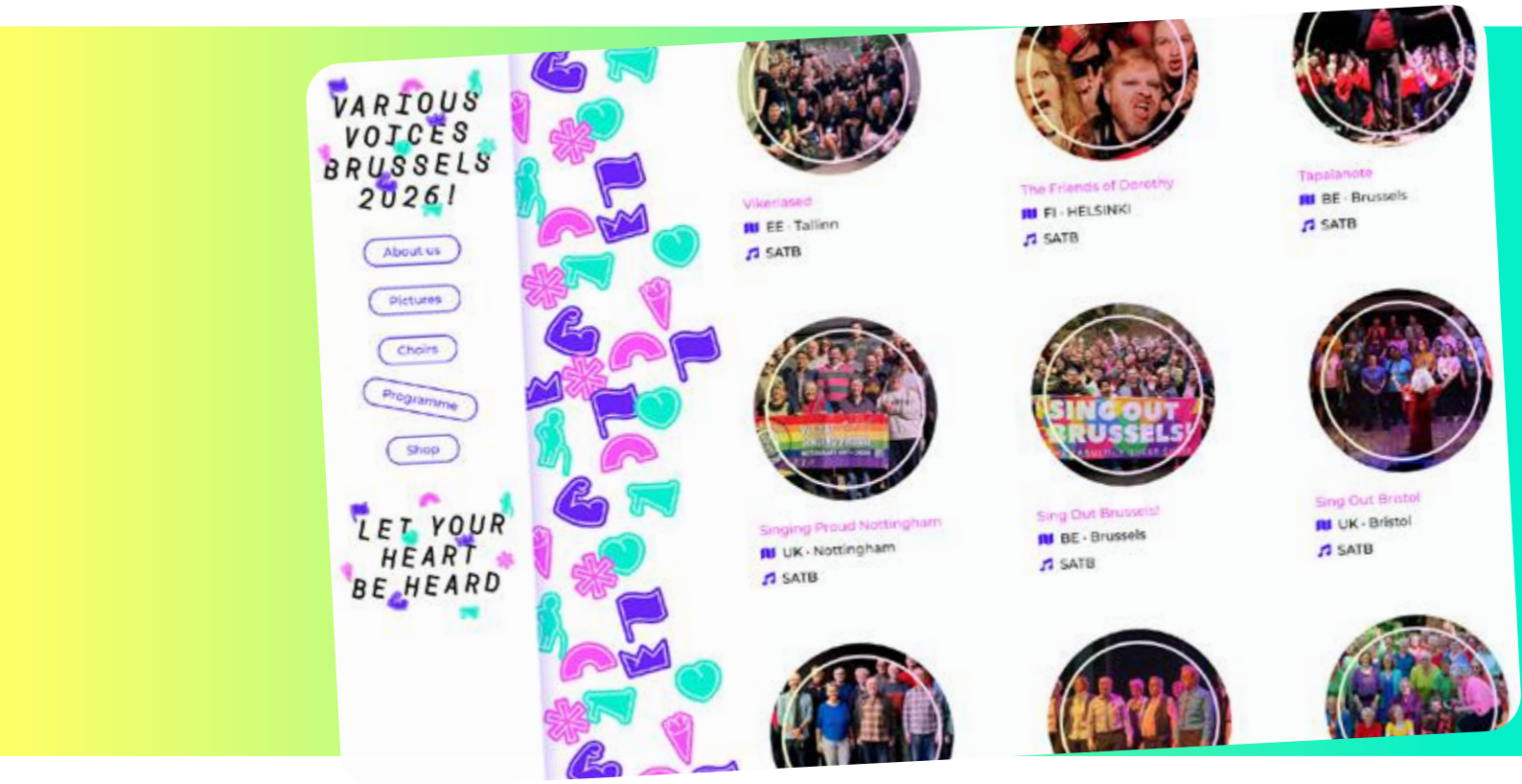
To develop the festival's visual identity, we decided to work with Kidnap Your Designer (KYD), a company run by queer people and specialising in cultural events. We were able to count on the invaluable help of their team throughout this process.

Following a brainstorming session, KYD proposed the festival's tagline, 'Let Your Heart Be Heard', and a visual identity. We fell in love with the logo and its icons, which highlight the festival's Brussels identity, its international character, its role as a voice for the community, its political role, its inclusivity, its strength and its joy.

The logo's typeface, with its slightly rotated letters, is reminiscent of musical notes.

This logo and its icons proved to be a very powerful communication tool, which we were able to adapt in countless ways throughout the festival's preparation and during the event itself. We are convinced that this graphic design helped to generate support and goodwill for our event.

Website



From 2022 onwards, setting up a website for the festival was our priority. It was essential for us to have this kind of identity card: what is Various Voices? Who is it aimed at? What is the festival's aim?

Through KYD, we got in touch with Cobea, a small web development company in Brussels, well-suited to a non-profit organisation like ours. Their team worked hard to meet our needs. One of their main challenges was to create a website catered to the needs of both choirs and Delegates, as well as those of the general public.

We also needed a user-friendly and flexible tool so that we could update the site and add content ourselves. The inclusion of a 'News' section, updated each month with a new article, helped improve our search engine ranking.

In its initial phase, the website was launched a few days before Various Voices Bologna 2023. At that stage, it served solely as an identity platform and a tool for collecting email addresses for newsletter subscriptions (our focused channel of communication).

When registration opened in September 2024, the site became the place where choirs – and later Delegates – could find practical information on the *Terms and Conditions*, dates and registration fees. We uploaded all the relevant documents (*Terms and Conditions*, *Code of Conduct*, etc.). We drafted a set of FAQs, which we updated as and when we received further questions.

From 2025 onwards, we prepared the second phase of the website to showcase the participating choirs and the festival programme. We collected the information needed to create a web page for each participating choir through a communication-focused questionnaire sent to each choir. At the same time, Cobea developed the necessary web pages, connecting them to the Integra platform API in order to automatically extract the data provided by the choirs. It was a difficult task, because the Integra API is old-fashioned and designed for the Integra app only.



By December 2024, we had gathered most of the information and had then translated all the texts into three languages. We release these pages dedicated to the choirs On 1 January 2026.

The next step was the finalisation of the pages dedicated to the festival programme, using the same principle (the content of these pages was directly extracted from Integra). The full festival programme was available online from 1 April 2026.

When the Delegates registration closed, we redesigned the other pages of the website. Until then, it was intended for festival registration and to provide a general overview of the festival for our partners. From April 2026, it was more geared towards the general public, with the aim of presenting the programme and selling tickets.

We will return to the use of the website during the festival later on. Our conclusion at this stage is that a comprehensive website that is easy for the organising team to manage is essential for communication. It is also important to bear in mind that this requires a great deal of work and time, particularly when the site is trilingual (every task has to be done three times!). We do not regret this decision, which was intended to demonstrate our commitment to inclusion. Adding further languages, however, would have imposed a disproportionate workload.

The Bologna Campaign



'Various Voices Bologna 2023' presented a powerful opportunity to reach our target audience. We therefore organised a communications campaign as part of the event. Given our commitment to sustainability, we wanted to avoid producing a simple, disposable flyer. KYD then suggested the idea of a sheet of stickers featuring, on one side, the logo and its icons in sticker form, and on the reverse, some information about the festival and a QR code to subscribe to the newsletter. We sent nearly **4,000** stickers to Bologna, and every festival-goer found one in their *Welcome Pack*. This fun promotional tool was well received.

At the same time, two representatives from Bozar took part in the festival (the Musical Director and the Audience Engagement Manager). Visit.brussels sent its representative in Italy to Bologna. We ran a joint stand in the festival village. However, the stand attracted little interest, as the Brussels festival still seemed a long way off at that point. In any case, the foundations of our communication campaign were in place!

Social media

Various Voices' social media accounts are owned by Legato, so the *@variousvoiceschoirfestival* accounts are passed on from one festival to the next. That's at least one area where the new organising teams don't have to start from scratch! We retained the followers from previous editions.

We took over these social media accounts in September 2023, after Bologna had finished its communications work. We didn't have much to communicate at the start, so things got off to a slow start. It was really only when registrations opened in September 2024 that we began to structure our communications, using three different templates provided by KYD for posts focused either on information (a visual with text), an image, or the programme (several visuals in a carousel). These visuals were, of course, illustrated with our icons.

From September 2024 to December 2025, we focused our communications exclusively on choirs and festival-goers, with two posts each month (three from September 2025): information on registration, an introduction to the festival venues, an introduction to the Festival Team and an overview of the festival's main events. We published a story each time a new choir registered. We tagged Legato, the newly registered choir and Sing Out Brussels! in each story, generating shares. These stories were collected as highlights on our Instagram account. They generated a lot of reactions.

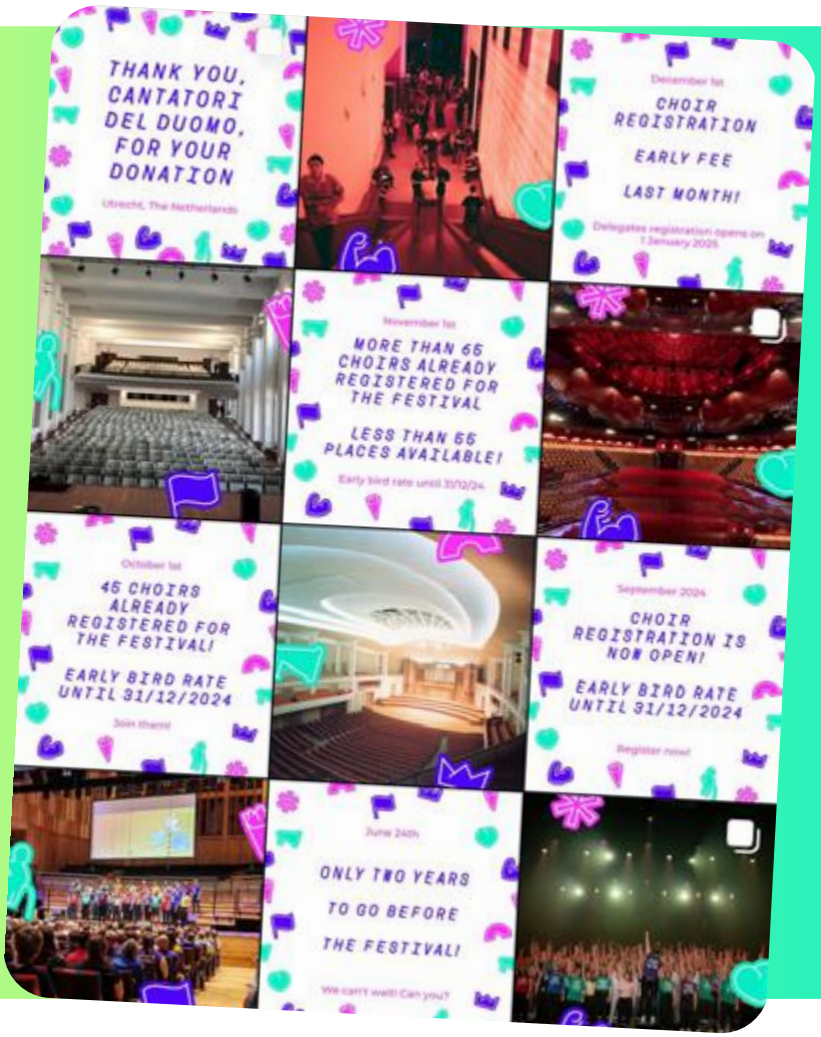
At the end of 2024, in the wake of Donald Trump's election and Meta's stance on inclusivity, we also debated whether to maintain our presence on the Facebook/Instagram networks. We decided to stay to avoid contributing to a lack of representation of our community on these networks and we also communicated about the situation. At the same time, the Festival Team migrated from Whatsapp to Signal for its internal communications.

In November 2025 the promotion of the *Let Your Heart Be Heard* video clip featured heavily on our social media channels.

From January to mid-May 2026, we showcased the 114 participating choirs on social media. This required careful planning to ensure we had enough time to feature everyone before the festival began. Preparing these posts took a great deal of time. Each choir was tagged in the relevant post, which generated shares and helped us gain a lot of followers.

From mid-May to mid-June, we showcased the guest artists performing at the shows and ceremonies. These posts were also shared by the artists themselves, which boosted tickets sale and engagement on our accounts

At the same time, we continued to post to promote the festival programme, ticket sales, the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' project, the festival shop, as well as to launch our calls for volunteers and thank our partners.



Newsletters

From September 2023, we started to send one newsletter a month to the few people who subscribed to it after Bologna. Although this is not in line with the GDPR, we added the contact details of all Legato's member choirs to the mailing list, as this was the only way we could get in touch with them.

Over time, we sent out three newsletters a month, aimed at three different target audiences: the Choir Administrators newsletter (from September 2024, at the beginning of each month, about their choir registration and their tasks as Administrators), the Delegates newsletter (from January 2025, about their own registration and information specific to Delegates), and, more sporadically, the external newsletter (over time, this one was tailored for the general public). All of this communication created anticipation and excitement, while clearly informing everyone about the progress of the festival preparations.

As part of the post-festival survey, we received complaints regarding the number of newsletters sent out. It is true that some people received all three newsletters, as they were Delegates, Choir Administrators and subscribers to the newsletter aimed at the general public.

However, we believe it was useful to repeat the information regularly and to communicate directly with all festival-goers. At previous festivals, communication was almost exclusively directed at Choir Leaders, rarely at Delegates, who often arrived at the festival knowing nothing about the organisation of the event.

Our feeling is that the reactions to this communication undoubtedly reflect what we all experience in our choirs: some people complain of being inundated with information, others complain of not being kept informed at all, not to mention those who never read the information and then complain of not being informed.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We leave it to you to work out the best way to communicate with the choirs and Delegates.

Email Management

Rather than creating individual email addresses for each member of the Festival Team, we opted to set up a single general email address to ensure that everyone had access to the same

level of information. There were mainly three of us managing the inbox, and our aim was always to be as responsive as possible.

Most people who contacted us received a reply within 24 hours, except in cases where the response required further research. This responsiveness was greatly appreciated and earned us many compliments.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

It's important to realise that managing emails takes a huge amount of time. Over time, we've actually prepared standard replies for frequently asked questions. But it's this responsiveness that builds trust.

'Rendez-vous à Bruxelles' / Hand in Hand Festival

In June 2024, Sing Out Brussels! hosted the 'Rendez-vous à Bruxelles' organized by Legato. Around twenty people took part in this event, bringing together Choir Leaders from the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Norway and Iceland.



The delegation visited the festival's main venues, including a behind-the-scenes look at Bozar. Our Artistic Director Simon Paco also presented their artistic project. The Festival Team provided a range of practical information. The day continued with a concert by Sing Out Brussels!, Voces Gaudii (Warsaw) and DynamiQ Voices (Utrecht). A fabulous afterparty and a delicious brunch brought the weekend to a close. This joint organisation by Legato, Sing Out Brussels! and Various Voices Brussels 2026 gave those taking part a comprehensive insight into what the festival experience would be like, and made our project much more concrete.

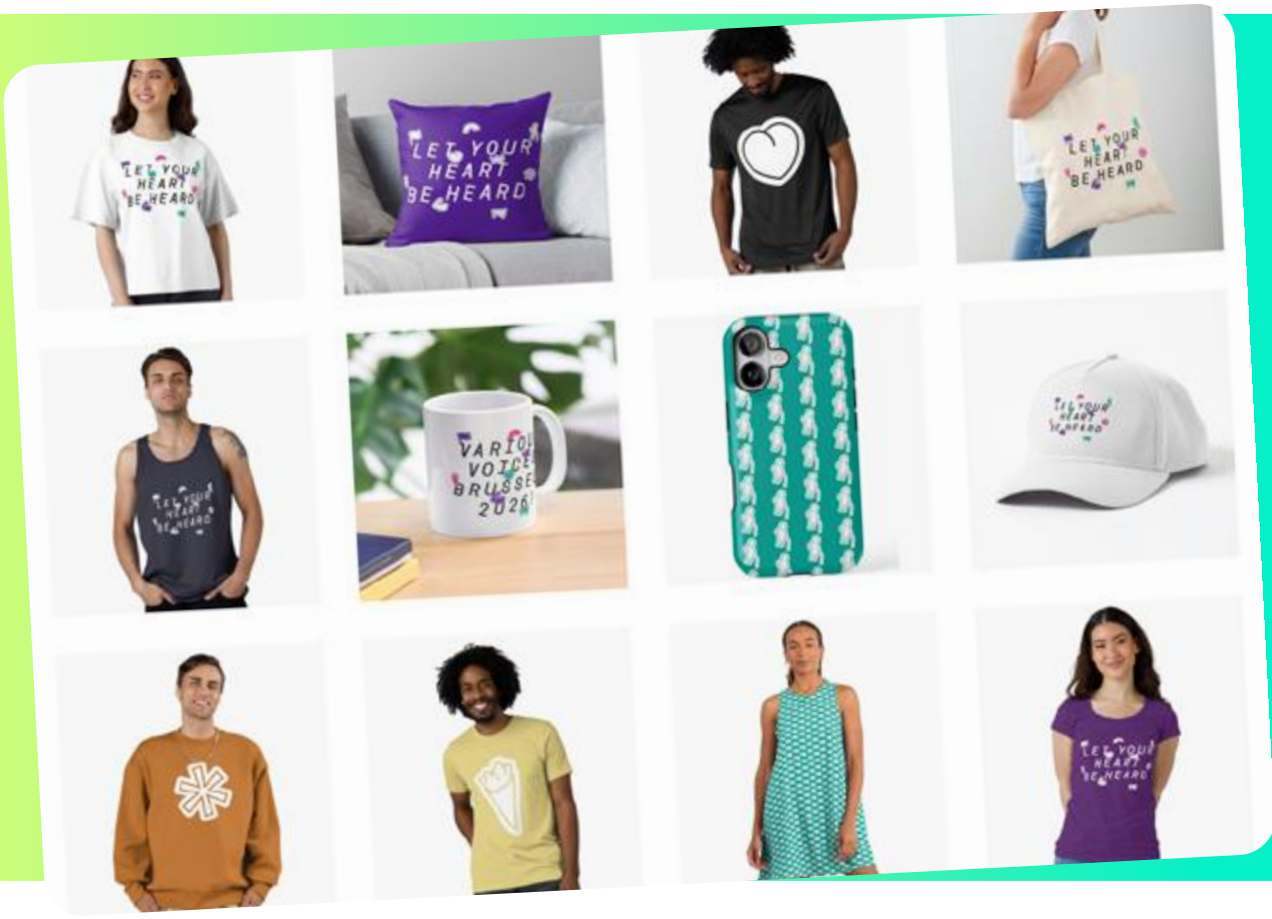
Those who took part in this event may well remember that it took place on the dates scheduled for the festival. It was freezing in Brussels and the sky was grey. At the time, no one could have imagined that we would be facing a terrible heatwave two years later...

A few months later, we received a summary of the survey carried out by Legato following this 'Rendez-vous in Brussels'. Most of the comments had already been expressed during the weekend

and the Festival Team took them into account (accessibility, concert opportunities, content of the shows). We reminded the choirs that we were doing our best to build a festival that would suit everyone, but that it won't be possible to make 100% of festival-goers 100% happy.

Finally, in August 2024, Sing Out Brussels! took part in the Hand in Hand festival (festival for LGBTQI+ choirs from the UK & Ireland), as the only continental choir invited. We took the opportunity to promote the festival by distributing our stickers and talking to the participants. It was clear that our festival was eagerly awaited.

Festival Shop



This relates more to merchandising than to communications, but we are nevertheless including the Festival Shop amongst our communications tools.

We had lengthy discussions at the Board meetings about producing a festival T-shirt. The debate centred on the sustainability of such T-shirts (often of poor quality, produced in Asia...) and on their inclusivity (one-size-fits-all designs suited to men with a 'standard' build, but not to other body types).

Drawing on the experience of Sing Out Brussels!, which had already carried out research on this topic for its own T-shirts,

we decided to use the RedBubble platform. This platform takes a sustainable approach because no product is manufactured until it is ordered. This means there is no stock and no waste. Furthermore, RedBubble pays its artists and designers the most fairly among these platforms. It offers a wide range of clothing designs and allowed us to offer items other than T-shirts (jumpers, caps, mugs, mouse mats... and even a shower curtain or bed linen!).

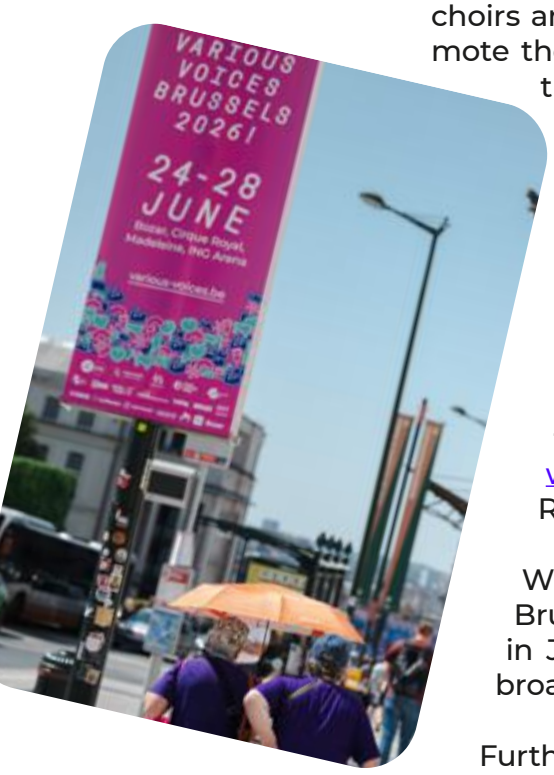
KYD adapted and uploaded the logos and icons, which were automatically adjusted to the various products offered by Redbubble.

Here is a summary of the shop's performance in terms of takings and items sold:

- **335** T-shirts (including 139 'LYHBH' and 144 'VV26' logo)
- **67** other textiles (jumpers, caps, socks)
- **114** stickers and magnets
- **27** various stuffs (mouse pad, Iphone case, tote bag, notebook, pillow...)
- **10** mugs

Consumers spent a total of **€7334**. The festival took a **7%** margin on the items sold. The aim of the shop was not to make a profit. It's currently still open.

Advertising



As well as promoting the festival to our target audience (LGBTQI+ choirs and singers), we allocated an advertising budget to promote the festival to the general public in Belgium. The aim of these advertising campaigns was twofold: to encourage the Belgian public to buy tickets for the event and to raise the event's profile in the public sphere.

We built a partnership with Tipik (an media outlet belonging to French-speaking Belgian public service broadcaster RTBF): this partnership with this national media outlet enabled us to benefit from two radio advertising campaigns in March and May 2026, at no extra cost to the festival apart from the production of the two adverts. This campaign was accompanied by a web article, the visibility of which was promoted on the RTBF website.

We also built a partnership with Bruzz, Dutch-language Brussels-based media outlet. An advert was broadcast in June 2026. We benefited from a reduced rate for this broadcast.

Furthermore, we launched a poster campaign. **25** posters were displayed on 2m² bus stop advertising hoardings at

various key locations in Brussels city centre, just before and during the festival.

The bulk of our advertising budget was invested in banners placed on lampposts at **25** particularly visible locations across Brussels from mid-June 2026. Around ten of these banners were vandalised the night after they were put up, but those that remained gave the festival significant visibility throughout the event. Many festival-goers also took photographs of these magnificent banners, which added a splash of colour to the city.

It is difficult to measure the impact of these adverts on festival attendance. This is undoubtedly the banner project of which we are most proud. We received a great deal of positive feedback about them. Their design, size and visibility went a long way towards lending credibility to the festival and raising its profile.

Media Coverage

We reached out to the general press on several occasions during the festival's preparations. We first issued a press release with the support of visit.brussels when Legato announced that Brussels had been chosen to host the festival. A news dispatch from the Belga press agency was picked up by numerous media outlets: La Libre Belgique, La Dernière Heure, Bruzz, Het Laatste Nieuws, Knack, RTBF and RTL.



Following our participation in the Bologna festival in 2023, Les Grenades, RTBF's feminist and inclusive project, dedicated an article to the Brussels festival.

In 2024, the 'Various Voices Rising' event, organised as part of the 'Rendez-vous à Bruxelles', earned us a feature on the regional television channel BX1, thereby raising the festival's profile.

We issued a new press release in January 2025, by which time the festival was already sold out with 120 choirs registered: Bruzz, RTBF, DH, BX1, La Libre, Brussels Times.

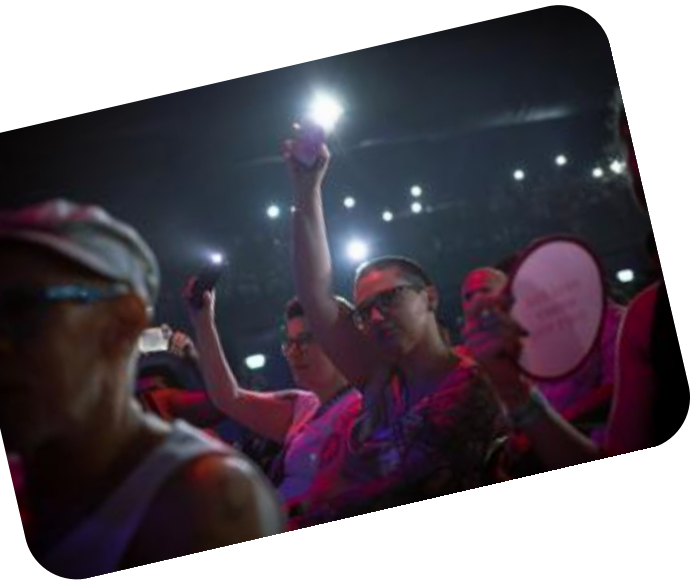
In 2026, our communications initially focused on the participatory project 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' and the rehearsals organised at Bozar in the run-up to the performance on 27 June. This led to us being invited onto the morning show on Vivacité Bruxelles (a regional RTBF channel) to promote the project. We were also invited onto the Tipik morning show (RTBF).

We built a partnership with the Brussels LGBTQI+ media Ket, which devoted a lot of articles to the festival over time : 22/02/26, 25/02/26, 04/03/26, 11/03/26, 02/04/26, 17/04/26, 27/04/26, 25/05/26, 29/06/26, 02/06/26, 04/06/26, 14/06/26.

As the festival approached, we were disappointed that the mainstream media were not showing greater interest in our project,

despite a context that was favourable to its visibility (the challenge to LGBTQI+ rights worldwide, the growing popularity of choral singing, the unique nature of the event, and its huge economic impact on the city). However, everything changed following the vandalism that affected around ten of our promotional banners. The shock was such that we spontaneously published a post in response on Instagram. This post quickly went viral. It was viewed over **1,130,000** times, liked **3,300** times, shared **500** times and generated nearly **200** comments. This huge buzz attracted the attention of the media, who published numerous articles and conducted interviews about the festival in the days that followed: Sudinfo, Bruxelles Today, RTBF, Bruzz, VRT, Het Laatste Nieuws, La Libre and La DH.

Whilst we appreciated the solidarity that followed this homophobic vandalism, we regretted that it took this incident for the media to take an interest in the festival. We therefore issued a further press release, urging the media to move the festival out of the 'News in Brief' sections and into the 'Society' or 'Culture' sections. Following this press release, we were invited on the morning programme of Bruzz and BX1 to talk about the festival in general.



DURING THE FESTIVAL


HOPE



THE HEATWAVE



It is said that Belgians are obsessed with the weather, which is often their first topic of conversation, given just how changeable it is in Belgium. During the festival, we had good reason to make it our main topic of conversation. The intense heat that prevailed throughout the festival took a heavy toll on the event.

The festival dates were not chosen by coincidence. In fact, they were the only dates on which all the venues were available at the same time, as the cultural season in Brussels ends around 20 June. Most venues are closed and unavailable for hire in July and August. Under these circumstances, we had a narrow window of opportunity to organise the festival.

Although these dates fall at the start of summer, our main concern during the six years of preparation for the festival has been rain and grey skies. By way of comparison, here are the weather conditions for these dates from 2020 to 2025:

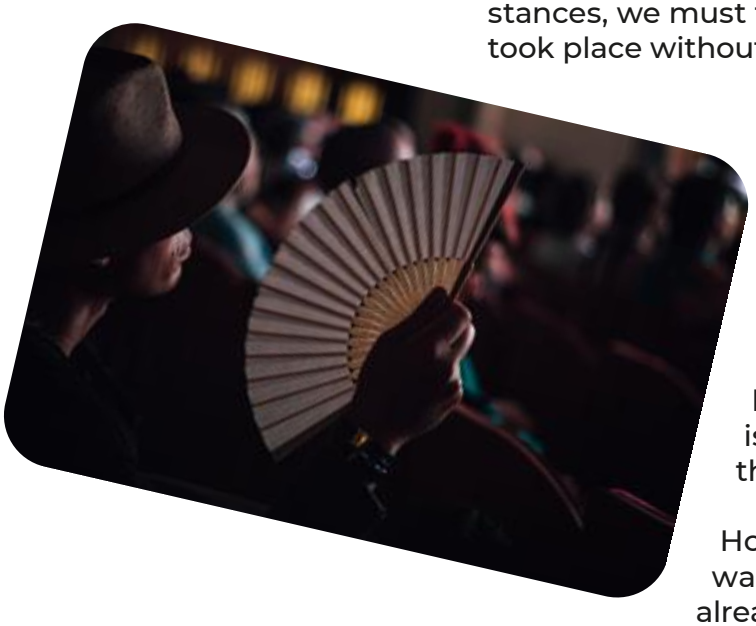
- → 2025 between 22 and 25°, with rain every day.
- → 2024 between 18 and 20°, with no rain, but grey sky and cold humidity.
- → 2023 between 22 and 25°, with rain on two out of five days.
- → 2022 between 18 and 20°, with no rain.
- → 2021 between 18 and 20°, with rain every day.
- → 2020 between 20 and 22°, with no rain.

We had therefore prepared for rather spring-like and probably rainy weather. This had, in fact, influenced our decision to limit the number of outdoor events on offer. The availability of air conditioning in the venues was never a concern for us.

A few days before the festival, we were initially relieved to hear that the sun was finally going to shine on Brussels... before quickly becoming disillusioned given the forecast temperatures.

Looking back, we now know that the festival took place during the hottest week ever recorded in Belgium since weather observations began in the country. On 26 June, the temperature reached **35.5°C** in Brussels, a record high for this time of

year. Never before had a heatwave struck so early, with, on top of that, six consecutive tropical nights from 21 to 26 June (including two nights with minimum temperatures of 24°C during the festival!), and seven days of extreme heat (maximum temperatures above 30°C). The thunderstorm that broke out during the night of 27–28 June was equally intense. In barely 30 minutes, 35.1 mm of rain fell in Brussels – half the amount of rain normally recorded for the whole of June. Given these conditions, over the entire period, 1,747 additional deaths were recorded in Belgium, representing an excess mortality rate of 47.8%. In these circumstances, we must first and foremost be grateful that the festival took place without any major health issues.



Belgium is clearly not equipped to cope with such temperatures. Air conditioning, for example, is not always available in public places or on public transport. Whilst most of our performance venues had air conditioning, air-conditioning systems were often not powerful enough to cope with such temperatures. Cirque Royal was a major issue, because it has no air conditioning and its roof is made of metal, which further exacerbated the situation in that venue.

However, cancelling or postponing the festival was never considered. All festival-goers were already on site anyway. As our events take place mainly indoors, the authorities did not ask us to take such measures, whereas on Saturday 27 June, the City of Brussels decided to evacuate the Couleur Café festival, held outdoors just a stone's throw from the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' show at the ING Arena, due to the threat of a thunderstorm.

In these exceptional circumstances, we took care to keep festival-goers as well informed as possible and to adapt whilst maintaining activities as far as possible:

- Communication through newsletters before the festival to inform of the weather conditions and offer some advice (bring a water bottle, drink plenty of fluids, dress lightly, bring a fan, etc.)
- Communication through newsletters during the festival to inform of the programme changes, possible adaptations and situation in the different venues.
- Tap water was available throughout all our venues, both for the audience and backstage.
- Given the stifling heat at the Cirque Royal, we split the evening shows 'Treachery of Images' and 'Royalties' into two parts, whereas each entire show was originally due to be performed twice. Moving the shows to another venue was technically and financially unfeasible. This was the best solution we could find, in the interests of both the artists and the audience.



Some initiatives were taken by our partners. For instance, at the Festival Village, visit.brussels installed a free drinking fountain and increased the number of parasols available. In front of Brussels Town Hall, where several festival events were taking place, the local authorities installed a drinking fountain. Vaux Hall Summer, however, did not provide any shade for the performing choirs, who had to sing facing the sun. We learnt that security staff had refused to allow festival-goers into certain venues with their water bottles, which is obviously deplorable given the circumstances.

This heatwave had an impact on the experience of the choirs, festival-goers and the Festival Team: shortened performances, very difficult concert conditions, last-minute ticketing issues to be resolved at the Cirque Royal, highly stressful crisis management, discomfort, fatigue and irritability caused by the heat, and low attendance at certain events and venues.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the choirs and festival-goers for their flexibility and understanding in the face of this entirely exceptional situation, which was, of course, beyond our control.

As part of our 2020–2021 application process, we had to anticipate what we would do in the event of a pandemic. It was a different time. During the festival, no festival-goer asked us any questions about the health and safety measures put in place. Everyone was talking about the heatwave.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

In future, application processes will undoubtedly need to take climate-related risks into account. As the Brighton Festival 2030 is set to take place in the middle of August, you will no doubt need to bear this in mind.

FESTIVAL PROGRAMME

The Programme

When registration opened, we offered three concert opportunities, just like 'Various Voices Munich 2018', from which we drew a great deal of inspiration: the afternoon concert, the street concert, and participation in a show or ceremony. The afternoon concert was compulsory. For the other two concerts, Choir Administrators were required to indicate their interest on the registration form. **87** choirs expressed an interest in these performances



From September 2025, in response to high demand from choirs, we added three further concert opportunities, thanks to our partnership with the City of Brussels: singing guided tours at the City Hall, a concert at the City Hall, or a concert as part of Vaux Hall Summer. A form sent to the choirs allowed them to express their interest in one or more concerts. **61** choirs expressed an interest in these performances. We were able to book them all as part of this programme. To meet certain specific requirements at the City Hall (small choirs), we proactively contacted a number of vocal groups that met the criteria in terms of the number of members.

In drawing up the programme, we took numerous constraints into account:

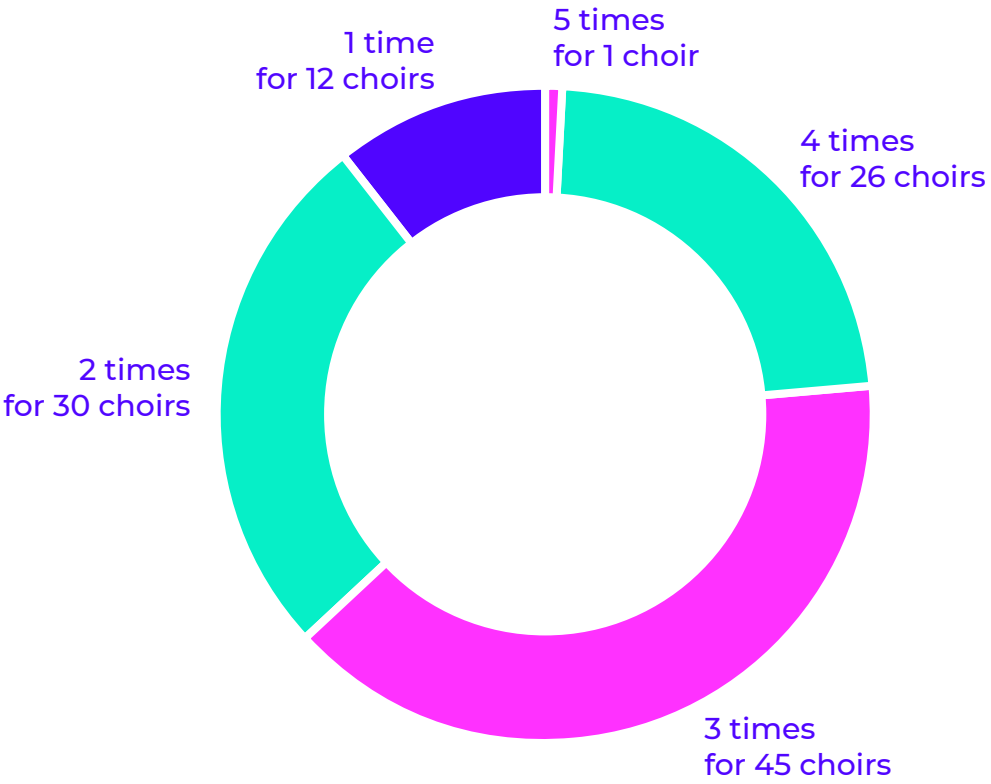
- Shared Choir Directors. The same Choir Director may lead several choirs, which therefore cannot be scheduled at the same time.
- Shared singers. The same singer may belong to several choirs (special mention goes to the European Queer Choir, which consists solely of singers who also sing in at least one other choir).
- Choir size (it is impossible to schedule very large choirs in small venues)
- Accessibility requirements (choir members with accessibility needs were scheduled to perform on stages without stairs).
- The choirs' arrival or departure dates (some festival participants did not arrive in Brussels until Thursday or Friday).



We scheduled **374** events, including **267** concerts (other events are rehearsals, soundchecks, workshops, and social activities):

→ Shows and ceremonies:	**9** sessions with **58** choirs on stage
→ Afternoon concerts:	**114** concerts
→ Vaux-Hall Summer:	**15** concerts
→ City Hall singing guided tours:	**40** performances for **32** choirs
→ Salle des Milices:	**17** free concerts
→ Street concerts:	**28** on Wednesday **44** on Saturday

In terms of the number of performances:





In order to organise the festival whilst taking these constraints and the choirs' concert requests into account, we developed our own scheduling app, capable of detecting conflicts. Without this app, we would probably never have managed it! In the vast majority of cases, we were able to accommodate all requests.

However, we manually reviewed this automated schedule, changing the venues or times for a few choirs to ensure the diversity of the programme (for example, to avoid having three SSAA choirs – which were already fewer in number – perform consecutively in the same venue, or

simultaneously in three different venues). In the end, we were able to send the festival programme to each choir in January 2026, even though we had set a later deadline to the end of March.

At the end of May 2026, the Festival Team sent the choirs a briefing for each venue, containing information on access to the venues, timings, the performance hall and its technical specifications (microphones, stage dimensions, positions of the raised platforms), dressing rooms, accessibility, and so on. Our Artistic Director sent a similar document, broken down by show or ceremony, to the choirs taking part.

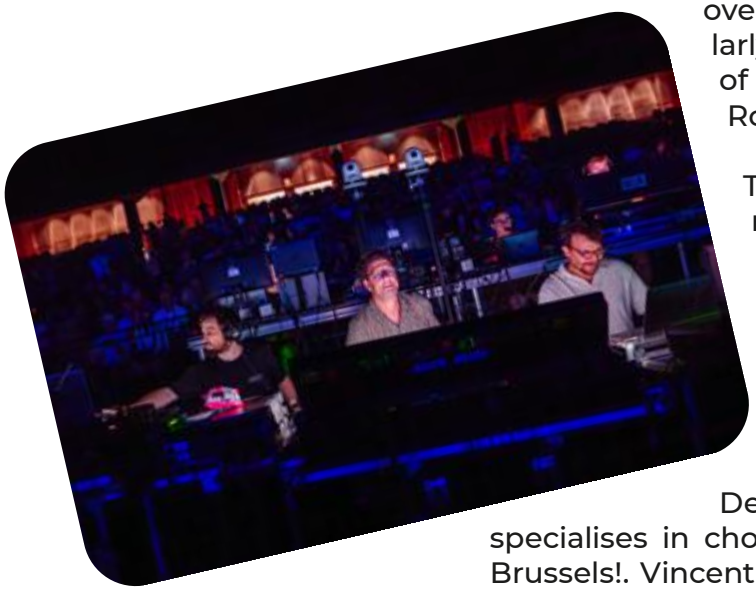
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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We urge you to be aware of the numerous constraints and requests put forward by the choirs. It is essential to compile all these requests into a single document to facilitate the process of sorting them for the programme (whether it is drawn up virtually or manually). Drawing up the programme is a huge task to fine tune but it generates a great deal of anticipation and excitement amongst the participating choirs.

Technical Team

In 2024, we appointed Antoine Denis as the festival's Technical Director. Antoine Denis runs Audeo, a company that works on over 300 events a year. We felt it was particularly important and useful to have a single point of contact for all our main venues (Bozar, Cirque Royal, Madeleine, Auditorium 490).



The other venues (partnership concerts) were not managed by Audeo. At the ING Arena, we had to choose one of the subcontractors specified by the venue. Antoine Denis handled all communications with this subcontractor.

Arrangements for the venues' sound systems were coordinated by Antoine Denis in collaboration with Sound Engineer Vincent De Bast, who was hired by the festival as he specialises in choir sound and works regularly with Sing Out Brussels!. Vincent's contribution was vital in helping our choirs shine on stage. Vincent was everywhere during the festival and even lent a hand with the sound system at the Vaux Hall, even though he hadn't been assigned to that venue.

For the lighting, we worked with Sébastien Mercial, who designed the lighting plans for the shows and ceremonies.

In March 2025, Antoine Denis provided us with technical estimates for each venue, including equipment and personnel. These estimates, which were very high, were reduced by 20% at our request.

The technical plan for each venue (sound and lighting) was finalised in April 2026. Meanwhile, the quotes provided in 2025 had almost doubled, mainly due to the technicians' extended working hours but also to some unforeseen circumstances (for example, Bozar wanted to force us to hire its sound system, which had not yet been installed when our contract was signed – we were not ultimately charged for this). At the ING Arena, the subcontractor didn't send the final quote until just one week before the festival! We had to hold tense discussions in the final days leading up to the festival to cut costs.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Antoine Denis and Vincent De Bast for their hard work and their flexibility. Their task was not an easy one, as they were unfamiliar with the event and were also unaccustomed to working with non-professional producers (the Festival Team).

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We would like to advise you that it is crucial to work with professionals specialising in sound for choirs for their festival, as this is a specialised field in its own right. It is equally crucial to establish effective professional relationships with these specialists, on whom a large part of the festival's success depends. We consider this collaboration to have been an extremely positive experience.

Ticketing Management

Our team explicitly wanted to open the festival to the general public. We didn't want a festival that was inward-looking, where LGBTQI+ choirs performed only for an audience of other LGBTQI+ choirs. Various Voices only makes sense if its message is spread widely.

Selling tickets was also necessary to boost our revenue, as the festival's expenses were constantly rising. However, we had to take into account the fact that our festival-goers needed to be

guaranteed a seat in the venues. Right from the start, one of our main challenges was finding a concert venue that could accommodate between 3,500 and 4,000 people. It was only possible at ING Arena. The capacity of Bozar and the Cirque Royal, even with double performances, is not sufficient to accommodate 4,000 people. We finally decided to open all events to the public. We gambled on the fact that not all festival-goers would attend every show, and we were right.

For the afternoon concerts, we explained the festival's concept to the venue managers: festival-goers move from venue to venue. We wanted to avoid having to allocate numbered seats. All the venues understood our request. For the general public, we sold *Afternoon Passes*, which granted access to all the venues.

For the shows and ceremonies, the situation was different. Both Bozar and the Cirque Royal insisted on numbered seating to facilitate crowd management. After lengthy negotiations, the two venues – which usually impose their own ticketing systems – agreed to let us use ours (Billetweb) to avoid festival-goers having to deal with multiple ticketing systems. Furthermore, Billetweb offers very competitive administration fees. Everything went very smoothly with Bozar, but not with the Cirque Royal. We had a dispute with the manager following a misunderstanding regarding the ticketing system. Resolving this dispute took us a great deal of time in the weeks leading up to the festival.



When we booked the ING Arena for the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' show on Saturday evening, we also asked to be able to use our own ticketing system. Despite our best efforts, this was refused by the management, who charged a high fee per ticket sold or given. Having two separate ticketing systems caused difficulties for both festival-goers and us.

For Bozar and the Cirque Royal, we deliberated at length over the best approach: pre-booking seats for each choir or allowing each chorister to book their own seat (whilst allowing multiple bookings so that friends could sit together). We opted for the second option. We already knew that many choir members would not be present for the entire duration of the festival and we wanted to avoid leaving seats empty. Furthermore, all these shows were being held at two different times, and we wanted to give choir members the option to choose the show time that suited them best. We therefore relied on individual responsibility. This decision was contested by several choirs, but we stand by it.

Normally, issuing a ticket involves booking fees paid by the organiser. Following negotiations, our ticketing partner, Billetweb, understood the unique nature of our festival and allowed festival-goers to book their seats free of charge.

At the ING Arena, however, where seating was not numbered, the venue itself sent tickets to all festival-goers, charging a fee.

We opened ticket sales for the shows at Bozar and the Cirque Royal in February 2026, with priority access for festival-goers until the end of March. After that, general public sales began. At the ING Arena, sales began in November 2025 and tickets were sent to festival-goers at the end of May.

Managing the ticketing process required a great deal of work and individual contact with festival-goers, despite the FAQs we had published (lost tickets, difficulties booking, singers scheduled to perform on stage who did not understand why they could not book a seat, seat changes).

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We urge you to bear these difficulties in mind if you wish to stage similar events. The simplest solution is, of course, to have a single ticketing system for all events, but this decision rests with the venue managers. Ideally, venues should also be large enough to accommodate all festival-goers at the same time for each show, thereby avoiding the need for individual advance bookings. However, given the continuous growth of Various Voices, this presents a challenge. In the case of a choice of shows, we still find the individual advance booking system to be the most effective.

Afternoon Concerts: the Heart of the Festival

Various Voices Brussels 2026 once again proved that the afternoon concerts truly are the heart and soul of the festival! What a joy it was to witness the performances of so many talented choirs, giving their very best in front of an audience that was both discerning and supportive.



The atmosphere in the venues (and in the corridors leading to them) was magical and extraordinary. As explained above, the well-thought-out programme allowed audiences to discover new choirs or reconnect with familiar ones, whilst also offering a variety of SSAA, SATB, TTBB and other ensembles of varying sizes. The afternoon concerts were very well attended; most venues were full.

Some concerts had a sparser audience, depending on the venue and the programme.



We deployed significant technical resources to ensure the choirs were properly amplified, so that they could all shine on stage.

Generally speaking, the timetable was adhered to, with sufficient time between each choir's performance. We paid very close attention to ensuring the timing was correct when the choirs provided us with their setlists. We are only aware of one issue at the Cirque Royal on Saturday afternoon, where some concerts were shorter than expected and, rather than waiting until the scheduled start time for the next concerts, the entire programme was brought forward, which we deeply regret.

We had decided to schedule the afternoon concerts over three days instead of five, bearing in mind that many choirs would not be available on Wednesday afternoons and Sundays. Managing the soundchecks proved to be a challenge. With **10** choirs scheduled each day in each venue, these soundchecks inevitably had to be rushed, as they could only take place within a three-hour window in the morning.

The main difficulty in organising these concerts was the lack of volunteers at key moments, even though their role is crucial for time management (see the 'Volunteering' section). We must also highlight the difficulty for people with reduced mobility in moving from hall to hall. Our cycle-taxi service worked well but could not meet all the demand. The ideal solution is, of course, to organise all the concerts in a single building, which was not possible in Brussels.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

These are important points we must convey: increasing the number of participating choirs might complicate the programming process, and it becomes difficult to manage within five days. Taking into account all the choirs' constraints and requests is also a major challenge. It is also essential to be very precise about the timing of the performances. The slightest slip-up can ruin an entire afternoon. Finally, our conclusion is the same as our introduction: these concerts are the heart of the festival. And our choirs are the stars of the event!

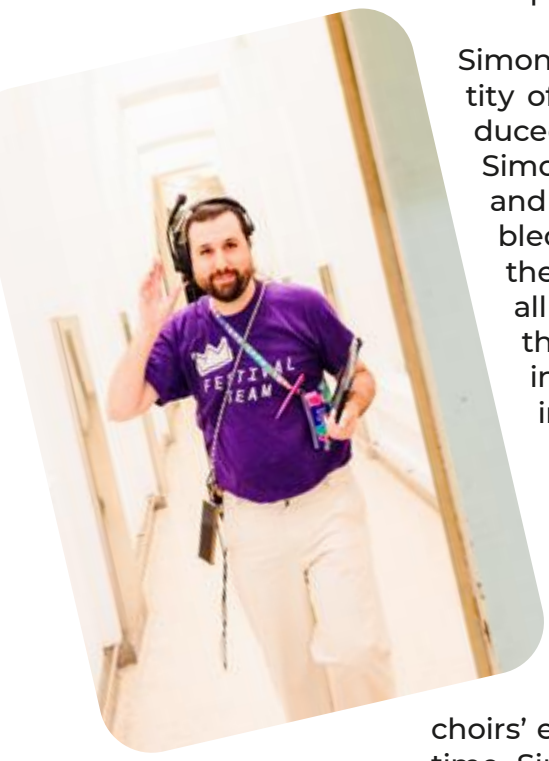
Shows & Ceremonies

Right from the start of our project, we wanted to create several shows, bringing together choirs around a central theme. We didn't invent anything new. As in Bologna, Munich and Dublin, these shows were an opportunity for us to showcase Belgian culture by inviting local artists to share the stage with the choirs, and also a chance to highlight the choirs whilst fostering connections between them.



We planned an opening and closing ceremony, as well as three shows. Their themes were decided following a brainstorming session organised within the Sing Out Brussels! choir during the 2021 lockdown. These themes, in keeping with the festival's Belgian, Brussels and European identity, were surrealism ('Treachery of Images', playing on gender and appearances), royalty and the European project.

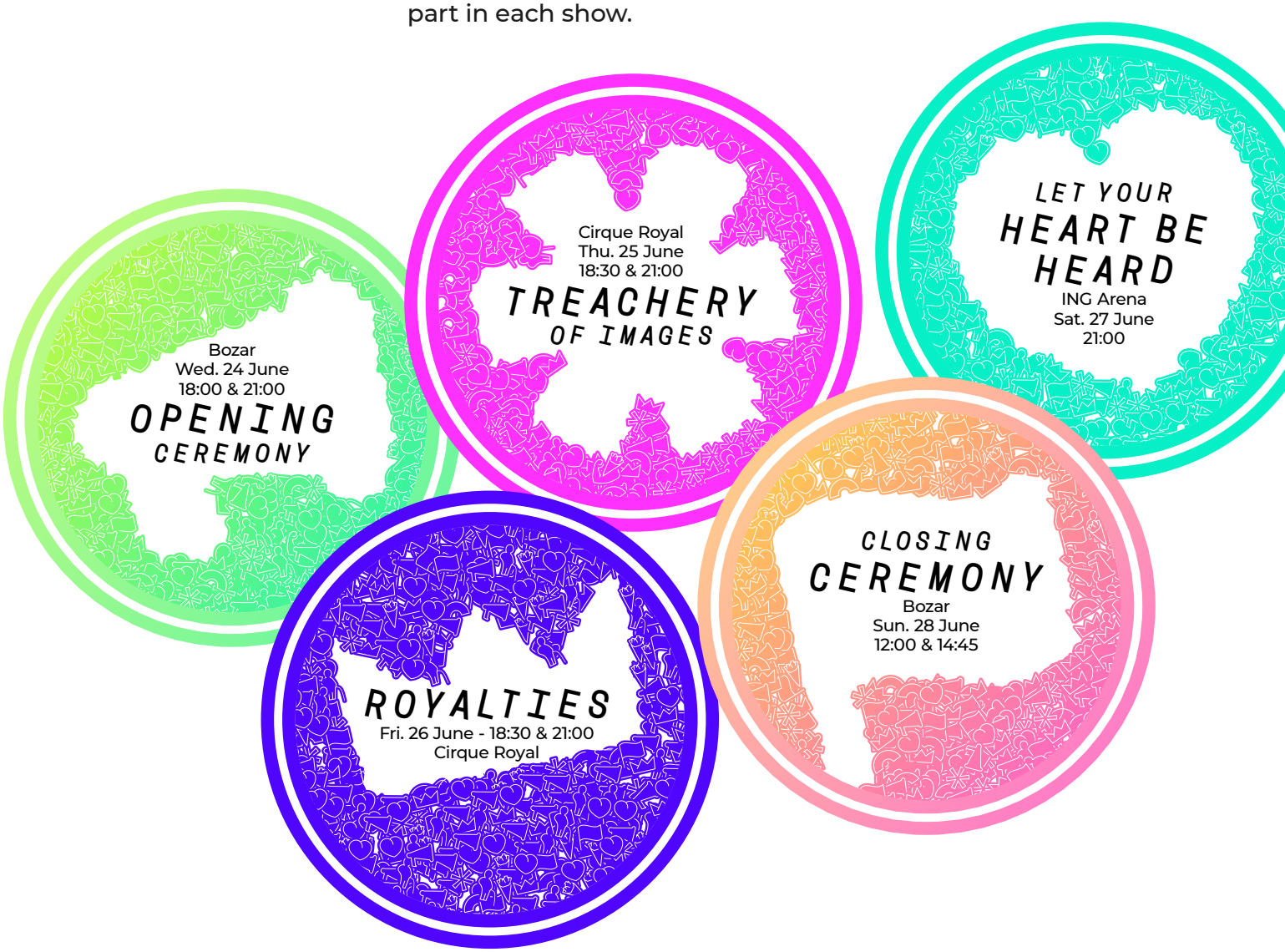
As artistic creation is a profession in its own right, we first got in touch with Sébastien Jurczys, with whom we worked on the bidbook. In 2022, as Sébastien moved abroad, we appointed Simon Paco as Artistic Director. We had already worked with Simon on several Sing Out Brussels! productions and had found the experience very rewarding. As Simon had never been involved with Various Voices before, we first gave them a detailed briefing to explain what the festival was all about, the need to showcase the choirs, and the unique nature of our choirs (highly organised amateur groups, but not actual professional performers).



Simon's first task was to carry out research to define the identity of each show and its message. In particular, they introduced the theme of 'Cabaret' to the 'Opening Ceremony'. Simon gave an initial presentation of their vision to our team and to key members within Sing Out Brussels!, which enabled them to refine the concept. One of our priorities was the diversity of the guest artists. We wanted to represent all the letters of the acronym LGBTQI+ on stage. Following these comments, Simon finalised their artistic dossier in 2024. The document was then shared with the choirs involved.

In the registration questionnaire, choirs could already express their interest in taking part in these performances. The artistic proposal included a questionnaire allowing them to specify their proposal (the show the choir wished to take part in, the proposed song, and any potential collaboration with another choir). Simon Paco received **83** proposals, which demonstrates the choirs' enthusiasm for taking part in these events. At the same time, Simon launched a call for applications from queer artists who would like to take part in our shows as guests.

In September 2025, Simon presented a first draft of the programme, stating that choirs registered for a single show would be given priority for that show. All choirs that applied were included in at least one show. The number of requests allowed to stage the same show twice each evening, which made organisation easier in terms of rehearsals. Approximately **15** choirs took part in each show.





Over the course of several months, Simon contacted each choir to explain the concept behind the shows, clarify their proposals and obtain additional information (song lyrics, copies of sheet music, video or audio recordings). Musical Director Emily Allison was consulted to ensure that the shows were well balanced (type of choirs, type of repertoire, etc.). We decided that musical quality would not be a selection criterion, as Various Voices is not a competition and every choir should be given the same opportunity to shine. Despite several reminders, some choirs never responded and were therefore removed from the list of candidate choirs. The programme of shows and ceremonies was finalised in December 2025.

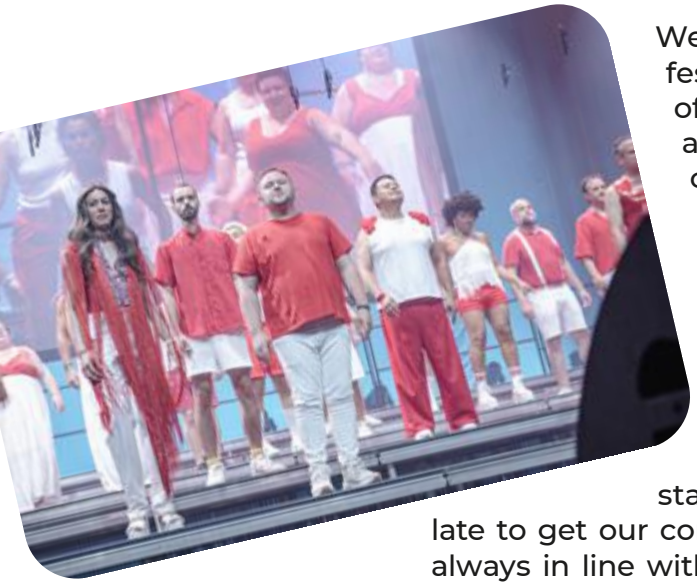
In January 2026, Simon hired the MCs Stéphanie Coerten (renowned in particular for her role as MC



at the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition) and La Veuve (an artist also well-versed in the art of event presentation). In March 2026, Simon presented us for the first time with a list of artists invited to perform on stage. However, many names were still to be confirmed.

It was from that point onwards that things began to go wrong. Simon was facing health issues and was, at the same time, busy with other professional projects. Their attendance at our meetings became less regular. They promised to provide the list of definitively confirmed guest artists, but this list never arrived. They also promised to provide us with the running orders for each show, but that didn't happen either. We had no insight into these running orders because Simon was working on their own document and had refused to enter the information on Integra, the platform we were using for scheduling the festival.

A few weeks before Various Voices, Simon noticed that some shows were too long. Whilst some choirs were due to sing two songs during the same show, they asked them to cut one. This provoked strong reactions from some choirs, with communication that was not always considerate. We supported Simon and called for respect for their work. We also reiterated our request for them to send us the show schedules.



We finally received them two weeks before the festival. We also finally received a very long list of guest artists (**23** artists and **7** DJs). These artists, spread across the five shows, showcased the diversity of the LGBTQI+ community (every letter of the acronym was represented) through a variety of art forms: live singing, drag queens, drag kings, stand-up comedy, circus acts, burlesque and performance art.

Simon had spent weeks chasing some of them to get their confirmation. No contracts had yet been signed, so we had to start negotiations with their managers far too late to get our contracts approved – contracts which were not always in line with the standard professional contracts usually signed by these artists.

Furthermore, whilst finally going through the running orders, we realised that the two shows scheduled at the Cirque Royal were 15 minutes too long compared to the timetable initially set by Simon and approved by the venue. At this stage, it was no longer feasible to remove any choirs from the programme. We therefore asked for guest artists to be removed. Simon preferred to move them to other shows. This created a huge imbalance as some shows now had far too many artists scheduled, particularly the 'Opening Ceremony' and the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' show, as well as an imbalance in the types of performances featured in

each show. We should have, at that point, insisted on cancelling or not signing certain contracts, but Simon was not at all open to this. We felt that they were primarily concerned with preserving their reputation on the Brussels arts scene, rather than prioritising the festival's interests. Given the very late submission by the Artistic Director, we also ran out of time to check the timing of the performances accurately and we had no choice but to trust what was delivered.

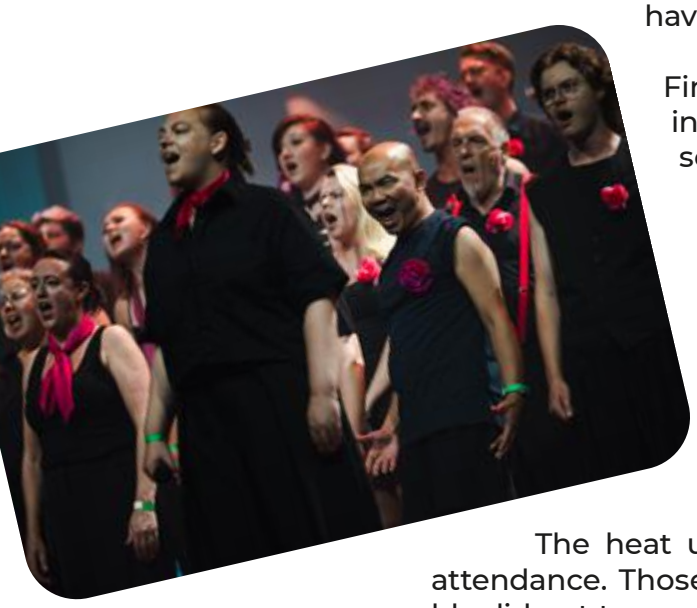
Then the festival began. And many things did not go as hoped for the shows & ceremonies.

- The rehearsal time was too short given the number of choirs and artists on the programme
- The time taken for the choirs to enter and exit the stage was underestimated, as well as the duration of the applause... This led to significant time overruns, particularly at the 'Opening Ceremony' and at the 'LYHBH' show, where the number of artists on the programme was far too high.
- Given the heat, working conditions were hellish, especially at the Cirque Royal. As a result, Simon suggested splitting each show in two. This was the best option rather than cancel. But although the choirs were understanding, it caused a great deal of frustration and also complete chaos in terms of ticketing, whilst almost all the shows were sold out.
- At the ING Arena, where we were working with a subcontractor imposed by the venue, huge problems arose (the stage wasn't erected in time, which caused delays during Saturday's rehearsals; the equipment provided to the trapeze artist, who was due to fly through the air, was incorrect, and the artist had to perform their act on the ground; there was a general lack of respect shown by the subcontractor towards our teams; ...)



Under these circumstances, Simon tried to salvage the situation as best they could, notably by cutting down on the MCs' speeches and asking the choirs not to take their bows... Moments intended to get the audience singing along were cut. This created a great deal of frustration and tension backstage. At the 'Opening Ceremony', they suggested cutting the performance of the festival anthem, which was non-negotiable for the Festival Team. During the 'LYHBH' show, the teams were under a lot of stress because the show ran 45 minutes longer than planned. The performance of the festival anthem, at the end of the evening, was really a last-minute rush. We were worried that the audience would miss the last underground train. Security staff was particularly on edge given the time overrun. The venue had, in fact, emptied considerably as the show still went on.

The movement of guest artists from one show to another also severely undermined the coherence of the themes. The overarching dramaturgy was no longer really discernible. It also undermined the representativeness of the LGBTQI+ community, with, for example, a far greater number of drag queens than originally planned for the 'LYHBH' show. Some artistic performances also provoked reactions. We regret that some people misunderstood what burlesque art is and perceived sexualisation in the work of artists who, on the contrary, are taking ownership of their bodies as a tool of power. Others did not appreciate the political message of certain acts. We had not been able to view these acts in advance (and in some cases, we didn't even see them because we were backstage). Whilst we obviously respect artistic freedom, we believe that, as the producers of these shows, we should have had the right to review the content.



Finally, attendance at the shows was disappointing, even though a lot of them were listed as sold out.

For the 'LYHBH' show, festival-goers had not chosen their seats but had all received their tickets by email. We were expecting just over 4,000 people (festival-goers and paying audience members). Barely **42%** of the expected audience turned up. 74% of the paying audience attended, but barely 39% of the festival-goers.

The heat undoubtedly played a major role in this low attendance. Those disappointed by the first few shows probably did not turn up for the subsequent ones. And the ING Arena undoubtedly suffered from its distance from the city centre.

We would like to commend Simon's preparatory work, as well as the work carried out during the festival under extremely difficult conditions. We would also like to extend our warmest thanks to their team of assistants: Manon de Terwangne, Clémence de Terwangne and Alex Sartoretti. We are very proud to have succeeded in staging five full-length, large-scale shows, featuring a variety of artistic offerings. We are also impressed by the quality of the performances by the choirs, who shone on Brussels' finest stages. Finally, we are delighted to see the number of choirs involved and the number that embraced the spirit of collaboration (each show included at least one song performed collectively by several choirs).



However, we remain very frustrated by the way these shows were conducted. We did not find what we had hoped for in terms of timing, coherence, a unifying theme, or the narrative provided by the MCs. We feel that we placed too much trust in our Artistic Director and did not sufficiently recognise the extent of our role as show producers.

Show booking and attendance rates

Shows	Sets	Venue capacity	Booked & sold tickets	Attendance rates on bookings
'Opening Ceremony'	Wed. 18:00	Bozar 1771 p.	83%	77%
'Opening Ceremony'	Wed. 21:00		Sold out	77%
'The Treachery of Images'	Thu. 18:30	Cirque Royal 1837 p.	68%	58%
'The Treachery of Images'	Thu. 21:00		88%	64%
'Royalties'	Fri. 18:30		65%	32%
'Royalties'	Fri. 21:00		Sold out	33%
'Let Your Heart Be Heard'	Sat.	ING Arena 6000 p.	57%	42%
'Closing Ceremony'	Sun. 12:00	Bozar 1771 p.	Sold out	52%
'Closing Ceremony'	Sun. 14:45		36%	62%

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We wish to point out that we organised five massive shows across three different venues, which made the organisation extremely complicated. Should all the shows be held in a single venue? Put on a single large-scale show? Divide the task amongst several Artistic Directors? These are avenues worth exploring. It would undoubtedly also have been useful to separate the tasks into purely creative responsibilities and purely operational ones (technical requirements, contracts, etc.). Given the scale of the festival, it was clearly too much for a single person. We would also recommend putting backup arrangements in place for all key roles (Artistic Director, Musical Director, etc.). Relying entirely on a single person carries too great a risk.

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Never forget that only you know what the spirit and mission of Various Voices is. It is your duty to ensure that this spirit is properly upheld. All decisions must be approved by the organising team, including artistic decisions.

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You also need to think carefully about the energy and budget you wish to devote to these shows. The 'LYHBH' show represents a huge budget (it is by far the most expensive event of the festival). One of its main aims was to bring all festival-goers together in one place. However, fewer than half turned up. So was it worth the effort?

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Finally, in an ideal world, the Creative Team at Sing Out Brussels! should have been involved in preparing these shows. Unfortunately, this team was already heavily tied up with the major shows put on each year by the choir. This may also explain the gap between our expectations as choristers and the final result. If you have the opportunity, involve your members in the design of the performances. And if an Artistic Director is brought on board, it is essential to constantly reiterate the basic rules of Various Voices: choirs must be placed at the centre, and the artists must complement them and, ideally, interact with them. These conclusions, drawn by our team the very day after the festival, were also widely echoed by festival-goers in the post-festival survey (see the relevant chapter) and by Simon themself in a document summarising the advice they wish to pass on to future Artistic Directors, which we can make available to the relevant teams.

Street Concerts



The street concerts were the easiest to organise. During Summer 2025, we identified key locations in Brussels city centre where these concerts could take place, with the help of our Musical Director, who ruled out certain venues that were too noisy. We then applied for permission from the City of Brussels, which was granted without any difficulty at the end of 2025.

In terms of timings, we decided to organise the street concerts on Wednesday afternoon, to mark the start of the festival and generate interest in the event, and on Saturday morning, to promote the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' evening show at the ING Arena. We were also determined to avoid the street concerts competing with the afternoon concerts, as this would inevitably have led to people leaving the venues.

We made it clear right from the registration process that these concerts would take place with a minimal set-up (no stage, no amplification, no equipment), due to a lack of available funding. Some choirs that do not sing a cappella nevertheless performed on the streets of Brussels, bringing their own equipment.

Due to the heat, the choirs had to adapt, either by choosing a shaded spot to sing or by shortening the length of their set. One choir chose to cancel its street concert.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We know that many choirs love street concerts! These greatly contributed to the festival's visibility in the city. We can, of course, only encourage future festivals to organise similar events. It costs nothing and brings so much joy!

Concerts as part of Partnerships

At the 'Rendez-Vous à Bruxelles' in 2024, several Choir Administrators made it clear to us that there were not enough concert opportunities on offer, particularly because some choirs sing with piano accompaniment and are therefore unable to perform street concerts.

Bearing in mind that our budget did not allow us to hire additional concert venues, we therefore sought to establish partnerships. We are delighted and proud to have achieved our objective by offering – to choirs who wished to do so – three additional concert opportunities. They applied via a registration form sent to Choir Administrators in early October 2025 and closed on 30 November 2025.

We finalised the programme by offering at least one option to all choirs that requested it, whilst taking into account each choir's requests and their respective constraints, such as their performance timings or technical requirements. Choirs that did not respond to the registration form were, of course, not included in the programme.

City Hall Guided Tours

Thanks to our close links with the team at the Brussels Department for Equal Opportunities, we got in touch with BME (Brussels Major Events), which organises guided tours of Brussels' City Hall. From time to time throughout the year, themed guided tours are offered (featuring dance or circus performances).

The BME had never tried this with choirs before and responded enthusiastically to our proposal. The City Hall is open to visitors on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons. These tours were punctuated with short 15-minute concerts with a basic setup (no microphones, no lighting) in three rooms (Gothic Hall, Council Hall and Mayor Office), each of which could accommodate choirs of different sizes within this prestigious building. A piano was available in the Gothic Hall.



Our task was to fill all the slots allocated for these performances. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the choirs who agreed to perform twice, or who agreed to perform early on Wednesday and late on Sunday to fill in the gaps. The festival received financial compensation of **€2,000** for its programming work, whilst the BME covered the cost of tuning the piano, providing drinks and snacks, and producing an aftermovie specifically for the guided tours. Photographers from the BME also captured the highlights.

Our volunteers were responsible for welcoming the choirs, whilst BME staff welcomed the general public. The organisation was a little chaotic on the first day, and the Festival Team had to step in to clarify arrangements regarding the dressing rooms, access to the tours and movement within the building. It was a first for both our team and the BME, but we were able to deal with the issues constructively and everything ran smoothly thereafter.

There was an admission charge for these tours, at a price slightly higher than the usual rate for guided tours, given the musical programme on offer. This had been clearly communicated to

festival-goers via our website and our newsletters but omitted on the printed program. Some festival-goers who were unaware of this information reacted very strongly and made inappropriate complaints to BME staff or our volunteers, which we deeply regret.

During the festival, the City Hall welcomed **508** visitors, whilst the total capacity over the four days was **1,530** visitors. More than the price, we believe it was the extreme heat that put visitors off. Nevertheless, we view this collaboration very positively, as it enabled a lot of choirs to perform in this historic venue.

Free Concerts at the City Hall



On Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 11.00 am to 1.30 pm, the festival hosted concerts at the Salle des Milices, which was made available free of charge by the City of Brussels. This hall is located on the ground floor of Brussels City Hall, with direct access from the Grand-Place.

The aim here was to put on free concerts open to everyone, particularly tourists strolling around the Grand-Place in Brussels. As the event was free and the venue was small (**120** seats), no technical set-up was planned.

We didn't keep a headcount here, but we were told that the venue was always full and that the queue at the entrance was sometimes quite long! Despite a problem with the security guard, who arrived late on Friday, and a sometimes noisy environment, the event was therefore a great success for us, allowing people to experience the festival atmosphere outside our main concert venues.

Vaux Hall Summer



Visit.brussels put us in touch with the City of Brussels' Culture Department, the organiser of Vaux Hall Summer, a free festival that brings that magnificent Belle Epoque venue in Brussels' Royal Park to life every summer.

The festival was solely responsible for the programme here. The Vaux Hall Summer Team was in charge of welcoming the choirs and setting up the technical equipment. The bars were also run by Vaux Hall Summer. Concerts were held every evening of the festival from 6.30 pm to 8.30 pm.

The start on Wednesday was a little chaotic, particularly in terms of accommodating people with reduced mobility and technical issues which required the festival's Sound Engineer to step in. It is also regrettable that Vaux Hall Summer

did not provide an emergency solution to shield the choirs from the sun in the early evening.

Nevertheless, the experience was very positive for both sides, with high attendance (**480** pax on Wednesday, **800** on Thursday, **850** on Friday, **390** on Saturday, whilst the venue can accommodate a maximum of **1,000**) and, above all, an excellent atmosphere every evening. Vaux Hall Summer truly reflected the atmosphere and spirit of the festival.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

Through these concerts, we not only gave the choirs another opportunity to shine: we also opened up the festival to the city, its residents and its visitors, as these events were not part of the Festival Pass and mostly free. We strongly encourage you to build similar partnerships in their own town.

Community Spirit, Social Programme

Alongside the already very busy musical programme, we felt it was important to offer a social programme designed to encourage festival-goers to meet one another. Given the scale of the festival, it is indeed difficult for many festival-goers to step outside their comfort zone to get to know people from outside their own choir.

Festival Village



The Village was the meeting place for festival-goers, where they could get together for a drink, chat or take part in socio-cultural activities. It was set up at the BIP (Brussels Info Point), the offices of our partner visit.brussels, in the heart of the Royal Quarter where most of our venues were located.

It included the BIP's Cour d'Honneur (an open area with bars, food trucks, chairs and tables, the Salle des Guichets on the ground floor of the BIP, which could be used as a fallback location in case of rain and host socio-cultural activities, a chill room for the volunteers and a work room for the Festival Team and the photographers/videographers.

The Village was open for four days: Wednesday 24 June from 12 noon to 11 pm, Thursday 25 June

from 10 am to 11 pm, Friday 26 June from 10 am to 11 pm and Saturday 27 June from 10 am to 6 pm.

The bar's takings were deducted from the rent payable for the spaces. As for the two food trucks, we had agreed a minimum turnover with the operators, which was not met by the chip shop. The festival therefore had to make up the shortfall.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

The Village fully fulfilled its role as a meeting place. It could undoubtedly have been busier. The heat probably limited visitor numbers, as the space is very open. However, it is essential to have a base that can serve both as a meeting place and a hub for work for the teams. It should ideally be located close to the festival's main venues.

Guided Tours

During the festival, **11** themed LGBTQI+ and feminist guided tours took place. They were led by specialist organisations: The Museum of the City of Brussels, L-tour and L'Architecture qui dégenre.

These tours were not included in the Festival Pass. We offered registration at a flat rate of **€11**, with this amount going solely towards paying the guides. Initially, 16 tours were on offer. We cancelled five of them due to insufficient numbers of registrants. Those affected were refunded or rebooked onto another guided tour.

In total, **269** festival-goers signed up for a guided tour. It was a great success! We did not keep attendance figures, but we know that all the tours went ahead and we received positive feedback from the guides.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We strongly encourage you to organise this type of themed tour, which generates a great deal of interest, meets a real demand and anchors the festival to the hosting city.

Let Your Heart Be Heard rehearsals

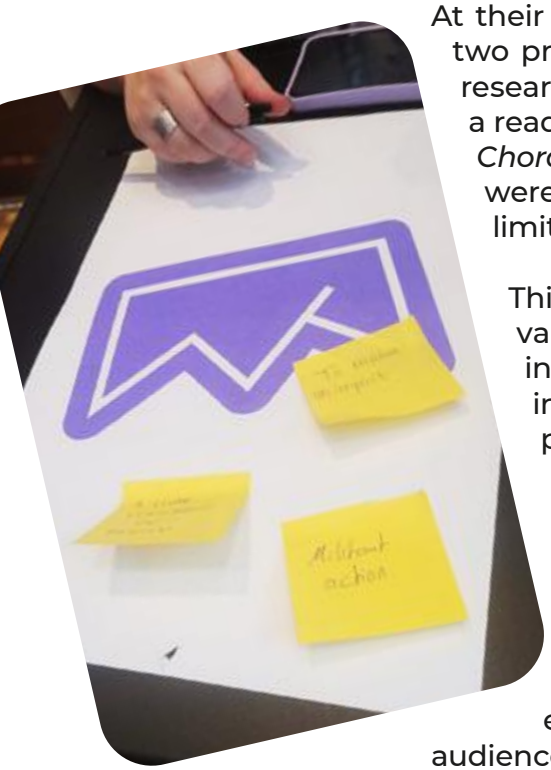
These rehearsals were organised as part of the 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' project, which has already been detailed at length above. During the festival, we organised two group singing sessions, on Thursday and Friday mornings. These rehearsals took place in the Terarken room at Bozar and were led by our Musical Director, Emily Allison. Each rehearsal brought together between **100** and **200** Delegates, who were able to learn or perfect their rendition of the festival anthem.

Workshops

We organised five workshops in the mornings during the festival. These workshops were included in the *Festival Pass*.

Given the limited capacity of the workshops venues, we asked festival-goers to register. That's why, before the festival, we cancelled a sixth workshop originally planned on the festival's affordability, due to a lack of registrations.

Of the five workshops, two went very well: *Why does a choir need a strategy*? and the workshop about *Inclusion of trans and non-binary people in our choirs*. The number of participants was lower than the number of those who had registered, but the facilitators appreciated the quality of the discussions. To our knowledge, the other workshops (*LGBTQI+ rights in Europe*, *A sense of European belonging* and the *Choir Historic Workshop*) had a fairly low attendance rate. Some of them already had a small number of registered Delegates (fewer than 20), but in some cases there were only a handful of people taking part.



At their request, we also set aside some time at lunchtime for two presentations: one by Yonatan Volfin, who is conducting research into a sense of belonging within LGBTQI+ choirs, and a reading by Jules Balen from his book *A Queerly Joyful Noise: Choral Musicking for Social Justice*. These two sessions, which were open to all without prior registration, also attracted a limited audience.

This is one of the paradoxes highlighted by the post-festival survey: many festival-goers are clearly keen to engage in discussions and meet others on these topics, which are important to them as LGBTQI+ singers, yet very few people actually took part in these workshops.

The heat, a lack of interest, an already very busy programme, and the fact that these workshops were perhaps too specialised are possible explanations for the low turnout. The calibre of the speakers is certainly not in question. It was, however, very awkward to have invited the Director of ILGA-Europe, who gave a presentation on the state of LGBTQI+ rights in Europe to an audience of barely three people...

TO FUTURE TEAMS 29

It is up to you to decide whether or not it is appropriate to offer workshops during the festival you will be organising.

Social Activities

As for recreational activities, we offered an activity every evening alongside the double shows organised at Bozar or the Cirque Royal on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday: a karaoke evening, a dance workshop and a quiz. We would like to thank all the volunteers who ran these activities.



These free activities (included in the *Festival Pass*) met with mixed success, no doubt for reasons similar to those affecting the workshops (the heat, an already packed programme). The post-festival survey, however, confirms the need to organise activities of this kind to encourage festival-goers from different backgrounds to meet and chat.

At Legato's request, we also coordinated the organisation of a reception for the Choir Administrators. This networking event took place in the Salle des Guichets at the BIP on Thursday at lunchtime.

Finally, a Delegate contacted us to offer to coordinate the organisation of activities for people wishing to stay sober during the festival. He set up a smartphone messaging group, which we promoted via our newsletter. Around a hundred people joined the group. During the festival, we made a room available for a 12-step recovery meeting for those in recovery, or those curious about it.

TO FUTURE TEAMS 30

The post-festival survey shows that there is a genuine demand for this sort of event, although they met with varying degrees of success during the festival. We nevertheless encourage you to put together a programme that includes such social activities, in line with your goals.

Night parties

We planned from the outset to organise dance parties every night. Initially, we would have liked to organise the parties at the venues themselves, but this was not permitted, as the venues closed at 11 pm (which is also why we were unable to offer different activities in the Village after that time, even though that had also been our original intention, given that not everyone enjoys dance parties). Finally we opted for the C12, a club located in the city centre, close to our concert venues. The C12 has two rooms (C12 and C11) which can offer two different atmospheres.



In Brussels, the C12 is known for its inclusive policy. Queer nights are regularly held there. The staff are specifically trained to welcome the LGBTQI+ community and the venue is accessible. C12 has its own Care Team which steps in should any incidents occur and assists people with reduced mobility.

The organisation of the dance parties was entrusted to our Artistic Director. They hired several DJs from the Brussels queer scene to host these evenings. Their initial plan was to organise parties in keeping with the theme of each evening's show, thereby bringing together artists and adapting the atmosphere and décor each night. However, for budgetary reasons, this proved unfeasible.

At the same time, we made several attempts to establish a partnership with Brussels Rainbow Village, the organisation that brings together all LGBQTI+ businesses – particularly the bars – in the Saint-Jacques neighbourhood (Brussels' 'gay' district). We sent a large number of emails, managed to secure a meeting and generate some interest, and followed up on numerous occasions... But it never came to anything. Possible explanations include the proximity of Brussels Pride, which took place a month before the festival and took up a great deal of their energy, and perhaps also a certain condescension towards a choir festival.

During the festival, however, the night parties were poorly attended, which we attribute to two main reasons: the heat, which led festival-goers to opt instead for the atmosphere of the bars in the 'gay' district, and the atmosphere at the C12, which failed to meet festival-goers' expectations (lighting that was too dim, and predominantly clubbing music that did not suit part of the festival audience's tastes). Furthermore, whilst several festival-goers praised the venue's inclusivity, others complained that they did not feel welcome there, particularly women (no doubt due to the lighting and the male-dominated atmosphere at these events).

The events at C12 were normally reserved for festival-goers wearing their *Festival Badges*, but given the low turnout, we decided on Friday that anyone accompanying a badge-wearing festival-goer could enter.

Those who attended certainly enjoyed their evening, but we nevertheless have several regrets regarding the line-up and organisation of these events, which we have shared with our Artistic Director. There was clearly a lack of briefing for the DJs regarding the target audience and the type of music required (with the notable exception of Friday evening). There was also a lack of consideration given to the venue's lighting to ensure the events better matched the festival's warm and welcoming atmosphere. Finally, having two venues could have allowed for two different atmospheres or activities (like a karaoke). This was not the case.

Given the very high footfall at the bars in the town centre, we really regretted that the partnership with Brussels Rainbow Village could not be finalised as we would have liked. This would have enabled the bars to be better prepared for the influx of visitors. The atmosphere on Rue du Marché au Charbon – Saint-Jacques' most animated street – during the festival was incredible (and even included some spontaneous singing!) and this also greatly contributed to the festival's visibility and reputation

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

In the longer term, you need to consider whether it is necessary to organise a night party every day. The festival programme is packed, and the average age of Delegates is 50. A single main evening event would probably suffice, provided partnerships are established with other LGBTQI+ venues or events on the other days.







INCLUSIVITY



Various Voices remains a festival heavily dominated by gay men. Women, transgender and non-binary people are fewer in number and therefore less visible. Members of Sing Out Brussels! had already noted this during the internal survey we carried out after Bologna.

In light of this, here are some examples of initiatives put in place to foster a sense of belonging and well-being amongst all Delegates:

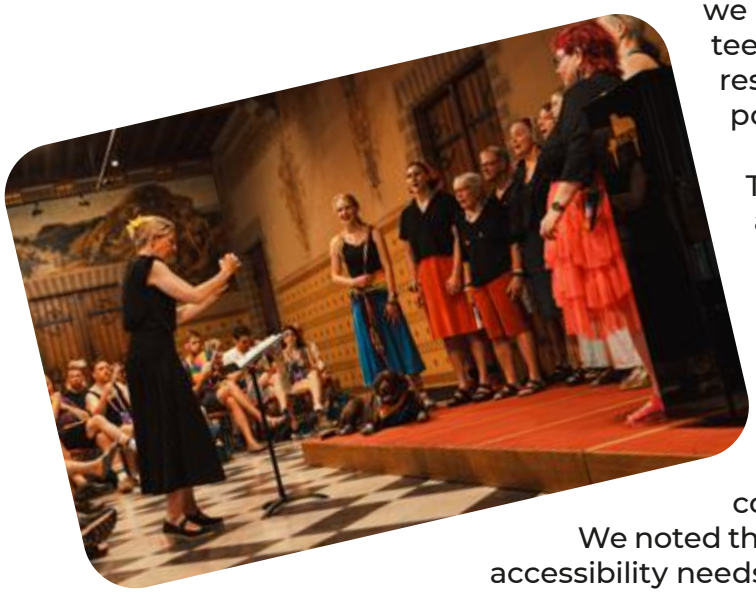
- Proactive outreach to choirs comprising a majority of women, transgender or non-binary people, to encourage them to register for the festival.
- Establishing criteria for the waiting list to prioritise the registration of these choirs.
- Asking for the preferred first name at the time of registration (this was the name that appeared on the *Festival Badge*).
- Asking for preferred pronouns during registration.
- Option to have one's pronouns displayed on the *Festival Badge*, in a space provided for this purpose and without pre-printing, as pronouns may change over time.
- Setting up a small, intimate Village with a relaxed atmosphere, close to the festival venues.
- Gender-neutral toilets (with specific icons on posters on the doors when it was gendered).
- Use of different languages in our communication (trilingual website)
- Choosing an inclusive venue with a Care Team for the evening parties
- A letter game on the *Festival Badges* to encourage choirs to make contact with one another.
- The option for choirs to perform a song with other choirs during shows and ceremonies (this happened at least once in every show).
- Large choice of social activities allowing Delegates to meet and connect.
- Diversity of the Guest Artists (all the letters of the LGBTQI+ acronym were represented on stage during the festival).
- Particular attention paid to the programme to ensure all types of choirs are given visibility (small choirs on large stages, etc.) and to avoid, for example, several SSAA choirs singing at the same time in different venues.
- Organisation of a workshop on the inclusion of trans and non-binary people in our choirs, led by those with lived experience.
- Partnership with Plan Sacha to prevent sexual and gender-based violence.

Overall, the atmosphere during the festival was excellent, and several participants told us how pleased they were with the festival's inclusivity. Of course, not everything was perfect: many people did not feel comfortable in male-dominated spaces or felt unsafe in public areas. Inclusivity is, of course, an ongoing process that will also depend heavily on how the profile of Delegates evolves in the future.

ACCESSIBILITY

Belgium lags far behind in terms of accessibility: there's no law requiring the venue managers to make their facilities accessible. Belgian associations representing people with disabilities, as well as accessibility consultancy firms, have been working on this with current political representatives and government departments for nearly 20 years, but they have not yet managed to secure such legislation. Belgium is, moreover, a country with a complex institutional structure. Accessibility standards vary depending on whether one is in Brussels, Flanders or Wallonia. Finally, Brussels is a historic city (with numerous cobbled streets and narrow, uneven pavements) and is quite hilly.

We realised very early on how important it was to take into account the accessibility needs of the participating choirs. But we also realised that our small team of volunteers, with a limited budget, would not be able to resolve on its own all the problems to which the political sphere has not yet provided a solution.



The Choir registration questionnaire contained a question about accessibility needs within their group. It showed that **32%** of registered choirs had members with needs (wheelchair / inability to climb stairs / need to sit on stage / blind people / neurodivergent people / need for a quiet space).

The Delegate registration questionnaire contained a question about accessibility needs. We noted that **3%** of registered Delegates (**120** people) had accessibility needs.

We felt that professional help was needed to ensure that these Delegates have the best possible experience. We worked with Access-i, a Belgian organisation which specialises in supporting organisations that want to make their activities accessible.

Access-i commissioned Esenca who carried out, during the autumn of 2025, an analysis of our indoor and outdoor venues, as well as itineraries between them. The target groups were people with reduced mobility, the visually and hearing impaired, and neurodivergent people.

Access-i issued recommendations that enabled us to either schedule choirs with accessibility needs in accessible venues or to adapt the venues to make them accessible.



To fund the necessary improvements to the venues, we sought assistance from Cap 48, a charity initiative coordinated by the RTBF – French-speaking Belgian broadcast – to support people with disabilities. We submitted a funding application in July 2025 and participated in the organisation's fundraising campaign in September 2025. We received financial support of €10,000. We also decided to allocate the surplus from the *Solidarity Fund* (approximately €8,000) to accessibility-related expenditure, bringing the total budget to nearly **€20,000**.

This sum enabled us to fund:

- The audit carried out by Access-i and the creation of the dedicated website.
- The hire of cycle taxis to help festival-goers travel from one venue to another. We could only use the service for a limited number of hours each day and therefore restricted it to afternoon concerts.
- At the ING Arena, the construction of a lift and a ramp to enable wheelchair users to access the stage, and the construction of a double staircase to reduce the time taken for performers' to access the stage.
- The hire of a minibus to transport people with reduced mobility from Heysel metro station to the ING Arena (800m).
- The installation of an induction loop at the ING Arena.
- The rental of noise-cancelling headphones every day.

A few weeks before the festival, we sent the choir organisers a fact sheet for each venue, including information on accessibility (access for the public, backstage access, access to the stages).

Access-i set up a dedicated website providing an overview of the situation at each venue. We included it in the latest newsletter sent to Delegates. The link to this dedicated website appeared on the festival's website. The *Festival Badge* also mentioned that the information was available there. The Access-i website provided a map showing the most accessible routes, whilst making it clear that getting around would be difficult due to the numerous slopes on the roads. Given the wide variety of our venues, it was not possible to anticipate the routes and travel choices

of each Delegate when moving from one venue to another. Furthermore, the festival's budget did not allow for temporary road modifications. Judging by the comments received after the festival, it is highly likely that the people concerned were not aware of the existence of this website.

During the festival, a number of problems arose:

- At La Madeleine, technicians unilaterally moved an agreed access ramp, preventing two wheelchair-using choristers from performing.
- The venues hosting concerts in partnership (City Hall and Vaux Hall) have not been audited by Access-i. At Brussels City Hall, a neurodivergent performer accompanied by an assistance dog was initially denied entry due to the lack of a clear municipal policy. At Vaux Hall, some people in wheelchairs had trouble accessing the site.
- Elsewhere, a designated accessible rehearsal space became unusable for the entire festival when its lift broke down on day one without repair.
- In some venues, staff were responsible for assisting people with reduced mobility. Where this was not provided for, our volunteers took on this task. However, they did not always have the necessary information to provide the best possible guidance to those concerned.
- Several festival-goers also reported to us that they had difficulty getting around the city.



Fortunately, other festival-goers had a better experience and were able to access the designated stage and performance venues without difficulty.

As for the cycle taxis, they carried **112** people and completed **62** journeys.

Throughout the festival's preparatory process, we were surprised by the lack of awareness amongst Venue Managers regarding the accessibility of their venues – not just for the audience, but for the performers as well! As the Festival Team does not own the venues, our scope for action was limited. It remains astonishing, however, that we were the ones who had to fund the necessary adaptations at the ING Arena, for example, rather than the venue's management directly!

Despite all our efforts, many people with reduced mobility had difficult (and sometimes even traumatic!) experiences during the festival. This is unacceptable in a city that is the capital of the European Union. At the end of August, we sent a letter to the City of Brussels and to the relevant ministers to make them aware of the difficulties encountered during the festival and to call for an action plan. To date, this letter has remained unanswered.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We urge you to take accessibility needs into account from the outset, as we did, and to communicate early and transparently about the difficulties festival-goers may face, both inside venues and in public spaces, whilst clearly setting out the organising team's capacity to address these issues. Accessibility should also become a selection criterion in the process of appointing organising choirs, whilst remaining aware that not all European countries have well-developed and equivalent policies in this area.

SAFETY

Having learnt from the feedback received from members of Sing Out Brussels! following the Bologna festival (especially women and trans or non-binary people), we felt it was necessary to work with a professional team in order to create the conditions for the festival to run as smoothly as possible.



We therefore signed an agreement with Plan Sacha, a French-speaking Belgian organisation specialising in the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence at festivals.

The collaboration includes a day's training for the Festival Team at Plan Sacha's premises. The Volunteer Team Leaders were also trained. These training sessions took place in spring 2026.

The Festival Team had already drawn up the festival's *Code of Conduct* in 2024, which all festival-goers signed upon registration. Following the training, Plan Sacha supported our team by providing a protocol setting out how to respond, who to contact and how to make decisions depending on the type of incident that might arise.



On Plan Sacha's advice, a number of volunteers recorded a message reminding attendees of the *Code of Conduct*, which was played as a voice-over very regularly in our performance venues. This message, available in four languages, had a significant impact.

On arrival in Brussels, festival-goers received a wristband containing Plan Sacha's contact details in their *Welcome Pack*. The partnership was also mentioned on the *Festival Badge*.

Various Voices was, of course, a completely unfamiliar festival for Plan Sacha, whose team found it somewhat challenging to grasp its complexity (the diversity of the programme and venues). Plan Sacha, however, views this collaboration very positively; it was clearly recognised and well received by festival-goers.

During the festival, *Safer Zones* were set up throughout the venue. There was good cooperation with venue managers, and Plan Sacha's volunteers were well received. All the festival venues were monitored by security staff, either part of the venue's own staff or from private companies hired by the festival. Plan Sacha proactively reached out to these teams to raise their awareness of the specific nature of our event.

Following the event, Plan Sacha does not release statistics as these may be misinterpreted. Many interventions involved people who needed a quiet space or were experiencing anxiety. The major issues that arose at the festival venues included accessibility difficulties for people with reduced mobility (see the 'Accessibility' section of this report), an incident between a security guard and festival-goers during an evening show at the Cirque Royal (physical violence and homophobic insults), as well as incidents of voyeurism and exhibitionism at the Vaux Hall.

Outside the festival grounds, several festival-goers were subjected to physical or verbal abuse. On the night between Thursday and Friday, three people were attacked just a stone's throw from the Saint-Jacques neighbourhood they had just left. On Sunday, at Gare Centrale, festival-goers were subjected to homophobic insults and had liquids thrown at them.

It is important to note that safety in public spaces was not directly the responsibility of our team. Our contact with the police was limited solely to festival events held in public spaces – namely the street concerts – which were subject to discreet surveillance.

The use of police services on a wider scale was a subject of debate during the festival's preparation process. We were unable to reach a unanimous agreement within the Festival Team to increase the police presence around the event. The post-festival survey showed that this debate is strong inside our community: some people are calling for a greater police presence to feel safe. Conversely, other members of the community associate the police with violence directed against them.

However, following the vandalism of our advertising banners in mid-June, we contacted the Mayor of Brussels and the Chief of the local Police force to request special attention be paid to the festival. We never received a reply. During the festival, the victims of the homophobic attack felt that the police were unaware of the festival's existence and that their complaint was not being taken seriously. After the festival, they were not informed of any follow-up to their complaint. Jointly, Legato and Various Voices Brussels 2026 sent a letter to the municipal, regional and federal authorities to express their concern at the lack of attention paid to security during the festival, as well as the shortcomings in the support provided to victims and the follow-up to their complaints. An interfederal LGBTQI+ plan is currently being drawn up in Belgium and must address these concerns.

In terms of healthcare, first aid was generally provided by security staff. At the ING Arena, the Red Cross was present. At the Cirque Royal, doctors were on call during each show. The festival had purchased first-aid kits, which were thankfully not used. The instruction was to refer people experiencing medical issues to the 112 – European emergency phone number – or the local Maison Arc-en-Ciel de la Santé (affiliated with RainbowHouse) and victims of violence to RainbowHouse, which has teams trained to support victims. However, our volunteers were not sufficiently briefed on this matter.

TO FUTURE TEAMS

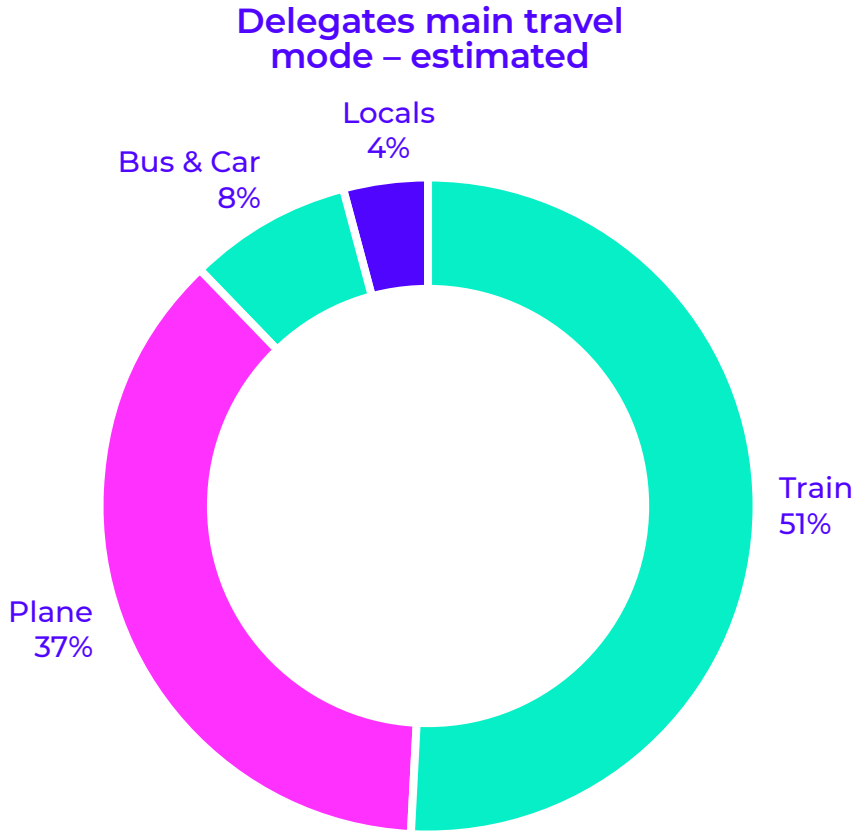
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We advise you to engage a service similar to Plan Sacha in your country, in order to raise awareness amongst the team, carry out preventative work and provide support for festival-goers. We also recommend proactively contacting the local police, even if no events are planned in public spaces and even if this causes internal tensions. We also recommend providing volunteers with comprehensive documentation on the health resources available. With regard to all these issues, however, it is important to recognise that this is about risk prevention. There is no such thing as zero risk, and it is neither possible nor desirable to place every festival-goer under constant protection.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability has been one of our key concerns right from the start of the project.

Transport was, of course, a particular area of focus. We therefore wanted to encourage travel by train. We asked festival-goers about their travel plans on the registration form and repeated the question in the post-festival survey. We can estimate that **51%** of the Delegates travelled by train and **37%** by plane.



We set up a small Sustainability Team of volunteers to look after the festival's sustainability. Among other things, this team produced a table showing the possible options for getting to Brussels by train from all the participating choirs' home towns. Our partnership with Eurostar was, of course, important in this context. This team also advised us to apply for the Eco-Coaching subsidy launched by the National Lottery. Thanks to this subsidy, we signed a contract with Tapio who carried out this eco-coaching within the defined budget.

The challenge we faced here was that the festival is a one-off event for our organisation, so it is not possible to track changes in our emissions year on year. Tapio has therefore mainly issued recommendations with a view to reducing our carbon footprint in the run-up to the festival.

Here are a few examples of the sustainability measures we have put in place:

- A sustainable *Festival Badge* made from paperboard, with a recycled PET lanyard (cotton lanyard fell out of stock just before their ordering)
- A pen made from recycled ABS
- A flag made from biodegradable polyester, given to each choir. Our aim is for the choirs to continue using this flag after the festival (the festival logo appears only very small on it). There is a slot for inserting a flagpole, so the flag can be used at Pride events, for example. We noticed this summer that several choirs had already used it for this purpose.
- Floor markings using washable chalk paint.
- Choice to work with a 'Print on Demand platform' (Redbubble) for the *Festival Shop* to avoid waste.
- Choice to work with local companies for the food and drink sold in the Festival Village, such as beers from the Brussels Beer Project.
- Use of reusable cups in the Festival Village.
- Use of cycle taxis to transport festival-goers from one venue to another.
- Choice to work with a vegetarian caterer for the Volunteers and Technical Teams.
- Collaboration with local companies for technical, logistical and communication needs.
- Promotion of local artists.

The carbon footprint is now being calculated.



VOLUNTEERING

The demand for volunteers at a festival of this size is enormous. It's not just a question of finding volunteers who are available during the festival, but also before the festival, to help organise the event!

We organised in 2024 a brainstorming session within our team to define the compensation offered to people who make a voluntary commitment to the festival, both before and during the event. We decided that anyone who volunteered and was also a member of a participating choir would pay their festival registration fee. This is the case for the members of the Boards of Various Voices Brussels 2026 and Legato.



Sing Out Brussels! choir members were not encouraged to volunteer during the festival, because of their busy schedule during the festival. Our priority was to recruit external volunteers.

For this task, we felt it necessary to call on the services of someone whose job it is to manage volunteers. We first recruited Margot Ruelle, who has experience of managing volunteers for other music festivals. The agreement provided for her to be paid specifically for this task of recruiting volunteers, defining and planning tasks, and managing volunteers during the festival. At Margot's request, we also invested in a specific app for volunteer management, Weezcreew. Margot began her assignment in September 2025, posting an application form online and making initial contacts with schools. In November, however, Margot requested the termination of the agreement due to a more interesting professional offer. In December 2025, we signed an agreement with two other people, who took over Margot Ruelle's tasks and shared the agreed remuneration: Salomé Denos, who has a good network of associations and was recommended by Margot, and Gaël Larregaray, who was responsible for recruiting volunteers for the Brussels Pride 2025.



Given the scale of the festival, the variety of venues and the long days involved, they estimated that **400** volunteers would be needed. Their task was to define the types of work to be carried out: welcoming the public, welcoming the choirs, managing signage and so on. Unlike more traditional festivals, there were no car parks to organise or bar service provided by volunteers. Calls for applications were launched as early as February 2026. Recruitment continued right up until the eve of the festival.



Unfortunately, the results fell short of expectations: around **150** volunteers were recruited.

We regret the lack of support from the Brussels LGBTQI+ community network in publicising our calls for volunteers. We also believe that recruitment suffered due to the event's lack of visibility.

An induction day for volunteers was organised a week before the festival, to allow everyone to get to know one another and to provide an initial briefing.

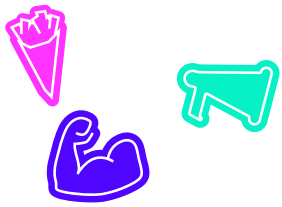
However, communication was not always ideal. It was only a few days before the festival that we discovered that key roles had not been filled, such as welcoming the choirs during the morning soundchecks. There were also not enough volunteers for the street concerts. We had to reorganise all the schedules. During the festival, we had to deal with quite a few no-shows: volunteers failed to turn up for their shifts without informing anyone. This caused a great deal of problems, particularly at the start of the day. The lack of volunteers also made it difficult to deal with unforeseen issues. Furthermore, our team made additional requests that had not been anticipated, or had not been communicated clearly enough. This situation led to a great deal of last-minute reorganisation, resulting in a significant mental workload and stress that could have been avoided with more preliminary meetings and a more extensive recruitment drive.

It is also important to recognise that volunteers are responsible for virtually the entire running of the festival. Apart from the security teams and technical staff, there were very few paid staff to support operations. This reality posed a considerable challenge for the volunteers, who had underestimated the level of responsibility they would have to shoulder. This was particularly the case in the reception areas, where volunteers had not been sufficiently briefed to answer questions. Certain requirements were underestimated right from the preparation phase. This is entirely understandable, given that this was an event on a scale the Organising Team had never experienced before. Nevertheless, it would have been beneficial to provide more support for the coordination of the volunteers.



During these difficult moments, we were able to count on the support of members of Sing Out Brussels!, who volunteered to step in on the spot and help out. The Volunteer Leads also did an incredibly efficient job. Generally speaking, all the teams – easily recognisable thanks to their yellow T-shirts – worked in good spirits despite the challenging conditions.

We would like to thank all our volunteers. Their enthusiasm, commitment and motivation contributed greatly to the festival's success.



The applause they received when they took to the stage during the 'Closing Ceremony' was truly well-deserved. An after-party for the volunteers was organised on 5 September 2026 to honour them.

Here are our recommendations for improving things during future festivals:

34 Working with motivated professionals is essential. We would never have managed it without the help of Gaël and Salomé. They did an incredible job during the festival, rushing about to sort out problems and going far beyond what we had asked of them.

35 Organise at least one working day with the Volunteer Coordinators to brief them on how a typical day is organised during the festival and to define requirements precisely.

36 Organise at least one working day with the Team Leaders (public reception, artist reception, etc.) for a clear briefing.

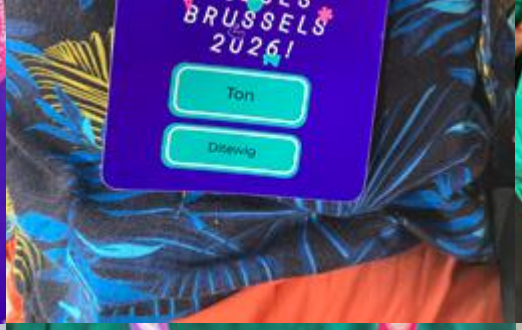
37 Choose a tool or app that allows Volunteer Coordinators to present their task plan to the Board to identify any gaps (which wasn't possible with Weezcrew).

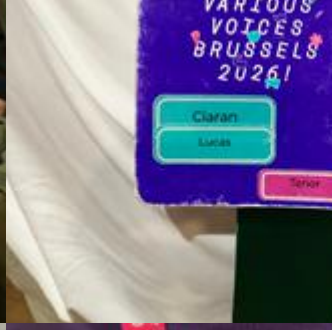
38 Devote a great deal of energy to recruitment, and recruit far more volunteers than the defined requirements, given the number of no-shows.

39 Do not rule out volunteering by choir members. This really saved us during the festival.

40 Clarify the planned compensation directly with the volunteers. There were many misunderstandings on this subject in Brussels because incorrect information had been provided by the Volunteer Coordinators.

41 The organising team can't single-handedly manage the entire festival during the event. There were only five of us, and we were rushing from one venue to another, trying to sort out problems. It is essential to appoint a Production Manager for each venue, who is fully briefed and able to make decisions independently.


Keshava
hanuja

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Ton
Diewig

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Ciaran


Alessandra
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Sing Out Brussels!

Addie
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Deep C Divas

Cécile
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Sing Out Brussels!

Ricard

European Queer Choir
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Carl
Hindmarsh

Equivox
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Till
Rexhausen

Queer Voices Glasgow
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Tally


Mannen-akkoord
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Bernd

Sing Out Brussels!
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Syl

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Yanis
Brighton Gay Men's Chorus



VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
He/ They
Vocal Presence

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Ian

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
European Queer Choir


Pink Singers
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Paul
Truesdale

Festival Team
Christophe
Sing Out Brussels!

ALL
Sing Out Brussels!
VARIOUS VOICES
Damien
Safie


Vera
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Sing Out Brussels!

Deep C Divas
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Julie

Rowan
THEY THEM
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Vocal Presence


Dublin Gay Men's Chorus
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Marty

London Gay Men's Chorus
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!
Luca
Silvestrini
Singer

Officially accredited
Antoine
Gabilaud
VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!

COMMUNICATION DURING THE FESTIVAL

Festival Badge

For the *Festival Badge*, we set ourselves the impossible task of creating something that was useful, practical, fun, sustainable and accessible all at once. Its creation is undoubtedly one of our greatest sources of pride. The *Festival Badge* was designed by Kidnap Your Designer.

It included in one item:

- a paper booklet with coated covers,designed to be read without having to remove it.
- a lanyard made from reusable material, with a double-fastening system to prevent the booklet from turning round.
- Individual sheet of stickers identifying each festival-goer, whilst allowing for flexibility (it's possible to use the whole sheet or just some of the stickers for greater privacy).
- A ballpoint pen made from reusable material, for adding information to certain stickers (pronouns, concert times).

The booklet contained a whole range of practical information:

- A stylised map, complementing online maps.
- Practical information (the Festival Village, the Welcome Centre, accessibility, option to read the text on the booklet in French or Dutch).
- The *Festival Charter* and Plan Sacha's contact details.
- The day-by-day *Festival Programme.*
- A game to encourage interaction between choirs (ask letters to form a sentence).

A few days before the festival, we enlisted around fifteen volunteers to put together personalised *Welcome Packs*, which contained their *Festival Badge* a leaflet for the Brighton 2030 Festival

and a Plan Sacha wristband. It took two days' work to prepare over **4,000** *Welcome Packs*! It was assembly-line work carried out in a great atmosphere.

We spent a great deal of time preparing it and we're absolutely delighted with the result!

TO FUTURE TEAMS

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We recommend that you pay close attention to the design of the badge! Serving as a physical complement to the website, and sustainable, the Festival Badge also acted as a means of identification, recognition and interaction for festival-goers around the city.







Signage

As the festival venues were spread across several locations in the city, we felt it was important to invest in signage to help festival-goers find their way around. Given our commitment to sustainability, we were determined to avoid using plastic sheeting or non-reusable/non-recyclable materials at all costs.

We therefore used a variety of tools and materials:

- Chalk markings on the ground, featuring the festival logo and arrows pointing to the various venues. These markings wash away in the rain. They were applied by our volunteers the day before the festival. However, they were not as clearly visible on the ground as we would have liked.
- Adhesive tape in the festival's colours, mainly used for indoor signage
- Life-size silhouettes featuring festival icons. These silhouettes could be used to display posters or simply to mark the way to key locations or raise the festival's profile during street concerts.
- Small posters, featuring a variety of information (the day's programme, venue names, festival icons) or used to indicate a change in a space's purpose (gender-neutral toilets). However, these posters were underused as we did not have enough volunteers to put them up and to change them on a day-to-day basis.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

Whatever signage is used by your team, the key really is to have a sufficiently large team of volunteers who are well briefed and specifically dedicated to putting up signage and carrying out daily checks (monitoring and replacing signs).

Photographers

Throughout the festival's preparation process, one of our greatest challenges was demonstrating what the festival was all about. We had very few photographic archives from previous festivals, and those we did have were often of such poor quality that they could not be used. This posed particular difficulties when preparing our grant applications, seeking sponsors, or illustrating our website. We therefore wanted to leave a significant legacy for future festivals.

At the beginning of 2025, we launched a call for applications and received around ten applications from photographers. Several

of them were from abroad (France, Spain, Poland...). We met with them individually during online interviews in August and September 2025. We defined the remuneration on the basis of time slots, proposing that each photographer cover five time slots. In accordance with the rules we set ourselves, we refused to pay festival-goers in this context.

We were very pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm of the applicants. We signed a contract with **9** of them at the beginning of 2026. **2** other photographers worked as volunteers.



In order to partially offset the cost of the photographers, we decided to sell the photos to the participating choirs. Each choir could thus receive a professional-quality photo album of its concerts and use the photographs for their own communication (social media, website...). The price of the photo album was **€200** for orders placed before the festival. In the end, we never switched to the rate of €300 (for orders placed after the festival), given our healthy financial situation. **52** choirs bought the photo album of their concert(s). This enabled us to cover around two-thirds of the photographers' costs.

All the photographs from the festival will be sent to Legato, which helped fund the remaining third of this legacy with a contribution of **€5,000**. Legato will thus be able to pass on these powerful mementoes of the emotions stirred by the Various Voices Festival to future organising teams.

Website

The website served as a complement to the *Festival Badge*, providing information on the festival programme and the participating choirs.

We had discussed with Cobea the possibility of creating a festival-specific app, but Cobea advised against this option: producing an app is costly and its impact would have been limited, given that the Brussels Festival is a one-off five-day event and it would likely only have been downloaded by a small proportion of festival-goers. Cobea therefore designed interactive web pages.

The choirs page allowed users to sort choirs by country, by type (SSSA, SATB, etc.) and by musical repertoire. Each choir's page featured biographical details, photos, videos, the dates and times of their performances during the festival, as well as the repertoire to be performed during the afternoon concert.

The programme page allowed users to sort events by type, venue or date. A simplified programme was also featured on this page, along with links to PDFs organised by date. This programme was particularly complex, with a vast number of links to other pages (for each venue, for each type of event, etc.). As

the website was trilingual, this required a great deal of work. The website also remained a useful tool for gathering general information about the event (the 'Practical Information' page, the 'Tickets/Shop' page).

Google Analytics statistics show that traffic to the site, which was fairly low in the months leading up to the festival, rose steadily from 1 June, peaking on 21 June 2026. During the festival, the most visited pages were, unsurprisingly, the programme pages (**6,000** views per day), followed by the choir pages (**3,500** views per day). The average time spent on the website was around **3** minutes, indicating active engagement by festival-goers. Whilst the English-language pages were the most visited, the French and Dutch pages were also viewed, demonstrating that there was a demand for them. Once the festival had ended, website traffic naturally plummeted. This analysis shows that the interactive website achieved its objective.

Social Media

Throughout the festival's preparation period, just one person was responsible for managing the festival's social media. As the festival drew nearer, it became clear that this task would absolutely have to be shared out during the festival itself.



The Communication 'Joy' Team from the organising choir, Sing Out Brussels!, offered their help. Five volunteers took turns managing the social media.

The bulk of their work involved managing the stories shared on Instagram & Facebook (there were up to one per minute!), which generated organic content, a high number of visits and new followers. Furthermore, every morning, the Communication 'Joy' Team received a selection of photos prepared by our photographers, enabling them to publish a daily post featuring the best moments from the previous day. These posts performed very well, with between **500** and **800** likes each day and between **40** and **90** shares per day, depending on the post.

After the festival, communication continued organically as we reposted all the posts from the choirs and festival-goers. After sending the photos to the choirs that had purchased them, we saw activity on our social media again as the choirs posted the photos and we shared them.

Our communication had a positive impact on the number of followers on the festival's online accounts. The Various Voices Choir Festival Facebook page had **4,235** followers in June 2025. It had **4,426** on 16 June 2026 and **4,619** on 28 June. On Instagram, there was a long-running battle between our choir's account, Sing Out Brussels!, and the festival's account. Both had around 2,000 followers in 2023. Since then, the festival has far overtaken the choir.

The festival's account had **4,660** followers by the end of August 2026, compared with 3,161 for the choir. The post about the vandalised banners was very impactful: **292** people started following us because of this post. Posts published during the festival also attracted many followers, with peaks of up to **50** new followers a day.

Once the final report has been released, we will hand over the management of our social media to the Brighton Team.



Welcome Centre

The Festival Welcome Centre was located in Auditorium 490. It was there that, on Wednesday 24 June, we welcomed the Choir Administrators who had come to collect the *Welcome Packs* for all their members. This space also served as an information point, where at least one volunteer was always on hand.

Unfortunately, whilst the members of the Organising Team who took turns working there were fully familiar with every detail of the festival's organisation, this was not the case for our volunteers, who were often somewhat at a loss when faced with the wide variety of questions asked. As mentioned above, a more comprehensive briefing would have been necessary. With hindsight, we should also have set up a Welcome Centre at the Town Hall, given the number of events organised there.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

We believe it is essential that you make provision for a Welcome Centre close to the festival main locations. Even if all the information is available on the website or on the *Festival Badge*, having a human point of contact is important, particularly when crises arise.

Media Coverage

During the festival, media coverage was mainly provided by the Brussels-based LGBTQI+ media outlet Ket, with which we had a partnership. Ket published an article about the festival every day: 24/06, 25/06, 26/06, 27/06

We regret not having received any attention from the mainstream media, particularly television, which clearly failed to recognise

the significance and impact of our event, especially given the current international climate, which is not particularly favourable to our LGBTQI+ community. We did, however, attempt to draw their attention to the event on several occasions, even believing that the festival could have been the subject of a documentary.

In this context, one Dutch media outlet did, however, devote an article to our event.

It should be noted that whilst preparing for the festival, we were in contact with two people keen to make a documentary about it (one in the United Kingdom, one in Belgium); however, as the festival approached, we heard nothing further from them and these projects did not come to fruition.

Crisis Communication

During the festival, we had to deal with two crisis situations: the heatwave and the homophobic violence directed at our festival-goers. In these difficult times, our team remained available and united, even though we did not always adhere to our guidelines on the use of communication in crisis situations.

Here are the crisis communication measures implemented in response to the heatwave:

- A newsletter was sent to Choir Administrators on Sunday 21 June to inform them of the weather conditions and offer some advice (bring a water bottle, drink plenty of fluids, dress lightly, bring a fan, etc.).
- Announcements were made by our Artistic Team regarding the splitting of the shows at the Cirque Royal into two parts, and announcements were made on stage by our MCs.
- A follow-up newsletter was sent to Delegates on Tuesday 23 June.
- A newsletter was sent on Saturday with information on conditions at the ING Arena and advising choirs scheduled for street concerts to seek shade and to adjust the length of their set if necessary, or even to cancel their performance. Most of them went ahead with their performances, however. At least one choir, with a particularly high number of older members, decided to cancel.

Here are the crisis communication measures taken in response to the homophobic violence:

- Proactive contact with the victims as soon as their identities were known to our team.
- Publication of a post on social media condemning the violence, calling on the authorities to take action and urging festival-goers to contact Plan Sacha in the event of any problems.
- After the festival, a letter was sent requesting a follow-up on the case for the victims and details of the measures put in place to ensure this does not happen again.

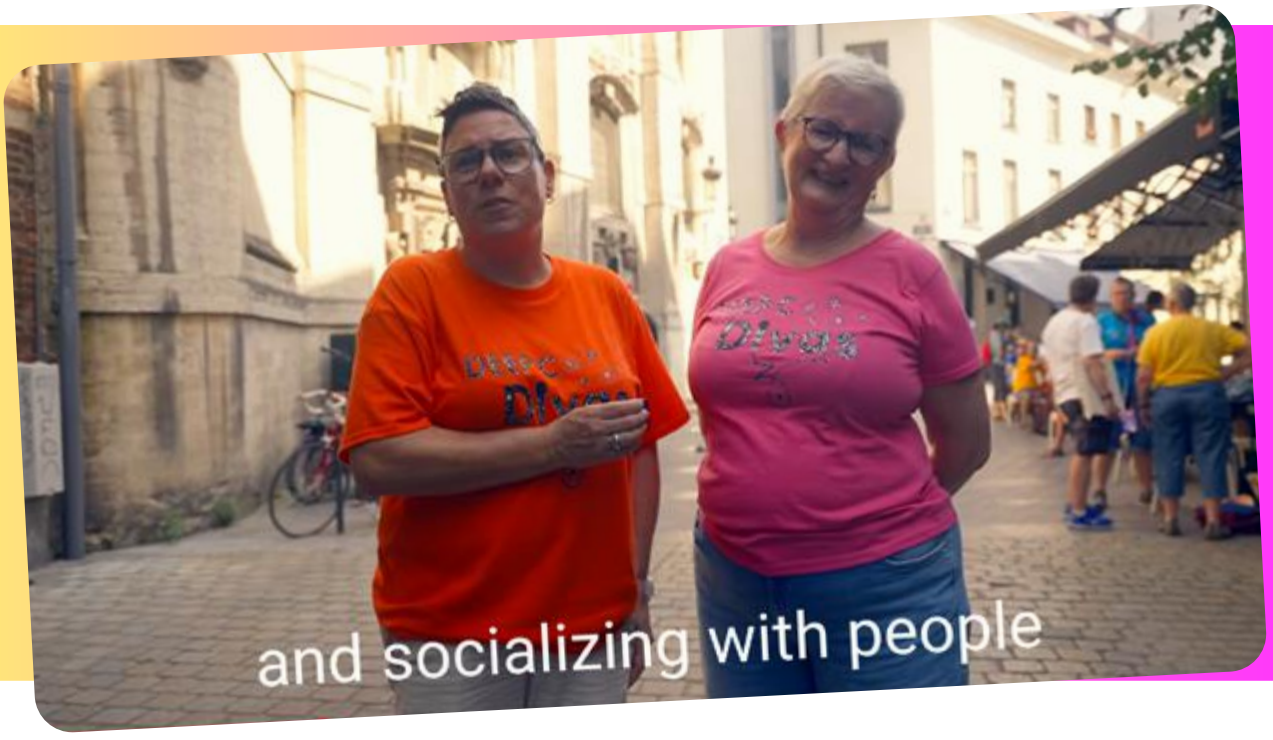
What we missed most during these moments of crisis was a smartphone messaging group to share brief and rapid updates. The newsletter is too cumbersome a tool. We had decided not to set up a messaging group for the Delegates because managing a group of 4,000 people seemed like a nightmare to us. At the very least, a group with one representative per choir would have been necessary to ensure the rapid transmission of information, as each choir undoubtedly had its own messaging group.

Aftermovie

Our collaboration with La Horde Productions to shoot our music video *Let Your Heart Be Heard* was greatly appreciated. We decided to continue working with this company to produce a high-quality aftermovie of the festival.

The aim is to leave a lasting impression, provide festival-goers with a souvenir and give the Brighton Team a tool to promote the festival.

Our budget did not allow us to fund the recording of all the festival's concerts. However, we did fund the recording of the main 'Let Your Heart Be Heard' show, and the videos from this show are now available on the festival's YouTube channel.






AFTER
THE
FESTIVAL

FESTIVAL BUDGET

General Overview

The festival budget was **€1.2 million**.

From the start of the project, we maintained our budget under control. Our association carried out a budget adjustment every three months. Strict budgetary monitoring was necessary to ensure the proper management of this project, which was mainly funded by festival-goers.

Right from the start, we had drawn up various budget models based on various expectations in terms of the number of registered festival-goers.

Our priority was to ensure that we had sufficient funds to pay essential bills before or immediately after the festival (venue hire, technical and artistic costs, hospitality for festival-goers, etc.). A number of investments were not approved, until we were sure of our ability to finance them. These were for example costs related to the festival's communication (e.g. poster campaign in public spaces, aftermovie, photographers).

We worked with an accountant responsible for the financial and tax monitoring of our project. This collaboration was essential given the amount of money we had to manage.

The budget changed significantly over the months. Depending on the number of registrations (which were either lower or higher than forecast, depending on the category) or whether or not we secured funding, we had to make difficult decisions or, conversely, free up funds for various projects.



From the beginning of the project and until the festival opened, we set aside a reserve equivalent to 10 per cent of the festival budget (**€100,000**). This reserve was intended to enable us to deal with any unexpected setbacks during the festival.

We were therefore able to start the festival with a balanced budget.

Pre-funding

Every festival starts from scratch. In this context, securing pre-funding is a major challenge. Before registration opened, we had no source of income whatsoever.

We received two crucial contributions to help us get our activities off the ground:

- A loan of **€30,000** from Legato. This loan enabled us to fund our activities during the first two years: the costs of setting up the non-profit organisation, our accountant's fees, the creation of our website, and the first instalment for the purchase of the Integra registration platform. This loan was repaid to Legato at the end of 2025.
- Donations from Sing Out Brussels!. Unlike the Various Voices Brussels 2026 non-profit organisation, the choir has organised activities every year, thereby generating revenue. We reached an agreement whereby two-thirds of this revenue would be donated to the festival. Over four years, the choir has thus donated nearly **€67,000** to the festival. This support has been vital in financing the initial deposits for the concert venues, before registration opened.

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TO FUTURE TEAMS

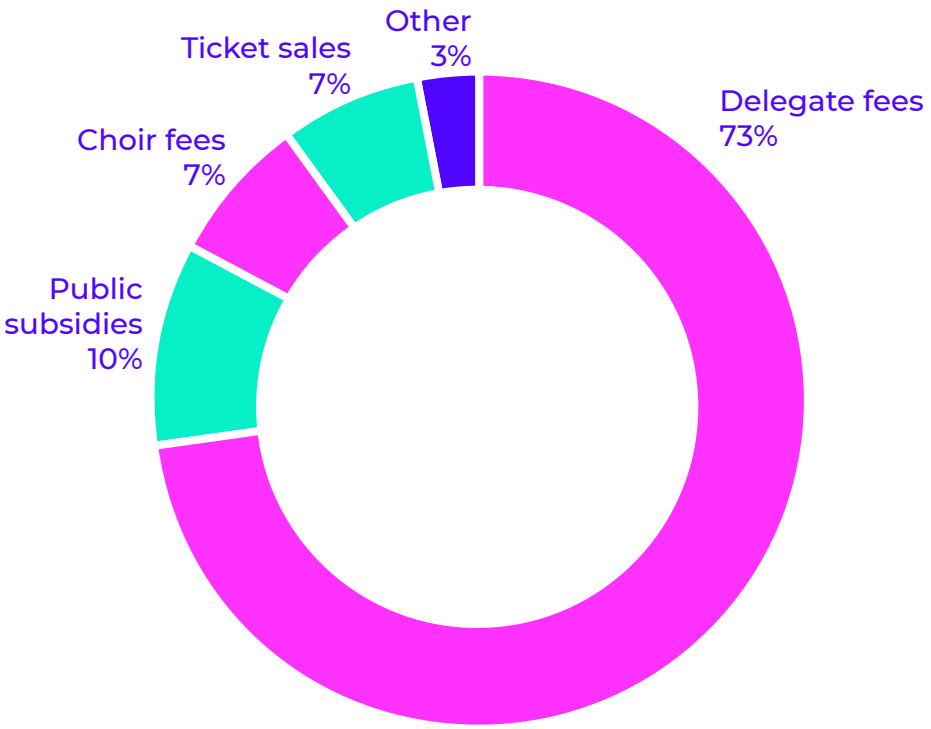
We encourage you to set up a similar mechanism to pre-fund the festival's activities before registrations open. Once registrations opened, we never faced any cash flow problems again.

Income

The chart below shows the festival's main sources of income. Please note that we are presenting a simplified budget here. We will provide a detailed budget to Legato and the Brighton Team.

Delegate registration fees account for **73%** of the festival's revenue. This is a huge amount and demonstrates just how essential the participants' contribution is to funding such a project. Festival registration fees totalled **€796,119**. Other revenue from Delegates comes from bookings for guided tours organised during the festival (€11 per tour), totalling €2,959. This money was used to pay the guides.

Festival income sources



Grants received

Source	Project supported	Amount
Flanders	As part of the Region's support for international amateur arts projects.	€29,000
Rayonnement de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles	For the festival.	€18,000
National Lottery	For the *Let Your Heart Be Heard* music video.	€10,000
National Lottery	For the festival.	€10,000
City of Brussels (Culture)	For the festival.	€10,000
Cap 48	For accessibility needs.	€10,000
Equal Opportunities (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles)	For the *Let Your Heart Be Heard* music video (2025).	€6,000
City of Brussels (Culture)	Discounted on Madeleine hiring	€6,000
National Lottery (Eco-coaching)	For funding the eco-coaching project carried out by Tapio to ensure the festival's sustainability.	€5,000
Koor&Stem	As part of our partnership with this Flemish federation of amateur choirs.	€2,500
Rainbow Visibilities (Francophones de Bruxelles)	For the *Let Your Heart Be Heard* music video.	€2,250
City of Brussels (Equal Opportunities)	As part of the 'Rendez-Vous à Bruxelles' programme (2024).	€1,950
RainbowHouse Brussels	For the *Let Your Heart Be Heard* rehearsals during Pride Week.	€1,950

3 – NB: This amount does not include the support received from visit.brussels as part of the bid process (€10,000 to fund the design of the festival's logo, tagline and visual identity, as well as the production of the layout of the final bid book and the promotional video), as this support was provided prior to the establishment of the festival's legal entity in 2022.

The festival's second main source of income was public subsidies (€105,814), accounting for around **10%** of the festival's revenue[3]. Belgium is a complex country, with many levels of government and potential sources of public subsidies. However, raising funds was not that easy. Most authorities only provide funding for projects taking place in the year of the event (so we had to wait until the end of 2025 to submit most of our festival-specific applications). Furthermore, given the difficult budgetary situation facing the various Belgian governments, most of them have cut the grants they award.

The third source of income was public ticket sales (**7%** of our income – €80,748.00). We offered each event (*Afternoon Pass* by day, shows and ceremonies) at the same price: the basic price was €30. There was a reduced price of €20 for people who met certain conditions and a supporter price of €40. As there were eight events, purchasing all events corresponded to the price of the *Festival Pass* at the 'regular rate' (€240), without access to the night parties, the Village and the socio-cultural activities. During the last months, this *Full Festival Ticket* was available at the 'late rate' (€290). We sold **77** *Full Festival Tickets*, **1050** *Show* or *Ceremony Tickets* for the at Bozar or Cirque Royal, **621** *Afternoon Passes* and **534** *Let Your Heart Be Heard Tickets* – the main Saturday show at ING Arena.



The fourth source of income came from choir registration fees, totalling **€62,255**, plus revenue from the hire of rehearsal rooms (€3,900) and the sale of photo albums (€10,400). In total, this represents **7%** of the festival's revenue. We provided three rehearsal spaces, with an hourly hire system similar to that in Bologna. We applied the same rates, taking inflation into account. All time slots were booked. Furthermore, in order to cover the costs of the ten or so photographers hired to cover the festival, we offered each choir the opportunity to purchase royalty-free photos of their concert(s). Fifty-two choirs purchased the photos. The festival makes no profit from this, as this money was used to pay the photographers.

The remainder (**3%**) includes:

- Revenue from the *Solidarity Fund* (donations from choirs and Delegates, and proceeds from the 'Brussels In Harmony' fundraising event). The majority of this sum was used to offset the reduced rates offered to beneficiaries, with the balance enabling us to fund accessibility improvements.
- Members' subscription fees. To organise the festival, we set up a non-profit organisation (ASBL), separate from our choir Sing Out Brussels!. We invited members of Sing Out Brussels! to join the ASBL Various Voices Brussels 2026 by paying a symbolic subscription fee of at least €10. This gave them the right to vote at our annual general meetings and occasional access to exclusive information about the festival's preparations.

- Revenue from the *Festival Shop*. For each sale on Redbubble, we took a 7% margin, which was paid to us after deduction of the platform's commissions. Our aim was never to make money from this shop.
- The financial compensation from guided tours of Brussels Town Hall.
- The interest on the money we placed in a fixed-term deposit account in 2025 to prevent it from losing value.

A Note about Sponsorship



The search for sponsors was a task for our partner visit.brussels. We had several changes of contact within this structure, which delayed the start of the prospecting work. In 2024, their team finally drew up a dossier and defined the compensation offered to sponsors. The visit.brussels Team had also been in contact with the Various Voices Munich 2018 Team to get feedback on their experience.

Their prospecting work was not successful, because our event was primarily aimed at an international audience, and probably because the Various Voices brand is not at all well known outside the LGBTQI+ choir world. We also believe that the proximity of Brussels Pride, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2026, did not work in our favour. Nor did the international climate, which has encouraged large companies to pull back from diversity and inclusion policies.

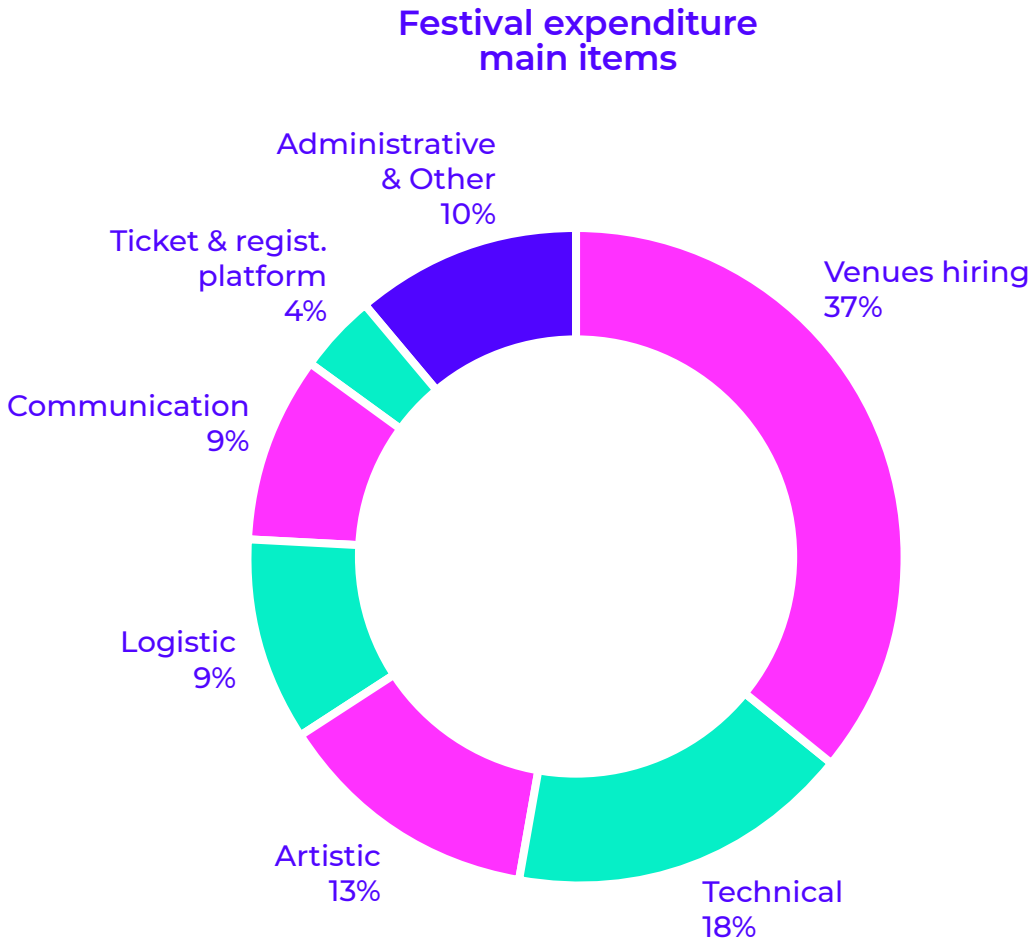
On our part, we tried to establish contacts with Brussels Rainbow Village, an organisation that brings together LGBTQI+ businesses in Brussels. Its managers circulated our appeal to their members with a view to commercial partnerships. We received no responses. Our team also proactively contacted some companies, without success.

As we had been counting on sponsorship revenue, we therefore had to set this budget to zero. This did, however, avoid complicated debates about potential sponsors' 'pinkwashing' or 'greenwashing'.

We therefore mainly entered into partnerships that resulted in discounts: Pianos Maene (hire of pianos or electric keyboards), Tipik (a double advertising campaign on this RTBF radio station in exchange for free tickets), Bruzz (a discount on the cost of an advertising campaign on this Brussels regional radio station in exchange for visibility for the festival).

Expenditure

The following chart shows the festival's main expenditure items. We will provide a detailed budget to Legato and the Brighton Team.



Hire of performance venues

The first expenditure category (**€388,000** – 37% of expenditure). In addition to the hire costs, this also includes ancillary costs (security services, cleaning, hire of additional chairs, etc.).

Technical costs

The second major expense category (equipment hire, remuneration for our Technical Director and Sound Engineer, and costs for sound and lighting technicians during the festival) totals **€188,000** (18% of our expenditure).

Artistic costs

The third major expense category, this includes the remuneration of our Artistic Director, our Musical Director, the various artists performing during the festival, copyright fees, piano rental and the costs of the 'Let Your Heart Be Heart' project (studio recording, music video, rehearsals at Bozar). This accounts for 13% of our expenditure (**€137,000**).

Communication costs

The fourth expenditure category (9% of our expenditure – **€93,000**) includes the costs of creating and maintaining the website, the costs of producing visual materials, the costs of communication campaigns, payments to photographers and videographers, and various subscriptions to communication tools (for the newsletter or social media).

Logistics costs

The fifth expenditure category (9% of our expenditure – **€95,000**) includes, in particular, the fitting out of the Village and payments to suppliers, catering for technical teams and volunteers during the festival, the production of the *Festival Badges* and signage, as well as the costs of making the venues accessible.

Ticketing and registration platform costs

The sixth expenditure category (4% of our expenditure – **€45,000**) comprises the purchase cost of the Integra registration platform, fees charged by our payment processor Stripe, and ticketing fees.

Miscellaneous costs

The remaining 10% (**€104,000**) includes bank charges, insurance, the non-profit organisation's administrative costs, the accountant's fees, the volunteer Coordination Team's remuneration, the licence fee paid to Legato, and *Support Programme* costs (purchase of air and train tickets for the Ukrainian choir).

Financial Results

At the time of writing this report, the festival's accounts are not finalised. Our association is unlikely to be wound up before the start of 2027.

However, the festival's financial results are very positive. As explained above, we had set aside approximately 10% of the festival's budget (**€100,000**) to cover any unforeseen issues during the event. We ultimately completed the festival without drawing on this contingency. Furthermore, ticket sales for the festival's events continued right up until the final day of the festival, thereby generating additional, unanticipated revenue.

We were thus able to make a donation of **€67,000** to Sing Out Brussels!, an amount equivalent to the sum the choir had donated to pre-finance the festival. The remaining balance is approximately €50,000 (the exact figure will be determined once the final invoices have been paid). This balance will be divided between Legato (to whom, under the terms of the contract, we are required to pay at least 25 per cent of the festival's revenue), the Various Voices Brighton 2030 festival and Sing Out Brussels!.

FESTIVAL TEAM

The Festival Team consisted, in alphabetical order, of Stefano Abruzzini, Walid Aissaoui, Marina Belotti, Christophe Cordier and Damien Wauters. Yes, just five people worked tirelessly as volunteers to organise this festival! Everything you have just read was made possible by them.



Among them, two people were involved throughout the entire project, from the submission of the application right through to the final day of the festival: Marina Belotti and Christophe Cordier, who jointly took charge of the overall coordination of the event.

Starting with the Bologna festival in 2023, the Festival Team held one meeting a month, lasting around four hours, to prepare for the event. In the six months leading up to the festival, the frequency increased to two meetings a month (including one online meeting). Occasional work days were also organised. The amount of work carried out between these various meetings, however, is impossible to estimate.

It is important to realise that the workload involved in organising the festival is enormous and bears no comparison to the voluntary work carried out within our choirs. Within the team, two people retired during the festival's preparation process and another was able to adjust their working hours to free up time. This enabled them to work almost full-time on the festival. Without this, we would probably never have managed it. As Various Voices continues to grow, this naturally raises questions about the festival's future. We will return to this in the conclusion of this report.

Recruiting the Festival Team proved to be a challenge. Our choir, Sing Out Brussels!, already offers numerous opportunities for one-off or ongoing voluntary work (Board, thematic sub-groups: artistic, communications, community building, strategy). Within this group of 80 people, most of those with the right profile to support the festival's organisation were often already tied up with other voluntary commitments. The scale of the project was also a hindrance. Many people were reluctant to commit, fearing (and rightly so!) the workload. The length of time until the event was also a deterrent: it is more exciting to get involved in preparing a show that will take place in six months' time than in preparing a festival that will take place in four years' time.

Our team numbered up to seven people, each contributing their views, areas of focus and expertise to the project. This worked relatively well during the two years when our meetings mainly consisted of brainstorming sessions to define the festival's identity. Once we got down to the nitty-gritty and the workload began to increase, along with the financial risks involved, the distribution of work within the team became increasingly unbalanced, whilst differences of opinion also emerged regarding how the project was being run. This led to tensions and the departure of several members. The remaining team continued to organise the festival, staying united and working together in a very constructive manner.

We would like to share our experience here:

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The weight of responsibility resting on the organising team is very heavy – far heavier than that of running a choir. The scale of the project, the number of people taking part in the event, the number and size of the venues hired, the professionals you have to work with, and the enormous budget are all sources of stress.

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Tensions are bound to arise within the team: some people will shirk their responsibilities, others will take on too much, volunteers will ask to be paid, and differing visions will clash. No one comes out of it unscathed. Organising Various Voices means making lots of wonderful connections, but also seeing friendships break down.

48

To put the team together, you need to recruit volunteers who are prepared to work, not just to offer their opinions. It is essential to identify, right from the start, people in charge of specific areas (performance venues, funding, accessibility, sustainability, registrations, programme, etc.) and to assign roles from the outset. In an ideal world, each person in charge should have a stand-in in case of problems (and there are always problems).

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Don't expect to enjoy the festival like any other Delegate. Even if you think, as we do, that everything is ready and that nothing can go wrong, you will inevitably have to deal with crises and unforeseen events.

50

Organising the festival is not a hobby. It is a job. A part-time job to begin with, but a full-time one as the festival draws nearer.

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It's an LGBTQI+ project that all the choirs look forward to for four years. Their expectations of the event are enormous. Every Delegate legitimately wants to be recognised and respected for who they are. Their expectations are sometimes irreconcilable. It is therefore impossible for 100% of the Delegates to emerge 100% satisfied with the festival's organisation. Given that the organising team is itself a participant, every criticism is very hard to take. Organising the festival means receiving a great deal of love and gratitude, but it also means being bound to disappoint.

52

You will sometimes spend hours debating a subject that seems important to you, whilst neglecting another issue that doesn't seem problematic. And you'll discover during the festival that you should have done the opposite...

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Recruit plenty of people, even from outside your choirs. As we reach the end of writing this report, it seems incredible to us that the five of us managed to achieve all this. Whilst we were able to handle the preparations, things were much more complicated during the festival. There weren't enough of us to deal with every crisis and every problem that needed solving, whether technical or interpersonal. Ideally, we should have had enough people to assign a point of contact to every venue at the festival at all times.

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After the festival, you'll no doubt need a little time to come back down to earth. A little time, too, to focus your attention on the positive memories, and not just on what went wrong. Be kind to yourself: what you've achieved is incredible!





FESTIVAL EVALUATION & ECONOMIC IMPACT

The post-festival survey was sent out via our newsletter two days after the festival ended. A reminder was sent out a few days later. We closed the survey two weeks after the end of the festival. Its main aim is to provide recommendations to Legato and the Brighton Team with a view to future festivals.

We received **1,161** responses, which represents around **30%** of the Delegates. However, this sample is representative of the Delegates' profile in terms of diversity of age, background and professional status.

Here you will find a summary of the key findings from this survey. Detailed responses and the various tables can be found through this link. As the open-ended questions sometimes generated more than **700** responses, we used Artificial Intelligence to identify the key areas for attention.

For **40%** of respondents, Brussels was their first Various Voices festival. These respondents are naturally younger and this percentage is higher for Delegates coming from Spain, Italy and the United States. Half of them stated that they had never previously taken part in an international LGBTQI+ event, either personally or with their choir. Those who had already taken part in such events primarily mentioned Pride events, the Hand in Hand festival or other similar national or regional festivals in Europe and the USA, as well as the Gay Games or Euro Games.



The festival enabled **38%** of respondents to meet more new people than they had hoped for. **40%** met new people but fewer than they had hoped for. For the vast majority of respondents, the festival also played a major role in their sense of belonging to the LGBTQI+ community or in their sense of being represented as an LGBTQI+ person.

In the following open-ended question ('What difference has VV2026 made to you?'), **40%** of respondents expressed joy, happiness, emotional renewal or a similarly strong positive emotional impact. Approximately **25%** referred to community or a sense of belonging. Approximately **20–25%** referred to artistic,



musical or performance-related inspiration. Approximately **18%** referred to visibility, politics, pride or activism. Approximately **10–15%** referred to international connections and/or strengthening their own choir. Approximately **12%** expressed an explicit negative or critical element.

What made the greatest impression on respondents was the opportunity to attend concerts by other choirs (**86%** chose this option), the chance to sing on stage with their own choir (**62%** chose this option) and spending time with their friends (**57%** chose this option). It is interesting to note here that respondents prioritised having attended other choirs' concerts over mentioning their own performances.

One question concerned the sense of safety within the festival venues. The vast majority of festival-goers felt safe either all the time (**53%** of respondents) or most of the time (**38%** of respondents). Respondents regard the festival as a 'safe bubble' and appreciated the help provided by the volunteers and the Plan Sacha Team. However, **5%** reported feeling very unsafe. This percentage is slightly higher amongst Italian and Spanish Delegates (9%) and lower amongst French, German and Dutch Delegates (1%). These people are generally the same ones who expressed general dissatisfaction with the festival. They mainly cited a lack of safety in public spaces, particularly at night, and called for an increased police presence or private security. Responses also highlighted the heat (air conditioning, access to water), accessibility issues, signage and transport between venues, as well as a desire for greater LGBTQI+ diversity amongst participants and in the festival's programme.

The survey also assessed the festival's economic impact.

In terms of accommodation:

- **50%** of respondents stayed for **4** nights in Brussels, **23%** stayed for **5** nights and **22%** for more than **5** nights. American Delegates were the most numerous in this latter category. Conversely, Italians and Spaniards were the most likely to have stayed for only 2 or 3 nights, which echoes the observation made earlier in this report regarding the high cost of the festival for singers from these countries, who do not, however, benefit from the *Support Programme*.

- **60%** of respondents stayed in a hotel. **26%** stayed in a shared accommodation such as an Airbnb. **10%** stayed in a youth hostel, but this percentage rose to **30%** for Polish, Czech and Estonian respondents.

- Delegates spent an average of **€118** per night on accommodation. There are significant differences here between the different groups of countries.

In terms of transport:

- **58%** of respondents travelled by train and **31%** by plane, which is in line with the intentions stated at the time of registration. Unsurprisingly, the train was the preferred option for those coming from neighbouring countries (Germany, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom).
- The average cost of transport was **€287** per person. There are, of course, significant differences here depending on the distance travelled (respondents from the US and Scandinavia spent more; those from France, the Netherlands and Germany spent less).

Other expenses whilst there (food and drink, bars, transport, museums, shopping, etc.) amounted to an average of **€427** per Delegate. It should be noted that, amongst the Delegates' leisure activities outside the festival programme, Americans favoured cultural activities (museums, etc.), whilst Italian, Spanish, British and Irish people preferred LGBTQI+ community activities (bars, clubs, etc.).

Excluding Belgian Delegates from this calculation, we can therefore estimate the total amount spent by an average foreign Delegate at **€1,257**, which must be added to the registration fee – for example, €190 at the *Early Bird* rate – bringing the total to **€1,447** per person.

With **4,040** Delegates, the festival's economic impact can therefore be estimated at over **€5 million**, or five times the festival's budget.

This also illustrates the high investment the festival represents for choir's members, an event that is clearly not affordable for all budgets without financial support. Indeed, **30%** of respondents received financial support from their choir. This percentage rises to **70%** amongst respondents from Eastern European countries, Italy and Spain, and amongst those under **35**. It stands at less than **5%** for American Delegates. It should be noted that, at the time of registration, **56%** of choirs had stated that they had an internal support programme for their members. It should also be noted that **690** people (**17%** of the Delegates) received direct support from the festival (*Support Programme*, *Solidarity Fund* or payments in installments).



One of the survey's main aims was to determine whether Various Voices Brussels 2026 had met festival-goers' expectations in three areas: community spirit, overall organisation and artistic programme.

This is clearly the case when it comes to community spirit. For **57%** of respondents, the festival met their expectations. For **31%**, the festival even exceeded their expectations. However, **12%** expressed disappointment in this regard.

The overall organisation of the festival also received a good rating. For **53%** of respondents, the festival met their

expectations. For **29%**, the festival even exceeded their expectations. Respondents provided many positive comments. However, **18%** expressed disappointment in this regard.

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Looking ahead to the Brighton 2030 festival, respondents made the following recommendations: more opportunities to meet and forge connections with other choirs, more chances to sing together, and a greater focus on the festival's inclusivity, diversity and accessibility. All these points had been taken into account in Brussels, but there is obviously always room for improvement.

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Looking ahead to the Brighton festival, the recommendations mainly focus on communication (shorter and more effective newsletters), heating and air-conditioning, strengthening the Volunteer Team (in terms of numbers and training), the festival programme (less packed, with more time for soundchecks), a simpler ticketing system, and paying particular attention to accessibility and inclusivity, etc.

The artistic programme is the most controversial topic. For **50%** of respondents, the festival met their expectations. For **22%**, the festival even exceeded their expectations. However, **28%** expressed disappointment in this regard – nearly one in three respondents.

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The key message conveyed to the Brighton Team aligns with the conclusions drawn by our team. The aim is to refocus the shows on choirs and, consequently, to place less emphasis on guest artists.

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Recommendations also cover the accessibility of venues, technical conditions, the quality of performances, the coherence of the shows, and the representation of the entire LGBTQI+ community. The political nature of the festival is a point of focus on which conflicting recommendations have been made. For some, the festival should be more political. Others believe it should be less so.

A five-day festival seems to suit the Delegates. **84%** of respondents are satisfied with the festival's duration as it stands. **9%** feel

it is too long and would prefer a programme condensed into three days. Only **7%** would like a longer festival.

In terms of concert opportunities, the majority of respondents who gave only one or two concerts would like to give more. It is worth noting here that this limited number of concerts was the choice of their Choir Administrators, a fact of which the respondents may not be aware. Three or four concert opportunities therefore seem to be a suitable number. We saw earlier that most choirs (**71** out of 114) took up this opportunity.

TO FUTURE TEAMS

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In terms of expectations for the Brighton festival, Delegates prioritised giving concerts with their choir, having enough time to attend other choirs' concerts, and the opportunity to meet new people.

The survey also assessed awareness of Legato, the European federation of LGBTQI+ choirs. **75%** of respondents had already heard of Legato before arriving in Brussels. Legato is primarily associated with Various Voices: **56%** of respondents know that Legato oversees the Various Voices festival (licensing and supporting host cities to deliver the festival). Legato's other activities are less clearly recognised. The Legato Academy (admittedly aimed primarily at Choir Administrators) is very little known. **47%** of festival-goers had never heard of it. Festival-goers' expectations of Legato center in particular on: strengthening connections between choirs, organising festivals more regularly, training activities, developing an LGBTQI+ musical culture, initiatives relating to inclusion, diversity and accessibility, and developing Legato's political and advocacy role.



The detailed survey results will, of course, be passed on to Legato and the Brighton Team.

CONCLUSION

Our journey ends here. We are now closing the Various Voices Brussels 2026 ledger with great pride and feeling utterly exhausted.

Organising this huge event was a challenge for our small team. It was also a very exciting experience, which allowed us to acquire new skills. The enthusiasm of the festival-goers and the positive feedback we got are great rewards. At the same time, it is difficult to cope with the disappointment expressed by others. As we had predicted, it wasn't possible to make 100% of the festival-goers 100% happy.

In August 2026, Sing Out Brussels! took part in the 'Queer Voices Unite' event as part of Amsterdam World Pride. This mini-festival brought together eight international choirs. As singing members, we loved the experience because we weren't responsible for anything! But we also realised just how much simpler it was to organise an event of this scale (a single concert hall, just a handful of volunteers needed...) and to organise activities enabling the choirs to meet one another. This makes it all the more clear why so many respondents to our survey expressed a desire to take part in more small events of this kind.

Various Voices may be at a crossroads. In their bidbook for Various Voices 2030, some choirs proposed hosting up to 160 choirs and 5,000 Delegates. How much bigger can the festival grow? And above all: can it continue to grow whilst being organised in this way? As you have read in this report, the number of issues to be addressed when organising Various Voices is enormous. We have to think of everything, anticipate every possible crisis scenario, and try to reconcile the expectations of a multitude of people from different backgrounds, ages and identities... And now that we have the experience to do this; that we know what we would like to keep and what we would do differently, a new team has to start all over again from scratch, in a new city, with different venues, different partners, different constraints...



The situation in Europe is not the same as in the US, but in the US, the organisation of the Gala Choruses festival is managed by paid professionals. If one day Legato could have at least one paid staff member to work for the festival (for example to manage the choirs

and Delegates registration), that would be fantastic and would reinforce the sustainability of this unique event. For our part, we remain at the disposal of Legato and the Brighton 2030 Team to pass the baton and share our knowledge.

We look forward to taking part in Various Voices Brighton 2030, simply enjoying the pleasure of singing, the pleasure of applauding, the pleasure of catching up with friends and meeting new ones, and the pleasure of feeling part of a vast community of LGBTQI+ singers. A community united by a shared passion and the same aspirations for a world where each and every one of us has a place where we belong. That is the spirit of Various Voices. We are delighted and proud to have played a part in its history.



Stefano, Walid, Marina, Christophe & Damien

Festival Team – Various Voices Brussels 2026

LET YOUR HEART BE HEARD

VARIOUS VOICES BRUSSELS 2026!





Take a look at the best photos
from the festival on our website:

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