



D3.4 Recommendations on innovation for European film creators

Project: Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness - REBOOT

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	film industry, with a special focus on marginalised groups, women, youth and migrants. It highlights voices and practices at the edges of dominant industry frameworks, revealing gaps and opportunities for more inclusive policy and production landscapes.
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1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This report is part of the Horizon Europe REBOOT project (Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness), which focuses on the European audiovisual sector and its film industry. The REBOOT project aims to connect their strengths, identify and overcome weaknesses, and plan for future competitiveness in the fields of policy, practices and experiences. More concretely, the project's objectives are, on the one hand, to explore the long-standing strengths and pervasive gaps in European audiovisual competitiveness and policies for competitiveness, including ways of 'measuring', 'analysing' and 'evaluating' the impact of policies and strategic pathways. The project aspires to focus attention on actively preparing for the future by exploring audience preferences and how these are generated, as well as modes of film content production.

The latter are elements which today's youth will carry and engage with in the coming decades as makers and consumers, as well as industry and policy leaders. The project therefore interrogates the 'what is', but also the 'what has been' and 'what will be' through fresh lenses. REBOOT aims to provide a holistic overview of the European film industry, focusing on maximising its existing strengths while developing strategies and tactics to optimise the potential of European youth audiences, both as emerging viewers and as engaged citizens. Specifically, the project's goals combine several dimensions, which reinforce each other but are listed separately (and in no particular order) for analytical purposes: a) increasing support intended to increase young people's engagement with European film; b) strengthening the position of the European Union (EU) in the global audiovisual economy, particularly in light of the rise of video-on-demand; c) supporting cultural diversity in the EU film industry; d) addressing the need for a different understanding of competitiveness and relevant indicators in this context; and e) recognising and supporting the importance for the EU of film and, more broadly, of the cultural and creative sector as a geopolitical asset.



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2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of analysing the competitiveness of the European film industry related to *Task 3.3 “Lived practices, principles, cultural institutions and the ‘fringes’ of filmmaking and consumption”*, it is crucial to examine what is known as the *fringes* of film and the creative industries, as these often represent untapped or underexplored sectors that have the capacity to impact on the overall dynamics of the industry. The working definition of fringes encompasses independent, experimental and niche film production and distribution, which, while sometimes marginalised, play a key role in driving innovation, diversity and cultural expression. These spaces can serve as incubators for new ideas, alternative narratives and diverse voices, pushing the boundaries of mainstream cinema and providing critical insights into emerging trends in the creation of AV storytelling. As an agent of innovation and testing ground, the fringes open also the stage to question established practices and hierarchies. By investigating these spaces, therefore, we can better understand the ways in which the broader ecosystem in which mainstream cinema operates and identify the factors which contribute to its competitiveness. Utilising triangulation and mixed methods, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches, allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the fringes’ impact. This approach helps to integrate diverse perspectives, ensuring that both data and in-depth cultural insights are considered, which strengthens the robustness of the findings and the conclusions drawn in this report.

For the purpose of this report, three communities are taken into consideration, as outlined in Task 3.3, which includes for six EU member states (Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Poland and Spain): women, youth and migrants in relation to their positioning within the film industry and their connection to the fringes. To better understand the positioning of these groups within the European film making ecosystem, this report examines national policies, concrete practices available within the industry, as well as the programmes, projects or initiatives (in particular film festivals) undertaken to support these communities in each country. With a particular focus on the connection to the *fringes*, the spaces outside mainstream industry norms where alternative and experimental practices often emerge, in terms of gender representation, France stands out for its advanced national policies aimed at gender equality in the film industry. The country has integrated gender quotas in funding programs, and strong institutional support. France's holistic approach provides a robust model for systemic support and visibility for women filmmakers.

In contrast, Austria and Belgium have made moderate progress, with policies in place to support gender equality, though they lack a national cohesion or full-scale implementation. Austria, for



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instance, offers gender bonuses through the Austrian Film Institute (FISA), while Belgium supports gender inclusivity at regional levels, notably in Flanders. Spain has made strides post-#MeToo with stronger laws requiring gender equality in film funding and initiatives like the CIMA collective, which advocates for women's participation. On the other hand, Poland and Greece are much further behind. Poland lacks specific gender equality policies in audiovisual fields, with only a few small-scale grassroots efforts to address the imbalance. Similarly, Greece has no targeted gender policies in the audiovisual sector, relying on informal networks and EU-funded projects, which leaves systemic barriers largely unaddressed.

For young filmmakers, France has taken the lead by incorporating youth film education into national policies. In Austria, there are supportive regional programs, which help emerging filmmakers, but there is no centralized national strategy for youth in film. While the country has a strong foundation for entry-level support and experimentation, its fragmented approach limits access for youth in more centralized or larger markets.

Belgium shows solid grassroots efforts, especially in the Flemish region, through initiatives like the VAF Wildcards and youth-focused film festivals. However, like Austria, the lack of a unified national strategy for youth involvement in film stunts long-term growth.

In Spain and Poland, youth policies are either poorly aligned with the film sector or entirely disconnected from it. Spain's broad national youth strategy has yet to develop film-specific initiatives, while Poland struggles with gaps in planning and access, offering limited pathways for young talent to enter the industry.

Greece also faces challenges, as it offers no specific youth film policies. Although education-focused initiatives like the Chania Film Festival's youth program exist, these remain isolated and disconnected from the wider film industry, limiting the effectiveness of support systems.

In terms of migrant participation in the EFI, France stands out for its targeted institutional support, which promotes diversity and international co-productions. Austria and Belgium also show some progress, with mentorship and cultural support platforms in place for migrants. However, these countries still lack proactive national policies to address the structural challenges faced by migrant filmmakers.

In Spain, regional initiatives, including diversity training and intercultural film programs, provide valuable support to migrant filmmakers, though there remains a significant gap in national coordination. The absence of a cohesive national strategy for migrant filmmakers limits the sustainability of these efforts.

Poland faces the most severe challenges, with minimal public discourse or support for migrant filmmakers. There are no identified national initiatives to support this community, and the presence



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of migrants in the film industry remains marginalized. Greece faces similar issues, relying heavily on grassroots-driven efforts to engage migrant filmmakers.



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3. INTRODUCTION

This report provides a detailed examination of three groups within the European Film Industry (EFI): women, youth and migrants or people with a diaspora background. Despite the asymmetrical power dynamics in technical outputs, the EFI reaches its highest level of diversity when engaging with the broader ecosystem surrounding film training, development, fostering, promotion, distribution and consumption. This ecosystem particularly includes films operating on the fringes of the core sector. These films, whether fictional, realistic, or factual, often serve to document, challenge, subvert and redefine understandings of diversity and democracy.

Given this context, the research objectives of this report are to:

- a. document and interrogate the status quo, to provide a comprehensive overview of the present situation faced by women, youth and migrants within the EFI as to/into fringes and
- b. to investigate the spaces and mechanisms through which these groups receive institutional support and gain public visibility. This involves mapping the structural conditions, barriers, opportunities and policies that shape their participation, support and visibility within the sector.

Women, youth and migrants have historically faced marginalisation, structural disadvantages and cultural prejudices within the European film industry for a variety of interlinked reasons. Women, for instance, have been underrepresented behind the camera since the early days of cinema. Directing, screenwriting, cinematography and production have long been dominated by men, with women often confined to roles perceived as supportive or secondary (e.g., costume design, editing). Access to financing and distribution networks remains highly unequal. A 2023 report by the European Audiovisual Observatory showed that only 23% of European film directors were women and women-directed films had lower average budgets and less promotional support (Simone, 2023).

Meanwhile young¹ filmmakers, especially those without access to elite film schools or industry connections, struggle to find entry points into the industry. Youth perspectives have been seen as less authoritative, relegating them to “emerging talent” categories that do not benefit from systems or policies of sustained support (Sarikakis, Ramadani, & Juengst, 2025). Entry barriers for this group include high production costs, unpaid internships and reliance on support by personal environments and networks, as funding schemes are often geared towards established names (Sarikakis et al., in press).

¹ Youth is considered to be individuals 18- 35 years of age for methodological reasons.



Migrants have long been depicted through stereotypical lenses or excluded from national cinema narratives. Migrant filmmakers have been treated as “outsiders” with limited access to core institutions; often lacking access to public funding, facing additional legal and residency hurdles and experiencing linguistic and cultural barriers. A 2022 report by the Migration Policy Institute Europe highlights that migrant creatives remain significantly underrepresented in publicly funded cultural projects, often encountering substantial barriers to accessing and influencing the arts and culture sector across Europe. The report, “Promoting the inclusion of Europe’s migrants and minorities in arts and culture”, stresses the urgent need for more inclusive institutional practices to ensure that cultural spaces genuinely reflect Europe’s diverse societies (Salgado & Patuzzi, 2022). Migrant artists are often pigeonholed into telling “migrant stories” or dealing with issues of displacement and integration, which may be impactful on limiting artistic freedom on one hand, but also restricting financial and commercial opportunities, on the other.

For conceptual clarity and to align with the broader scope of the research, the term “migrant” is often used interchangeably with and at times replaced by diaspora across the countries under examination. This shift reflects a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of transnational mobility and community affiliation, capturing the complexity of lived experiences beyond the conventional notion of migration. The term “migrant” typically refers to the physical act of moving from one country or region to another, implying a unidirectional movement with the expectation of either permanent or temporary relocation (Castles & Miller, 2009). The concept is often associated with immediate socioeconomic and political debates, making it a highly politicised term, loaded with ideological connotations, particularly in public discourse. Conversely, diaspora encapsulates a broader and more dynamic set of processes: it refers not only to physical movement, but also to the maintenance of cultural, social and political ties across national borders. According to Anthias (1998), the concept of “diaspora” should be understood more broadly to include generational experiences, cultural affiliations and transnational ties. The use of “diaspora” reflects a wider range of experiences, including not only first-generation migrants, but also their descendants who retain cultural and social affiliations with their countries of origin. This aligns with the report’s aim to capture complex social realities beyond the immediate act of migration (Anthias, 1998). While “migrant” emphasises the act of movement, “diaspora” emphasises the ongoing processes of identity formation, transnational interaction and community building (Dufoix, 2008). This processual perspective is particularly relevant for the film industry, where diasporic identities shape and are shaped by cultural production across borders. The term “migrant” is often politicised, particularly in policy and media contexts, where it can carry pejorative connotations (Anderson, 2013). By adopting



“diaspora” the report distances itself from exclusionary narratives and instead emphasises the cultural and economic contributions of these communities (Bauböck & Faist, 2010). The European diaspora in the film industry has become an essential element of cultural production, influencing both mainstream and independent cinema across the continent and yet still remains limited. Diasporic filmmakers bring diverse stories and perspectives that reflect the rich history of migration in Europe.

This same societal and political claim for inclusion and representation is reflected in the development of strategies to address gender disparities in the film industry. Although ongoing efforts aim to promote gender equality, women remain underrepresented across key creative roles in the EFI. The underrepresentation of women across various roles in the film industry, including screenwriting, directing, producing, cinematography, editing and technical positions is persistent. Women face significant challenges in securing funding and even when they do, the financial support they receive is considerably lower than that of their male counterparts. Research identified a broader pattern of gender inequality, where women are systematically marginalised and face barriers to power-sharing and to participating in decision-making processes. Despite some progress, these advancements remain limited and vulnerable to setbacks, while lack of transparency further contributes to the exclusion of women from key industry positions (Liddy, 2020). This systemic exclusion is particularly evident in the challenges faced by women in securing creative roles and gaining visibility within the industry.

Similarly, young filmmakers, often characterised as “independent” cultural producers, navigate their own set of challenges within this evolving audiovisual landscape. As Yannis Tzioumakis (2006, p. 1) points out, “independent filmmaking typically involves low-budget projects by young filmmakers with a distinct personal vision, free from the influence of major industry conglomerates.” This autonomy enables independent filmmakers to create works that not only reflect unique voices, but also challenge political, economic and cultural constraints (Baltruschat & Erickson, 2015).

Independence in this context goes beyond simply working outside the state-funding systems of production, distribution and exhibition. More crucially, it involves presenting an alternative cultural vision, one that engages with contemporary social taboos and explores innovative artistic methods to represent them.

Specific statistical data on young filmmakers in Europe’s fringe film industry are limited, however some programmes highlight ongoing efforts to encourage and support young filmmakers in the experimental and fringe sectors. Organisations, such as Europa Cinemas dedicate 20% of their



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support to young audience development, implementing activities and programmes that engage young people in cinema (Gubbins, 2016). A UK based study on the pathways of youth from under-represented groups into the screen industries reveals significant socioeconomic disparities. The research found that 52% of the screen industry's workforce come from high socioeconomic backgrounds, compared to 38% across all industries. Furthermore, the study highlights the intersection of wealth and education, showing that individuals with a university degree from privileged backgrounds are 6.5 times more likely to secure a creative role than those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds with qualifications at GCSE-level or below (Griffin & Reeve, 2023). As authors of this report, we are well aware that intersectionality is a crucial factor in the lived experience of creators and as such neat categorisations of youth, women or migrants are often categories that either have inherent characteristics of each other (female migrants, female youth, young male migrants and so forth) and /or they serve on one level as a compass for the analytical focus and emphasis of the study (Al-Faham et al. 2019; Koskela, 2019). For example, a more detailed study would include socioeconomic status as well as ethnic backgrounds as additional layers that can make disadvantage even more visible, as “class in itself is a racialised and gendered notion” (Koskela, 2019: 7) . Moreover, although these analytical categories may interact, intersect and influence each other, we do not assume that the contributions, needs, experiences of either are directly aligned or identical: intersectional privileges or lack thereof, relational and contextual advantages or disadvantages, but also differences within categories provide more questions and differentiation. Therefore, although we do understand and acknowledge that homogeneity of experience is not a given, we also note that intersectional categorisation obtains different significance within the contexts of groups or individuals’ environments i.e. working vs social environments. For matters of scholarly simplification, in order to pay attention to the larger policy and practice frames governing the EFI from the perspective of acknowledging the historical under-representation and marginalisation of social groups, we maintain these three larger concepts as they are largely understood socially. We invite the reader to maintain further questions about the potential gaps in policy that intersectional realities are subjected to and maintain an open space of this inquiry as to the possibility of more complex burdens on individuals as the result thereof.

The report begins by identifying persistent structural inequalities in the European film industry (EFI), particularly affecting women, youth, and migrant filmmakers. State of the art, introduces the concept of ‘fringes’ to describe films and creators operating outside mainstream industry norms, often using experimental or alternative approaches that align with contemporary theoretical paradigms, such as feminism, or identity politics. It explores how these ‘fringe’ creators are often excluded from



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institutional support despite contributing meaningfully to cinematic innovation. The section also analyses European diversity policies, offering focused subsections on women, young people, and migrants, and further explores the critical role of alternative film festivals in elevating marginalised voices and reshaping film history beyond commercial imperatives. The findings section outlines practices in six countries, grouped into policy, industry initiatives, and festivals promoting inclusion.

4. STATE OF THE ART

The EFI has long been characterised by structural inequalities, with women, youth and migrant filmmakers facing significant barriers to access funding and representation. Despite policy efforts to promote diversity, these groups remain on the fringes of mainstream industry practices, struggling for visibility and equitable participation.

Women continue to be underrepresented in key creative roles, such as directing, producing and screenwriting. Data from the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) (Simone, 2023) highlights that female directors account for less than 25% of all European film productions, with significant funding disparities compared to their male counterparts. According to EAO (Simone, 2023) gender inequality varies according to profession. Between 2019 and 2023, the share of female professionals was higher for producers (43%) and writers (37%), close to the average for editors (31%) and directors (27%) and significantly lower for composers 10% and cinematographers (10%). Although initiatives, such as Creative Europe and national gender quotas aim to bridge this gap, progress remains slow and uneven across EU member states (European Commission, 2021).

For young filmmakers, financial and institutional barriers hinder entry into the film industry. While programmes like Erasmus+ and national youth film funds provide some support, access to production and distribution networks remains challenging (European Commission, 2024). The transition from independent, low-budget productions to industry-backed projects is particularly difficult, leading many emerging filmmakers to operate outside traditional structures.

Migrant and diaspora filmmakers face additional obstacles, including limited access to funding, underrepresentation in mainstream narratives and a lack of institutional support. Research on migration and cultural industries in Europe shows that film funding structures often fail to accommodate the specific needs of migrant filmmakers, limiting their ability to tell stories from their perspectives (Fontaine, 2023). While some initiatives, such as Culture Moves Europe, provide mobility opportunities for artists, comprehensive strategies for integrating migrant voices into national film industries remain underdeveloped.



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4.1. Understandings of “fringes” in filmmaking

The concept of “fringes” in film has long been associated with works that push the boundaries of conventional cinema, embracing alternative and experimental approaches to both storytelling and technique. Over time, the term has been expanded to encompass a diverse range of films that engage with various theoretical frameworks and cultural movements. As Missen (2002) reflects on the evolving nature of fringe cinema, it becomes evident that these films are not just valued for their innovation, but also for their ability to resonate with contemporary theoretical trends as “in any given period, experimental works correspond loosely to contemporary theoretical paradigms, be they transcendental phenomenology, structuralism, psychoanalytic feminism, semiotics, activism, queer theory, or identity politics to name but a few of the ‘trends’ of the last thirty-plus years” (Missen, 2002, p. 133).

Missen (2002) aptly notes, “all fringe experiments (from whatever era) are valuable and can be experienced anew” (Missen, 2002, p. 136), underscoring the timeless relevance of experimental filmmaking. Contrasting to this appreciation of the role of fringes comes the critique of a naval gazing, self referential practice, whereby the “fringe merely produces a parade of references to its own disjointed and marginal history and in doing so, becomes increasingly disconnected from the social”. Lipski (2017, p. 60) described “weird” filmmaking as “with unexpected combinations, audience estrangement and intertextuality” and comes in contrast to the “mainstream” that aims “to sell things, to manipulate, to impart ideology, or to ‘move us’” (Missen, 2002, p. 140). The Fringe-Knowledge scene consists of people that “are proponents of ideas and worldviews that often stand in stark opposition to what is considered rational, normal, or even sane in mainstream society” (Ramstedt, 2018, p. 3).

Another important characteristic is that *fringe* works are nonprofit-oriented. The communities of fringe productions are mostly emerging from anti-systemic, anti-capitalist spaces, such as activists, students and working class (Missen, 2002). The aim of fringe production “is to uncode, to make useless work in the construction of a cinema of playful misunderstanding, of feeling, nonsensicality and inconcise experience” (Missen, 2002, p. 139). Fringe works address the “resolutely particular” and are “a distinctive cinematic experientiality” and therefore “to make fringe works too useful is beside the point” (Missen, 2002, p. 140).

The Fringe-Knowledge scene consists of people that “are proponents of ideas and worldviews that often stand in stark opposition to what is considered rational, normal, or even sane in mainstream society” (Ramstedt, 2018, p. 3). It is necessary to distinguish between the terms “fringes” and



“independent films.” Although fringes are almost exclusively independent, independent films are not necessarily part of the fringes. While both operate outside the mainstream, their motivations, structures and cultural positions differ significantly.

A widespread image in public discourse is that independent filmmaking refers to low-budget film productions that are distinguished and separated from mainstream films. These films are frequently produced by emerging filmmakers who express their personal perspectives in unconventional subjects. Tzioumakis (2017) explains that despite the popularity of this definition, it is incomplete because it does not clarify what these films are actually “independent” of and the term is not always clear or all-encompassing. On the contrary, Tzioumakis argues that independent films have a different meaning for industry experts: “For the trade publication, however, independence has nothing to do with low-budget films with gritty visual style and offbeat subject matter. Instead, an independent film is any film that has not been financed, produced and/or distributed by a conglomerated major” (Tzioumakis, 2017, p. 2). Tzioumakis provides the example of *The Lord of the Rings*, which is considered an independent film and is financed by New Line Cinema with a budget of \$300 million. An additional parameter, are the independent production companies created by mainstream filmmakers in order to produce films and often are distributed by a conglomerated major.

4.2. European Policies

Women

Gender equality has long been a cornerstone of the European Union’s (EU) commitment to human rights, democracy and social justice. Over the years, the EU has increasingly integrated gender perspectives into its internal and external policies, aiming not only to promote equal opportunities, but also to address structural inequalities and discrimination. This commitment has been articulated through a series of strategic frameworks, most notably the Gender Action Plans (GAPs), to promote women’s empowerment across partner countries.

The Gender Action Plans (GAP I, II and III), produced and introduced by the European Commission as part of its broader commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, both within the EU and globally, aimed to address persistent gender disparities across various sectors and ensure that gender equality became a central focus in the EU's external and development policies.



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GAP I (2010-2015), the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development 2010-2015, was the first step in establishing a coherent strategy to promote gender equality in EU development cooperation. Its goal was to support women's empowerment by improving access to education, healthcare and economic opportunities for women worldwide (European Commission, 2010).

GAP II (2016-2020) titled “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment”, was built on the first plan, with a stronger focus on integrating gender equality into all EU external actions and policies. The plan aimed to advance women's rights globally, tackling key issues, such as violence, economic inequality and the underrepresentation of women in decision-making.

GAP III (2021-2025) as part of the EU's broader Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, continues the EU's focus on gender equality but with an added emphasis on intersectionality, focusing on the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination that women may face. It aims to close the gender gap across multiple areas, such as leadership, economic participation and gender-based violence, with a strong focus on achieving gender parity by 2025 (European Commission, 2020).

The 2023 Gender Equality Index by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) reports the EU's score at 70.2 out of 100, reflecting the largest increase (+1.6 points) since the Index's inception. Most progress is seen in the “time” domain, which measures the distribution of time across economic, caregiving and social activities. Additionally, EIGE notes an increase in the number of women on the boards of the largest publicly listed companies, with women representing 33.8% of board members in 2023, up from 32.2% in 2022. Austria reached 33.6%, achieving the target of at least 33% women on boards (EIGE, 2023).

In line with these advancements, the Creative Europe Annual Work Programmes continue to emphasise inclusion and diversity, with a focus on gender balance in the cultural sector (European Commission, 2023a). The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 recognises gender equality as a key driver of creativity, economic growth and innovation. As part of this strategy, multi-annual actions aim to support emerging artists and promote fair, inclusive environments in cultural professions, addressing gender gaps and discrimination. (European Commission, 2020) The Culture Moves Europe mobility scheme, launched in October 2023, provides financial support, including child care subsidies for parents with young children, to encourage gender equality in cultural mobility (European Commission, 2024b).

Furthermore, Horizon Europe, the EU's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, continues to support gender studies and intersectional research. The Horizon Europe Work



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Programme 2023-2024 includes calls on gender roles in extremist movements and projects addressing intersectionality in democratic processes (European Commission, 2023e).

Diaspora/migrants

The EU has increasingly recognised the vital role of culture, including cinema and the broader creative industries, in supporting social inclusion and reflecting the continent's growing diversity. In this context, EU policies and programmes have incorporated various initiatives aimed at supporting the industry, particularly through the Creative Europe programme.

Creative Europe is the EU's flagship initiative to support the cultural and audiovisual sectors. Structured into two main strands, Culture and MEDIA, which aims to strengthen the cultural and creative sectors by promoting innovation, artistic excellence and diversity. Within this framework, particular attention has been paid to enhancing the visibility and participation of different voices and communities. For years, Creative Europe's Media programme has been the key of the EU support for filmmakers, helping films to travel beyond their national borders and find new audiences. The EU has not directly supported production, preferring to leave this role to national governments. Now the EU is seeking to boost financing for European filmmakers through its equity investment scheme and loan-guarantee facility by providing investment support for the film and TV industry in two distinct ways; the first is through the European Investment Fund (EIF)'s *MediaInvest* and the second is via debt-guarantee lines targeted at film companies from EIF's InvestEU Cultural and Creative Sector guarantee. *MediaInvest* aims to strengthen the competitiveness of the audiovisual industries across Europe, by supporting investments totalling €400 million between 2022-2027 (EIF, 2024).

Although Creative Europe does not operate specific funding schemes exclusively for migrant or diaspora filmmakers, it offers a wide array of opportunities that are accessible to these groups. The MEDIA strand, in particular, supports the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works, including film. Migrant and diaspora filmmakers can benefit from these funding streams to realise projects that contribute to Europe's rich cultural mosaic (European Commission, 2023d)

Importantly, the EU has also responded to social and political developments with targeted cultural funding calls. In 2016, a special call under Creative Europe was launched to support refugee integration through cultural projects. As a result, 12 projects were selected, involving 62 organisations from 20 countries, with a total of €2.35 million in grants. These projects used cultural expression, including film, music, performance and visual arts, as tools for building bridges between



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refugees and host communities, emphasising shared experiences and mutual understanding (European Commission, 2016).

Youth

The European Youth Strategy 2019-2027 (2018/C 456/01) establishes a framework for European cooperation in youth policy. It emphasises the need for youth empowerment, participation and engagement in democratic life while fostering social inclusion and equality. The strategy is built on three core areas: Engage, Connect and Empower, aiming to create opportunities for young people in education, employment and active citizenship.

A key aspect of the strategy is its focus on cross-sectoral cooperation to ensure youth policies align with broader EU objectives, including sustainability, digital transformation and social cohesion. It also stresses the importance of evidence-based policymaking and youth participation in decision-making processes. However, while the strategy provides a comprehensive and inclusive vision for youth engagement, its effectiveness largely depends on national implementation and funding (Council of the European Union, 2018).

4.3. Industry Initiatives to Support Women, Youth and Migrants

Literature on alternative industry initiatives to support women, youth and people from diaspora backgrounds is rather scarce. The literature on industry initiatives in these directions is often intertwined with policy initiatives to support women, youth and filmmakers from migrant or diasporic backgrounds. In this literature, there is a clear focus on gender disparity - across the European continent - while literature looking more closely at youth and diaspora support is again more limited. This suggests that a closer examination of these industry initiatives is of paramount importance, not least because recent research suggests that feminist activism - and by extension all activism - has an important role to play in addressing these issues (Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024).

Women

Smith et al. (2016), Komorowski and Asardag (2020), Verhoeven et al. (2020) and Herrero-De-La-Fuente et al. (2022) state that there is a clear gap with regard to women in the film industry. The European Parliament even stated in 2019, in the wake of the Weinstein case, that there is a legislative gap "on non-discrimination against women and gender equality, especially in terms of social security, employment and wages" (Katsarova, 2019, p. 5). According to Kerns (2019), gender inequality is firmly embedded in film schools and production and is therefore a manifestation of



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structural inequalities. In 2023, the overall share of women in the EFI was only 24% and varied by position, with fewer women in more technical positions - such as cinematographers - and only in the field of editing do women outnumber men (Fontaine, 2024a). Fontaine (2024a) notes that when women work with women, the overall percentage of women in that particular production increases. Nevertheless, according to Komorowski and Asardag (2020, p. 1), "only one in five films is directed by a woman," and both Komorowski and Asardag (2020) and Katsarova (2019) highlight a clear difference across Europe, with northern European countries having slightly better figures than eastern and southern Europe. If we look at the last decade, although there has been an increase in the percentage of women in the film industry, this growth is still insufficient to achieve gender equality, certainly because women share their position more often than men, thus limiting the so-called solo positions for women (Fontaine, 2024b).

In addition, Smith and his other colleagues (2013) argue that in 2013, initiatives by industry professionals were limited to moving women "into more established roles," indicating the lack of initiatives to improve the position of professional women and the corresponding disadvantaged position of women in the film industry. Some studies even argue that these inequalities are systemic (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013; Smith et al., 2013). Therefore, the study by Verhoeven et al. (2020) suggests that women work with as many women as possible to increase their chances of leaving the periphery of the film industry, thus linking the number of female colleagues to their career opportunities.

At a more supranational policy level, the issue of gender equality in relation to competitiveness has become more relevant in the latest funding programme, Creative Europe 2021-27, whereas the European Film Academy through its Diversity and Inclusion Standards (European Film Academy, 2024a) seeks to address issues of underrepresentation in terms of gender, sexuality and sexual identity, ethnicity, disability and other social axes of difference. In line with the Council of Europe's policy, Eurimages is also committed to promoting diversity, inclusion and equality and therefore implements policies to promote gender equality. As part of its gender equality policies, Eurimages has embraced the aim of achieving equal distribution of co-production funding between women and men; it posters monitoring the underrepresentation of women in the industry; and it tries to raise awareness among professionals in relation to gender issues (Council of Europe, 2024). Eurimages seeks to promote gender equality through the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategies and one of the measures implemented is to increase the amount of funding that projects can request up to 25% of the total production costs for projects directed - or co-directed - by a female director (the maximum eligible amount of funding is still limited to 500,000 euros). Another initiative in this area



is the *Audentia Best Female Director Prize*, an international film festival prize that awards 30,000 euro to the winning director, applies a Bechdel test and provides financial support to emerging female filmmakers (Katsarova, 2019; Council of Europe, n.d.).²

This links to other measures to promote greater gender equality in the EFI, such as the LUX Film Prize, initialised in 2007 by the European Parliament, which is a pan-European initiative to support films that “address European values and raise awareness about some of today’s main social and political issues, such as mental health, poverty, climate change, freedom of expression, gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights” (Katsarova, 2019; European Film Academy, 2024b).

Other supranational funds and bodies are also working on gender and other issues and standards of equality, diversity and inclusion. These include the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO)³, the European Film Agency Directors (EFAD)⁴, the European Film Agency Research Network (EFARN) and the Federation of European Screen Directors (FERA) (Federation of European Screen Directors, n.d.). Other important initiatives need to be addressed. New Dawn, for instance, is an international collaboration between different European film funds and Telefilm Canada and advocates for more diversity in the film industry (New Dawn, n.d.).

Within the European film sector, several organisations are active in the field of gender equality and advocate for a more equal representation of women in the industry and on screen. These include the European Women’s Audiovisual Network (EWA), a pan-European organisation that acts as an international community linking women audiovisual professionals worldwide, organises seminars, talks and so on (European Women’s Audiovisual Network, n.d.). Another interesting initiative comes from UNIC (International Union of Cinemas), which represents cinema operators across whole Europe and is the organising party of a pan-European event to enhance women’s position in the film industry, Women’s Cinema Leadership Programme (UNIC, n.d.a). This event provides women in the film industry with the opportunities “to learn, enjoy networking opportunities and receive career advice from outstanding women executives from across the cinema landscape” (UNIC, n.d.b). Until

² On the LUX Prize, see the Reboot report, see Hiltunen, K., & Lähdesmäki, T. (2024). Report on Young Audience Award. The Reboot project. Retrieved March 24, 2025 from <https://thereboot-project.eu/pdfs/research-001.pdf>

³ See e.g. the EAO report *Female professionals in European TV/SVOD fiction production 2015-2022 figures*: Fontaine, G. (2024). *Female professionals in European TV/SVOD fiction production 2015-2022 figures*. European Audiovisual Observatory. <https://rm.coe.int/female-professionals-in-european-tv-and-svod-fiction-production-2022-f/1680ae4a68>

⁴ In 2017, the EFAD has set up a Gender & Inclusion Working Group, see EFAD. (n.d.). *Gender & Inclusion Working Group*. Retrieved March 25, 2025 from <https://www.europeanfilmagencies.eu/working-groups/gender-inclusion>



today, this initiative is one of UNIC's most thriving initiatives to enhance women's position in the filmed entertainment sector.

Diaspora/migrants

Many of the previously mentioned initiatives in relation to gender equality are captured within a broader strategy or policy with regard to monitoring or promoting issues of diversity, inclusion and equality. Often they are also related to issues of ethnicity, migration and diaspora. The international film production fund New Dawn, for instance, has a clear focus on ethnicity as "large demographic groups have been struggling for access to funding and to the marketplace," hence supporting "talented filmmakers without prejudice or exclusion and to give ample opportunity for multifaceted, original and authentic film to flourish" (New Dawn, n.d.). As Jäckel already noted in 2010, "most EU countries now have programmes in place to facilitate awareness of ethnic diversity and encourage cultural and artistic expression of minorities" (p. 77), differences between countries remain visible. Consequently, film funds obtained an important role in providing support for diasporic communities, therefore enhancing the abilities of those communities in partitioning in the EFI and hereby fostering with enlarged financial means the opportunities to combat stereotypical representations regarding minority groups (Jäckel, 2010; Saeys, 2018).

However, the amount of initiatives coming from the industry to support this focus group appears to be underdeveloped, despite the "systemic inequalities" (Smith et al., 2013) that diasporic filmmakers face (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). On top of it, as one of our interviewees (Int. 3) argued, critical questions can be raised as to how film industries, despite these diversity policies, don't really provide a level playing field (see also De Man et al., 2024) and do not ensure their works with everlasting visibility "given the temporary and volatile nature of many of the initiatives mentioned" (Jäckel, 2010, p. 92). Nevertheless, diasporic filmmakers remain vastly dependent on financial aid originating from state mechanisms (Jäckel, 2010).

Youth

Historically, specific issues related to young film audiences have been high on the agenda in the European film sector. As part of major debates on the potential (negative) impact of films and cinema on children and young cinemagoers, there were major initiatives with regard to protecting young audiences through various measures, ranging from censorship, age restrictions, parental guidance and industry regulations (e.g., Biltereyst & Mathijs, 2024). This links to media literacy initiatives, where, as Petranová et al. (2017, p. 62) argue, "film education (or improving film literacy) is highly developed in the EU along with practical skills associated with filmmaking," and also that "within the



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development of film literacy, the individual organisations conducting film festivals and competitions even provide the target groups with opportunities to create films in professionally equipped studios.”

However, as the study of Griffin and Reeve (2023) indicates, there still is a need for supporting young people to make the bridge to the industry. In this study, Griffin and colleagues list several issues that keep them from tackling a career path in the film industry, such as difficulties finding a job and lack of experience. According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (2013) report, enhanced access to information regarding filmmaking, more – and especially more low-cost – tools for creation and market access and entry are important to boost the potential and corresponding growth of youth in filmmaking. Therefore, community-based programmes like the GIFTS initiative in Canada where professional filmmakers take on the role of mentors and where young people can try and hence learn the art of filmmaking, play an important role in creating learning opportunities for young people regarding filmmaking (Lin & Castro, 2011). Perhaps Europe can learn from such transatlantic initiatives, although some countries have devised methods to support their youth in the educational process of filmmaking, but these methods are not always fully developed and fail to address all the issues that would be resolved in an ideal scenario (Blum-Ross, 2015). Given that the creative industries are vital to Europe's economies, which underscores their cultural and economic significance, it is imperative to engage youth adequately, as the lack of such engagement threatens the industry's future (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2013). To put it in the words of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (2013, p. 5): “investing in creative industries (...) is investing in culture”.

Few pan-European studies are available that map or compare industry initiatives regarding attracting youth, especially young (potential) filmmakers. The need to engage more effectively with young audiences as potential future filmmakers was highlighted as one of the key challenges for the EFI in the 2023 Nostradamus report, entitled *Everything Changes All At Once*, especially because, as Johanna Koljonen (2023, p. 11) argued, there seems to be “a disinterest among young people for their local scripted drama,” what is also “a threat to the talent pipeline.” Claiming that “our lack of diversity and abysmal work environment makes us unattractive and the traditional allure of working adjacent to glamour is fading,” Koljonen’s report emphasised the importance of better understanding and targeting Gen Z, defined as “all teenagers and young adults up to the age of 26” (p. 45). She underscored the urgent need and responsibility “to share great storytelling with them and as parents and citizens to create spaces for reflection, context and empowerment.” Acknowledging the unique role and long-standing tradition of PSM in engaging with young audiences, Koljonen (2023, p. 47)



calls for the continuation of a “trust-building exercise—an investment in a long-term relationship that can contribute to democratic stability.”

4.4. Film festival with focus on women, people with diasporic background and youth

Although film festivals originally emerged in Europe, their significance within European cinema has been unnoticed in academic literature for a long time (Evans, 2007; de Valck & Loist, 2009). Since the late 2000s, more research has focused on the key role of film festivals and their audiences in the cinema value chain (de Valck & Loist, 2009). This growing attention resulted in the contextualisation and in-depth analysis of film festivals, ultimately shaping the foundation of a new academic discipline: film festival studies. At the time de Valck and Loist (2009) posited this, film festival research became increasingly important in film studies. Consequently, de Valck and Loist described it as a burgeoning field.

The purpose of film festivals attracts arguments regarding distribution and marketing as the most frequent ones (de Valck and Loist, 2009). Experts argue that film festivals have a positive impact on today's film industry in many ways, for instance by fostering industry encounters and networks, helping film producers, filmmakers and other people working in the industry to find support, etc. (Falicov, 2010). In recent years, film festivals increasingly expanded their activities, including providing for training and funds to promote inclusion (de Valck & Loist, 2009). Frameline's Completion Fund, for instance, supports applications that come from women, people of color and other minority groups.

Current film festival research often addresses identity-based festivals, which focus on politics and representation and address inclusion by showcasing diverse stories, increasing visibility and ensuring representation (Loist, 2014). Acciari (2018) argues that these film festivals play an important role in creating a sense of cosmopolitanism, as many of these events are shaped by diasporic experiences. Hannerz (1997) defines cosmopolitanism as the desire to engage others and their corresponding cultures. By doing so, film festivals generate a sense of community and involvement (de Valck, 2006), which could be linked to the concept of imagined community of Anderson (1991). Furthermore, film festivals seek to create a sense of community by challenging certain stereotypes (de Valck, 2006). Acciari (2018) emphasises that film festivals play an important role in creating awareness regarding transnational differences and perceive migration less negatively.



This study focuses on the so-called alternative film festivals in the direction of women's film festivals, youth film festivals and diasporic film festivals. Each of those festivals is identity-based and, in doing so, have the potential to challenge the current status quo by sparking involvement and a sense of community (de Valck, 2006; Loist, 2014; Acciari, 2018). These three types of film festivals – women's, youth and diasporic film festivals – will be elaborated in more detail in the following sections.

Women's film festivals

Women's film festivals have emerged and proliferated in the wake of feminist thinking about the role of cinema, roughly since the 1970s. Most gender-focused festivals aim to challenge traditional festivals by reflecting and reinforcing structural gender inequalities in the film industry (Carocci, 2016). The first international women's film festival was organised in New York in 1972 and Europe followed a few months later with the Edinburgh International Film Festival (Fischer, 2015). Women's film festivals cannot solve these inequalities, but they have the potential and responsibility to draw attention to them (Carrocci, 2016). In addition to raising awareness, these festivals are often associated with activism as they challenge heteronormative society and provide platforms for women in and out of the industry (Loist, 2012). White (2015) argues that women's film festivals also create a network through which women filmmakers can circulate their work. In this way, such film festivals act as a kind of feminist public sphere (White, 2015). However, the ultimate goal of women's film festivals, according to Kerns (2019), is to become obsolete once women have equal access to resources and top positions in the industry, while feminist film festivals are likely to remain in place to address broader social issues.

Diasporic film festivals

For diasporic filmmakers, filmmaking is both a profession and/or a means of cultural activism (Grassilli, 2008), similar to indigenous cinema in its role of identity expression (Ginsburg, 2002). Özduzen (2020) argues that such events have an activist character, creating space for dialogue between filmmakers, academics, activists and diverse communities on socially relevant issues. Film festivals, such as the San Sebastián Film Festival in Spain (Berghahn & Sternberg, 2010), play an important role in the production of these films, both in terms of funding and in winning awards and positive reviews for these films (Naficy, 2001; Jäckel, 2010). Elsaesser (2005) notes that film festivals are making greater efforts to support these filmmakers and to ensure that their works are screened more often. This has had positive results, for example, Arab and other non-Western films are increasingly winning festival awards and reaching wider audiences (Jäckel, 2010). She



highlights that film festivals, such as the Mostra Film Festival in Valencia have become important platforms for non-Western cinema (Jäckel, 2010) and notes that films by diasporic filmmakers in Europe were already highly visible at film festivals in the 2000s. Film festivals thus provide a safe space for interaction between audiences and migrants. By identifying with migrants' experiences, a film festival can bring about subtle social or political change (Ostrowska, 2019). However, limited recognition at the national level and a lack of cultural diversity in policy continue to affect identity and self-confidence, both of which are essential for creative expression (Grassilli, 2008).

Youth film festivals

A third category on which this report will focus is those that focus on youth and/or give a platform to young filmmakers. European film festivals struggle to attract young audiences, with only 18% of visitors under the age of 25 (European Film Market, 2023). This highlights the need for youth engagement, as cultural participation fosters social cohesion and a sense of community (Jeannotte, 2003). Effective communication is key: Fischer (2009) argues that strong outreach not only promotes an event, but also contributes to identity formation. To address this, many film festivals actively create programmes tailored to young people, introducing them to new cinematic experiences and helping them to better understand film as a medium (Robertson, 2009). Dedicated youth film festivals, such as the Youth Film Festival Antwerp (JEF, n.d.) or Kinolub in Poland (Kinolub, n.d.), cater specifically to younger audiences by offering films tailored to their interests. In addition, some festivals provide platforms for young filmmakers to showcase their own work, giving them visibility and supporting their early careers (King, 2014; Jocson, 2013).

4.5. Alternative film festivals and their impact

Alternative film festivals are understood as platforms that operate outside the dominant circuits of commercial and institutional film culture. These festivals often prioritise marginalised voices, experimental aesthetics, and political engagement, positioning themselves as counter-hegemonic spaces within global film culture (de Valck, 2007; Elsaesser, 2005). Unlike mainstream festivals that emphasise market visibility, celebrity culture, or distribution deals, alternative festivals are typically grassroots-driven and community-oriented, functioning with limited budgets and often relying on public funding or volunteer work (Loist, 2016). Scholars such as Iordanova & Torchin (2012), note that these festivals serve not only as cultural events but also as activist spaces where curatorial politics support feminist, queer, migrant, and other underrepresented perspectives.

Film festivals do more than celebrate cinema. They play an active role in shaping and influencing film history. Festivals both create and mediate film history by using key tropes, such as genre,



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movement and national origin to categorise films. Through programming choices, awards and exposure, festivals can elevate certain films and filmmakers to international recognition, while also reviving classics or introducing marginal cinemas into dominant cultural spaces (Vallejo, 2020). Understanding how film festivals impact the economy isn't always straightforward. As Marijke de Valck (2007) explains, festivals operate in a unique way, where normal market rules do not always apply. Instead of aiming to make money directly from film screenings, festivals tend to focus more on creating visibility and prestige for the films they show. Ticket sales often help cover the festival's costs, but usually do not benefit the filmmakers financially. The value created is often symbolic, being selected, participating, or winning awards brings recognition, not revenue.

Aida Vallejo (2020) highlights that the economic impact of festivals can be seen in three main areas. First, there is event management, festivals can bring cultural funding into a city and boost tourism. Second, there is the exhibition side, where festivals help build audiences and appreciation for cinema, which can later lead to financial success elsewhere. Then, festivals support film production by offering funding opportunities and training programmes for filmmakers. So, even if they do not operate like regular businesses, festivals still play an important role in supporting the film industry and the economy around it. In addition to their economic contributions, film festivals hold a unique social and cultural significance. Those that go beyond showcasing films to thoughtfully engage audiences through curated programming and educational activities often foster intercultural understanding and dialogue. By offering diverse audio-visual narratives, these festivals create spaces for connection across communities, helping to strengthen cultural ties and promote shared values within Europe (Krainhöfer, 2018).

In recent decades, film festivals and transnational funding bodies have become central players in the development and visibility of independent and arthouse cinema, especially since the 1990s. As highlighted by Wong (2011), these platforms significantly influence the ways in which films cross national boundaries, not only through exhibition, but also through their increasing involvement in production processes. Scholars, such as Ostrowska (2010), Loist (2011) and De Valck (2017) have examined the ways in which festivals and supranational funds operate as curators and talent scouts, often stepping into roles traditionally held by producers. These actors not only shape which voices are amplified, but also provide vital financial and structural support to filmmakers working outside the commercial mainstream (Falicov, 2010, 2017; Chan, 2011; Ross, 2011; Vallejo, 2020). Additionally, Iordanova (2009) notes that festivals act as entry points into global circulation, connecting otherwise marginalised films with international audiences.



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Beyond production and distribution, festivals serve as gathering points for filmmakers, critics, distributors and audiences, creating networks of exchange and influence that extend far beyond the screening room. Independent cinema, with its focus on underrepresented stories and diverse perspectives, thus plays a critical role not only in the evolution of global film culture, but also in promoting social awareness and cultural dialogue.

Estimating the exact number of film festivals in Europe is challenging, due to the dynamic and expansive nature of the festival's landscape: the concrete number of film festivals is not yet clear. However, despite the high number of film festivals in Europe, the landscape of experimental or alternative festivals does not appear to be expanding at the same rate. While interest and demand remain strong, supply seems comparatively limited. The case of "Vienna Shorts" in Austria, now in its 21st edition, illustrates this dynamic. In May 2024, the festival featured 306 films from 67 countries, with over two-thirds being Vienna premieres and 21 world premieres, attracting a notably young and international audience (Vienna Shorts, n.d.).

Similarly, the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in Greece has developed a reputation for spotlighting emerging filmmakers and politically engaged cinema, often with dedicated sections for youth and diversity-driven programming. The 65th edition, held from October 31 to November 10, 2024, attracted approximately 89,000 attendees (Thessaloniki international film festival, 2024a). These examples underscore the growing demand for such spaces, even if institutional support and proliferation remain relatively limited compared to mainstream counterparts.

5. KEY FINDINGS FROM SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

What follows is a non-exhaustive overview of policy measures, industry initiatives and film festivals with regard to issues of inclusion and diversity with a focus on women, youth and people with a diaspora background. Each country overview takes three different divisions into consideration: policy, industry initiatives and film festivals.

This part is built upon a combination of both desk research and interviews to formulate an evaluation of the research objectives. Regarding desk research, an analysis was conducted on national and partly regional legislation, policies and industry initiatives. Therefore, our primary sources were the websites of national and partly regional film institutions. Additionally, out of the 66 in-depth interviews conducted with key stakeholders in the film industry, including filmmakers, policymakers, young filmmakers, producers, and actors, 35 participants identified as female, 30 as male, and 1 as non-binary. To ensure relevance and depth, interviews were guided by a tailored topic list, covering



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themes, such as action groups, policy frameworks, and film festivals, adapted to each interviewee's area of expertise and professional background.

For structural reasons, the industry initiatives and film festivals were enlisted with a brief description, after which initiatives and film festivals were elaborated into more detail. This way, a well-structured, non-exhaustive overview of the found initiatives was obtained and a too intensive enumeration could be avoided.

5.1 Austria

Austria's film industry relies heavily on public funding, with little to no tradition of private film financing (Fliger & Vogelmann, 2020). Key national funding bodies include Film Industry Support Austria (Filmstandort Austria; FISA), the Federal Chancellery of Austria (BKA) and the Austrian Film Institute (Österreichisches Filminstitut; ÖFI). Additionally, public broadcasters, such as the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (Österreichischer Rundfunk; ORF) and the Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications (Rundfunk und Telekom Regulierungs GmbH; RTR) provide financial support for television programmes and, in some cases, film productions.

Despite Austria's relatively small size, its federal structure adds another layer of complexity to film funding. Each of the country's nine states operates its own cultural and film funding programmes, allowing for a decentralised approach to financial support for filmmakers. This decentralised system means that most filmmakers seek funding from multiple sources, as no unified eligibility criteria apply across all funding institutions (Fliger & Vogelmann, 2020).

5.1.1. Women

While public accountability for these funds is required, there are no legal mandates for gender budgeting or a gender-sensitive analysis of public spending in the Austrian film industry. In many cases, gender is not included as a data category and although there have been gradual improvements, the implementation of gender-based financial tracking remains limited (Fliger & Vogelmann, 2020).

In 2025, the Österreichisches Filminstitut (ÖFI) started to implement a Gender Incentive aimed at promoting gender equality in the Austrian film industry. Under this initiative, production companies receiving ÖFI funding are eligible for an additional €30,000 if their films include a significant proportion of female employees in key creative and technical leadership roles. These roles span multiple departments, including production, directing, screenwriting, cinematography, editing, sound design, visual effects (VFX) and animation, among others.



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The additional funding is intended to support material and project development for future productions that maintain female representation in at least two of the three core leadership positions: production, directing and screenwriting. To ensure transparency, production companies must provide proof of female participation through the film's official credits. This policy represents a strategic effort by ÖFI to encourage more gender-balanced hiring practices and increase the visibility of women in the Austrian film industry, addressing long-standing gender disparities in creative leadership roles (Österreichisches Filminstitut, 2025a).

The *Austrian Film Gender Report (2012-2016)* (Flicker & Vogelmann, 2018) reveals significant gender disparities in film funding. During this period, 80% of the total production funding was awarded to projects led by men in the core creative roles of directing, production and scriptwriting, while only 20% went to projects led by women. This imbalance is consistent across all major funding schemes. In script development, 72% of the Austrian Film Institute's funding was allocated to men and 28% to women. For project development, 75% of funding went to men and 25% to women. The gap widens in production funding, 76% for cinema films went to men and 24% to women. In television films, men received 84% of the funding and women only 16%, while television series displayed the greatest disparity, with 92% allocated to men and a mere 8% to women.

The data shows a clear pattern: as funding amounts increase, the share awarded to women decreases. Notably, none of the ten projects receiving the highest production funding were directed by women. This demonstrates that women-led projects are not only underfunded, but also excluded from the most lucrative funding opportunities. Despite the collaborative nature of filmmaking, where projects involve multiple creative contributors, gender budgeting analyses reveal a persistent bias in favor of male-led productions. This underrepresentation of women in key creative roles highlights structural inequalities in Austria's film industry, where men continue to dominate decision-making positions and receive the majority of financial support (Flicker & Vogelmann, 2018).

In gender representation over time, women continue to receive a disproportionately small share of this funding and remain underrepresented in key leadership roles across both cinema and television. According to the *Second Austrian film gender report* (Scheibelhofer & Koblitiz, 2022) conducted between 2017 and 2019, only 25% of the total funding for cinema and television projects was allocated to women. Specifically, women received just 28% of the approved funding for cinema projects and only 18% of the funding in the television sector. This disparity becomes even more pronounced when analyzing larger funding amounts, as projects receiving substantial financial support are more likely to be led by men. Notably, no projects with exclusively female crews received significant funding during this period. In the television sector, the imbalance is particularly striking,



100% of the funding for TV series went to projects with either exclusively male (46%) or predominantly male (54%) core creative teams. Similarly, the field of cinema distribution reflects these gendered patterns, with 88% of the funding going to companies run by men, leaving a mere 12% for female-led distributors. This suggests that the greater the funding amount, the lower the likelihood that women will receive financial support, reinforcing long-standing gender inequalities in the industry.

The underrepresentation of women is also evident in the leadership of core creative roles, such as directing, screenwriting and production. During the 2017-2019 period, women held only 26% of production roles, 33% of directing positions and 36% of screenwriting roles. This gendered division of labor extends to other departments as well. Men dominate technical roles like lighting and sound, while women are concentrated in traditionally feminised fields, such as costume design and make-up. Nevertheless, there are indications of gradual progress.

Despite these challenges, female-driven films have achieved notable artistic success, particularly in the festival circuit. Between 2012 and 2019, 69% of female-led films were selected for at least one festival, a slightly higher proportion than their male-driven counterparts. This suggests that while women may encounter significant barriers in securing funding, their creative work is frequently recognised as artistically valuable. Future research aims to explore the economic performance of these films, which would provide a more comprehensive understanding of gendered outcomes in Austria's film industry. (Scheibelhofer & Koblitz, 2022).

The Austrian Film Institute's *Third Gender Report (2020-2021)* (Scheibelhofer, 2024) shows slow progress toward gender equality in the film industry. While the share of female-driven films increased to 35%, male-driven projects still dominate at 55%. The disparity is especially pronounced in fiction films, where only 20% had a predominantly female core crew, down from 25% in the previous report. In contrast, female-driven documentaries increased significantly, reaching nearly 48%.

Gender segregation persists in key production roles. Women remain underrepresented in technical fields, such as lighting (8%), sound (14%) and camera (20%), while their presence in core creative positions, directing (43%), scriptwriting (41%) and production (35%), shows modest growth.

Cinematography remains a male-dominated field. From 2012 to 2021, male-led teams almost exclusively hired male cinematographers and even female-driven projects employed women in this role only 30% of the time.

Representation on-screen also reflects gender bias. Female-driven fiction films portrayed women as 58% of main characters, compared to 44% in male-driven films. Moreover, 80% of female-driven



films passed the Bechdel-Wallace Test, while only 50% of male-driven films did. Women on screen were typically younger and motherhood was more often portrayed as linked to single-parent households. Additionally, queer representation remains minimal, with only six queer main characters across all films, just one of whom was female.

In documentaries, men dominated as narrators and experts. While 56% of documentary protagonists were women, they accounted for only one-third of the speaking time. Additionally, only 20% of biographical documentaries focused on women, reinforcing a male-centered narrative. Gendered divisions of labor persist, with women more frequently depicted in caregiving roles and men in leadership positions.

The television sector shows the least progress. No female-driven TV series received funding and only 5% of TV fiction films were female-led. The share of female-driven TV fiction films has even declined by six percentage points since the last report.

Overall, the report highlights that while female representation in Austrian cinema is improving, particularly in documentaries, systemic gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched across both creative and financial aspects of the industry (Scheibelhofer, 2024).

While the Austrian film industry has made some progress in addressing gender disparities, substantial inequalities persist. Women remain underrepresented in leadership positions and receive a disproportionately small share of public funding, especially for large-scale projects.

Policy

Austria has taken significant steps to promote gender equality within its film industry, implementing policies that encourage female participation in key creative roles while ensuring a more equitable distribution of funding. A major initiative in this effort is the Austrian Film Institute's gender incentive, introduced in 2016 as part of a broader gender mainstreaming policy. This incentive provides an automatic grant of 30,000 EUR for project development to productions that meet specific gender balance criteria, requiring at least two female professionals in key positions, such as producer, director, or scriptwriter (Österreichisches Filminstitut, 2019).

Beyond direct funding mechanisms, Austria's Federal Chancellery as per Article 3 of the *Guidelines for the awarding of grants according to the Art Promotion Act by the federal ministry of housing, arts, culture, media and sport*, one of the goals pursued by the fund is the "gender-fair distribution of funding to ensure equality between men and women". It has also integrated gender equity into its cultural support framework, mandating that at least 50% of individual grants be awarded to women.



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This policy reflects a broader commitment to fostering gender parity across artistic and creative fields, ensuring that women have equal access to resources and opportunities. (Bundesministerium Wohnen, Kunst, Kultur, Medien und Sport, 2025)

The Vienna Film Fund further reinforces this effort by regularly monitoring gender representation in its funding programmes. In television production, funding ceilings are contingent on having a woman in a key creative role, while additional consideration is given to projects with female scriptwriters or directors.

Austria also participates in broader European initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in the audiovisual sector. For instance, the European Women's Audiovisual Network (EWA) has conducted research and advocated for policies to sustain women's careers in the film industry. Austrian respondents to EWA's research emphasised the importance of targeted development and production funding, greater equality in policy-making committees and increased support for first and second films by female directors.

Industry practices

In the context of both industry and civil initiatives, various programmes and partnerships in Austria are taking proactive steps to support underrepresented voices, particularly women, in the film industry. For example, in the city of Baden, located in Lower Austria, Cinema Paradiso collaborates with the feminist association Frauenzimmer and the City of Baden to curate a series centred on *International Women's Day* in March. This initiative highlights films by, about and with women, providing a platform for female voices in cinema. The films featured in this programme offer a diverse range of perspectives, contributing to the ongoing conversation about gender representation in the media (Cinema Paradiso Baden, 2025).

In addition, the Austrian Film Institute, in collaboration with Drehbuchforum Wien, the Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Civil Service and Sport, and FC GLORIA Feminismus Vernetzung Film, continues its significant efforts to combat gender stereotypes in film production. In 2025, they will host the ninth edition of their initiative titled "IF SHE CAN SEE IT, SHE CAN BE IT". This competition aims to promote the creation of female characters who transcend typical stereotypes. The competition supports female writers by providing funding and dramaturgical assistance. In the first round, five selected pitches will each receive 5,000 EUR along with support for developing a film treatment from which one writer and their treatment will be awarded with an additional 15,000 EUR to fully develop a screenplay. This initiative not only contributes to increasing gender diversity in film,



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but also provides a vital resource for female screenwriters working to break new ground in narrative cinema (Österreichisches Filminstitut, 2025b).

Film festivals

In Vienna, the *Tricky Women/Tricky Realities Animation Film Festival* provides a significant platform for animated films made by women and genderqueer artists. Held annually in March, the festival showcases a diverse range of animated films that often explore both narrative and experimental approaches to storytelling. The films presented at the festival are distinctively feminist, pushing boundaries and offering fresh perspectives on issues, such as gender, identity and societal norms. As the festival's official description notes, it is dedicated to highlighting boundary-pushing works that challenge conventional norms and foster critical discourse within the world of animation (Tricky Women, 2015).

In addition to the Tricky Women festival, the annual *Queertactics festival* in Vienna adopts a global, feminist and queer perspective, aiming to address the intersection of aesthetics, politics and social change. With the slogan “The world should become more queer and more female,” *Queertactics festival* not only showcases queer and feminist films, but also delves into the economic realities of queer and female creatives in the film industry. The festival aims to introduce a “queer_feminist economy” into the filmmaking community, drawing attention to the precarious economic conditions faced by women and queer artists in the industry. Through discussions and presentations, it challenges the traditional structures of the film business and advocates for greater inclusivity and support for marginalised voices (Queertactics, 2022).

5.1.2. Migrants

In Austria, the representation and inclusion of migrants and diaspora communities within the film industry have been subjects of growing attention. Despite the country's diverse population, individuals with migration backgrounds remain underrepresented both on-screen and behind the scenes. The *Third Austrian Film Gender Report* (Scheibelhofer, 2024), released in April 2024 by the Austrian Film Institute, analysed 401 feature films released between 2012 and 2021. The report found that only 13% of main characters had a migration background, whereas migrants constitute approximately 26% of Austria's population. Moreover, these characters were often depicted as belonging to lower socioeconomic classes, reinforcing certain stereotypes. In contrast, characters without migration backgrounds were more frequently portrayed as affluent or highly educated, with over a quarter of main characters belonging to the upper class and nearly half holding university degrees.



Policy

Austria has taken concrete steps toward integrating migrants and diaspora communities through a series of national policies and institutional frameworks, though these efforts do not explicitly extend to the film industry. The Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF) plays a crucial role in migrant integration by providing services and information through its nationwide centers. Although not specifically tailored to the film industry, ÖIF's resources help migrant filmmakers navigate the cultural sector and access available opportunities. At the city level, for instance, Vienna introduced the *Kültür gemma!* project (2013-2017) to support young migrant cultural producers. This initiative promoted migrant contributions to the city's cultural landscape by providing work scholarships and creating platforms for visibility and independence in cultural production. It aimed to combat structural discrimination and foster equal participation in the cultural sector.

The country adopts a two-way integration model, which emphasises both the provision of state services and the active participation of migrants in Austrian society. This approach is reflected in the National Action Plan for Integration (NAP), introduced in 2010 and still guiding integration policy today. Developed by the Ministry of the Interior in cooperation with a steering group that included other ministries, local authorities, researchers and civil society organisations, the NAP covers a wide spectrum of areas: language acquisition, employment, education, health, housing, cultural values and intercultural dialogue (Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten, n.d.).

Austria's commitment to integration has been reinforced through targeted measures, such as the 50-Point Plan for the integration of beneficiaries of international protection, introduced in 2016 in response to rising refugee numbers (Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten, 2016). Further, the Integration Act (Integrationsgesetz) of 2017 established a legal framework for the long-term integration of third-country nationals, once again underlining the necessity of migrant participation in the integration process - Federal Law Gazette I No. 68/2017 (Bundeskanzleramt Österreich, 2017).

Supporting the implementation of these policies is the Austrian Integration Fund (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, ÖIF), a government-affiliated body that offers services through its network of integration centres across Austria. The ÖIF plays a practical role in delivering integration courses and advice to recognised refugees, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and other migrant groups (Österreichischer Integrationsfonds, n.d.).



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While the film industry is not explicitly referenced in these documents, the broad inclusion of cultural participation and intercultural dialogue as key pillars of integration suggests an institutional recognition of the importance of creating spaces for migrant and diaspora voices (Bundesministerium für europäische und internationale Angelegenheiten, n.d.). This provides a valuable starting point for discussions on expanding such inclusion into Austria's cultural and creative industries, including cinema.

Industry practices

In the Austrian film industry, initiatives have been established to support and amplify the voices of filmmakers from diverse and migrant backgrounds. One notable programme is *Diverse Geschichten* (*Diverse Stories*), a scriptwriting initiative developed by the Austrian production company Orbrock. This programme offers a series of workshops, dramaturgical consultations, lectures and case studies led by experienced filmmakers, along with individual coaching sessions. While it does not provide direct financial assistance, it aims to support the development of screenplays by writers with intercultural backgrounds and promote their networking with directors and producers. The programme spans eleven months and is free for participants during seminar sessions in Vienna, including full catering. It welcomes submissions for both feature film and series screenplays across all fictional genres, without thematic restrictions (Diverse Geschichten, n.d.). The Austrian film landscape has also seen the emergence of filmmakers with migration backgrounds gaining prominence. For instance, the 2017 film *Die Migrantigen* (*The Migrumpies*), directed by Arman T. Riahi and developed under the Diverse Geschichten programme, is a satirical comedy that critiques media stereotypes about immigrants. The film follows two well-integrated Viennese friends who, for a documentary show about a socially disadvantaged neighborhood, pretend to be petty criminals with immigrant backgrounds, leading to unforeseen consequences.

Another significant platform is *Brunnenpassage*, an *ArtSocialSpace* in Vienna that serves as a laboratory for transcultural art. *Brunnenpassage* organises the monthly film series *Cinemarkt*, which focuses on posing political questions about migration, flight and racism. *Cinemarkt* aims to publicise and discuss feature films by Austrian filmmakers with migration backgrounds, often including discussions with the filmmakers and Viennese initiatives working on the issues covered in the screenings (Brunnenpassage, n.d.).

In addition to these initiatives, film clubs, such as *Film Club Tacheles* and the *Jewish Film Club Vienna*, organised by the Institute for Jewish Studies and Visual Contemporary and Cultural History at the University of Vienna, host screenings and discussions on topics including Judaism, Israel,



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remembrance culture, anti-Semitism, Yiddish language and cultural tradition and the life of Jews and non-Jews in and outside of Austria (Filmclub Tacheles, 2022; Jüdischer Filmclub, n.d.).

Film festivals

Austria is the place of a variety of culturally themed film festivals that serve as key platforms for boosting and supporting intercultural understanding, reflecting on diasporic identities and showcasing global perspectives beyond the mainstream. These festivals often aim to counter dominant narratives and offer nuanced insights into underrepresented cultures and regions. In 2014, the *Medien-Servicestelle Neue ÖsterreicherInnen* (“Media Service Centre New Austrians”), a former self-proclaimed “journalistic intermediary between primary sources and the media,” specialised on migrant and diasporic communities in Austria created a report on the thematisation of migration in Austrian film festivals, of which many insights still ring true (Medien-Servicestelle Neue ÖsterreicherInnen, 2014).

For example, the *Cinéma Africain!* festival in Linz seeks to challenge western misconceptions about Africa by highlighting the continent’s cinematic diversity through curated screenings, masterclasses and discussions that promote a deeper understanding of African cultures (Cinéma Africain, 2024). First edition included the screening of 19 films, including a short film programme. Similarly, the *Nordiale Festival*, organised annually by the adult education centre *VHS Wiener Urania*, offers a curated selection of films from the Nordic and Baltic regions, bringing these often-overlooked cinematic landscapes into Austrian public discourse where in the last 3 years 28 films were screened. (VHS Wiener Urania, 2024).

Vienna’s Red Lotus Asian Film Festival with 53 film screenings within the period from 2022-2025, positions itself as both a showcase for Asian cinema and a communicative bridge for Austria’s Asian communities. It aims to encourage dialogue within and beyond these communities through film (Red Lotus, n.d.). In a similar spirit, *Japannual*, hosted by the Austrian-Japanese Society, focuses on introducing recent and acclaimed Japanese cinema to Austrian audiences (Japannual, n.d.).

The *Mittelamerikanisches Film festival Wien* (Central American film festival), held at Vienna’s METRO cinema and organised by the Papaya Media Association, promotes awareness of Central American cinema, often spotlighting political and social issues central to the region where within the period from 2020 to 2025 has screened 143 films (Papaya Media Association, 2024).

In addition to these, Vienna’s *Votiv Kino* and *Kino de France* hold regular festivals like *Nuovo Cinema Italia* (38 film screening from 2022-2024) and *Festival du film francophone* (33 film screening only



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in 2025), presenting contemporary works and cinematic classics from Italy and French-speaking countries, respectively, thereby enriching the city's transnational film culture (Nuovo Cinema Italia, n.d.; Festival du film francophone, n.d.). The *Vienna Jewish Film Festival* takes a clear political and educational stance, with programming that confronts antisemitism and racism, while also delving into broader themes, such as migration, identity and social justice, screened 255 films from 2020 to 2025 (Vienna Jewish Film Festival, n.d.).

While Austrian film festivals provide visibility and foster dialogue around diasporic experiences, what remains notably absent is targeted support for migrant and diasporic filmmakers themselves in terms of production, funding and professional development.

5.1.3. Young filmmakers

Policy

Austria's national youth policies, as outlined through the *Federal Youth Promotion Act* (Bundeskanzleramt, 2000), focuses primarily on addressing key areas, such as vocational guidance, peaceful coexistence and participation in societal decision-making. These priorities, especially in fields like MINT (Mathematics, Information Sciences, Natural Sciences and Technology), target areas where the demand for professionals is growing. However, the focus on creative industries, particularly film, remains secondary and is not mentioned within the current national youth programmes. The *Federal Youth Promotion Act* (Bundeskanzleramt, 2000) aims to support and enhance extracurricular youth education by fostering the mental, emotional, physical, social, political and ethical development of children and young people. This legislation enables youth organisations to apply for financial assistance for projects that contribute to these developmental goals.

The national policy landscape in Austria highlights the government's commitment to involving young people in voluntary activities, integration and social participation, which are important but tend to overlook the creative industries, including film. For example, while the funding priorities emphasise issues, such as preventing violence and fostering peaceful coexistence, they do not specifically address the role of youth in cultural and artistic fields.

The *Austrian Youth Strategy* (2012) aims to coordinate and optimise policies and measures for young people. It emphasises the active inclusion of youth in various cultural and creative activities. The main topics of the *Austrian Youth Strategy* are divided into four fields of action that are essential to its framework; learning and employment, participation and initiative, quality of life and a spirit of cooperation and media and information (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, n.d.).



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Within this framework, *the Austrian National Youth Council* plays a vital role, legally representing young people and ensuring their voice is heard in political matters, placing youth on equal footing with other significant social groups, such as employees, traders and seniors (Bundeskanzleramt Österreich, 2000).

At the national level, together with *Talent Lab*, the *Startstipendium* programme provides substantial support for young and emerging filmmakers. The *Startstipendium* programme by the Federal Ministry of Arts and Culture is targeted at filmmakers and media artists under the age of 35, supporting the early development of feature-length fiction and documentary films. This scholarship provides six months of financial support (1,500 Euro per month) and requires participation in workshops and industry events. This initiative emphasises not only financial assistance, but also professional development through mandatory training, ensuring recipients build both creative and industry-specific skills (Bundesministerium für Kunst, Kultur, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport, 2024; Bundesministerium für Kunst, Kultur, öffentlichen Dienst und Sport, 2025).

According to Peter Schernhuber, Head of the Film Department at the Austrian Federal Ministry for Arts, Culture, the Civil Service and Sport, explains, “we are funding a lot of experimental films, animations, music videos and so on. And these are a lot of films which couldn’t exist without the funding. So they couldn’t be produced on the free market.” This reflects a fundamental principle in public funding policy: “we even must not support films which are able to exist in a free market.” This boundary is particularly important in ensuring that public funding supports artistic innovation and emerging voices, especially those unlikely to find backing in commercial contexts. Schernhuber clarifies, “if we have a feature film, international co-production with a lot of private money within it, we will ask, of course, very critically, could you exist without the public money? Why do you need this public money from Austria? What is your impact here for Austria, et cetera?” (Interview, September 2024).

Regarding regional funding for young filmmakers, Austrian federal states play a significant role in supporting emerging filmmakers through a variety of funding programmes. Each region’s approach reflects local cultural priorities and emphasises diverse forms of cinematic expression, ranging from experimental films to commercially challenging projects.

Carinthia’s general film funding programme focuses on artistic films, particularly short films and emerging talent. With a total annual budget of EUR 80,000, the region emphasises structural support for art-house cinemas and film festivals. Funding is reserved for projects with a direct connection to the region, making local engagement a key criterion. Explicitly, the federal state’s funding serves as



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an alternative for debut film projects by emerging filmmakers that are not eligible for funding by the Carinthia Film Commission, as for eligibility past reference film projects are necessary (kulturchannel.at, 2016).

Lower Austria's funding supports "commercially difficult" films, projects with limited market potential due to experimental styles or risky content. Notably, this programme explicitly includes graduation films, which are often excluded from other funding schemes. This approach demonstrates a commitment to supporting young filmmakers at the beginning of their professional careers while fostering artistic innovation (Land Niederösterreich, 2024).

Upper Austria's film funding is designed to support a wide range of artistic projects, including feature films, documentaries, short films and experimental films. With funding of up to EUR 15,000, this programme values independent cinematic originality and diversity, with an emphasis on gender equality. It primarily targets filmmakers with a strong connection to Upper Austria, reinforcing the region's commitment to fostering local talent (Land Oberösterreich, n.d.).

Salzburg's Free Film Funding programme is dedicated to supporting emerging filmmakers aiming to pursue professional careers. This programme excludes educational projects but provides start-up funding for those with previous reference projects, helping young filmmakers transition from independent work to the professional sphere (Land Salzburg, n.d.).

The Cine Art programme in Styria supports artistically and culturally unique projects across various genres, including feature films, documentaries, animation and experimental films. With a focus on critical and controversial materials, this programme offers funding up to 50% of total project costs. Styria also participates in the "Drehbuchwerkstatt München-Steiermark," a scriptwriting workshop in collaboration with the prestigious Munich University of Film and Television (HFF), promoting international collaboration (Das Land Steiermark, 2024; Das Land Steiermark, 2025).

Industry practices

Comprehensive statistical data specifically focusing on young filmmakers in Austria is limited and specific statistics on young filmmakers are scarce, however, several initiatives and reports provide insights into the support structures and demographic composition of the Austrian film industry when speaking on the young filmmakers community.

The Austrian Film Institute (ÖFI) has launched (2024) the Talent Lab scheme, an initiative aimed at emerging filmmakers working on their first or second feature films. This programme offers a structured framework and defined budget, reflecting Austria's commitment to nurturing new talent in



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the film sector. This programme supports both fiction and documentary films, with a maximum production budget of EUR 1.2 million for feature films and EUR 280,000 for documentaries. The Talent LAB offers guidance throughout the development and production phases, allowing filmmakers to gain industry insights while completing their projects. Applicants must demonstrate prior experience relevant to the area they are applying for, reflecting an emphasis on professional readiness (Österreichisches Filminstitut, 2024).

Young filmmakers in Austria benefit from a range of funding programmes and support initiatives designed to support new talent and encourage artistic expression. These initiatives come from national, regional and local institutions, each with specific criteria and objectives. However, despite these opportunities, access remains fragmented, with geographical and eligibility conditions creating barriers for many emerging creatives.

Film festivals

While film festivals are often celebrated as platforms for artistic discovery, diversity and innovation, the inner workings of these institutions, particularly their organisational and structural dynamics, remain underexplored in scholarly literature. As Loist (2011) notes, the ways in which festivals actually operate and the impact of these operations upon the final product are relatively unexplored within the interdisciplinary field of film festival studies, with analyses in organisational and management research being especially rare. This lack of scrutiny has significant implications for understanding how power circulates in the cultural sector, especially for young and emerging filmmakers.

Jakob Serdaroglu, a young filmmaker and producer, shared critical reflections on the structural barriers and inequities facing emerging filmmakers in Europe. He highlighted how access to different and prestigious film festivals is often limited to those with institutional backing or industry connections, rather than based on merit or creativity alone. While festivals are ostensibly open to all, in reality, the selection process and associated costs create significant hurdles for young, independent creators.

Jakob emphasised that elite institutions, such as film academies provide privileged access to expensive equipment, motivated crews and institutional support, advantages that are out of reach for many aspiring filmmakers. In contrast, those outside these networks often face prohibitive costs simply to submit or promote their films: “for instance, independent distribution of short films in Austria requires fees that many young creators can’t afford” (Interview, February 2025).



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However, Austria's independent film festival landscape offers a dynamic platform for non-mainstream cinema, supporting experimental, politically engaged and socially diverse storytelling. These festivals serve as critical spaces where emerging and alternative voices can be heard, offering not only artistic recognition, but also cultural impact.

The *Vienna Independent Film Festival* (VIFF) stands out as an international showcase that encourages innovation and experimentation in independent filmmaking. Since its inception in 2016, VIFF has celebrated global talent and has provided a space for unconventional narratives and bold storytelling approaches (Vienna Independent Film Festival, n.d.).

In Linz, the *Crossing Europe Film Festival* (April) focuses on contemporary European cinema with a special emphasis on “hybrid” forms that blur genre boundaries. The festival highlights socially and politically engaged works, contributing to the cultural discourse on European identity and diversity (Crossing Europe, n.d.).

In Innsbruck, the *Diametrale Film Festival* uniquely dedicates itself entirely to experimental cinema. As Austria's only festival focusing exclusively on absurdist and surrealist film, it elevates avant-garde works that challenge traditional narrative forms, with a preference for humor, grotesque aesthetics and dadaist influences (Diametrale, 2025).

Vienna hosts “*UNDER_the_RADAR*”, a festival and conference held each March that showcases experimental animation and artistic film. It explores the frontiers of sequential media, with the “Radar International” award spotlighting investigative and avant-garde contributions (UNDER_the_RADAR, n.d.).

The *Diagonale Festival* of Austrian Film in Graz features a broad spectrum of Austrian filmmaking, including a curated section for experimental films. These works confront mainstream visual conventions and expand the national cinematic identity (Diagonale, 2024).

Another Vienna-based event, *Frame[o]ut Digital Film Festival*, held in July and August, presents open-air screenings of alternative digital films. It fosters innovation in digital storytelling and supports the evolving practices of experimental filmmakers working with new media formats (Visiting Vienna, n.d.).

The *Tricky Women/Tricky Realities Animation Film Festival* highlights feminist and gender-diverse voices in animated filmmaking. By focusing on narrative and experimental films made by women and genderqueer artists, it has established itself as a pioneering feminist platform for boundary-pushing animated works (Tricky Women, 2015).



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5.2 Belgium

5.2.1. Policy

Although being one of the smaller film countries in Europe, Belgium's film industry is then once more subdivided into two smaller industries operating independently: the northern, Dutch-speaking part (Flanders) and the French-speaking part. This results in an eminently fragmented, decentralised policy with both national and regional levels, eliciting in two different film institutions: the *Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds* (VAF, the Flemish Audiovisual Fund) and *le Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel* (CCA, the Centre of Cinema and the Audiovisual), which are both responsible for the implementation of the regional audiovisual policies and are paramount for the professionalisation of both regional film industries. Albeit the Belgian film industry is relatively small, its film culture is undeniably present with some renowned authors with international appeal such as Chantal Akerman, the Dardennes brothers, Felix Van Groeningen, Lukas Dhont, Adil El, Arbi and Bilal Fallah; all gaining recognition with international prizes. Ranging from commercial cinema to arthouse and critical narratives, Belgian cinema can be interpreted as diverse and layered, notwithstanding the characteristic small production budgets.

As the following overview shows, the Belgian film industry has a strong legal framework and well-defined policy initiatives to protect and support female, young and diasporic filmmakers. However, some critical observers have noted that the notion of equal opportunities within the industry is far from perfect (e.g., De Man et al., 2024). For example, according to Delaere et al. (2021), the Belgian film industry still contends with gender inequality. Their study found that the employment rate of professional women in film is 11,5% lower compared to men, which translates even in a 16% lower pay rate across all levels. Despite the fact that women, in some categories, are more represented in comparison with men, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles – e.g. the role of producer and director – and more technical positions like DOP (Fontaine, 2024a; Delaere et al., 2021; Verhoeven et al., 2020). Despite that, gender inequality gains more and more attention from policy makers (Janssens et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, issues to tackle diversity, inclusion and equality are well developed in Belgium. Different laws can be distinguished in this regard (Federal Public Service Justice, n.d.). In 1981, the Belgium state adopted an Anti-Racism Law, which was amended in 2007, and which seeks to punish acts inspired by racism and xenophobia covering criteria like nationality, presumed race, skin colour, and descent or national or ethnic origin. In 2007, the Gender law was adopted, which refers to the protected criterion of sex; distinctions based on pregnancy, childbirth, maternity, sex reassignment,



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gender identity and gender expression are also assimilated. In 2014, the Sexism Law was adapted with the aim to combat sexism in the public space, forms of sexual harassment, as well as street sexual harassment committed in public places. These laws transcend the film industry but nevertheless pertain to it. Important with regard to gender is the Belgian law on equality for women and men, which stipulates that organisations – again not limited to the film industry – are obliged to enhance equality between men and women; and it provides a legal framework to implement gender equality in all policy measures, conform the strategic objectives composed by the federal government. The *Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen* (the Institute for the equality of women and men), which was created in 2002 and which is competent for all these laws, is a federal institute responsible for guaranteeing and promoting gender equality and to combat any form of gender-based discrimination and inequality (Instituut voor de gelijkheid van vrouwen en mannen, n.d.). Another important institute with regard to equality is the independent public institution UNIA, or Interfederal Center for Equal Opportunities (*Interfederaal Gelijkekansencentrum*, or *Centre pour l'égalité des chances et la lutte contre le racisme*) that fights discrimination and promotes equal opportunities (Unia, n.d.).

With regard to regulatory and policy initiatives with regard to cinema, first in Flanders, we need to refer to the crucial role of the Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF), which was launched in 2002 and where we can distinguish several initiatives promoting equality and diversity in the Flemish film and audiovisual sector. One clear policy measure is to obtain gender equality in the selection commissions, examining film project proposals. VAF aims for a gender balance in those said commissions, meaning that maximum 3 out of 5 members are allowed to be of the same gender, which is an objective part of the broader Action Plan Inclusion and was implemented in 2022 (Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, n.d.; Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, 2023). This plan aims to help minority groups on and off the screen by lowering the existing barriers those groups face (Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, 2023). By doing so, the VAF hopes that their policy transcends into the entire Flemish film industry.⁵

The “unconscious bias training” (Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, 2023, p. 57) for commission members can be perceived as an example in the attempt to obtain said equality. This way, VAF hopes to tackle biases present by the commission members and subsequently improve the chances of

⁵ Hereby relying on two principal pillars: “everybody on the screen” and “equal chances for equal talent”, the VAF believes that they mitigate the existing, often structural, barriers faced by minority groups aiming at launching a career in acting or production. In concreto this implies that the challenges previously encountered by minority groups become inconsequential, as they should receive equal opportunities based on their merits rather than on societal orientation and backgrounds.



minority groups. Despite these and other efforts to initiate diversity in selection committees, some of our interviewees argued that the current level of diversity still remains somewhat insufficient. One interviewee (Interview March 2025), who represents filmmakers with a diaspora background, notes that committees are renewed every five years and require members with substantial expertise. However, the lack of diversity within these committees inevitably leads to a lack of diversity in the industry. Another interviewee (Interview March 2025), who is a media scholar, supports the implementation of subject quotas, arguing that the prevailing notion of quality subjects is predominantly male and white. Consequently, gender and other equality and diversity issues are among the criteria considered by these committees when evaluating funding proposals.

Additionally, on the VAF website, we can find a questionnaire to help filmmakers critically analyze their film projects and consequently enhance the inclusivity of said projects (VAF, n.d.c.). This questionnaire, which is free of charge, was refined in collaboration with the minister of Media, mediarte.be, the *Diversiteitscel* VRT and *Representbelgium*, and consists of four specific questionnaires with, among others, critical questions regarding persons of color and women. Last year, the VAF co-organised together with *Representbelgium* an inspiration event regarding inclusivity (Mediarte, n.d.a; VRT, n.d.; Representbelgium, n.d.; VAF, n.d.c.).

Furthermore, VAF – and by extension its French-speaking counterpart *le Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel* (CCA) – also developed initiatives to monitor gender equality through gathering data and providing statistics, which are made available on their website and in annual reports and other publications. However, as both VAF and CCA acknowledge, initiating the same data collection process for (ethnic) minority groups is unattainable due to legal constraints on the Belgium national level. With regard to the latest data (which will be published in May 2025), a representative of the VAF (Interview March 2025)⁶ informed us that the data exhibits a positive trend which shows that female professionals receive more and more opportunities compared to their male colleagues (cf. Figures 1 and 2) (personal communication, March 2023). This is, among others, shown by Figure 1 which states that, since 2018, allocated funding to female requesters is almost doubled. Nevertheless, VAF's reliable data regarding gender is limited only to the level of filmmakers and producers and is restricted to support applications and Wildcard winners, which indicates that they do not provide an exhaustive overview concerning the state of gender equality in the Flemish film industry. Additionally, Figure two shows that, since 2019, female emerging filmmakers receive financial incentives regarding graduation films systematically more often than their male

⁶ This data will be published in the VAF annual report, which will be published in May, 2025. See <https://www.vaf.be/jaarverslagen>.



counterparts. This can be linked to the statement of one of our interviewees (Interview March 2025), a media scholar, namely that “over the last couple of years, these awards were mostly provided to minority groups.”

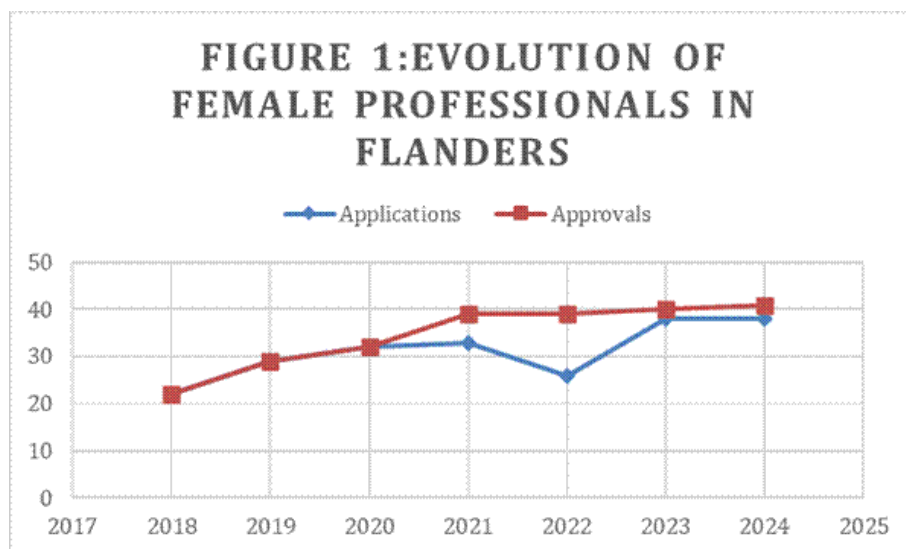


Figure 1: Evolution of female professionals in the Flemish audiovisual sector. Adapted from “2024 Jaarverslag,” by VAF, forthcoming. Copyright 2023 by Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds.

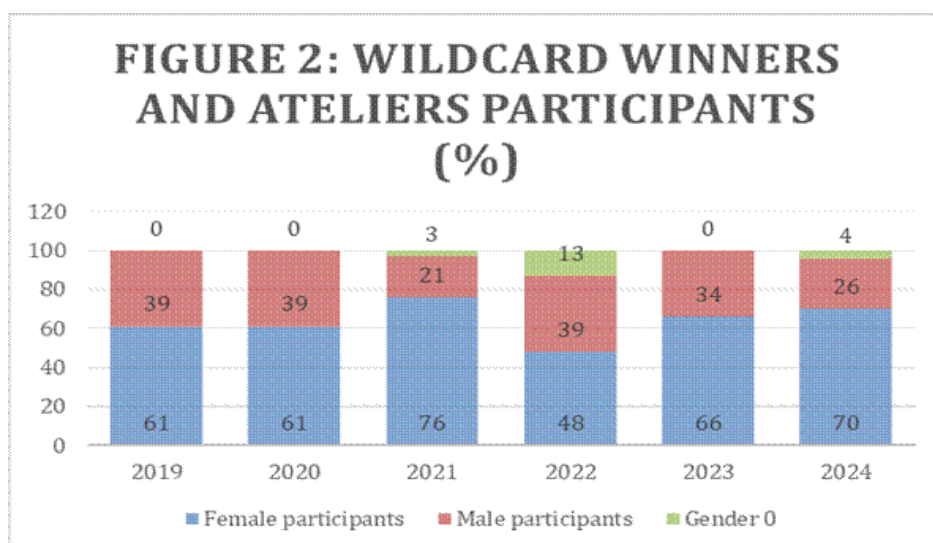


Figure 2: Wildcard winners and ateliers participants for male and female participants (percentage). Adapted from “2024 Jaarverslag,” by Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds, forthcoming. Copyright 2023 by VAF.⁷

⁷ With ‘Gender 0’, VAF is referring to participants who did not specify their gender. This could mean that some participants preferred to not specify their gender, who identify themselves as non-binary or who simply indicated this option by mistake (personal communication, March 2025).



VAF also coordinates training sessions and other initiatives, which targets female directors and producers specifically. The LEF initiative, what refers to Leadership and Individuality in Film (*Leiderschap en Eigenheid in Film*) and is part of the Action Plan Inclusion, aims at fostering the leadership capabilities of directors and producers who identify themselves mostly as female (VAF, n.d.a.). Supplementary to the LEF courses, VAF also encourages film professionals to select female talent for their productions by offering a financial incentive – the so-called *Impulspremie Gender* – disbursed upon the completion of the production (VAF, n.d.e.). But, according to one of the interviewees (Interview March 2025), this Impulspremie Gender is no coercion, thus not necessarily resulting in adequate results. On a certain level, another interviewee (Interview March 2025), who is a professor in media studies, agrees and argues that policy support can be elaborated in more detail, which implies that VAF can, for example, organise more courses. Additionally, this interviewee advocates for quota's, which are limited in time, to level the playing field.

This opinion that “the VAF can always do more,” (Interview March 2025) is contradictory compared to another interviewee, who represents the VAF (Interview December 2023). Although this interviewee acknowledges that “pessimism and outrage” lives among some people in the sector, diversity is improved. According to this key representative of the VAF, female creators are gaining more and more recognition in the industry, leading to more women in meaningful positions in big, impactful production companies, such as Ivy Vanhaecke.⁸

“New people are receiving important positions and representation is really improving, not only behind the screens (...). People are less casted because of their appearance and receive a place as a full character in the industry. It is a process that takes time, but I can feel a positive evolution. (...) Of course the problem of women in the industry still remains, but I notice that female creators are less sensitive to promote themselves.” (Interview December 2023).

A representative of JEF (Interview March 2025) notes that young filmmakers are perceived as an important target group, but policy makers' decisions do not always correspond with this vision. A key representative of the Flemish Audiovisual Fund, Karla Puttemans (Interview December 2023), is convinced that the existing implemented policies regarding talent development are reaching their intended objectives. She notes that “before the founding of the VAF, there was barely such a focus on talent development, but nowadays, this has evolved into an important source of new talent in the industry”. Consequently, the most important provider for youth support in Flanders is undoubtedly the VAF, with perhaps the VAF Wildcards as the most distinguished example (VAF, n.d.f). The VAF

⁸ Ivy Vanhaecke is a Belgian based producer, known for *Hotel Beau Séjour* (2021), *Black* (2015) and others (IMDb, n.d.).



Wildcards are a financial incentive (varying from 6.000 to 60.000 EUR) with accompanying guidance, awarded by a specialised jury from the Flemish Audiovisual Fund (VAF) to graduating film students across five different categories (Kortfilmfestival Leuven, n.d.c; VAF, n.d.f).

Additionally, the VAF Wildcards can be situated – implicitly – on the policy level with regard to supporting diaspora filmmakers because, according to Alexander De Man (Interview March 2025), “over the last couple of years, these awards were mostly provided to minority groups.” An interviewee (Interview March 2025) representing diasporic filmmakers in Flanders, Belgium argued that “the VAF Wildcards are a way of filling the gaps” by utilising an individual approach and is even perceived as “positive discrimination” by providing minority groups with a “career boost because the winners are directly allocated with funding for their next project.” But despite that some policy measures were found, De Man (Interview March 2025) argues in an interview that structural changes regarding policy are still missing. Although minor changes are distinguishable, the sector fails to recognise the underlying structural inequality. According to De Man, the sector appears to hold the belief that “the system an sich is adequate, with the sole necessity being an improvement in diversity.” Nevertheless, the sector is convinced of the effectiveness of the policy of the Flemish Audiovisual Fund; hereby partly endorsed by De Man, although he emphasises that “all initiatives are accompanied by their own ideological restrictions.”

Apart from the VAF Wildcards, the Flemish Audiovisual Fund provides young graduates with a practical guide, the so called Flanders Image, which is a subsection from the aforementioned VAF – to promote their graduation audiovisual projects; thus, transforming Flanders Image into an advisory board (VAF, n.d.b). Additionally, Flanders Image maintains an extensive and comprehensive page dedicated to assisting film school graduates in their selection process of film festivals and the accompanying submission process. And finally, on the website of the Flemish Audiovisual Fund, filmmakers can find a page dedicated to different kinds of training programmes; e.g. scenario atelier, which is a 6 months lasting training programme with expert coaching for beginning filmmakers (VAF, n.d.d).

Looking at the French-speaking part of Belgium, it is important to notice that *leCentre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel* (CCA) also developed several policy measures with regard to gender equality (Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, n.d.a.). Since 2016, the CCA, which is the counterpart of VAF, responsible for the French-language part of Belgium, implemented a policy which states that if two different projects have the same quality and if the gender of the directors is different, the funding will be allocated to the female director (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021). Additionally, in 2019, CCA

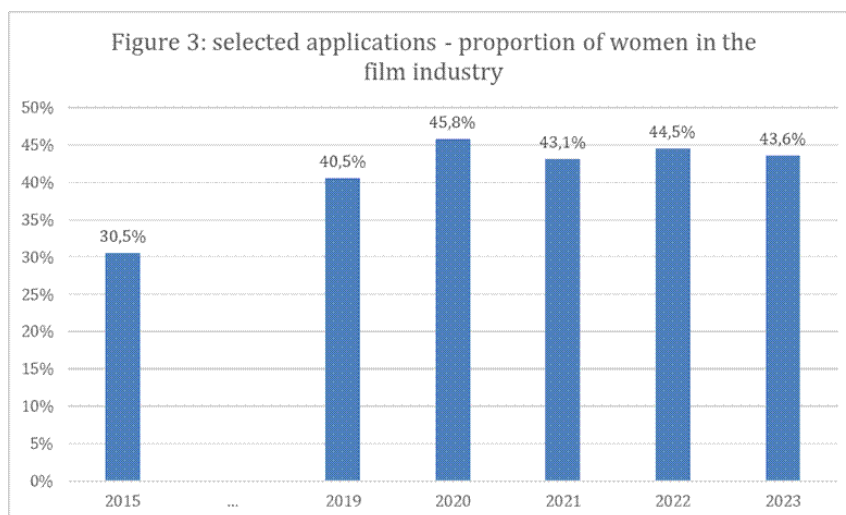


implemented equal selection committees regarding gender and started analysing their policies in relation to gender from 2022 on.

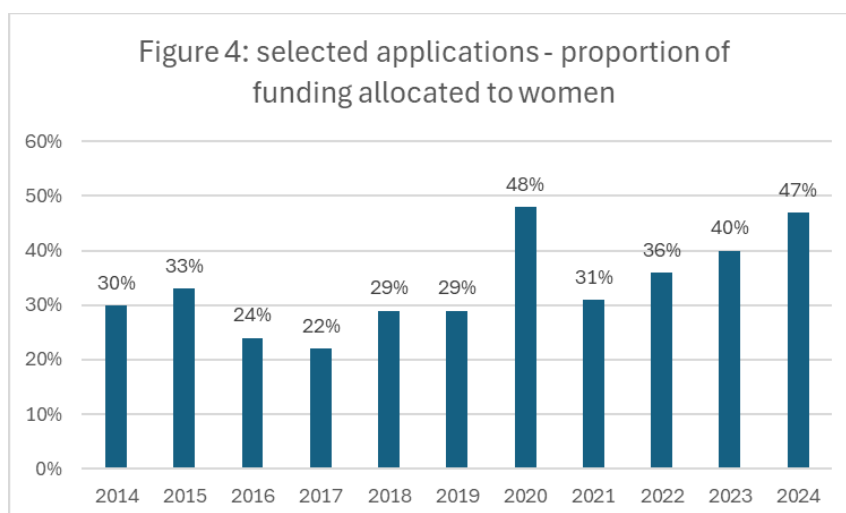
Meanwhile, CCA's *Plan Diversité* (diversity plan), implemented in 2021 by Minister Bénédicte Linard, expanded into a more comprehensive diversity policy (Audiovisuel et Médias centre du cinéma, n.d.; Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, 2024). The main objective of this plan is "to raise awareness in cinema and the broad audiovisual sector" in respect to society (Audiovisuel et Médias centre du cinéma, n.d.). In other words, the plan wants to attain a film industry reflecting the equal diversity dynamics of broad society. To obtain this objective, CCA demands in the support application a diversity reflection for each project, both on the screen and in regard to the crew. Secondly, we can distinguish Coaching Diversité, which is a non-obligatory – but strongly recommended – initiative that organises workshops to discuss sensibilities concerning representation and is aimed at screenwriters, producers, etc. (Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, 2024; Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, n.d.d.). By doing so, this initiative aspires to tackle stereotypes.

Additionally, CCA is collecting data to obtain an overview of diversity in film and series in the French-speaking part of Belgium. This data is published in CCA's annual reports. Overall, CCA believes that encouragement is more effective than compulsion. They endorse awareness by funding university research on gender inequality in the film industry (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021). However, according to three interviewees representing the CCA (Interview March 2025), financing such initiatives faces challenges due to the recent economic situation and the Covid health crisis. Based on the available data in the 2023 annual report of CCA, we can conclude that assistance for women is increasing and more financial funding is allocated to female filmmakers (see Figure 3 and 4; Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, 2024; Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, 2025). Nevertheless, the available data shows that female professionals in the film industry remain slightly underrepresented. This is particularly evident in Figure 3. Despite an obvious increase in female representation since 2015, parity has not yet been achieved.





[Figure 3: Selected applications - proportion of women in the film industry.](#) Adapted from “Bilan 2023: production, promotion et diffusion cinématographiques et audiovisuelles,” by Centre du cinéma et de l’audiovisuel, 2023, 145. Copyright 2023 by Centre du cinema et de l’audiovisuel, 2024 Belgium.⁹



[Figure 4: Selected applications - proportion of funding allocated to women.](#) Adapted from “Bilan 2024: production, promotion et diffusion cinématographiques et audiovisuelles,” by Centre du cinéma et de l’audiovisuel, 2024, 152. Copyright 2024 by Centre du cinema et de l’audiovisuel, 2025 Belgium.

Concerning the French part of Belgium, CCA has several policy lines to support young filmmakers, producers and other young people in the industry, as well as it has a wide range of activities to

⁹ Starting from April 16th, 2025, the most recent report from CCA will be available through their website: <https://audiovisuel.cfwb.be/ressources/publications/bilans-annuaire/>



stimulate young people to engage with cinema. One of those initiatives is the *Production légères* (or light productions) policy line, which wants to encourage young writers and producers by offering them the opportunity to produce a fiction project and to work within a fast, light and autonomous production schedule (Centre du Cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, 2024). Since the launch of the Diversity Plan in 2021, particular attention has been paid to projects from young people and projects from people who are under-represented in Belgian French-language cinema French-speaking—hence referring to people with a diaspora background.

Additionally, CCA notifies that they also organise a Film Lab, which is not limited to emerging filmmakers (Centre du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel, n.d.b.). One of the main criteria for this initiative is that the film must proceed beyond mainstream narratives and filmmaking, thus containing some part of “exceptional, individual or artisanal work” (Centre du cinema et de l'audiovisuel, n.d.). Allocated funding will be limited to a maximum amount of 25.000 euros.

In addition to those initiatives, a broad range of policy lines have been developed with regard to young people and their relationship or engagement with cinema—often linked to media and film literacy initiatives (Vlaanderen, n.d.b). In the Flemish part, this resulted into support mechanisms for film literacy initiatives, such as JEF (see further). In the French-speaking part similar support mechanisms exist, with support to film schools (e.g., Cinécolab).

5.2.2. Industry practices

In the past ten to twenty years, many initiatives have been taken to promote diversity and equality in the Belgian film industry. Specifically, regarding gender issues, the position of women, diasporic inequalities and youth support, several initiatives have been launched to help these groups participate in creating a more diverse and inclusive film industry. These initiatives often come from activist organisations who mostly try to build a network and support women, diasporic or emerging filmmakers and often acting as a pressure group towards policy makers and industry stakeholders. Nevertheless, most of these action groups are established to support women and taking a closer look at industry initiatives in Belgium, we can hence identify several efforts, some of which are top-down, that operate on a supranational level while maintaining local engagement. An example is *WIFTM* International, which functions globally but has distinctive national, local and regional branches, such as *WIFTM Belgium*. On another level, we could also distinguish certain local initiatives, such as *WANDA Collective*, *Represent* and *JEF*—the last one being linked to films for children and young adolescents (*WANDA Collective*, n.d.; *Jeugdfilmfestival*, n.d.). Nevertheless, although these organisations exist in multitude, one of our interviewees who is a media professor is



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critical regarding their impact and is convinced that the implemented policy measures of VAF are more impactful. Subsequently, she believes that the organisation of action groups needs to be enhanced in order to truly have a bigger impact on policy. Below we provide a non-exhaustive list of those initiatives, from which we will select six initiatives to elaborate in more detail:

Camerata Productions is a local non-profit organisation, founded in 2008, in the region of Dendermonde, East-Flanders, Belgium with the ambition to support young, emerging and talented filmmakers and provide them with the necessary chances. The organisation is led by a board of directors with both artistic and business leaders and is subsequently advised by an expert panel (Camerata Productions, n.d.);

Cinemaximiliaan is an initiative, founded in 2015, that started as an open air cinema in the Brussels Maximiliaan Parc, a place where a lot of refugees after arrival in Belgium found shelter. This initiative quickly grew and exhibits movies on a regular basis in asylum centres across whole Belgium; the organisation also fosters film production as a means of integration (Cinemaximiliaan, n.d.);

Collectif Dérives is founded in 1975 by the Dardennes brothers – some of Belgium's most meritorious filmmakers – to tell the story of Liège's working class and subsequently evolved into a production atelier (Derives, n.d.);

Collectif Faire-Part is a collaboration between Belgian and Congolese filmmakers who are focussing on the two main capitals of these countries and their complex relation (Collectif Faire-Part, n.d.);

Connex 2023 could be perceived more as an industry showcase event to expose promising film and tv projects. Nevertheless, this particular event in 2023 was dedicated to enhance female filmmakers position in the Flemish film industry in 2023 and can thus be perceived as an industry event to support women (Macnab, 2023);

Elles Font Des Films (They Make Films) is a film collective, founded in Wallonia, with only female members and challenges the heteropatriarchy – which still exists – in the film industry (Elles font des films, n.d.);

Girls on Film, which is a feminist film collective with monthly screenings and corresponding guest speakers, aspires to provide a broader exposure to cinema made by and for women (Vertigo, 2023);

Matière Première is a Brussels-based collective that provides a platform for young filmmakers, including those from diverse backgrounds, to showcase their work and collaborate on projects (Matière Première, n.d.);



Platform is a film collective, co-organising – together with MOOOV, BLVRD and Jong Volk – Kind of Bruges, a film competition aimed at young filmmakers originating from Bruges (Bruijlants, 2024);

Representbelgium, which is founded by Aminata Demba, is an initiative not only dedicated to enhance gender inequality, but advocates to amplify the position of all minoritised groups – among which diasporic filmmakers (Representbelgium, n.d.);

Short Film Festival Leuven dedicates an entire day to film school students, offering them opportunities to network and possibilities to talk to professional filmmakers from all across Europe (Personal communication, November 2023; Kortfilmfestival Leuven, n.d.a);

WANDA Collective is an independent action group representing directors of all kinds of films and is advocating against institutional inequality in the Flemish and Brussels audiovisual sector, thereby not only limiting themselves to gender inequality (MediarTE, n.d.b);

WIFTM, or *Women in Film, Television and Media*, is the Belgium strand of Women in Film and Television International and devotes itself to enhancing gender equality in the audiovisual media sector (Women in Film, Television and Media, n.d.).

WANDA Collective is an action group, independently operating, that unites women filmmakers in their institutional fight against structural inequalities in the Flemish and Brussels film industry. According to one of our interviewees, WANDA exhibits a stronger activist orientation compared to other action groups and was established in response to the frustrations of young (female) filmmakers. The collective welcomes female directors and minoritised groups of all genres of filmmaking, ranging from arthouse movies to documentaries and so on. For WANDA, intersectionality constitutes a crucial aspect of their activism, signifying that their focus extends beyond merely gender equality and is aimed at “challenging the traditional, white, male dominated visual culture” through dialogue. *WANDA Collective* aspires, among others, to achieve an equal distribution of female and male directors by 2025, which is now, strives additionally for an equal chances policy and advocates to diminish – and eventually to destroy – the wage differential. In other words, *WANDA Collective* strives to dwindle the current imbalance by implementing a proactive policy (Timmermans, 2020).

WIFTM – Women In Film, Television and Media – Belgium is the Belgian strand of an international network that aims to connect women in film, television and media all over the world. The main objective is to enhance gender equality and equal rights for women in the media industry and consequently fostering an inclusive community, especially with regard to leadership positions. The international strand of the network emerged in the heart of the global film industry, Hollywood, in the



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seventies, named Women in Film LA and evolved gradually into WIFTM International, which was officially founded in 1997. Nowadays, 30 countries, spread over 6 continents, are part of the international initiative, among which WIFTM Belgium. This initiative is an important partitioner regarding events organisation, offering mentorships and information and knowledge exchange. The main pillars of WIFTM are knowledge, visibility and action. By doing so, WIFTM hopes to initiate an impactful – and positive – change with regard to gender equality in the audiovisual industry. Therefore, the initiative collaborates with Ella, the knowledge centre for gender and ethnicity, WANDA Collective, Nakhla, Film Fest Ghent and Ghent University. With regard to financing, WIFTM is dependable on sponsorships and free gifts (Women in Film, Television and Media, n.d.).

Collectif Faire-Part is a cooperation between Belgian and Congolese filmmakers, therefore portrayed against the background of colonialism. By its foundation in 2016, the collective consisted of 4 filmmakers, equally divided between Belgium and Congo. The four makers have found each other in their mutual interest of filmmaking and decided to tell stories about the intertwined relations of Kinshasa – and its corresponding fight against the perpetuating narrative of colonialism – and Brussels. Over the past years, the collective expanded to a growing group of filmmakers cooperating on a regular basis, with collaborators changing and depending on the specific project (Collectif Faire-Part, n.d.).

Cinemaximiliaan started organising an open-air cinema in 2015, to present migrants in the like-named Maximiliaan Parc in Brussels with the opportunity to participate in the cinema-going experience. During the migration crisis, the Maximiliaan Parc was converted to the improvised home of arriving refugees who hoped to receive asylum. Since then, the initiative started rapidly growing thanks to the help of many volunteers and is nowadays organising film screenings in, among others, asylum centres across Belgium. Each year, the initiative organises its own film festival, Cinemaximiliaan's Film, Food & Friends Festival to foster solidarity among society. The initiatives headquarters can be found in the Project House, which is situated in Molenbeek – a local department located in Brussels. One of the key values of *Cinemaximiliaan* is inclusivity (Cinemaximiliaan, n.d.).

Platform is a Bruges-based film collective linked to Lumière Burges and MOOOV, supposedly founded in 2015 and which consists of young female volunteers with a passion for film, organising film screenings for and by young people. The last two years, the collective organised a “short film jam” in cooperation with MOOOV film festival and Entrepot, called Kind of Bruges, which is their most meritorious film project. At this “short film jam”, young filmmakers were able to compose their own films, by means of workshops, which were publicly screened afterwards, thus giving the young makers public recognition. The contribution of Platform at this event is mainly substantive and



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practical. During the workshops, young filmmakers were provided with the opportunity to ask substantive questions regarding technical uncertainties, script writing, etc. Besides the organisation of Kind of Bruges, Platform is involved in different other, external activities, such as the Young Programmers Workshop – an initiative provided by MOOOV (Bruijlants, 2024).

Collectif Dérives, on the other hand, is linked to the Dardenne brothers – a famous Belgian filmmaker duo. The initial objective was to produce and direct films with respect to the working class, focused on stories in predominantly Wallonia. This then evolved into a collective that shifted its aim towards organising workshops, resulting in the emergence of some talented filmmakers – especially in the 2000s, but the Dardenne brothers never lost their passion and ambition in producing films. Their workshops have a special focus on documentary filmmaking, especially during the first decade and a half since the founding of the collective in 1975. Later on, the focus shifted towards filmmaking as well, but the support for documentary filmmaking was never omitted from the programme and remains predominantly the main objective. During the last ten years, the collective's objective shifted once more, this time towards the support of emerging filmmakers – more specifically the brothers supported exclusively the first and second works of filmmakers, while continuing to co-develop together with more experienced filmmakers. Additionally, the collective provides filmmakers with the opportunity to experiment and hence develop their own cinematic language, especially with regard to documentaries. Being no strangers to the artistic concept of *authors*, the brothers – and hence collective's – aim is to discover, further develop and support rising authors. For the financial support, the collective depends on donations and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation (Derives, n.d.).

5.2.3. Film festivals

Although the Belgian film market is rather small, the country has a prolific film festival scene. The country has a set of wide-audience, more general film festivals, such as Film Fest Gent (FFG) and Filmfestival Oostende (FFO), but there are also more dedicated festivals with a focus upon the work of female, young and diasporic filmmakers. However, according to representatives of the CCA (Interview March 2025), most film festivals at least dedicate a part of their programme to women. Most of those general film festivals, such as FFG and FFO have kids and young adolescents as target groups (mostly organised with schools), offering dedicated film programming strands, which then are more eligible in attaining funding.



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Specialised film festivals with focus on women, diasporic and emerging filmmakers are:

- *Afrika Filmfestival*, based in Leuven, is dedicated to provide African film and afro-descendant filmmakers with an enlarged exposure. Additionally, the organisers of the event want to limit clichés regarding the African continent (Afrika Filmfestival, n.d.);
- *Anima*, or the Brussels International Animation Film Festival which highlights animated films (Anima, n.d.);
- *Courtisane* – established in 2002 – is a specialised experimental film festival with – at least – a part of the film festival dedicated to film screenings made by or narrating stories about women, young and diasporic filmmakers (Courtisane, n.d.);
- *Elles Tournent / Zij Draaien*: Brussels International Women's Film Festival is an international Brussels based film festival, aiming at enhancing diversity and innovation by focusing on films either directed by women or directed for women (Elles Tournent, n.d.);
- *Filemon*, the *International Film Festival for Young Audiences* between the age of 2 and 16 years old in the cities of Ghent and Brussels (Filemon, n.d.);
- *Film, Food & Friends Festival* is organised by the collective Cinemaximiliaan and enhances harmony and community feelings (Cinemaximiliaan, n.d.);
- *Ghent International Short Film Festival* is a rather young short film festival, emerged in 2023 and can be situated in an international context. The festival's objective – among others – is to support young, international filmmakers who are starting their filmmaking careers. Besides, the festival provides a specific programme targeted at children aged 8 and 12 years old and screens also some experimental films (Ghent International Short Film Festival, n.d.);
- *Global Migration Film Festival* is a film festival organised by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) offices of Belgium and Luxembourg (IOM, 2018);
- *I Am Tomorrow International Film Festival* is a fairly new film festival, as it only organised its second edition recently and lasts only two days (I Am Tomorrow International Film Festival, n.d.);
- *Jeugdfilmfestival Antwerpen*, or the Youth Film Festival Antwerp which targets a young audience between 1,5 and 18 years old and is linked to JEF, an organisation focusing on youth films (JEF, n.d.);
- *Kortfilmfestival Leuven*, or Short Film Festival Leuven, dedicates one day exclusively to young film school students and is granting – in collaboration with VAF – the VAF Wildcards. Additionally, the festival is not only screening mainstream film content, but also some more



films that can be perceived as more experimental (Personal communication, November 2023; Kortfilmfestival Leuven, n.d.a; Kortfilmfestival Leuven, n.d.c.);

- *MOOOV filmfestival* is a critical film festival spread across all of Flanders and is aimed at independent film productions, documentaries and films originating from non-Western countries (MOOOV filmfestival, n.d.);
- *NOVA* is a Brussels based cinema collective, focusing on experimental film experiences and is linked to the wide variety of communities in the Belgium capital (Nova-cinema, n.d.);
- *Ongezien Kort* (Unseen Short) aims at short films from young filmmakers – without limitations regarding genre, but limited to short films with a maximum duration of 25 minutes – and exposes their work (FilmFreeway, n.d.d);
- *Pink Screens*, or the *Brussels Queer Film Festival*, focuses on fiction, documentaries, experimental films and short and long films (Pink Screens, n.d.);
- *Rural Youth Cinema* focuses more on ethnographic documentaries and in supporting young people in their education of ethnographic documentary makers (Rural Youth Cinema, n.d.).

What follows are six film festivals, chosen to be elaborated in more detail:

Brussels International Women's Film Festival (BIWFF) – formerly known as *ELLES TOURNENT-DAMES DRAAIEN Festival* – is an international film festival, based in Brussels, screening films made by (international) women. The current name was only adopted last year and the festival is now organising her 17th edition this year, with an open call for films, closing on April 1, 2025. The objective of the film festival is not limited to screening films made by women – and their corresponding worldviews –, but wants to provide female film professionals with workshops and networking opportunities to enhance their career. Additionally, *Elles Tournent*, the organisation behind BIWFF, is engaged in the support and promotion of young, starting female filmmakers by providing them with moments of knowledge gathering in the form of workshops etc (Elles Tournent, n.d.).

Another example of a film festival dedicated to women is *Pink Screens*, with special regard to the queer community. In 2024, the festival held its 23rd edition in Brussels and it focuses on a wide range of film productions directed by women. The festival is not limited to feature films, as short films are awarded as well. The organiser of the festival is a non-profit organisation Genres d'à côté – which was founded in 2001 – with the main objective to enhance diversity among sexualities and genders. Genres d'à côté is entirely composed of volunteers (Pink Screens, n.d.).



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The *Global Migration Film Festival* is linked to the United Nations, more precisely the IOM and was launched in 2016 (IOM, n.d.). The festival's objective, as noted by Laura Palatini (IOM's Chief of Mission for Belgium and Luxembourg), is to use "films as tools to challenge the negative portrayal and stereotypes about migrants, by bringing a wide range of stakeholders to discuss key migration-related aspects, such as fundamental rights, tolerance and inclusion" (IOM, 2018). In other words, the festival hopes to change the perspectives regarding migration by employing the power of film to cultivate a deeper understanding and empathy for people – in this respect – with a diasporic background (IOM, n.d.). This way, the organisation hopes to amplify the tolerance and inclusion regarding migrants and marginalised groups. In 2018, the festival was organised by the IOM's office responsible for Belgium and Luxembourg in Brussels, in honour of International Migration Day on December 18 (IOM, 2018). This particular event focused on children and migration, titled "Migration with Dignity", which resulted in showcasing films narrating migrant experiences.

MOOOV filmfestival is a Flanders-based film festival with focus on diasporic filmmakers originating from Africa, Asia and Latin-America. Subsequently, the film festival showcases films which do not receive much attention or wouldn't be distributed otherwise and pleads for the programming of their monthly showcase film, called the "fomofilm" initiative, by exhibitors. The festival also aims to cooperate with schools, in particular regarding film education and even offers the possibility to consult films online with corresponding educational material, free of charge, thus providing as much flexibility as possible to schoolteachers. On their website, interested schoolteachers can delve into the possibilities offered by *MOOOV filmfestival*; with year-round applicable material, enumerated possibilities for film festivals and valuable educational resources. And finally, *MOOOV* organises together with organisations like Platform (cf. infra), – their so-called "young ambassadors" – organise film screenings during the film festival (*MOOOV filmfestival*, n.d.).

Youth Film Festival Antwerp is a bottom-up festival, which indicates their preference for audience engagement and collaboration with other participating festivals, with the ambition to be an innovative and socially relevant film festival (JEF, n.d.). The main objectives of the film festival are educating their audiences regarding film, creating an experience, fostering sustainable partnerships and educating children and young people regarding the critical analysis of film and gaming. Organising a film festival is of course costly and, therefore, Creative Europe allocates funding to Youth Film Festival Antwerp, according to one of their representatives. The main target audience of the festival is children between the age of 1,5 and 18 years old, therefore being completely dedicated to providing entertainment for non-adults. By incorporating (online) games and organising workshops, the festival provides entertainment options beyond the realm of film. By accommodating their



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audience with premieres of youth films, the festival offers a unique opportunity for young film enthusiasts. Additionally, the youth film festival presents schools with the opportunity to visit the festival, prior to the actual festival – which takes place annually during the crocus holiday –, in relation to their educational programmes during the school performances, which consists of adaptive programming. Therefore, the festival provides educational materials, organises workshops and the XL-Medialab and, finally, invites interesting guest speakers. A representative (Interview March 2025) of the Youth Film Festival indicates that this initiative is perceived as successful. In order to promote the creation of youth films, the festival awards 9 different films with a corresponding award. According to Jeroen Verhaeghe in an interview for this report (Interview February 2024), the specific approach that is exerted by the festival can spark the interest of the young public in the audiovisual industry, therefore possibly resulting in a new qualitative talent injection.

Ghent International Short Film Festival is a local film festival with an international appeal. The 2025 edition received approximately 1000 applications from all over the world with 85 short films accepted, which were showcased over a period of 9 days long. In their programme, the short film festival dedicates one entire day to short films intended for children, which are screened Wednesday afternoon when school attendance in Flanders, Belgium is not mandatory. Besides young children, emerging and young filmmakers are also catered with opportunities to showcase their work, if accepted. After the screening, the film festival organises a short Q&A with some filmmakers, offering them opportunities to elaborate on the production process or explain the origin of the inspiration for the film and answering questions from the audience. The film screenings are organised in a small room in the centre of the city of Ghent, therefore limiting the audience capacity to slightly less than 30, which implies that the festival's reach regarding audiences is rather limited. Nevertheless, on the festival's website, interested film lovers can participate in the festivities by screening – against payment – the short films online (Ghent International Short Film Festival, n.d.).

5.3 Greece

Greece, as a small country with a limited media market, faces structural challenges common to similar-sized nations, such as restricted production resources, limited commercial potential and a high dependency on imported media content (Papadimitriou, 2020; Puppis, 2009). In response, Greece has developed a multi-layered cinema policy through a coordinated governance model involving three key ministries: the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Ministry of Digital Governance and the Ministry of Development and Investments.



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The Ministry of Culture and Sports supports national cinema through the Greek Film Centre (GFC), the Hellenic Film Commission and the Thessaloniki International Film Festival (TIFF), providing funding, talent development and international exposure. The Ministry of Digital Governance, via EKOME, focuses on infrastructure and investment incentives, most notably a cash rebate programme offering up to 40% reimbursement for audiovisual productions, which has attracted €545 million in investment between 2018 and 2022 (EKOME, 2023). Film Offices have also been launched across regions to facilitate production and boost local economies. Beyond cultural and digital infrastructure, the Ministry of Development and Investments supports the audiovisual sector through broader economic tools. Chief among these is the Fund for Entrepreneurship II (TEPIX II), a financing programme managed by the Hellenic Development Bank. TEPIX II provides tailored loans and financial instruments to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including those active in the creative and cultural sectors (Hellenic Development Bank, 2023).

5.3.1. Women

Policy

An examination of the policies concerning women's participation in the Greek film industry reveals a growing awareness of gender inequalities within the audiovisual sector, although this awareness is still in the process of fully translating into systemic change. Greece has aligned itself with broader European frameworks that promote gender equality, yet national policy implementation remains somewhat fragmented, often relying heavily on the efforts of civil society organisations and support from international collaborations.

Public institutions, such as the General Secretariat for Demography and Family Policy and Gender Equality, have introduced more structured approaches, notably through the National Gender Equality Action Plan (2021-2025). This plan outlines concrete strategies across different sectors, including culture and media. Under Priority Axis 2, titled "Equal participation of women in the labour market," the plan sets out targeted objectives that are particularly relevant to the film and creative industries.

Objective 2.1, for example, aims to strengthen female employment and includes:

Action 2.1.1, which supports female employment and entrepreneurship in areas, such as cultural heritage and the cultural and creative economy;

Action 2.1.2, which focuses on upskilling female professionals in these sectors through training and development opportunities (NGEAP, 2021).



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Despite these advancements, structural barriers, such as underrepresentation in leadership roles and funding disparities, continue to impede women's full and equal participation in the creative and decision-making aspects of the film industry. Sustained policy focus and implementation, along with coordinated collaboration between public and civil actors, are essential to closing this gap. However, specific statistics on the exact number of women working in the Greek film industry are not readily available. Nevertheless, studies indicate that Greece has one of the lowest proportions of female film directors in Europe (Katsarova, 2019). Between 2012 and 2016, the average percentage of films directed by women in the EU was 19.6%, with Greece among the countries with the least impressive performances (Katsarova, 2019). Another study conducted by *Le LAB Femmes de Cinéma* on the representation of female film directors across Europe, showcased that as of 2017, the representation of female directors in Greece remains low. Women directed less than 15% of films in the country (Le LAB Femmes de Cinéma, n.d.). At that time, there were no specific policies or initiatives aimed directly at increasing the number of female directors in the Greek film industry. The study highlights that the appointment of women to key positions, such as Electra Venaki as head of the Greek Film Centre in 2016 and Venia Vergou as president of the Hellenic Film Commission in 2017, was perceived as a potential catalyst for future change (Le LAB Femmes de Cinéma, n.d.).

The Greek Government's Law No. 4604/2019, enacted in March 2019, addresses gender equality and prevention against gender bias. While the law does not explicitly refer to the audiovisual industry, the regulation impacts media and advertising sectors, which include audiovisual media: "The gender dimension is integrated into all areas of private and public life, particularly in the political, social, economic and cultural reality of the country" (Article 3, par. 1, Law No. 4604/2019; Greek Ministry of Interior, 2019, p. 1546). Article 3 par. 1 also defines that at least 25% of the members of the boards in publicly listed companies in Greece must be women.

Key aspects relevant to the audiovisual industry are the promotion of gender equality. The law No. 4604/2019, mandates gender equality in media, including also advertising content by presenting individuals free from gender stereotypes and discrimination (Tsigou, 2020). Additionally, the law incorporates specific rules on gender equality at public and private television channels and radio stations, not only internal rules (self-regulation), but also to foster collaboration with others to establish rules (co-regulation) that promote gender equality and prevent gender stereotypes in their content (Tsigou, 2020). Moreover, the legislation prohibits the broadcasting of advertising with discriminatory, aiming to eliminate gender biases (Tsigou, 2020). Another aim of the law is the active promotion of gender equality by all media (Tsigou, 2020). The implementation of this law, even though it does not explicitly refer to the film industry, reflects Greece's commitment to promoting



gender equality across various sectors. Regarding the audiovisual industry, Greece is a member of Eurimages, the Council of Europe's cultural support fund to promote gender equality in the film industry for 2025-2027 (Council of Europe, 2024).

Industry practices

Addressing gender inequality in the Greek film and audiovisual industry, efforts have increasingly emerged through a range of industry-led initiatives, signalling a growing awareness of the need for structural change. One of the most prominent actors in this space is *Women in Film and Television Greece* (WIFT Greece), established in 2017. As part of an international network encompassing more than 50 chapters across six continents and 15,000 members globally, WIFT Greece provides a platform for women working across the creative industries in Greece. The organisation actively works to promote gender balance and greater inclusion within the film industry by advocating for policy change, hosting networking events and supporting professional development opportunities for women creatives (WIFT Greece, n.d.).

Another significant awareness-raising effort was the 2018 initiative by the Greek film portal *Flix.gr*, which released a video featuring 36 women professionals, directors, producers, actresses, cinematographers, composers and designers, who shared personal accounts of sexism, professional obstacles and representational challenges they have faced within the Greek film industry. The purpose of the project was not only to highlight the underrepresentation and inequalities women face, but also to spark a wider public dialogue on these systemic issues (Economou, 2018).

Expanding the conversation to include broader gender identities, *Girls in Film Ellada* (GiF Ellada) has emerged as a progressive initiative focused on building an inclusive and supportive community for underrepresented filmmakers in Greece. Spearheaded by Konstantina Levi, Nikki Powell, Margarita Velentza, Yvoni Lada and Hermione Efstratiadou, GiF Ellada places a particular emphasis on women, trans and non-binary film professionals. Their first event, held in Athens on May 18, 2024, addressed the critical issue of film funding and its accessibility for marginalised creators. The initiative reflects a more intersectional approach to gender inclusivity within the Greek audiovisual sector (Girls in Film, n.d.).

Public institutions have also contributed to the promotion of gender equality in the industry. The *Greek Film Centre* (GFC), for instance, has taken several steps to support content and creators addressing gender issues. One such initiative was the 2017 collaborative film festival "50/50: Gender Equality also in Cinema," organised in partnership with Greece's General Secretariat for Gender



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Equality and the Swedish Film Institute. This event explicitly highlighted the importance of equitable representation and offered a public forum for discussing gender equality in cinema (WEgate, 2017).

Additionally, the GFC awarded a 3,000 Euro prize to the project #WithSofia at the 24th Thessaloniki Documentary Festival. The documentary tackles pressing gender issues within Greek society and the award not only recognised the project's artistic merit, but also affirmed the GFC's commitment to supporting content that challenges societal norms and fosters dialogue on gender equality (Onassis Foundation, 2022).

While many film festivals represent important strides, these efforts also underscore the ongoing need for systemic and policy-level reforms to ensure lasting and equitable participation for women and gender-diverse professionals.

Film festivals

Efforts to elevate the visibility and contributions of women and underrepresented gender identities in Greek cinema have been increasingly supported through specialised festivals and institutional collaborations. One prominent initiative is the *WIFT GR Film Festival*, organised annually since 2016 by Women in Film and Television Greece. The festival serves as a platform to showcase the creative output of women and femininities in cinema, aiming to challenge the entrenched male dominance in the Greek audiovisual sector and address the ongoing underrepresentation of women professionals both in front of and behind the camera. Each year, the festival features a curated programme of over 30 films, spanning fiction, documentary and experimental genres, by female and gender-diverse filmmakers from Greece and abroad. Accompanying the screenings are panel discussions, masterclasses and networking events that foster critical dialogue and professional exchange (WIFTI, 2025).

In a parallel effort to center intersectional perspectives, the *Aphrodite Queer-Feminist Festival** has been active in Athens since 2018. The festival is dedicated to amplifying LGBTQI*+ feminist voices by presenting a multidisciplinary programme of films, performances and art installations that explore themes, such as gender identity, sexuality and social justice. With a deliberately inclusive and community-oriented ethos, Aphrodite* positions itself as a cultural meeting point between activist networks and creative practices, drawing in a growing audience of over 2,000 attendees annually (Aphrodite* Project, n.d.).

Institutional recognition of gender equity is also reflected in major Greek festivals. Both the *Thessaloniki International Documentary Festival* and the *Thessaloniki International Film Festival*



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have partnered with WIFT GR to present the WIFT GR Award, a distinction given to a woman filmmaker featured in the official competition sections. (WIFTI, 2025).

5.3.2. Migrants

While Greece offers various incentives to attract foreign film productions, such as a cash rebate programme covering up to 40% of eligible expenses, specific funding programmes targeting migrant or refugee filmmakers are limited (Christodoulou, 2024). However, the general support for international co-productions and the emphasis on cultural diversity in storytelling provide opportunities for inclusive projects that involve migrant narratives or creators (HFAC-Creative Greece, n.d.). National policy regarding the cultural and creative sector and film industry in Greece does not specifically target refugee and migrant filmmakers, there are some industry initiatives that support their participation and representation in the film sector.

Industry practices

The RefugeesIN project is a European initiative that fosters the social inclusion of refugees. Refugees are involved in filmmaking that narrates their personal stories and experiences. The Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) participated in the RefugeesIN project in 2017 and 2018 by developing educational resources and organising film screenings that highlight refugee narratives to promote dialogues and challenge discrimination (Greek Council for Refugees, n.d.).

IOM and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, in Greece, with the support of the Municipality of Ioannina in 2020, organised screenings with focus on migrants and refugees. The event aimed to foster dialogue and communication between locals and refugees and Ioannina to facilitate the harmonious coexistence and raise awareness on migration-related issues (International Organisation for Migration, 2020).

Karpos, Center of Education & Intercultural Communication under Video and Storytelling Lab with the support of UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, promoted the film production of five short films created by Greeks and refugees, who worked in teams aiming to explore themes, such as acceptance, support, collaborations, justice and respect in 2023. It is accompanied by an exhibition and discussion about “cinema as a means of expression and collaboration” (UNHCR Greece, 2023).

Refugee Week Greece, part of the global Refugee Week movement as a cultural festival, celebrates equality and diversity by offering a platform for people from diaspora communities to engage creatively and professionally. During the 2023 edition of the festival, a dedicated team curated eight film screenings centred around stories of migration, shedding light on the lived experiences of



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refugees and migrants through the cinematic lens. This effort sparked the creation of Pixida Films in 2024, a film collective committed to amplifying migrant and female perspectives in cinema. Pixida's mission is to challenge dominant narratives by presenting migration stories shaped by those who live them, giving voice to the often-silenced through visual storytelling (Refugee Week Greece, n.d.; Pixida Films, n.d.).

Similarly, *GlobalGirl Media* has contributed to reshaping the gendered and cultural dimensions of film production in Greece. This international organisation provided training workshops for young refugee women from countries, such as Congo, Syria, Afghanistan and Iran. These women were trained in filmmaking and editing under the guidance of an American director, allowing them not only to express their own stories, but also to gain professional skills in media production. The initiative underscores the empowering potential of film as a tool for both advocacy and career development, especially for women at the intersections of displacement and marginalisation (AFP, 2021).

Further institutional support for inclusivity comes from *The Hellenic Initiative* (THI), which, in collaboration with the Global Greek Film Initiative (GGFI), provides funding to support emerging Greek filmmakers and crew training within the country. While THI's focus is broader, spanning economic development and Diaspora engagement, it directly benefits migrant and diverse filmmakers by creating opportunities for employment, training and industry exposure. Since its founding in 2012, *THI* has invested approximately \$20 million in initiatives across Greece, including efforts to invigorate the national film sector by integrating it with global networks and supporting inclusive storytelling (Kokkinidis, 2023).

These initiatives point to a shifting landscape where marginalised voices are being brought to the forefront, transforming the Greek film industry into a more inclusive and socially responsive space.

Film festivals

Although Greece does not currently host film festivals exclusively dedicated to migrant and refugee filmmakers, several key festivals engage with migration as a central theme, fostering dialogue and raising awareness through cinema. One such initiative is the *HELIOS Film Festival*, organised by the IOM Greece. This online festival is part of the EU-funded HELIOS project and is held annually in conjunction with World Refugee Day. The festival showcases short films and documentaries focusing on refugee experiences, integration processes and the contributions of migrants to Greek society (IOM, 2025).



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Another prominent example is the *Movement Film Festival*, an initiative of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation's Office in Athens. Movement focuses on diverse narratives of migration, including social inclusion, displacement and the lived realities of refugees and migrants. The festival aims to create a platform for critical engagement and public discourse through film, providing visibility to underrepresented voices and stories within Greek and European contexts (Movement, n.d.).

5.3.3. Young filmmakers

Policy

Between 2022 and 2024, Greece's youth policy strategy is being implemented through the Strategic Plan for Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth, overseen by the General Secretariat for Vocational Education, Training, Lifelong Learning and Youth under the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. This plan responds to the evolving needs and interests of young people by integrating both international and European trends and priorities. It promotes a cross-sectoral approach to youth policy, aiming to address the broad range of challenges facing younger generations today. A key focus is digital transformation, emphasising policies that encourage active youth engagement in the digital era. The strategy also aligns with major European initiatives, such as the European Year of Youth 2022 and the Council of Europe's *Democracy Here. Democracy Now* campaign, while simultaneously supporting reforms in vocational education and training (Hellenic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2022).

Despite the presence of several initiatives aimed at supporting young filmmakers, Greece still lacks a coherent and comprehensive youth policy specifically dedicated to the film industry. Existing support measures are fragmented and largely project-based, rather than being embedded within a broader strategic vision for youth participation in audiovisual culture. The primary institutional actor, the Hellenic Cinema Center, operating under the Ministry of Culture, includes youth support among its objectives. However, this is mainly implemented through sporadic training workshops and short-term talent development programmes (Film Commission, n.d.), which are not sufficient to address the systemic challenges faced by young creatives entering the film sector.

While financial aid is available through the Film and Audio-visual Center, Creative Greece, which offers grants of up to €60,000 for documentaries and up to €250,000 for fiction and animation (Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center, n.d.a), this support does not exclusively target young filmmakers. Rather, it is open to all eligible applicants, making it difficult for newcomers with limited networks and production experience to compete on equal footing. Recent developments, such as the Greek Film Centre's five new funding programmes introduced in



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2023, part of the *GREECE 2.0* Recovery and Resilience Plan funded by the European Commission's Next Generation EU, include provisions for emerging professionals. However, these initiatives, with a total budget of 7.247 million Euro for the period 2023-2025, remain short-term responses rather than a long-term youth-oriented policy framework (Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center, 2023).

Industry practices

In Greece, various educational initiatives and programmes are available to support and nurture young talent in the film industry. These programmes are designed to equip young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to pursue careers in filmmaking, offering a mix of practical training, vocational education and higher education opportunities.

One notable programme *Be Inspired by Greece, Filmmaking Made in Greece*, offered by the Metropolitan College. This two-week course is aimed at introducing young individuals to the art of filmmaking. The programme is highly practical, focusing on core film techniques, including camera use and it provides hands-on experience through outdoor shooting for both fictional and non-fictional projects. This initiative is an excellent starting point for young people looking to explore filmmaking in a structured, immersive environment (Metropolitan College, n.d.).

The Vocational Education and Training programmes provided by the National Centre of Audio-visual Media and Communication (EKOME) are another important aspect of Greece's youth-focused film industry initiatives. EKOME offers a range of training programmes for audio-visual professionals, including those aimed at fostering new talent and improving the skills of those already in the industry. These programmes are key to the development of technical expertise and professional knowledge in the field of audio-visual media (Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center, n.d.b).

In addition to these educational programmes, the inter-university programme *DIAPLASIS* (2019-2022) focused on producing documentaries created by students. This initiative, in collaboration with the Hellenic Parliament and media, aimed to provide students with practical experience in documentary filmmaking while also engaging with important social issues. The programme helped bridge the gap between academic training and professional filmmaking (Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center, n.d.b).

To provide young filmmakers with direct industry experience, EKOME partnered with *Nu Boyana Film Studios* and the *FilmForge* center for vocational training to offer an internship programme in 2019. This programme allowed twelve young Greeks between the ages of 18 and 30 to gain hands-on experience in film production, working alongside experienced technicians in a professional studio



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environment (EKOME, 2019). Such internships are critical in giving young filmmakers the exposure and practical skills they need to succeed in the competitive film industry.

Another initiative aimed at developing script writing skills is the *Script2Film Workshop*, organised by the Mediterranean Film Institute. This workshop provided seminars from 2019 to 2021, led by global experts, to train young people in scriptwriting for films, TV series and documentaries. This programme has helped young filmmakers hone their storytelling abilities, a crucial skill in the filmmaking process (EKOME, 2021).

For young filmmakers with a particular interest in creating content for children, KidsKinoLab, part of the Athens International Film Festival for Children and Youth, focuses on training young people to produce audiovisual content specifically for younger audiences. This initiative supports young filmmakers in exploring creative storytelling approaches that resonate with children, providing them with the tools to create engaging, age-appropriate films (Hellenic Film and Audiovisual Center, n.d.b).

The Educational Programme for Young Filmmakers offered by the *Chania Film Festival* is another important initiative. This programme provides training and workshops for young filmmakers, particularly those interested in documentary filmmaking. Through its *cineLessons and True Stories / CreDoc programmes*, the festival has facilitated the production of over 100 documentaries in recent years, showcasing the growing talent in Greece's youth film sector (Chania Film Festival, 2024).

In addition to these targeted training initiatives, Greece is home to several film schools that provide more formal educational opportunities for young filmmakers. The School of Film at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is one of the leading public film schools in the country, offering a comprehensive curriculum in film studies. As the first university department dedicated to film studies in Greece, it plays a crucial role in shaping the future of Greek cinema (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, n.d.).

The Hellenic Cinema & Television School Stavrakos, established in 1966 in Athens, is another prominent institution offering specialised education in cinema and television. The school is known for its high-quality training and its contribution to Greece's film and television sectors (Hellenic Cinema and Television School Stavrakos, n.d.).

The Sparks Film School Athens, an extension of a renowned UK-based film school, provides filmmaking courses for young people aged 5 to 17. This institution fosters creativity and technical skills in aspiring filmmakers, helping to inspire and guide the next generation of professionals (Sparks Film School Greece, n.d.).



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Film festivals

Film festivals in Greece play a crucial role in nurturing young filmmakers, providing them with platforms to showcase their work and gain exposure. These festivals support the development of new talent, encourage creativity and foster collaborations among emerging professionals from various countries.

One of the key festivals for young filmmakers is the *Athens International Digital Film Festival* (AIDFF), which is held annually in Athens. This festival focuses on digital filmmaking and offers a platform for young filmmakers to present their work. AIDFF is committed to supporting independent productions and the use of new technologies, serving as an inspiration for emerging creators. The festival promotes an evolutionary approach to digital media, helping young filmmakers to engage with modern trends in film production (AIDFF, n.d.).

The *Thessaloniki International Film Festival* (TIFF) also provides substantial support to young film professionals. In collaboration with the prestigious *Locarno International Film Festival*, TIFF hosts the *Thessaloniki Locarno Industry Academy*. This initiative focuses on training young professionals in the areas of film promotion, distribution and networking. Through this programme, emerging filmmakers have the opportunity to develop their skills and gain valuable industry connections, which are essential for career progression (Thessaloniki International Film Festival, 2024b).

Another important festival, the *Aegean Film Festival*, provides space for both experienced and emerging professionals, including cinema students. The festival fosters dialogue and collaboration within the film industry by organising the ReScript the Future Competition, which encourages young filmmakers to create short documentaries and explore new ideas. The festival offers up to 85,000 Euro in awards to young filmmakers, with a particular focus on promoting emerging talent (Aegean Film Festival, n.d.).

The *Olympia International Film Festival*, which has been held in Pyrgos since 1997, is another prominent event that emphasises youth engagement. It focuses on films for children and young people, with public national funding and support from Creative Europe MEDIA. The festival features four competition sections and screens a total of around 200 films. It also organises the Camera Zizanio event, a European meeting for young people's audiovisual creation, which showcases over 250 films made by children and young people from European schools or independent projects. Additionally, the festival offers film literacy activities through its School Cinema initiative, with around 80 workshops and seminars aimed at fostering filmmaking skills among youth (Olympia International Film Festival, n.d.).



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The *International Short Film Festival Psarokokalo* has been dedicated to presenting the work of emerging filmmakers since 2007. This festival hosts approximately 100 films from over 40 countries, creating a diverse international environment. Psarokokalo also provides additional opportunities for learning, offering lectures and masterclasses for young filmmakers. Organised by Kyklos, a non-profit organisation in Athens, the festival is a vital space for aspiring filmmakers to network and develop their skills (Psarokokalo International Short Film Festival, n.d.).

The *Skopelos International Film Festival for Youth* (SIFFY) is a unique event that targets young filmmakers aged 6 to 18. It engages approximately 100 children in the process of filmmaking and showcases 140 films from over 20 countries. In addition, 14 filmmakers are invited to create short films during the festival, further promoting hands-on learning and collaboration among youth filmmakers (Skopelos International Film Festival for Youth, n.d.).

The Drama International Short Film Festival (DISFF) has been a key event for emerging filmmakers in Greece for years. It encourages the creation of short films, with a special national competition section aimed at supporting new Greek talent. In 2024, the festival hosted 211 films from 39 countries, reflecting its international reach. DISFF also runs a Pitching Lab, a five-day workshop where directors, screenwriters and producers present film projects. This initiative helps participants refine their ideas and connect with industry professionals (Drama International Short Film Festival, 2024; Drama International Short Film Festival, n.d.).

Through these various initiatives, Greek film festivals play a significant role in shaping the careers of young filmmakers, offering them opportunities for growth, exposure and professional development.

5.3.4. Film Festivals in Greece Promoting Experimental Films

The *Thessaloniki International Film Festival (TIFF)*, established in 1960, is one of Greece's most renowned cultural events. Held annually in November, TIFF features a variety of competition sections, including Film Forward, which has a competition section *Film forward*, on emerging professionals experimenting with film genres and reshaping audience perceptions of reality. This section gives filmmakers a space to showcase their bold approaches to narrative and form (Thessaloniki International Film Festival, 2025).

Similarly, the *Drama International Short Film Festival* held in September in Drama, presents a wide array of short films across various genres, including experimental works. The festival is known for its commitment to providing a platform for emerging filmmakers to showcase films that push artistic boundaries and introduce new cinematic forms (Drama International Short Film Festival, n.d.).



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The *Athens Avant-Garde Film Festival* (AAGFF), held every December, is dedicated to promoting unconventional and experimental films. Organised by the Greek Film Archive, AAGFF aims to support filmmakers who challenge traditional filmmaking methods by experimenting with innovative techniques. The festival's new competition section, "Reframing Images," was introduced specifically for emerging filmmakers to explore avant-garde cinema. This section invites films that stretch the limits of filmic expression, offering new and exciting perspectives on what cinema can achieve (Athens Avant-Garde Film Festival, n.d.).

The *International Experimental Film Festival* (IEFF), which takes place annually in October in Athens, celebrates groundbreaking voices within the global experimental cinema scene. Organised by the Institute for Experimental Arts, the festival focuses on creativity and innovation, pushing cinematic spaces beyond traditional formats. The festival awards prizes in various categories, including Best Film, Best Short Film, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, Best Music, Best Performance and Best Picture, honoring outstanding contributions to experimental filmmaking (Filmfreeway, n.d.f).

The *Syros International Film Festival* (SIFF), founded in 2013, is another important festival in Greece dedicated to experimental cinema. SIFF invites films that explore the question of "What is cinema?" through innovative and thought-provoking approaches. The festival emphasises works that go beyond commercial production, providing a platform for cutting-edge, artistic films that challenge conventional norms and encourage new ways of thinking about film (Syros International Film Festival, n.d.).

The *Kalamata International Short Documentary Festival*, launched in October 2021, has quickly become an important event for experimental filmmakers, particularly those working within the documentary genre. Located in the Peloponnese, the festival embraces artistic approaches that tackle important social issues, such as equality, the environment and gender discrimination. Through its inclusion of experimental works, the festival fosters a space for filmmakers to engage with important contemporary topics in innovative ways (Peloponnisos International Documentary Film Festival, n.d.).

The *Animasyros International Animation Festival*, held in September, showcases animated films from around the world, with a focus on innovative and experimental approaches to animation. The festival presents a diverse selection of 261 films from 50 different countries, including works that challenge traditional animation techniques and explore unconventional visual storytelling methods (Animasyros, 2024).



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The *Athens Ethnographic Film Festival - The Ethnofest*, established in 2010, includes a programme section dedicated to “Filmic Experiments.” This section encourages filmmakers to experiment with new forms and techniques in ethnographic and documentary filmmaking, promoting avant-garde approaches that push the boundaries of visual storytelling (Ethnofest, n.d.).

5.4. France

With a prolific film industry, France boasts one of the most comprehensive support systems to cinema in Europe. State funding still is a crucial element to the cinema industry. The categorisation of state funding policies for the art sector has always been controversial. This has further been accentuated by globalisation trends resulting from advanced technologies and the emergence of “a multiplicity of capitalisms” (Halle, 2002, p. 21). The French film industry operates within a deeply structured policy framework that shapes both its artistic and economic dimensions. Regulation is not merely a control mechanism but a tool for cultural inclusion and diversity. By setting standards for production, distribution and content, the French state ensures that cinema serves as a reflective medium for society, one that allows a multiplicity of voices to emerge while maintaining ethical boundaries (Gimello-Mesplomb, 2024).

As Ma (2023) notes, this regulatory environment safeguards the integrity of cinematic expression and protects public audiences. At the same time, the government’s commitment to sustaining the cinema and audiovisual economy reveals a strategic cultural investment. Through a combination of subsidies, tax reliefs and funding mechanisms, France fosters an ecosystem where creativity can thrive without being wholly dependent on market forces. This approach allows young and independent filmmakers to take risks and innovate, ensuring both economic vitality and artistic relevance.

Moreover, France’s cultural policy actively promotes cinema as a shared social experience. State-supported initiatives, from film festivals to educational programmes, serve to democratise access to film culture. These efforts are not just about increasing viewership but about cultivating a critical public that engages with cinema as art, discourse and identity. In this way, French policy reflects a holistic understanding of cinema: as an industry, a public good and a space for cultural dialogue (Ma, 2023).

To address these shifts and promote greater inclusivity, France has implemented a set of measures to support women filmmakers, as well as migrant and diasporic cinema, fostering diversity in storytelling and ensuring broader representation within the national film landscape.



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5.4.1. Women

France has been demonstrating remarkable commitment to addressing gender disparities in its cultural industries, making significant investments in both policy development and practical implementation. The French Ministry of Culture, through the gender equality observatory in the film and audiovisual industries, has been pursuing in-depth public policies for several years on equality in the film, audiovisual and technical industry sectors. These actions are part of the “Equality” workstreams for 2023-2027 and are implemented by the CNC (Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée). These new equality workstreams redefine and complement the 2027 objectives, setting higher expectations for the promotion of an egalitarian culture, as well as the prevention of gender discrimination and the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. These include measures, such as setting up the Observatory for Gender Equality in the Film and Audiovisual industry (Observatoire de l'égalité femmes-hommes dans l'industrie du cinéma et de l'audiovisuel). Launched in 2014, this body has since undertaken initiatives, such as conditioning aid to audiovisual works and the Cinema Parity Bonus (bonus parité dans le cinéma).

However, despite these efforts, significant challenges remain for women in the French film industry. According to the CNC's 2025 Gender Equality Observatory, women still represent only 24.2% of directors of French-initiated films, with mixed-gender co-directing teams comprising a mere 2.6%. The representation of women varies by genre, with documentaries showing a slightly better gender balance (35.7%) compared to fiction (25.6%) and animation . Furthermore, women are underrepresented in technical roles, such as machinery (9.2%), electrical work (15.8%) and set construction (19.4%). However, they dominate in traditionally feminine roles like makeup (88.7%) and costume design (87.1%) (CNC, 2025a).

Additionally, systemic financial inequalities persist, with films directed by women receiving budgets 39% lower than those directed by men. Despite this, some positive trends are emerging. For instance, 31.4% of first films were directed or co-directed by women and the CNC has made strides in promoting gender equality through targeted training programmes and parity bonuses. Nonetheless, these statistics highlight the need for continued efforts and structural change to achieve true gender equality in the French film industry (CNC, 2025a).

Policy

In a proactive effort to tackle the persistent gender imbalances in the French cinema and audiovisual industry, the French government has introduced a series of comprehensive measures aimed at reinforcing its commitment to gender equality. Since January 1, 2023, both selective and automatic



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public funding for audio-visual productions (*aides sélectives ou automatiques à la production d'œuvres audiovisuelles*) has been made conditional on the submission of gender-disaggregated data. This means that applicants seeking public support must now provide detailed information on the number of men and women occupying key roles in their production teams. This policy aims to increase transparency, monitor progress and ultimately encourage more inclusive hiring practices across the sector.

As part of its automatic support, the CNC has introduced a bonus for artistic teams that are equal since 1 January 2019, which implies crews that have at least as many women as men in key positions in the production and creation of a film. The aim is to encourage the employment of women in key positions in film production by awarding a bonus of 14.21% to eligible films using their automatic support account. This commitment, which further promotes gender parity in film production, is demonstrated through the annual publication of a quantified report on its actions (CNC, 2019).

Equality in dialogue with local authorities

To address the issue of gender equality in its dialogue with local authorities implementing film and film policies in the regions, the CNC now systematically includes a section on gender equality in agreements signed with local authorities and regional directorates of culture, Directions régionales des affaires culturelles (DRACs). Negotiations for the 2023-2025 agreements include parity in the composition of committees that select films supported by local authorities. In addition, special attention is paid to the place of women in front and behind the camera. As part of an agreement between the local authorities and the CNC, standard indicators have been introduced to monitor local policies. These indicators were first implemented in 2023: local authorities now provide information on the gender of talent behind projects supported by their funds: directors, screenwriters and producers where appropriate (CNC, 2024 c).

Image Education: parity in catalogues and within programmes

The CNC has committed to include at least five women's films each year in all school equipment catalogues: *My Class in Cinema, Kindergarten, School, College, High School and Film Apprentices*. In addition, since 2020, the CNC has carried out important work on gender equality in educational resource content. For each film, the CNC systematically questions whether it is appropriate to address the issue of gender. Resources are designed by joint editorial boards. In addition, the issue of gender in the recruitment of professionals who participate in image education programmes on all



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positions is also a priority to show students that the field of cinema is not reserved for men (CNC, 2023 c).

Heritage: valorisation of women works

The CNC promotes, through its film heritage, the role of women in cinema by paying particular attention to their restoration and digitisation. In this logic, many films made by women are added to the films produced or co-produced supported by the CNC as part of the support for the digitisation of cinematographic heritage works.

Industry practices

The French film industry has implemented a set of measures to advance gender inclusivity through a strategic combination of top-down policies and grassroots initiatives. Several pioneering initiatives have emerged to tackle structural inequalities and create spaces for underrepresented voices, particularly women, within the audiovisual sector.

One of the leading organisations is the *Lab Femmes de Cinéma*, a think tank dedicated to improving parity and diversity in the film and audiovisual industries. It plays a central role in generating research, raising awareness and suggesting policy recommendations aimed at transforming the industry landscape. Through its actions, Lab Femmes de Cinéma encourages reflection and experimentation on gender parity, particularly by supporting women filmmakers and advocating for systemic changes that benefit gender diversity at all levels of production (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, n.d.). *Lab Femmes de Cinéma* on the other hand is a think tank working on parity and diversity in the film and audiovisual industries. It aims to generate ideas, raise awareness, propose actions and stimulate experimentation, to enact change in the film industry with an emphasis on women cinema. It promotes parity and gender diversity in the industry. *Lab Femmes de Cinéma* functions as a platform for reflection and action, dedicated to fostering a more equal and inclusive cinema industry. Its work is structured around three key pillars:

Workshops-bringing together professionals from all areas of the audiovisual sector, these workshops utilise collective intelligence methods to encourage discussions, facilitate meaningful connections and generate actionable solutions for greater industry inclusivity.

Masterclasses and a Podcast-showcasing prominent women in the film industry, these initiatives provide role models while highlighting the breadth of careers within the audiovisual sector. Through in-depth conversations, they aim to inspire and empower aspiring professionals.



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Annual Study on Women Filmmakers in Europe: this study examines the evolving position of women directors across Europe, analysing national policies and their long-term impact on gender equality in the industry. It serves as a valuable tool for tracking progress and advocating for change.

Another initiative is *Femmes-Cinéma-Égalité* (Women-Cinema-Equality), which focuses on promoting the visibility of women directors, especially from France, while addressing gender imbalances across various cinematic professions. Anchored in Lyon and its surrounding region, this association fosters engagement with the local community through cultural and social cinema-related activities. It seeks not only to highlight the creative contributions of women filmmakers, but also to use cinema as a tool for broader social awareness and gender justice (Femmes-Cinéma-Égalité, n.d.).

Similarly, the association *Femmes & Cinéma* takes an activist approach by employing audiovisual media as a means to combat gender-based violence and discrimination. Its educational and outreach efforts target youth, particularly students in vocational high schools, underserved urban areas (QPV) and rural communities. By encouraging young people to use filmmaking to express and challenge social norms, the initiative empowers a new generation to engage with and transform gender narratives through visual storytelling (Femmes & Cinéma, n.d.).

Furthermore, *Collectif 50/50* represents a powerful collective of professionals striving for equality, parity and diversity in the French film and audiovisual industry. Through its observatory, the organisation monitors and publishes data on disparities in the sector, while developing actionable tools and measures to foster systemic change. *Collectif 50/50* promotes dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders, encouraging the industry to commit to concrete practices, such as equitable hiring, inclusive funding criteria and awareness campaigns that address entrenched inequalities (Collectif 50/50, n.d.).

Collectif 50/50 is a movement fighting for equality, parity and diversity in the French film and audiovisual industry. The organisation is committed to promoting equality and diversity within the film industry through a series of targeted initiatives. To enhance awareness and track progress, it has established an *Equality Observatory*, which publishes figures and analyses data on French cinema. This initiative aims to produce both quantitative and qualitative insights across various aspects of the industry, including wage disparities among technicians and actors, budget differences between directors, access to funding, exploitation, film criticism and broader representation issues. By highlighting inequalities, the Observatory seeks to support meaningful change within the sector.



According to *André Lange*, former head researcher at EAO: “The data published by the Observatory on the presence of women directors in trending series is interesting because there is a gradual improvement in the proportion of films or series directed by women. So, in this case, it’s a criterion we took into account. It was a deliberate choice. It’s important to highlight this, to showcase mixed teams.” (Interview February, 2024)

In addition, the organisation actively challenges cultural institutions and raises awareness within the profession, engaging with public bodies, private organisations, professional unions, festivals, juries and film schools. It encourages decision-makers within these institutions to prioritise parity, youth inclusion and diversity, ensuring that the industry’s workforce and creative output reflect the true multicultural fabric of society. To support these efforts, it has developed charters aimed at fostering awareness and commitment to change.

To further advance its mission, the organisation has created practical tools for industry professionals. These include the *50/50 Bible*, an online directory designed to facilitate the formation of diverse and balanced teams by connecting professionals from underrepresented backgrounds; a mentoring programme linking young talents with established film professionals; and the White Paper *All Actors of Change*, developed in partnership with the Ministry of Culture’s Delegation for Equality between Women and Men. This resource provides concrete guidance for identifying, addressing and preventing harassment and sexual violence within the industry, contributing to a safer and more inclusive working environment for all.

Film festivals

France has long been recognised as a cultural powerhouse and its film festival landscape reflects an ongoing commitment to promoting gender equality and amplifying the voices of women in cinema. Several film festivals across the country have emerged as significant platforms for supporting female filmmakers, addressing issues of representation and challenging gender-based inequalities in the audiovisual sector.

One of the most pioneering initiatives in this regard is the *Festival International de Films de Femmes de Créteil* (FIFF), established in 1979. As one of the oldest and most prominent women’s film festivals globally, FIFF was founded to offer visibility to women filmmakers whose work often goes underrepresented in mainstream cinema. The festival’s mission goes beyond mere exhibition; it actively challenges discrimination based on gender, race, culture and social class. FIFF serves as a political and cultural act of resistance, showcasing diverse narratives and supporting global solidarity among women artists (Festival International de Films de Femmes, n.d.).



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Similarly, the *FEMMES! Festival du Cinéma Toulon Provence* reinforces the transformative power of cinema in the promotion of gender equality and the cultural emancipation of women. Through a curated selection of fiction and documentary films from France and abroad, the festival emphasises the technical, artistic and humanistic dimensions of women's contributions to cinema. Events are often accompanied by discussions with directors and artists, aiming to raise awareness and stimulate reflection on equality through cultural engagement. For over 20 years, the *FEMMES!* film festival has grown into a key cultural event in the region, attracting a diverse audience. It continues to innovate with experimental initiatives, such as the discovery of documentaries on female painters, the "Portraits of Women" photography competition on social media, and the distribution of short citizen films, alongside supporting their production. Every year, around thirty feature films and several short films are screened, catering to audiences of all ages, with dedicated sessions for schools (FEMMES ! Festival du Cinéma Toulon Provence Méditerranée, 2024).

Another significant event is the *Festival du Film Féminin*, or the Women's Film Festival, an annual celebration of female perspectives in the film industry. The festival features a wide range of genres including short films, feature-length works, documentaries and animated films, all directed by women. Its programming seeks not only to highlight women's creative talents, but also to facilitate dialogue around gender parity, diversity and inclusivity in cinema. By spotlighting women's stories and experiences, the festival fosters a new generation of filmmakers and advocates for a more balanced and equitable film industry (Festival du Film Féminin, n.d.).

Additionally, the *Festival Sœurs Jumelles*, founded in 2021, represents an innovative approach to interdisciplinary storytelling by combining music and cinema. Although relatively new, the festival has demonstrated a strong commitment to gender parity from its inception. It offers a platform where filmmakers and composers, particularly women, collaborate to create immersive, sensory narratives. *Sœurs Jumelles* not only promotes the visibility of female creators in both music and film, but also contributes to a broader rethinking of gender roles within the creative industries (Festival Sœurs Jumelles, n.d.).

5.4.2. Migrants

Jäcel (2010) argues that the definition of what constitutes a 'national' film has been considerably expanded with the opening up of state financing to co-productions with EU and third-party countries. This has permitted directors, who are multiple-passport holders and living across continents (between Europe and North Africa and the Middle East) to avoid national censorships and to benefit from the best film funding opportunities.



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He further points out that, the high mobility of audiovisual professionals coupled to the existence of multiple groupings and/or allegiances further complicate the attribution of terms, such as “migrant”, “diasporic” or “exilic” to a filmmaker and their subsequent identification with – a particular cultural and/or ethnic community. She further argues that despite the emergence of categories, such as *beur* and *banlieue cinema* in France by filmmakers working in and from Europe, these professionals still claim their individual vision and creative independence rather than being under a collective label.

A key element to France’s sustainable strategy for resisting American dominance while broadening the country’s prestige and linguistic reach in the world has been its support to French and non-French authors. The CNC under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture has provided for a series of measures geared at migrant and diasporic filmmakers. These include amongst others grants for script development and production, funds that assist international filmmakers unable to produce films in their home countries, along with support for training, distribution and exposure through platforms, such as film festivals.

Advances in film production have seen a surge in diverse perspectives marked by the more international appeal of French production content (Higbee, 2014). This cinematic shift is representative of the broader social, economic and cultural transformation. These globalisation efforts are tied to its beliefs in the inevitable primacy of market forces, whereby “the once ‘de-bedded’ economy now claims to ‘im-bed’ everything, including political power.” This has occurred not only in France, but also across Europe ((Higbee, 2014, p. 26; Mentan, 2010). *André Lange, former head researcher at EAO emphasises:* “There is analytical work that could be undertaken by academics on films about minority populations or films dealing with immigration. These could take the form of sociological or socially-focused analyses. Such studies could be developed using data from the Observatory in order to deepen knowledge in this field” (Interview February, 2024).

Policy

The *Avance sur recettes* (or Advance on Earnings) (ASR) stands at the heart of production grants. It is an interest-free loan introduced in 1959. This funding aims to support bold and innovative cinema, fostering creativity and artistic renewal. It provides financial assistance for debut films, second films and projects from more experienced filmmakers, whether before or after production (*Aide avant ou après réalisation*) (CNC, 2024a). A review of the ASR recipient list reveals a significant presence of migrant and diasporic filmmakers (Jäckel, 2010). As new generations and emerging talent gain recognition, these filmmakers receive funding at the same rate as other French auteurs and are also invited to serve as members of the awarding bodies.



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The *Aide avant réalisation* (Support before production) is structured into three commissions “ASR1” Commission (first film projects) “ASR2” Commission (second and third film projects) and “ASR3” Commission (fourth film projects and beyond) with an average funding amount standing at €480,000 for a fiction film and €140,000 for a documentary in 2019. The *Aide après réalisation* (Support after production) on the other hand funds an average amount of €100,000 per project (Guide des aides du CNC en direction des auteurs, 2025). According to CNC annual reports (2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023), on average, 65.25 short film projects are supported yearly before production, with a total funding of 14.1 million Euro, while 44.25 projects receive support after production, with an average funding of 345.25K€ per year. The number of projects supported before realisation fluctuated, peaking in 2023 at 108 projects (€3.2.M). The highest fundings was also recorded in 2021 and 2022. Projects supported after realisation remained relatively stable, with minor variations in the number of projects and funding levels. An exploration of CNC support for short films from 2020 to 2023 is presented in the following table.

Type of Support	Recipients	Objective	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Pre-production support (shorts)	Producers	To encourage the emergence of new authors and new forms of artistic creation	€3.5M ; 47 projects	€3.7M ; 53 films	€3.7M ; 53 films	€3.2M ; 108 films	€14.1M; 261 films
Post-production support (shorts)	Directors & Producers	To recognise films that did not receive development support and reward risk-taking	€347K ; 41 films	€354K ; 47 films	€340K ; 43 films	€340K ; 46 films	€1.381M; 177 films

[Figure 5: Support for short films in France, before and after Production](#) (Bilans du CNC 2021; 2022b; 2023a; 2024b).

Overall, the total funding for projects before realisation consistently outweighed that of post-realisation support, reflecting the priority given to early-stage production financing in the industry. The increase in funding and supported projects in 2021 and 2022 suggests a temporary boost, possibly as a response to challenges faced by the film sector in previous years induced by the Covid-19 pandemic.



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Fatima Djoumer - Chief Executive Officer, Europa Cinemas and Nicolas Edmery - Former Assistant director, responsible for studies and statistics, Europa Cinemas say: “There is a growing concentration of funding around a small number of major productions, drawing disproportionate attention and resources. This trend leaves many other films with limited budgets and reduced visibility. As a result, the space for mid-budget films, once a vital part of the cinematic ecosystem, is steadily shrinking. The overall diversity of film production is narrowing, with increasing emphasis on high-budget projects and fewer opportunities for the so-called ‘middle-ground’ films that once flourished.” They add that: “when a film is perceived as experimental or intellectually demanding, audiences may be reluctant to take a chance on it, fearing it won’t offer a rewarding or entertaining experience. For occasional cinema-goers in particular, the cost of a ticket, especially in multiplexes where prices tend to be higher encourages caution in their choices, often steering them toward safer, more familiar options.” (*Interview April, 2025*)

Fonds Images de la Diversité (Images Diversity Fund) is a film support scheme aiming to support the creation and distribution of cinematic, audiovisual, multimedia and video game works that contribute to a more accurate representation of the French society and its diverse components. Specifically, the fund provides funding for the creation, production and distribution of films, audiovisual works, digital content and video games that primarily take place in France and that represent immigrant populations, descendants of immigrants and overseas communities within French society, particularly those living in priority urban districts. Moreover, it favours the depiction of the contemporary realities, history and memory of immigrant and overseas populations in France and promotes gender equality, support integration policies and combat discrimination, particularly those related to place of residence or real/perceived origin (CNC, n.d.).

The *Aide aux Cinémas du Monde* (*Support for world cinema*) (ACM) is a selective funding programme designed to encourage and support international co-productions of feature films between France and countries worldwide. Jointly managed by the CNC and the *Institut français* (IF, or French Institut) since its establishment in 2012, ACM promotes cultural diversity in cinema, fosters the development of international filmmaking talent and strengthens artistic and technical collaboration with the French film industry. With over 600 supported projects, many of which have gained recognition at festivals and in theaters, ACM has become a key player in global film financing. The programme, structured into four annual sessions, is divided into three categories: grants for first and second feature films, grants for third feature films and beyond and post-production grants for films that were not selected in earlier rounds and have not yet been commercially exploited. Eligible projects must be feature-length fiction, documentary, or animated film intended for theatrical



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release, with its primary language corresponding to either the filming location or the director's nationality with exceptions being made for artistic, documentary, or opera-based works (CNC, 2025 b).

Industry practices

France has established itself as a European leader in supporting diaspora cinema and the promotion of diverse voices in the film industry. This leadership is reflected through a comprehensive network of initiatives that combine public service values with artistic innovation, creating inclusive spaces for filmmakers from varied cultural backgrounds. One of the most notable institutions driving this agenda is ARTE France, a European cultural public television channel founded in 1991 with the mission of strengthening cultural ties among European citizens through high-quality programming.

In the cinematic field, ARTE France operates through its specialised division, ARTE France Cinéma, which plays a crucial role in supporting both established filmmakers and emerging talent from underrepresented backgrounds. Each year, ARTE France Cinéma co-produces approximately twenty films, encompassing a broad range of genres and styles, including feature films, experimental works, virtual reality, augmented reality, documentaries and animation (ARTE, 2025).

The commitment of ARTE France Cinéma to diversity and cultural representation is evident in its production record. According to its 2014-2015 annual report, 87% of its film production activities were based in Europe, reflecting a dedication to fostering regional cinematic expressions and narratives rooted in diverse sociocultural contexts (ARTE, 2015). Beyond geographical representation, the initiative has actively contributed to global cinema. Since its inception, ARTE France Cinéma has co-produced over 600 films and collaborated with more than 300 directors from over 50 nationalities, illustrating its broad engagement with international voices and diaspora filmmakers (European Producers Club, n.d.).

Film festivals

Over the years, France has emerged as a significant hub for showcasing migrant narratives through cinema, with several established festivals dedicated to amplifying voices from diverse cultural backgrounds and migration experiences. These initiatives represent important platforms where artistic expression meets social advocacy, creating spaces where migration narratives can be presented with dignity and complexity. Each festival, through its unique programming focus and community engagement, demonstrates how cinema functions not only as artistic expression but as



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a powerful tool for fostering intercultural dialogue and challenging dominant narratives about migration and cultural identity in contemporary France.

Festival Migrant'Scène de La Cimade is an annual rendez-vous held at the end of November in France. The festival aims to provide a platform for films and documentaries that explore the themes of migration, exile and the struggles faced by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Structured as a national event since 2006, the volunteer team members of Cimade Normandie organise the Migrant'Scène festival in Caen, Alençon, Rouen and Evreux and other cities in their respective departments. The festival brings together filmmakers, activists and the public to discuss and reflect on the challenges of migration and displacement. It showcases a diverse range of films that give a voice to people affected by migration and offer different perspectives on their experiences. The festival is also an important space for dialogue between the filmmakers, social organisations and the general public, helping to foster a more inclusive and informed discussion around migration. By supporting this initiative, the festival aims to engage a broad public in migration by promoting an innovative and plural approach (La Cimade, n.d.).

In the same light, *Festival des 3 Continents* stands out as a major annual event dedicated to showcasing cinema from Africa, Latin America and Asia. Held in Nantes, this festival offers a carefully curated selection of fiction and documentary films that provide fresh, committed and often underrepresented perspectives on global issues. By spotlighting powerful narratives from regions frequently marginalised in mainstream cinema, the festival fosters cultural dialogue and cinematic diversity. Its structure includes an Official Selection, thematic programmes, screenings tailored for young audiences and special events. Importantly, the festival strikes a balance between popular and art house cinema, offering a space where diverse forms of cinematic expression become more accessible. Each year, it presents nearly 80 films and organises approximately 200 screenings (Festival des 3 Continents, n.d.).

Similarly, the *Festival International du Film d'Amiens* (Amiens International Film Festival – FIFAM), founded in 1979, has established itself as one of France's most important cinematic events. Held annually in November over the course of nine days, FIFAM showcases around 300 films across a variety of formats including feature-length, medium-length and short films. The programme also spans multiple genres, such as fiction, animation and documentaries. With a yearly audience of approximately 65,000 spectators and the participation of 350 film professionals from around the world, the festival serves as a major hub for international cinema and cultural exchange (Festival International du Film d'Amiens, n.d.; wbimages, n.d.).



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The *Festival International Séquence Court-Métrage* (Sequence International Short Film festival), founded in 1991 in Toulouse and the Occitania region, is dedicated to celebrating the short film format in its broadest diversity. Ranging from fiction and animation to documentary and hybrid forms, the festival annually receives approximately 1,300 short films from across the globe. Its programming is designed to appeal to varied audiences and emphasise cinematic diversity. The festival offers not only a rich film selection, but also an immersive, multidimensional experience, including filmmaker Q&As, screenings for all age groups, creative workshops, animated concerts and interactive shows (Festival Séquence Court-Métrage, n.d.)

Similarly, *Cinemed-Festival International du Cinéma Méditerranéen de Montpellier* (Cinemed – Montpellier Mediterranean Cinema Festival) has played a pivotal role in promoting Mediterranean cinema since its inception in 1979. Originally launched as *Rencontres avec le cinéma méditerranéen* (Meetings with Mediterranean Cinema), it became an international film festival with competitive sections by 1989. Cinemed’s mission is centered on fostering cultural dialogue through the cinematic works of countries from the Mediterranean basin, as well as the Black Sea region, Portugal and Armenia. In addition to its annual competitions covering various formats (fiction, documentaries, short films), the festival organises year-round educational programmes, media library partnerships, professional development initiatives, such as “Cinemed Meetings” and regular documentary screenings. These efforts underline Cinemed’s commitment not only to showcasing Mediterranean cinema, but also to developing emerging talent and expanding audience engagement (Festival Cinémed, n.d.)

The *Cinélatino, Rencontres de Toulouse* (Cinélatino, Toulouse Latin American Film Festival) celebrates Latin American cinema with 130 films, comprising fiction, documentaries and a special selection for young audiences. Beyond screenings, the festival fosters cultural exchange through discussions, concerts and its Barrio Latino village, making it a vibrant hub for cinephiles and creators (Cinélatino, n.d.).

The *Festival du Film Franco-Arabe de Noisy-le-Sec* (Franco-Arab Film Festival of Noisy-le-Sec) is an annual rendez-vous that showcases approximately thirty films highlighting Arab cinema, including numerous premieres and exclusive screenings. The festival features international guests and filmmakers from Arab countries or with connections to these regions. Activities include debates and discussions alongside the festival’s traditional short film competition at Le Trianon cinema, where four distinct awards are presented: the jury prize, audience choice, high school students’ selection and young ambassadors’ award. Events extend beyond screenings to multiple cultural venues across Noisy-le-Sec and Île-de-France, including Théâtre des Bergeries (Bergeries Theatre) and



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the contemporary art center La Galerie, with programming designed to strengthen connections between Arab and French cultures (Cinéma Le Trianon, n.d.).

5.4.3. Youth

France has long prioritised cinema as a vital cultural and educational tool, implementing a range of initiatives to engage young audiences and emerging filmmakers. Programmes like *Ma Classe au Cinéma* (My Class at the Cinema) introduce students to film as both an art form and a shared experience, while initiatives, such as *Passeurs d'Images* extend access to cinema beyond the classroom, fostering creativity and critical thinking. Financial support mechanisms, including the *Fonds pour le développement de la cinéphilie du public jeune* and *Aide sélective à la distribution 3e collège* (Fund for the Development of Film Literacy Among Young Audiences and Selective Distribution Aid- Category 3), further ensure a diverse and dynamic film culture for young people. Through festivals, regional education centers and direct collaboration with industry professionals, these efforts aim to transform young audiences from passive viewers into active participants in the cinematic world, reinforcing France's role as a global leader in film education and cultural accessibility.

French cinema is characterised by its youthful nature, marked by both the relatively young age of its directors and their limited experience in the field, a phenomenon resulting from *avance sur recettes*, a key feature of the French film support system (Jeancolas, 2005).

These innovative directors use new technologies, such as various video formats, including digital in their production process. Youth Cinema constitutes an essential part of the French Cinema scene. Nacache (2014) characterises the rise of French cinema between 1990 and 2000 as a remarkable wave of change marked by novelty and youth, evidenced by a significant increase in the production of first films that far exceeded the typical generational "rate of replacement".

With no clear demarcation as to what constitutes young cinema, it is perceived to be at the crossroads broadly aligning with auteur cinema, suburbs cinema (*cinéma des banlieues* - suburban cinema), French-Arab cinema (*le cinéma beur* - Beur Cinema), heritage fiction, etc. without clear defining attributes encompassing it (Palmer, 2011). Ascribing meaning to Young French Cinema "le jeune cinéma français", (Palmer, 2011, p. 15) describes it as "any striking or especially creative surge in contemporary film making".

This wave of French cinema connotes a creative and exploratory ambition that stands out from the ordinary productions. It is characterised by a refusal to sacrifice artistic integrity by catering to dominant practices and audience expectations. Instead, these filmmakers demonstrate a preference



for modest budgets, viewing financial limitations as a means to foster creativity rather than as a constraint. This approach enables them to pursue their artistic vision without the pressure to achieve commercial success, prioritising innovation and personal expression over box office performance (Nacache, 2014).

To further explicate the constituents of the “young French cinema”, Vincendeau (2005) split the concept into at two opposed tendencies that is, on one hand, there is the French auteurs’ trend, with filmmakers, young men, but also many women who make small auteur films appealing to a select cinephile audience, financed principally with the help of the “avance sur recettes” and young’ television channels, such as Arte and Canal +. On the other hand, a more masculine, cinema consisted of young men making more spectacular, violent and potentially mainstream films, which appeal to a broader young audience.

Policy

“Ma Classe au Cinéma” (My Class at the Cinema) is a national initiative designed to introduce students, from kindergarten to high school, to cinema as a collective, artistic experience. The programme consists of specially curated film screenings held in partner cinemas and accompanied by workshops, educational material and interactions with film professionals. Organised under four educational pillars (“Kindergarten at Cinema”, “School and Cinema”, “College at Cinema” and “High School Students and Apprentices at the Cinema”), the initiative emphasises the appreciation of art-house cinema and films of diverse genres and origins. Its core objective is to cultivate sensitivity, creativity and critical thinking among youth, making cinema an integral part of cultural education (CNC, 2024d).

Regional Image Education Centers (Pôles régionaux d’éducation aux images): To further enhance film literacy and ensure equitable access across regions, the CNC has decentralised its education policies through the establishment of regional image education centers. Launched in 1999, these regional hubs are co-managed by the *Directions régionales des affaires culturelles* (DRAC) and aim to coordinate local activities, such as in-school programmes, after-school screenings and hands-on workshops (CNC, 2020a). The centers support national initiatives like *Ma Classe au Cinéma* and others, such as *Passeurs d’Images* and *Des Cinés, la Vie!*, while promoting democratisation of culture, civic engagement and the development of critical media skills.

Passeurs d’Images: Outside the formal education system, the *Passeurs d’Images* programme offers marginalised and young audiences opportunities to engage with cinema through a practical, participatory approach. Built on the triad of seeing, doing and meeting, it includes screenings,



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creative workshops and discussions with professionals. The programme is particularly geared towards social inclusion and personal empowerment, aiming to transform participants from passive viewers into active cultural contributors. By tailoring its activities to local contexts and co-developing projects with the communities involved, Passeurs d'Images has become a flagship tool for cultural access and social cohesion (Ministère de la Culture, n.d.).

Aide Sélective à la Distribution -3e Collège (Selective Distribution Support – 3rd College): For young filmmakers and distributors targeting youth audiences, the *Aide Sélective à la Distribution, 3e Collège* is a crucial financial support mechanism. It supports the distribution of both new and repertory films, regardless of nationality, intended for children and young audiences. The aid is particularly generous, covering up to 70% (or even 80% in exceptional cases) of a distributor's investment. Special emphasis is placed on emerging filmmakers, particularly those producing their first or second films and animation or short film programmes. With funding caps reaching €550,000 for standard films and €750,000 for animation, this measure supports not only artistic diversity, but also the renewal of cinematic offerings for younger viewers (CNC, 2022a).

Fund for the Development of Film Culture Among Young Audiences (Aged 15–25): Launched in 2023 in response to the declining cinema attendance among the 15-25 age group, who represent 15% of the cinema-going population, this fund aims to reignite interest in cinema, particularly French and independent works. The scheme supports innovative, youth-centered programming, including special screenings, artistic workshops, festival juries and creative curatorial projects. By leveraging the Culture Pass, the initiative promotes an approach that is both participatory and emancipatory, encouraging young people to become critical and active participants in cultural life, rather than passive consumers (CNC, 2023b).

Industry practices

The *Young Audiences Group of the Association Française des Cinémas d'Art et Essai* (AFCAE) exemplifies a long-term strategy to cultivate film literacy among children and teenagers through curated screenings, educational materials and workshops designed to deepen cultural appreciation (AFCAE, 2024). Through its initiative *Les Ateliers Ma P'tite Cinémathèque* (My little Cinematheque workshops), AFCAE further strengthens regional arthouse cinemas by positioning them as hubs of creative and educational experiences.

Similarly, *Ciné Junior*, one of the most established youth film festivals in France, supports both the artistic development of young viewers and the recognition of new filmmakers. By combining a large-



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scale screening programme with workshops and international competitions, the festival functions as both a cultural and professional springboard (Ciné Junior, 2025).

Other national efforts, such as the *Jeune Public* (Young public) programme by the National Agency for Regional Cinema Development, ensure access to quality cinematic education beyond metropolitan areas. By collaborating with *La Cinémathèque française* (French Cinematheque) and funding thematic workshops, the initiative prioritises underserved communities and reinforces cinema's role as a tool for critical thinking and social connection (Cinémathèque française, n.d.). Regionally, *Cinemas Indépendants de Nouvelle-Aquitaine* (Nouvelle-Aquitaines' Independent Cinemas) (CINA) engages volunteers in civic service to help bridge young people with independent cinemas, emphasising hands-on experience and community integration (CINA, 2024). Meanwhile, *L'Oeuf à la cOque* promotes inclusive audiovisual education through participatory filmmaking workshops that democratise media creation across all ages and backgrounds (L'Oeuf à la cOque, n.d.).

Film festivals

France has given a significant place to young people who aspire to, apply within, or experiment in the film industry. The wide range of festivals and the diverse spaces created for this community reflect a strong cultural and institutional commitment to supporting emerging talent. These opportunities are not only abundant, but also meaningful, offering young filmmakers numerous ways to participate and showcase their work to broader audiences. These events are more than just showcases, they create dedicated spaces for young talents to experiment, express and evolve within a vibrant community that values diversity and innovation. *Kira Kitsopanidou*, Professor at Sorbonne Nouvelle -Director of the Department of Arts & Media, underscores the dual role of both innovation and accessibility in shaping the cultural engagement of young audiences in France. She highlights that “young audiences are, in a way, already cosmopolitan and open to the world,” and stresses the need to prioritise innovation and actively embrace new forms of creation, especially within filmmaking. This imperative, she says, “is closely linked to the broader challenge of media literacy and image education, which remains a crucial area for development in the French context” (Interview April, 2025).

The *Image'IN initiative*, established in 2005, stands as a regional beacon for emerging filmmakers in the departments of Aisne, Oise and Somme. By celebrating creativity and the richness of diverse perspectives, it demonstrates how collective expression can fuel artistic innovation and empower young voices in cinema (Image'IN, 2024).



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Similarly, the *Aisne International Youth Festival*, founded in 1983, specifically targets audiences aged 3 to 18. Its traveling format and emphasis on intercultural exchange allow young viewers and creators to interact with global perspectives, cultivating critical thinking and aesthetic appreciation through screenings, workshops and debates (Ciné-Jeune de l'Aisne, 2024).

The *Festival du Cinéma Européen in Lille* (Lille European Film Festival) exemplifies how festivals support student and emerging filmmakers through its short film competitions and national screenplay awards. Involving over 60 selected works each year, it extends its reach beyond traditional venues to hospitals, detention centers and retirement homes, thus democratising access to cinema and fostering a culture of inclusion and social engagement (Festival du Cinéma Européen de Lille, n.d.).

The *Orry-la-Ville Film Festival*, launched in 2021, further strengthens this ecosystem by spotlighting works by middle and high school students. Through masterclasses and direct interaction with professionals, the festival fosters early exposure to the film industry and encourages cultural participation from a young age (Orry Film Festival, n.d).

Cour(t)s d'Écoles provides a cross-border space for student filmmakers in animation. By connecting schools from Hauts-de-France and Belgium and featuring workshops and public screenings, it celebrates regional talent and enriches artistic dialogue across borders (Cellofan, 2024).

Expanding on the role of film festivals, Kitsopanidou concludes that: “Young audiences are, in a way, already cosmopolitan and open to the world. It is therefore essential to place greater emphasis on innovation and engage more actively with new forms of creation, particularly in filmmaking. In this regard, there is a major challenge around media literacy and image education in France” (Interview April, 2025).

5.4.4. Film Festivals in France Promoting Experimental Films

Experimental film festivals in France provide essential platforms for young filmmakers to explore unconventional cinematic forms, challenge industry norms and expand the boundaries of visual storytelling. These festivals create spaces of artistic freedom, where innovation, risk-taking and multidisciplinary are not only encouraged but celebrated.

As Juliette Prissard, General Delegate at EURO CINEMA, points out that, “diversity of creation is needed to express the diversity of culture across the 27 member states. It is necessary to be unified in order to express our differences because disruption and dissensus, as you say, are essential to a healthy democracy. This isn't just a feature of the French system, but of the European system as



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a whole.” She adds, “but I believe that without diversity clauses, there is nothing. In France, diversity clauses ensure the presence of diversity. They are obligations to produce and because they are obligations, they compel action. We are united in diversity and that diversity must not be erased. We need these obligations because they provide a steady foundation for social rights” (Interview February 2024).

However, events, such as *PRISME -Argentique du futur* embody this ethos by merging experimental cinema with performance, sound and visual arts. Since its launch in 2018, PRISME has highlighted cinema’s potential beyond the screen, inviting young creators to experiment in public spaces, museums and hybrid formats (Mire, n.d).

The *Mobile Film Festival* democratises filmmaking by stripping down barriers to entry: “1 Mobile, 1 Minute, 1 Film.” With over 5,000 submissions from 151 countries and €310,000 awarded in grants, it proves that powerful storytelling can emerge from limited means. For young and emerging filmmakers, particularly those with limited resources, this festival represents both an accessible entry point and a launchpad for recognition (Mobile Film Festival, 2023; CNC, 2020a).

The *Festival des cinémas différents et expérimentaux de Paris* (Paris Festival of Different and Experimental Cinemas) plays a unique role in introducing young audiences and creators to avant-garde cinema. By including experimental works by children and filmmakers under 18, it actively nurtures a new generation of visual artists and validates their creative expressions on an international stage (CJ Cinema, 2023).

Similarly, *Tous Courts Festival* in Aix-en-Provence provides an international competition focused on experimental short films, encouraging young filmmakers to engage with non-linear narratives and challenge mainstream cinematic paradigms. Born from a student initiative in 1983, it continues to champion emerging voices with bold artistic visions. Exemplary is the *Séquences Femmes*, a call for screenplays launched by the Femmes & Cinéma association, in which any secondary school class in France can take part, with the aim of raising awareness of gender equality and the fight against discrimination. The winning classes receive support in making their films and are then shown on French television and at feminist events and film festivals. (Festival Tous Courts, n.d.).

The *Cannes Indie Shorts Awards*, recognised by IMDb, is a prestigious space for short-form experimentation. Its emphasis on networking and international visibility offers independent filmmakers, including many young creatives, opportunities to connect, share and grow within the global film community (Cannes Indie Shorts Awards, 2023).



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In Toulouse, the *Traverse International Encounters* explores intersections between experimental cinema, video art, AI and performance. For young filmmakers working at the frontier of digital and immersive media, this festival is a vital arena for artistic exchange and recognition (Traverse Vidéo, 2023).

The *CINÉMONDES festival*, with its focus on auteur cinema and intercultural dialogue, supports young filmmakers in telling socially engaged stories that resonate globally. It provides an inclusive space where emerging talent can reflect on identity, politics and culture through cinema (Krysalide Diffusion, n.d.).

LILLE VJ FEST (Machine Sauvage) is a haven for audiovisual artists and VJs. It fosters collaboration between digital, analog and organic forms of media. Its open, dialogic atmosphere invites young creators to question societal norms through visual expression and to experiment without constraint (Machines Sauvage, 2023).

5.5. POLAND

5.5.1. Policy

Poland holds a significant position in European cinema as one of the major film production countries in the eastern part of the EU, with a rich film history that includes numerous internationally acclaimed directors, such as Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Roman Polanski, Agnieszka Holland and Paweł Pawlikowski. The country's cinematic achievements are marked by a unique blend of artistic innovation and socio-political commentary, influenced by the country's political context over the past decade (e.g. *The Green Border*, 2023 from Agnieszka Holland), which contributed to its recognition at prestigious film festivals worldwide and several domestic acclaimed film festivals. Additionally, the recent Ukrainian - Russian war induced a more diasporic filmmaking community with their own, specific needs in the country due to the willingness of the Polish people to support their neighbouring country. Furthermore, the establishment of the Polish Film Institute in 2005 has further bolstered the nation's film industry, supporting the production of a popular cinema as well as critically acclaimed films.

The Polish film industry has also made notable strides in tackling issues related to diversity, most prominently in promoting gender equality where the Polish film industry's track record seems to be adequate. Taking a closer look at Polish policies regarding gender equality, the Polish national constitution can be perceived as the basis to obtain gender equality in the Polish film industry. This



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constitution ensures gender equality, conforming to article 33 of the 1997 written constitution (Unesco, n.d.). Furthermore, some other legislations on a more national level can be found which – directly or indirectly – ensure equal rights for both men and women, e.g. the Labour Code (Int. 14). Another example is the Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation Act, which opposes discrimination faced by women – but this is not limited to the film industry – and was implemented in 2010.

In 2014, the *Stowarzyszenie Twórczyń Filmowych* (the Polish Female Filmmakers Association) was established to address the uneven distribution of funding and recognition for female filmmakers. This led to the Polish Film Institute committing to formal gender policies, including ensuring that at least 35% of the Committee of Experts evaluating funding applications are women. Nevertheless, according to Katsarova (2019), Poland does not succeed in providing its national film industry with a level of support exceeding the European average. The national average between 2012 and 2016 remains below 19.6%, matching the European level during that period. Katsarova is hereby endorsed by Grabowska and colleagues (n.d.), who refer to the European Gender Equality Index for 2021, which implies that adequate improvements regarding gender equality will be limited from 2016. This may be due to the – former – ruling right-wing parties who didn't seem to perceive women rights as an important agenda item (Human Rights Watch, 2019). However, the Polish Film Institute implemented several measures to enhance gender equality. One such measure is aimed at obtaining gender equal expert selection committees, which – in concreto – meant that 35% of the selection committee members needed to be female (Gober, 2020). One can also refer to the fact that many positions regarding the board of directors of the Polish Film Institute are equipped with women and at least half the members of the selection committees, responsible for advising the general director, are obliged to be women (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021). The Polish Film Institute also requires producers to compile reports regarding gender equality in their support appliances (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021). Additionally, there has been a growing focus on producing films that tackle minority issues and taboo topics, such as abortion and surrogate motherhood.

According to Human Rights Watch (2019), the objective to obtain gender equality in Poland remains a rather recent phenomenon and it continues to face resistance from the ruling right-wing parties, who campaigned against women rights (Gober, 2020). Similar critical voices were raised with regard to issues related to migration. In the recent past, some stories about the issue of migration caused quite some debate in Poland. This is elucidated by the case of Agnieszka Holland's story about Syrian refugees in her film *The Green Border* (2023), which was attacked by the Polish ruling right-



wing party and even measures of censorship were taken in consideration (Kosc, 2023). In this regard, the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language can be distinguished (Kwasniewski, 2005). Originating from 2005 and founded to support the cultural heritage and preservation of the language of ethnic minorities in Poland, this particular policy grants diasporic communities with a legal framework to shield the cultural heritage of Polish diasporic communities – undoubtedly not only limited to the audiovisual industries. By taking a closer look at the used definition of minorities regarding this legislation, it is patently that this definition does not consider all minorities, therefore limiting the protection and support of all minority groups. Nevertheless, according to Malgorzata Pek (n.d.), this particular law obligates funding institutes to consider allocating funding to minority groups and consequently supporting and fostering the cultural identity of those groups.

By contrast, issues related to youth and media seem to be higher on the agenda. As of recently, Poland used its presidency of the Council of the EU to encourage youth support on a supranational level – which indicates their devotion to talent development in the film industry (Maroutsis, 2025). Concerning youth support, the Polish Film Institute, in cooperation with the Minister of Culture and National Heritage and the General Board of the Polish Filmmakers Association, established the *Studio Munka* (Munk Studio), whose main objective is to provide financial and artistic support for emerging filmmakers during their debut films – as long as creators do not exceed the age of 40 years old –, hence fostering the quality of those audiovisual works. In doing so, this initiative mitigates the obstacles encountered by young, emerging filmmakers at the dawn of their career. To obtain this objective, the Polish Film Institute conceives a predetermined budget to allocate at audiovisual works from emerging filmmakers. Additionally, the Polish Film Institute provides financial support to numerous initiatives aimed at fostering talent development (Polish Film Institute, n.d.; Studio Munka, n.d.).

Another distinct initiative is the Film Education Operational Programme led by the PFI, which intends to encourage and support the ambition of young people in pursuing a career in the audiovisual industry by providing film education, talent development and ensured creative and innovative potential. The programme supports diverse schools – both primary as secondary –, universities and other institutions with film educational programmes. Additionally, further support is offered at arthouse cinema's with the ambition to foster film knowledge at their audiences (Polish Film Institute, 2023).

And finally, we can distinguish the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, which is working together with international partners worldwide – without overlooking the importance of Polish partnerships – to



support young filmmakers by providing them with new international contacts. However, the assistance of this institute is not limited solely to emerging filmmakers, but also supports established filmmakers. By doing so, the institute hopes to foster Polish culture globally (Wyslowka, 2017).

5.5.2. Industry practices

Despite the fact that the Polish film industry faced opposition from the former federal government in enhancing gender equality and supporting diasporic filmmakers, some bottom-up industry initiatives that encouraged the assistance of women and diasporic creators in the Polish film industry can be found. Nevertheless, supporting measures remain rather scarce in comparison to other countries. Regarding supporting initiatives for diasporic filmmakers, the encountered initiatives can all be linked to stimulating Ukrainian filmmakers and – by extension – all people affected by the war in Ukraine, therefore evoking the presumption that these initiatives are not everlasting. Additionally and in contrast to the two aforementioned groups, youth support in Poland is notable. Some interesting initiatives in the direction of diversity and equality are:

- *Creative Equality Fund*: this initiative was established by the global streaming giant Netflix and New Horizons festival, aspiring to increase Polish women's representational share in film, both before and after the camera (Dobroszek, 2021);
- *Filmmakers for Ukraine* is an initiative to financially assist Ukrainian war refugees in Poland. By providing people the possibility to donate a self chosen amount of money, Polish inhabitants can support Ukrainian refugees financially. On the Filmmakers for Ukraine website, some other initiatives to support Ukrainian filmmakers can be found (Filmmakers for Ukraine, n.d.);
- *First Film programme*: this initiative provides youth who are passionate about film, with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in filmmaking (SFP, 2022);
- *Kobiety Filmu* (Women in Film) is an online – and informal – action group, assembling over 3000 members via the Facebook group and opposes gender inequality in the Polish film industry; this group constructed a Code of Ethics and Good Practices for the Polish film industry to alleviate awareness in relation to gender inequality and the concomitant hardships (Kobiety Filmu strona, n.d.; Filmweb, 2020);
- *National Chamber of Audiovisual Producers*: this organisation is, together with the Polish Film Institute, involved in an initiative which offers Ukrainian war refugees the possibility to work in the Polish film industry, therefore being an 'alternative' – and presumably a temporary – initiative in supporting diasporic filmmakers (KIPA, n.d.);



- *Polish Cinema of Young Viewers*: this project promotes Polish cinema at youth by organising free film screenings (SFP, 2025);
- *Stowarzyszenie Twórczyń Filmowych*: The Polish Female Filmmakers Association was endowed in 2014 and is an online action group on Facebook, which can be compared to the *Kobiety Filmu Strona* (Polish Female Filmmakers Association, n.d.);
- *Young Horizons Industry* is part of the International Film Festival Young Horizons and organises, among others, workshops with the sole aim to enhance the starting and promising careers of young filmmakers (Young Horizons Industry, n.d.);
- *Young Poland programme*: this initiative grants the opportunity to young creators to gain a scholarship, awarded by the National Centre for Culture and was initially granted in 2004 (Czwórka Polskie Radio, 2024);

What follows are six arbitrarily chosen aforementioned highlighted initiatives, which will be discussed in more detail.

The *Kobiety Filmu* – Women in Film – was founded following the example of worldwide fellow women and aspires to enlarge the percentage of women acquiring film funding. According to the collective and the analyzed data of the Polish Film Institute, only 13% of funding is allocated to a female director.¹⁰ Therefore, Women in Film desires to tackle the Polish gender inequality by organising a conference and furnishing the audience with some best practices originating from Europe. This conference was organised on September 21, 2018 during the Gdynia Film Festival, which is one of Europe's most historic film festivals. Women in film can be perceived as a merely informal organisation, with approximately 3000 female Polish film industry professionals endorsing the initiative (*Kobiety Filmu strona*, n.d.; Filmweb, 2020).

The Code of Ethics and Good Practices is an initiative of *Kobiety Filmu* (Women in Film) and was founded under the supervision of Joanna Bielak. This particularly initiative's main objective is to enhance gender equality among film industry professionals and thus foster audiovisual innovation:

“The code is to oblige not only employers to observe ethical principles, but also the people employed by them, who express their readiness to take care of the institution and co-workers and prevent situations in which private interests exceed the public good. Therefore, the Code is a declaration of both parties to comply with the principles contained therein” (Filmweb, 2020).

¹⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/women-in-film-event/16808d7db9>



The Code was inspired by other, successful stories across Europe and was initialised with help of female film professionals, HR departments and psychologists. With this Code, the creators aim to persuade managers and production companies of the existence of boundaries that women in film face (Filmweb, 2020).

The *National Chamber of Audiovisual Producers in Poland* has put some information on their website on how to bolster Ukrainian war refugees – not limited to filmmakers. By offering possibilities to help Ukrainian filmmakers portraying the warzones in Ukraine, for example by sending audiovisual material, the initiative provides Ukrainian filmmakers with ongoing opportunities in narrating stories that should never be restrained. To accomplish this objective, the Polish Film Academy initiated the collection of information, compiled by a general e-mail address in a central place. Additionally, the Polish Film Institute presents job opportunities in film on their website for Ukrainian filmmakers fleeing from the war (KIPA, n.d.).

On the web page *Filmmakers for Ukraine*, a lot of initiatives to support Ukrainian war refugees can be found, although those initiatives go beyond the assistance of Ukrainian filmmakers. Sympathisers can find numerous and various initiatives on the website to donate money directly to Ukrainian filmmakers or – if preferred – they can choose to donate via a bank transfer, whereupon the Filmmakers for Ukraine determines the intended purpose of the money. Although these measures and initiatives are non-structural and temporary, their significance may not be underestimated (Filmmakers for Ukraine, n.d.).

The *First Film programme* – organised and funded by the Wladyslaw Ślesicki Film Foundation – provides ambitious young people – aged 18 till 26 years old, dreaming of a filmmaking career in all profiles (i.e. directing, editing, camera operators, etc.) – with the opportunity to craft their own films or documentary shorts, while supervised by more experienced filmmakers. Before admission, interested candidates need to apply and – after a first round of selections – will then be invited to convince the supervisors that they are the right fit. Eventually, 15 students will be selected to participate in the programme. Furthermore, the short films will have the opportunity to be screened at the Millenium Docs Against Gravity Film Festival. The programme, organised in Warsaw, has a duration of 6 months, starting in June and ending in December (SFP, 2022).

The *Polish Cinema of Young Viewer* project is part of the *Polish Filmmakers Association*, which attempts to amplify the likeability of Polish cinema and, additionally, to foster positive feelings among young people regarding this peculiar cinema style. The project aspires to enlarge the talent pool of young filmmakers and, consequently, to ensure the future of the Polish cinema. This objective is



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pursued by providing film screenings for students, schools and young people, but also by providing film education (SFP, 2025).

5.5.3. Film festivals

Poland has a vivid film festival scene, with quite some women's oriented festivals, youth festivals and other initiatives aiming at giving a platform for diasporic filmmakers. On top of this, most major film festivals provide a distinct part of their programme to women and youth; this is, for instance, the case for the *Nowe Horyzonty* (New Horizons) and OFF Camera film festivals (personal communication, March 25, 2025). Regarding diasporic filmmakers, quite some film festivals give attention to the Ukrainian diaspora in Poland. Important festival initiatives with regard to women, youth and diasporic cinema, are:

- *Barrier-Free Cinema Festival*: This unique initiative connects the world of film and accessibility, while promoting equality in access to film culture (Ckzamek, n.d.);
- *Bulbamovie* is a film festival devoted to the Belarusian diaspora in Poland and originated in 2014 (Bulbamovie, n.d.);
- *Cinema in Sneakers Film Festival for Children and Youth*: this festival emerged in 2013 with the sole ambition to create a film festival dedicated to children (Filmfreeway, n.d.b);
- *Cinema on the Border* is the largest review of films from Polish, Czech Republic and Slovakia. This is the only film event that has occurred for over two decades in one city, but on both sides of the border – in Polish and Czech Cieszyn (Kino na Granicy, n.d.);
- *Demakijaż – Festiwal Kina Kobiet* (Makeup Removal – Women's Cinema Festival) is a festival, founded in 2016, screening international films with women, both as directors/camera operators/etc. or as actresses and is dedicated to depicting a more realistic and richer image of women (Filmfreeway, n.d.e);
- *Five Flavours Film Festival*: this festival aims at screening Southeastern and Eastern Asian films (Five Flavours, n.d.);
- *LGBT+ Film Festival* is the largest festival on this subject in Central and Eastern Europe, taking place annually since 2010. It presents feature films, documentaries and short films related to the experiences of LGBTQ+ people. The festival takes place in many Polish cities, for example Warsaw, Krakow, Poznań, Wrocław, Łódź, Konin, Gdańsk, Bydgoszcz and Szczecin. The festival also includes accompanying events, such as the Art Stage, promoting queer work by artists from Poland and Europe (LGBT+ Film Festival, n.d.);



- *Lubuskie Film Summer* is a festival dedicated to feature films from post-communist countries of Europe (1969) (Lubuskie Film Summer Festival, n.d.);
- *HER Docs Films Festival* is a film festival showcasing only documentaries directed by women and emerged in 2020 in Warsaw. The first edition occurred in the Kinoteka Cinema, Warsaw, early March—celebrating International Women’s Day (Humanity in Action Polska, 2020);
- *International Film Festival for Children and Youth KINOLUB* is aimed at young children from 4 until 18 years old and is held in both arthouse cinemas as cultural institutions in the south of Poland, featuring both full-length films and short films (Kinolub, n.d.);
- *International Young Audience Film Festival Ale Kino!* screens both feature films as short films, varying from animations to documentaries, intended for young children to adults and is organised in Poznan (Ale Kino, n.d.);
- *Jewish Motifs: International Film Festival*: this festival is a Polish film festival dedicated towards the Jewish society in Poland (Jewish motifs, n.d.);
- *Krakow Film Festival*: this major general festival dedicates a part of its programme to young people (Krakow Film Festival, n.d.);
- *Mastercard OFF Camera International Festival of Independent Cinema* can be found in Krakow and takes place by the end of April and the beginning of May (OFF Camera, n.d.);
- *Millennium Docs Against Gravity* is a documentary film festival featuring – among others – documentary films narrating the story about women who fight for justice and equality (Millennium Docs Against Gravity, n.d.);
- *Młode Horyzonty Festiwal* (International Film Festival Young Horizons) is a Polish film festival, screening all sorts of movies aimed at young audiences and appears each year at the end of September – beginning of October. *Młode Horyzonty festiwal* was firstly organised in 2013 (Young Horizons International Film Festival, n.d.);
- *Nowe Horyzonty* (New Horizons) is a film festival established in 2001 in Wroclaw and dedicates a part of the festival to women (Nowe Horyzonty, n.d.);
- *Place of Women’s Festival*: this festival organised its 19th edition in 2024 and can be found in Slupsk; the festival is not only limited to film screenings, but also organises workshops, yoga sessions and film screenings (Slupsk, 2024);



- *Polish Film Festival*: this festival in Gdynia is up to its 49th edition, both screening feature and short films and is acknowledged as the oldest film festival of Poland. The festival aims to support young filmmakers, as noted by Joanna Lapinska, the festivals' Artistic Director (Festiwal Polskich Filmów Fabularnych, n.d.);
- *Transatlantyk Festival*: this festival emerged in 2011, dedicated the 2017 edition to women and – more precisely – to their work in the film industry. This specific edition was called “The Power of Woman” (SoundTrackFest, n.d.);
- *Ukraina! Festiwal Filmowy* (Ukraine! Film Festival) is a Polish film festival dedicated to the Ukrainian diaspora in Poland and celebrates the Ukrainian cinematography, thereby screening the most meritorious Ukrainian films since 2016 (Ukraina Festiwal Filmowy, n.d.a; Ukraina Festiwal Filmowy, n.d.b);
- *WAMA Film Festival* is held in Olsztyn, referring to the multiculturalism of the region of Warmia and Mazury, which is characterised by the largest number of national and ethnic minorities in Poland. The festival's theme focuses on this region's cultural diversity and history (WAMA Film Festival, n.d.);
- *Youth and Film Festival*: this film festival is dedicated to debut films and is known as the oldest film festival in Poland (Młodzi i Film, n.d.).

What follows are six self-chosen highlights of the above, which caters us with the possibility to discuss some of the aforementioned initiatives in more detail.

HER Docs Film Festival exemplifies an activist women's film festival in Warsaw, Poland, which emerged in 2018 when the president of Humanity in Action (HIA) Poland, Monika Mazur-Rafał and Maja Szydłowska, a lawyer, met during the Humanity in Action Fellowship in Berlin. Realising the necessity of combining their efforts, they identified film as one of the most effective tools for activism, as it raises awareness and can spark social change. Mazur-Rafał and Szydłowska intend to highlight female perspectives, while recognising the ongoing underrepresentation of women in the Polish film festival sector. In response, they collaborated with Humanity in Action Poland to establish HER Docs Film Festival in 2020, aspiring not only to influence policy and the film industry, but also to engage and mobilise an activist audience by addressing the lack of female representation in the film festival sector and thus contributing to the increasement of the visibility of women in cinema. In order to enhance the visibility, the film festival provides a platform for the multiplicity and diversity of female voices in documentary cinema. A deliberate decision was made to screen only films directed by women, offering a more nuanced perspective on society. Additionally, the film festival does not



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shy away from addressing urgent social issues, such as gender-based violence, ethnic conflicts and the climate crisis. Therefore, HER Docs Film Festival focuses on non-fiction works by female filmmakers (Humanity in Action Polska, 2020).

The *Women's Film/Art Festival* in Demakijaž is organised annually by the Fundacja Camera Femina and fosters the participation of women and LGBTQ+ individuals in public life. According to this mission, the festival aims to promote and include female cinematic works. In 2022, the festival was transformed into an arts festival, emphasising the role of art in driving social change. Consequently and in addition to films directed by and about women, the festival now also features other art forms, such as theater and literature. The underlying premise is that art can be used to raise awareness about gender (in)equality and women's rights (Fundacja Camera Femina, n.d.).

Due to the Russian – Ukrainian war, an increasing *number of Ukrainian inhabitants departed to Poland. Therefore, the* Ukraine Film Festival, organised by the Luna Plus Foundation and being the only Polish film festival focusing solely on Ukrainians, aims to foster mutual understanding and dialogue by using film as a medium to connect both nationalities (Polsko-Ukraińska Izba Gospodarcza, 2023; Ukraina Festiwal Filmowy, 2025a; Ukraina Festiwal Filmowy, 2025b). Due to its lack of recognition, in its early years, promoting Ukrainian cinema in Poland was therefore a challenge. The festival's director, Beata Bierońska-Lach, describes this cinema style as European with an Eastern touch. And finally, the programme includes a diverse selection of documentaries, feature films, short films and animations (Ukraina Festiwal Filmowy, n.d.a).

The *Bulbamovie Festival* – founded in 2014 by a Polish documentary filmmaker, Janusz Gawryluk – is dedicated to Belarussian filmmakers and distinguishes itself by its ongoing pursuit of new talent (Mirash, 2024). After operating independently until 2017, the film festival became part of the LISTAPAD International Film Festival, which is organised by the Belarusian state since 2021 (Gawryluk, 2024). In 2021, after being discarded in consequence of being too extreme, the festival relocated to Warsaw, Poland (Gawryluk, 2024). In 2024, a Belarussian court in Pinsk even declared the festival's Facebook page extremist (Gawryluk, 2024). Although independent Belarussian cinema can be considered as an exile cinema, it continues to exist, albeit in Poland (Mirash, 2024).

Kinolub is a film festival dedicated to honoring films produced by children and young people. Since 2015, the IKS Foundation – a non-governmental research institution focused on education – has organised this particular film festival (Fundacja Rektorów Polskich, n.d; Kinolub, n.d.). *Kinolub* prioritises film education and organises screenings in both urban and rural areas of southern Poland. Moreover, the programme targets children and young people aged 4 to 18 years old, featuring a



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selection of films from around the globe, often distinguished by their artistic expression and socially significant themes. By providing an accessible introduction to cultural engagement, the film festival helps to cultivate the next generation of cinema audiences. The awards are allocated by a jury consisting of both adults and children, thus ensuring a diverse and inclusive evaluation process. In addition to a financial award, prizewinners receive a prestigious Kinolot statuette. Committed to making film and cinema accessible to young audiences, the festival attracts approximately 11,000 visitors annually (Kinolub, n.d.).

The *Young Horizons International Film Festival's* main objective is to provide young audiences a day to remember. In 2025, the film festival will occur in at least twenty different cities across Poland and, being a hybrid film festival, the organisation offers both on-site and online film screenings. Additionally, workshops and meet & greets with professional filmmakers are provided. Furthermore, visitors can explore Medialab, which is an interactive space offering children the possibility to fully immerse in the world of cinema through virtual reality (VR) and animations. And finally, regarding film assessment, both jury and audience will have the opportunity to evaluate a selection of films, including the latest releases (Young Horizons International Film Festival, n.d.).

5.6. Spain

5.6.1. Policy

Representing one of the major film industries in Europe, contemporary Spanish cinema is characterised by a multifaceted film culture, ranging from popular cinema aimed at broad audiences, to an internationally acclaimed auteur-driven art-house tradition and a dynamic, more experimental film scene. The arrival of big streaming platforms like Netflix strengthened the Spanish audiovisual industry's international appeal. Over the last decades, Spain has also developed an important set of film policy measures, both at a national and regional level, which tried to help the industry to grow, prosper, as well as to become more inclusive (Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024). Although, according to Zapatero (2025), these measures gave the greatest importance to the development of the industry, they also address possible stigmas and issues of diversity in the sector (Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024). When reflecting upon these issues, one of our Spanish interviewees (Interview March 2025) pointed out that policymaking in Spain is largely decentralised, with significant authority vested in regional governments.

The two main institutions central in this development have been the National Film Agency *Instituto de la Cinematografía y de las Artes Audiovisuales* (hereafter ICAA) and the *Asociación de Mujeres*



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Cineastas y de Medios Audiovisuales (CIMA), who both actively strive towards improving gender equality in the sector.

According to this interviewee (Interview March 2025), who is a professor, much work has been done in Spain in the direction of considerable attention and awareness regarding the presence and the representation of women in the industry—both behind the camera and on the screen. Spain has been invoking measures against gender inequality in the film industry for years. A policy milestone was Article 40 of the *Ley del Cine y de la Cultura Audiovisual* in 2007, which entrusts ICAA with the liability to endorse gender equality within the sector (stating that “parity between men and women shall be sought, in accordance with the Plan for Gender Equality in the General State Administration”).¹¹ This resulted in a more balanced representation within selection and funding committees (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021, 31-33). Since 2011, films can also obtain the label “Especially Recommended for the Promotion of Gender Equality”, an initiative which intends to amplify awareness among audiences regarding gender-equal representations on screen and which emphasises content rather than the filmmakers’ identity (Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024).

Although it remains difficult to resolve the structural causes of the problem, in the last decade certain policy adjustments applied to the 2007 Film Law have played a pivotal role; among them *El Real Decreto 1084/2015* (the Royal Decree 1084/2015, cf. infra) and its later modification in 2020 (*El Real Decreto 1090/2020*) stand out (Zapatero, 2025): with this latter modification, public funding up to 75% was introduced for films “exclusively directed by women”.¹²

Spain is further recognised for its quota system, which appears to be competent and ensures that at least 35% of general funding and 40% of selective funding is allocated to female directors, thus encouraging enhanced gender balance. For instance, in 2021, the percentage of public funding allocated to female directors increased to 49% of the selective funding and 38% of the generic funding. Additionally, the subsidy scoring system emboldens a more favorable assessment of projects led by female filmmakers (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021, 31-33). The above-mentioned interviewee (Interview March 2025) asserts that there is ongoing polarisation regarding opinions on the quota system in Spain. However, the majority currently appears to be in favor of those quotas. She further asserts that, in the absence of effective equality, this is still preferable to having nothing at all. The successful presence of Spanish films at international film festivals in the last year seem

¹¹ Translation of: “Asimismo, se procurará la paridad entre hombres y mujeres, de acuerdo con el Plan para la igualdad de género en la Administración General del Estado.” See <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2007-22439>.

¹² Translation of “realizadas exclusivamente por directoras” (Zapatero, 2025, p. 1).



to prove the effectiveness of these measures: in February 2022, the Spanish film director Carla Simó was awarded the Golden Bear during the 72nd Berlinale for her film *Alcarràs*. Her success generated a broader discussion on new women's position within the national film industry, which continued well into the next year, when Sofia Otero (from Estibaliz Urresola's *20.000 especies de Abejas*) was awarded the Silver Bear for Best Actress in 2023. That year, in the 71st edition of the San Sebastián Film Festival, the Golden Shell went for the first time to a Spanish female filmmaker, Jaione Camborda, for *O Corno*. The prize came only months after Elena Martín's *Creatura* had been awarded the Best European Film at Cannes's *Quinzaine des cinéastes*.

Despite these developments, challenges still remain. Additionally, films directed by women are still frequently categorised as “difficult audiovisual works”¹³, which makes them eligible for additional public support (Zapatero, 2025; Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024). *El Real Decreto 1084/2015* – the Royal Decree 1084/2015 (Olswang, n.d.); which made some adjustments to the still in effect 2007 Film Law – introduced the concept of “difficult audiovisual works” (Zapatero, 2025), establishing specific funding rules for projects originating from emerging filmmakers with production budgets limited to 300.000 euros, short films, debut works and productions in co-official languages¹⁴ like Catalan and Vasque. One of the interviewees (Interview March 2025) asserted that while it remains important to recognise these works, this classification still reinforces the idea that such films only receive support due to gender rather than their intrinsic merit, hereby perpetuating structural inequalities in the sector (Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024). Zapatero (2025) elucidates it as a compelling step for improving the position of women in the sector. Although he is positive regarding this measure, it also sparks a debate about the negative connotations.

More recently, in 2024, the Minister of Culture, Ernest Urtasun, established the Plan de Igualdad 2024-2026 en la Cultura to enhance gender equality. This plan reinforces existing quotas, prioritises female filmmakers in funding decisions and allocates resources for research on gender equality. However, it is still too early to assess its impact as this plan was only announced in December 2024 (Ministerio de Cultura, 2024).

In 2021, the Spanish government launched the *Spain, Audiovisual Hub of Europe* initiative to enhance the international position of Spanish audiovisual productions and, consequently, foster its attractiveness regarding foreign investments. This plan provides foreign professionals – particularly

¹³ Translation of “obras audiovisuales difíciles” (Zapatero, 2025, p. 1).

¹⁴ Besides Castilian Spanish, which is the official language in Spain, four different so-called co-official languages can be distinguished and are officially recognised by the Spanish Constitution, Article 3: Catalan, Galician, Valencian and Basque. See <https://mpt.gob.es/en/politica-territorial/autonomica/Lenguas-cooficiales.html>.



those originating from outside the EU – with lesser obstacles to pursue a career in Spain by reducing administrative barriers and thus facilitating the implementation of coproductions (Gobierno De España, n.d.). Consequently, this initiative primarily aims to attract foreign investments and professionals, rather than addressing the needs of domestic filmmakers with diasporic backgrounds.

At the European level, the EU Youth Strategy emphasises engagement, connection and empowerment of young people as its core principles (European Commission, n.d.; European Union, n.d.). It is a framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027, which aims at fostering youth participation in democratic life and it equally supports social and civic engagement in order to ensure that all young people have the necessary resources to take part in society. In Spain, the *Consejo de la Juventud de España* (CJE, Spanish Youth Council), a platform of more than 60 youth organisations – in collaboration with the state administration, civil society and autonomous regions – established in 2022 the *Estrategia Juventud 2030* (Youth Strategy 2030) (European Commission, 2023c; Ministerio de Juventud e Infancia, 2022). This national strategy can be perceived as the national implementation of the EU Youth Strategy, as the European framework provides overarching guidelines (European Commission, n.d.; European Commission, 2023c).

A key article regarding youth support in the Spanish National Constitution is Article 48, which states that public authorities are obliged to promote the free participation of young people in social, cultural and economic life. However, the Spanish Constitution does not contain a specific and fully developed legislation dedicated to youth policy. At the national level, institutions, such as the *Instituto de la Juventud* (INJUVE) (Spanish Youth Institute) and the Interministerial Youth Commission bear responsibilities concerning decisions related to youth affairs. Additionally, the Spanish Youth Council coordinates the relationship between policymakers and youth interest groups (European Commission, 2023b).

The initiative, *A Renewed Partnership with Youth*, represents an extensive inter-ministerial collaboration led by the *Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030* (Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030). Its primary objective is to develop a coherent and effective youth policy, with a strong focus on supporting young people facing structural disadvantages, including women, LGBTQ+ people and diasporic communities. Additionally, the initiative seeks to expand knowledge regarding these minority groups to enhance policy effectiveness (European Commission, 2023c).

One of our Spanish interviewees (Interview March 2025) indicates that the Spanish academy has the potential to foster change. However, a lack of diversity and overall issues remain, in particular regarding intersectionality. A notable example is the establishment of the Delegation of Migrant and



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Racialised Women in the Film Industry in 2021, which operates within CIMA and advocates for preeminent inclusivity (Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024). While the impact of the *Plan de Igualdad* 2024-2026 still needs to be assessed, the structural causes of inequality have yet to be thoroughly addressed. Nevertheless, continuing efforts signal a good starting point and a commitment to evolve to a more inclusive Spanish film industry (Le Lab Femmes de Cinéma, 2021; Herrero-De-la-Fuente et al., 2022; Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024).

5.6.2. Industry practices

According to an interviewee (Interview March 2025) there is significant media attention regarding women in the Spanish film industry. This visibility extends beyond governmental policies and is reflected in industry-wide trends. A clear example is the prestigious *Premios Goya* (or Goya Awards) where the film category the “mejor dirección novel” (Zapatero, 2025, p. 1), or “Best New Direction” consistently was awarded to women between 2018 and 2024; hereby being a confirmation for the enhanced and still growing visibility of women in the Spanish film industry (Zapatero, 2025; Ciné Watch, 2024; Roxborough, 2025). Moreover, female filmmakers themselves are driving change, as seen in initiatives like *La Bonne* in Barcelona, or the “*Centre de Cultura de Dones Francesca Bonnemaison*” (Francesca Bonnemaison Women’s Cultural Center) (LaBonne, n.d.a). This is a hub for feminist projects, specialising in audiovisual and performance arts and which uses culture as a tool for societal change (LaBonne, n.d.a).

Female makers are also establishing collectives themselves to accomplish enhanced gender equality (Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024). Besides the national *Asociación de Mujeres Cineastas y de Medios Audiovisuales*, or CIMA, regional associations advocate for more women in the Spanish film industry, such as *Dones Visuals* in Catalonia, or *Dona i Cinema* in Valencia (CIMA, n.d.; Dones Visuals, n.d.; Dona I Cinema, n.d.a). In 2018, those associations, together with MIA, formed the Inter-territorial Working Group for Equality in Audiovisual 50/50 (Calderón-Sandoval, 2021; Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024; Dona I Cinema, n.d.a). Additionally, efforts are being made to enhance inclusivity for young people in the industry. Many of these actions and organisations obtained financial support from – mostly – the EU (A Bao A Qu, 2020; Vilnius Short Film Festival, 2023; Jovesólides, 2024). Among the interesting sector associations with regard to gender, are:

- *Asociación de Mujeres de los Medios Audiovisuales* (AMMA, Murcia) is a regional non-profit organisation that intends to support women in the audiovisual sector in the Murcia region



and which upholds the *Ley de Igualdad* and enhance the visibility of female-created works (Asociación de Mujeres de los Medios Audiovisuales de Murcia, n.d);

- *Asociación Andaluza de Mujeres de los Medios Audiovisuales (AAMMA)*, or the Andalusian Association of Women in Audiovisual Media, is an independent collective advocating for the rights and access of female professionals within the film industry (Asociación de Mujeres de los Medios Audiovisuales de Murcia, n.d);
- *CIMA* (Association of Women Filmmakers and Audiovisual Media in Spain) is an influential organisation advocating for gender equality in Spanish cinema (Jansson & Calderón-Sandoval, 2024), which launched the CIMA Impulsa with the aim of improving industry access for female screenwriters (Herrero-De-la-Fuente et al., 2022);
- *Dona I Cinema*, Valencia, is an association dedicated to increasing the visibility of women's creative work, therefore focusing on interculturality and dialogue (Dona I Cinema, n.d.a);
- *Dones Visuals*, Catalonia is a non-profit organisation working on the increased presence of women in Spain's male-dominated audiovisual sector (Dones Visuals, n.d);
- *Hemen*, Basque Country, is an association devoted to ameliorate the visibility of female creators in theater and the audiovisual sector (Hemen, n.d.).

Alongside associations and other efforts to promote gender equality, the Spanish audiovisual sector has also implemented various programmes addressing youth and migration. Notable among these are:

- *Black View* is an initiative with the primary objective being the enhancement of black artists careers in the Spanish audiovisual industry (The Black View, n.d.);
- *Campus de Verano* of the Academia de Cine, or the Film Academy Summer Campus, an initiative promoting diversity in the Spanish film sector (Academia De Cine, n.d.);
- *Elephant Man Project*, a Euro-Mediterranean initiative led by Jovesólides to promote youth inclusion in art and video (Jovesólides, 2024);
- *Film in Hospital* project is a collaboration between different institutions, including JEF (Belgium) and provides access for hospitalised children to film festivals and educational content (Creative Europe, 2024);
- ODA, or the *Observatorio de la Diversidad en los Medios Audiovisuales de España* (Observatory of Diversity in Audiovisual Media), analyzes the representation of minority



groups in Spanish audiovisual media (Observatorio de la Diversidad en los Medios Audiovisuales, n.d.);

- *Pack Màgic* is a distributor promoting audiovisual education and social values and is part of Drac Màgic (a social initiative cooperative founded in 1971, dedicated to study and disseminate audiovisual culture) (Pack Magic, n.d.b; Drag Màgic, n.d.).
- Special entrance exams in art and film schools: designed for applicants without formal diplomas to attract a more diverse talent pool (Salgado & Patuzzi, 2022).
- *Young Film Programmers for Young Audiences* is a seminar promoting youth engagement in film selection and curation (Vilnius Short Film Festival, 2023).

What follows are six self-chosen industry highlights of the above which caters us with the possibility to discuss some of the initiatives in more detail.

CIMA is a collective of women from diverse backgrounds within the film and audiovisual sector. Committed to fostering gender equality in the industry, CIMA develops various programmes tailored to the peculiar needs of female professionals. Reports indicate that films directed by women remain a minority, not exceeding the emblematic 40% threshold. Additionally, women also continue to face financial disadvantages, limiting their opportunities and depriving future generations of role models. Therefore, CIMA advocates for immediate action to improve the visibility and status of women in the industry. Of course, some sub initiatives can be found. One of the principal initiatives is CIMA Impulsa. Another programme, CIMA-Mentoring 1-to-1, provides individual mentorship for professionals across various technical, artistic and creative disciplines within the audiovisual sector. For young talents aged 16 to 23, CIMA runs the CIMA10 programme, a screenwriting and production competition aimed at promoting gender equality in storytelling. These initiatives—funded by Netflix, the ICAA and Prime Video—contribute to fostering a more inclusive and equitable audiovisual industry (CIMA, n.d.). According to an interviewee (Int. 12), these actions appear to be effective. Additionally, by having an undeniable presence across various regions in Spain – operating in various Spanish regions – CIMA serves as a vital partner for policymakers. Its focus extends to areas beyond gender equity, such as actress representation, independent cinema, LGBTQ+ inclusion, education, screenwriting, research and sustainability; with a particular attention to professionals from diverse backgrounds (CIMA, n.d.).

CIMA Impulsa assists both emerging and experienced female screenwriters in advancing their audiovisual careers. Each year, the programme selects twenty projects from creators in Spain and Latin America, including feature films, documentaries and animated series. Participants receive



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expert mentorship, with screenwriters refining their scripts and producers receiving guidance on budgeting, financing and production planning. Additionally, industry professionals are organising specialised training programmes aimed at female screenwriters. The programme concludes with a networking and pitching event where participants present their projects to key industry leaders (CIMA Impulsa, n.d.). The project is supported by Netflix, with ICAA being one of the partners (CIMA, n.d.).

The *Campus de Verano* of the *Academia de Cine* is a programme designed to promote and raise awareness in respect to diversity and inclusion in the Spanish audiovisual sector. Launched in 2020, the project aims to encourage reflection on how audiovisual productions can enhance diversity in society (Academia De Cine, n.d.). Aspiring filmmakers are invited to participate by submitting a completed script. According to data from ODA, the representation of minority groups, such as characters of colour, remains challenging. In an attempt to address this, the programme prioritises diversity from the initial phases of production (Rivera, n.d.).

Black View, established by two Afro-Spanish filmmakers, intends to combat discrimination and racism in the audiovisual sector (Belinchon et al., 2020). Over time, more Afro-descendant professionals have joined the initiative, broadening its reach and impact. The main objective of the project is to increase the visibility of Black artists, offer training and support and normalise the representation of people of colour in audiovisual productions (Afroféminas, 2019). One of their key initiatives, the *Proyecto para una Sociedad Diversa*, seeks to close the research gap regarding gender and racial diversity (Black View, 2023). To solidify its position, the initiative actively collaborates with various organisations, including a partnership with the Zaragoza Film Festival (Afroféminas, 2019). And finally, Black View aspires to become a central reference point for Black artists in Spain.

Moving Cinema is a European project, launched in 2014 and led by the Catalan organisation A Bao A Qu, which is supported by the MEDIA Creative Europe programme. The project collaborates with partners from France, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Scotland, Slovenia, Serbia and the UK. The main goal of Moving Cinema is to transform young people into an active and engaged audience that truly appreciates cinema. To achieve this, the project primarily focuses on expanding young audiences' knowledge of film. Secondly, young people between the age of 12 and 19 years old are encouraged to independently explore Video-on-Demand (VOD) and to visit cinemas (Moving Cinema, n.d.). Moving Cinema organises a variety of activities, including participation in film festivals, access to films via VOD and Inside Cinema—an online platform that documents and provides insight into the creative filmmaking process. The project continuously evaluates its activities



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with a critical lens to improve and refine its approach. Through these efforts, different sectors—such as festival networks, cinemas, screening venues and educational institutions—collaborate to educate young people about European cinema. This not only fosters cinephilia but promotes European cinema among younger audiences as well (Moving Cinema, n.d.).

The *Elephant Man* project is a EU Erasmus+ project designed to cultivate social inclusion and active youth citizenship by establishing community-based meeting spaces through film laboratories in five Euro-Mediterranean countries: Spain (Jovesólides), Italy (CEFA), Poland (Strefa WolnoSłowa), Greece (AMAKA) and Lebanon (Lebanese Development Network). The project is led by the Valencian organisation Jovesólides. By engaging young people in creative audiovisual storytelling, the project endeavours to improve awareness, empowerment and participation, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive, tolerant and accessible European society. At the core of the initiative is the development of innovative approaches to social inclusion, with a particular priority on harnessing new media as a tool for engagement. To achieve this, the project consortium will implement a range of activities, including the training of youth workers in novel methodologies for social inclusion, the creation of a comprehensive training toolkit and the facilitation of workshops and web series targeting young participants. Furthermore, the project encourages the production of short films and a documentary exploring themes of identity, culminating in a dedicated film festival that showcases the creative outputs and narratives developed throughout the initiative. By leveraging the power of cinema as a medium for social change, The Elephant Man aims to provide young people with the tools to express themselves, address pressing social issues and actively contribute to shaping a more inclusive and democratic future (Jovesólides, 2024).

5.6.3. Film festivals

Although film festivals indicate progress in gender equality, diversity and inclusion (with the proportion of female award winners increasing; for instance, at the San Sebastián Film Festival in 2021, women received the most prestigious awards from the festival) (Associated Press, 2021), gender parity in selection committees is not yet assured. Although many film festivals now feature special sections dedicated to gender and other types of inequality and diversity (e.g., on migration, LGBTQ+), one interviewee (Int. 12) criticised that some festivals still lacked gender-balanced juries. Nevertheless, film festivals repeatedly devote part of its programme to women, young audiences and emerging filmmakers or are fully dedicated to these groups. Additionally, migrant film festivals perpetuate a crucial role in promoting the inclusion of migrants because they provide a platform for diasporic people to share their stories and experiences (Peralta & Simour, 2024; IOM, n.d.).



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Some of the interesting film festivals, which are partly or wholly devoted to issues of gender inequality, youth and migration, are:

- *Biennial International Dona i Cinema – Mujer y Cine* has been organised since 2011 by the Valencian organisation Dona i Cinema. The organisation aims to increase the visibility of women's works on both national and international levels and seeks to achieve this through the film festival as well (Dona I Cinema, n.d.b; Filmfreeway, n.d.a);
- *Cinema Jove International Film Festival* (Valencia) showcases films by young international filmmakers (Cinemajove, n.d.);
- *Escola la Pau Film Festival* is an initiative by AulaMedia aimed at introducing more young people to the world of cinema (Rodriguez, 2025). Aula Media itself is committed to promoting media literacy among educators and is recognised for its exemplary work, according to Willem;
- *Festival Cine por Mujeres* (Madrid) is an internationally renowned women's film festival in Spain, aimed at increasing visibility for female filmmakers (Films by Women, n.d.);
- *Gijón International Film Festival* includes *Enfant Terribles*, a section for children and young audiences (FICX, n.d.);
- *Málaga Film Festival* features a dedicated section solely focused on the protection of women's rights (Festival de Málaga, n.d.);
- *Mi Primer Festival* (My First Film Festival) is a film festival for children (2 till 12 years old) and families, organised in Barcelona and Madrid (Mi Primer Festival, n.d.);
- *Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones* (Barcelona), which is an internationally recognised women's film festival in Spain, focusing on highlighting female filmmakers' work (MIFDB, n.d.);
- *Punto de Vista Festival* features Moving Cinema Young Programmers x Punto de Vista, a programme for youth (16 till 22 years old) (Punto de Vista Festival, n.d.a; Punto de Vista Festival, n.d.b);
- *San Sebastián International Film Festival* hosts the Dama Youth Award, judged by a youth jury (San Sebastián International Film Festival, n.d.);
- *U22 Barcelona* is a short film festival for youth (16 till 24 years old), organised by the Joan Miró Foundation & Letto Collective (Fundació Joan Miró, n.d.);



- *Zinemakumeak gara!*, or Muestra de Cine Dirigido por Mujeres, Bilbao is a collective initiated by the Simone de Beauvoir Feminist Group for feminist discussion and theoretical development on feminism. In this context, the festival serves as a platform for using screenings to facilitate debates on women's issues (Zinemakumeak Gara, n.d.).

Some alternative/experimental film festivals that also focus on engaging young audiences:

- *FILMADRID* is a festival that embraces all genres, nationalities and formats. It plays a significant role in supporting emerging young talents. Along with the Polish New Horizons International Film Festival (see above), it is part of Smart7, a network of prestigious film festivals (FILMADRID International Film Festival, n.d.);
- *L'Alternativa, Festival de Cinema Independent de Barcelona* makes dedicated efforts each year to increasingly involve young people in cinema (see above) (L'Alternativa, n.d.);
- *Tarifa-Tangier African Film Festival* is a hybrid Spain-Morocco event fostering intercultural exchange and is expected to continue in 2025 (Festival de Cine Africano de Tarifa-Tánger, 2025; Hola Tarifa, n.d.).

What follows are six focus highlights of the above, therefore catering us with the possibility to discuss some of the film festivals in more detail.

The *Mostra Internacional de Films de Dones de Barcelona* (hereafter: MIFDB) is a feminist film festival that challenges the androcentric status quo. Established more than 30 years ago, the festival critically examines the construction of gender and power in cinematic narratives and visual representations. Committed to advocating for female authorship, MIFDB seeks to amplify underrepresented voices in film history. The festival adopts a politically activist approach while remaining non-competitive. By forgoing competition, MIFDB facilitates a more profound engagement with ethical and social discourses. Rooted in pedagogical activism, the festival's preliminary intention was to spark critical reflection on androcentrism in cinema. Additionally, MIFDB collaborates with *Drac Magic*, an organisation dedicated to film education, which also runs *Pack Magic*, a youth-focused initiative, which will further be elaborated upon in greater detail (MIFDB, n.d.).

On December 18, 2022, in honour of International Migrants Day, the Port of Spain office of the IOM hosted the Global Migration Film Festival. This special event aspires to foster dialogue regarding migration and increase awareness and understanding pertaining to the subject. Organised at Estate 101 in Maraval, the festival highlighted cultural integration and the opportunities migrants induce in society. Particular attention went to Venezuelan migrants and the cultural similarities between



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Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela. In addition to showcasing films, the event emphasised the importance of inclusion, diversity and the fight against discrimination and xenophobia. Additionally, it provides a platform for discussions concerning migration policies, social integration and the role of culture in connecting communities (IOM, n.d.).

The *Festival de Cine Africa Tarifa-Tangier* (FCAT) is a South-European cross-border festival organised in Tangier (Morocco) and Tarifa (Spain), dedicated to diasporic African filmmakers (Film-Documentaire, n.d.). Coordinated by the non-profit Al Tarad, the festival seeks to foster enhanced understanding amidst individuals with diverse backgrounds and reinforce African influences in the Spanish film industry. The transcontinental nature – spanning both Africa and Europe – and the significant focus on documentaries across various categories distinguishes this film festival (Film-Documentaire, n.d.). Cultural exchange is the festival's primary goal (Cooperación Español, 2024). The latest edition centred on Equatorial Guinea, while also celebrating African cinema as a whole. As a result, the festival assembles people from diverse cultures in both the industry and the audience (Cooperación Español, 2024; Guinea Ecuatorial Press, 2021).

The *Gijón International Film Festival* was originally established for children and young audiences but expanded its reach to a broader public. Nevertheless, its commitment to young viewers remains evident through its *Enfants Terribles* section, which aims to astonish the audiences of tomorrow. The film festival showcases films that premiered internationally at major film festivals - such as Cannes - but are being screened in Spain for the first time. It also seeks to highlight films that are not always accessible through mainstream distribution channels (Gijón, 2021). Emerging filmmakers are invited to submit their works for consideration, with the *Enfant Terribles Award* being adjudicated by a jury composed of young audiences (Gijón, 2021). The selected films frequently explore themes relevant to younger viewers, such as family and immigration, fostering both discussion and empathy among youth. Beyond film screenings, the film festival offers a wide range of complementary activities. Q&A sessions with filmmakers are a long-standing tradition of the film festival, designed to enhance the audience's critical thinking skills. Moreover, the film festival places a strong emphasis on film education and audiovisual literacy through creative workshops. A didactic guide, authored by critic Jesús Palacios, is also available for schools, providing educators with tools to engage with the screenings and prepare students for the viewing experience (Gijón, 2021).

Mi Primer Festival is an initiative of Associació Cultural MODIband, a cultural association specialising in programming children's films for cultural institutions. The film festival has an international scope and is aimed at children aged 2 to 12 years old, with the goal of introducing them to cinema in a fun and educational way (Mi Primer Festival, n.d.). Through this festival, young



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audiences get the opportunity to discover unique films from around the world. The selection is tailored to their perspective and complemented by engaging, interactive activities for schools, families and professionals. Special screenings with child-friendly introductions, creative workshops and opportunities to meet filmmakers are coordinated. Schools benefit from educational guides, interactive presentations, and competitions that encourage children to actively engage with film (Mi Primer Festival, n.d.). Additionally, the film festival performs as a meeting space for film professionals, providing them with a platform to share their work, discuss ideas and strengthen their network (Mi Primer Festival, n.d.).



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6. CONCLUSIONS

It is crucial to acknowledge a key reality in the European film industry: women, youth, and migrants, though often positioned on the fringes, continue to play an essential role in shaping its creative landscape. These fringes are not merely a product of circumstance, but the result of systemic structures that have historically limited visibility and access to resources for these groups. While challenges such as delayed recognition, inconsistent support, and the constant need to prove legitimacy remain, it is within these very spaces that some of the most innovative, culturally diverse, and bold storytelling emerges. Below is an overall assessment for each category.

6.1. Women

Among the three groups examined in this report, women, youth and migrants, policies and initiatives targeting women in the film and audiovisual industries are the most established. Progress in this area is largely driven by a combination of public policy, activist movements advocating for gender rights and women-focused film festivals and networks. These efforts have collectively increased awareness, data collection and concrete support measures.

France clearly stands out as a frontrunner. It offers a comprehensive model that combines national policy frameworks with active institutional support. Good practices include regular gender-disaggregated data collection, financial incentives for projects led by women, gender equality clauses in public funding contracts, mentorship programmes and consistent public discourse around parity. The French example demonstrates how a coordinated approach between government bodies, funding agencies and civil society can lead to structural change and better representation of women filmmakers.

Austria and Belgium also show significant steps forward, with gender equality gradually becoming integrated into funding criteria, training schemes and industry debates. However, gaps remain in implementation, transparency and long-term monitoring of impact.

In contrast, countries, such as Poland and particularly Greece lag behind in both policy development and practical support. Structural inequality persists due to the lack of sustained public investment, absence of gender-sensitive policies and limited visibility for women filmmakers. The few existing initiatives often depend on individuals or non-profit sectors and lack systemic backing. The table below presents an assessment of the current state of support for women within the six countries under study, focusing on three key areas: policies, industry initiatives, and practical examples. Each



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aspect is assessed and categorised based on the extent and effectiveness of actions currently implemented.

Country	Policy Development Status	Industry Initiatives	Key Practices / Examples	Summary Evaluation
Austria	Moderate – gender objectives included in some funding bodies and public discourse	Medium – active civil society input, gender-sensitive workshops, Austrian Film institute and ORF diversity strategies	FISA’s gender equality bonuses, targeted training, Public Value Initiative	Promising – but underdeveloped in scope and scale
Belgium	Moderate – regional policies vary (stronger in Flanders), gender addressed in funding guidelines	Medium – film schools and collectives promoting inclusivity	VAF’s gender equality index, mentorship networks	On the right path – needs national cohesion
France	Advanced – integrated gender equality in national film law and funding criteria	Strong – public support for data collection, training, funding for women-led projects	Gender quotas for funding, CNC’s gender tracking reports, 50/50 collectives	Leading model – comprehensive and systemic support



Greece	Minimal – no specific audiovisual gender policy; general equality law rarely enforced	Weak – informal networks, dependent on EU projects	Some grassroots training (e.g., Her Docs), limited public funding	Critically underdeveloped – policy vacuum and systemic barriers
Poland	Limited – lacks specific gender equality laws in audiovisual field	Weak – few state-led programmes, low representation in public institutions	Small-scale grassroots efforts, limited impact of European funds	Lagging behind – needs policy and structural change
Spain	Moderate – Law 55/2007 requires equality measures, stronger after #MeToo	Strong – women’s film festivals, active networks, diverse training	ICAA scorecards, financial incentives for parity, CIMA collective	Progressing – uneven enforcement, strong advocacy

[Figure 6: Comparative Analysis of the status of women in the Film Industry Across Six Countries](#) (Fringes) 2025.

6.2. Migrants

In contrast to gender-related initiatives, support for migrant and diaspora filmmakers across Europe remains underdeveloped and inconsistent. Of the six countries analysed, France stands out as the leader, offering institutional tools, such as the *Fonds Images de la Diversité* and co-production schemes that promote visibility and professional integration. Austria and Belgium follow with some notable initiatives, Austria’s mentorship-driven workshops and Belgium’s diversity tools and grassroots efforts like Cinemaximiliaan, yet both lack overarching national strategies. Greece shows innovation in participatory and educational approaches but lacks structural backing, while Poland shows almost no formal support.



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Common barriers include the lack of dedicated funding, limited access to professional networks and persistent stereotypes. Importantly, migrant support often takes a back seat to gender-focused programmes or is dependent on political will, risking short-term or symbolic action. The table below presents an assessment of the current state of support for migrants within the six countries under study, focusing on three key areas: policies, industry initiatives, and practical examples. Each aspect is assessed and categorised based on the extent and effectiveness of actions currently implemented.

Country	Policy Development Status	Industry Initiatives	Key Practices / Examples	Summary Evaluation
Austria	No migrant specific film policies, but general inclusion principles apply	Moderate – mentorship and cultural support platforms exist	Diverse Geschichten programme, Brunnenpassage, diaspora festivals	Formally inclusive system with limited proactive measures;
Belgium	Emerging – formal diversity frameworks in development (e.g. VAF)	Mix of institutional and grassroots efforts	VAF Wildcards, Inclusivity Checklist	Promising model combining policy and activism, but sustainability varies
France	Advanced – specific national policies for diversity in film and public funding	Strong institutional support (e.g. CNC, ARTE)	Fonds Images de la Diversité, Aide aux Cinémas du Monde, ARTE France Cinéma	Leading country with comprehensive strategies, strong funding, global visibility
Greece	Absent – no targeted film policy for migrants	Grassroots-driven and educational	RefugeesIN, Pixida Films, Karpos Lab	Relies heavily on non-state actors;



				strong community engagement
Poland	Very weak – minimal public discourse or support in film policy	Virtually no identified initiatives	N/A	Marginalised migrant presence in film; significant policy and industry gaps
Spain	Moderate – general diversity clauses in cultural policies	Regional programmes and NGO-driven	Catalan region's diversity training; intercultural film programmes	Some good regional practices, but no coordinated national strategy

[Figure 7: Comparative Analysis of the Situation of Migrants in the Film Industry Across Six Countries](#) (Fringes) 2025.

6.3. Youth

Support for young filmmakers across Europe varies widely, shaped by national priorities, funding models and institutional frameworks. France leads with well-established cinema education programmes and decentralised access to resources through CNC-backed initiatives. Austria and Belgium offer promising entry-level funding and grassroots collaborations, but often lack long-term structures and comprehensive strategies. Greece provides production support through EU-backed initiatives but lacks dedicated youth-targeted schemes or training pathways. Across all countries, key challenges include limited access to sustainable funding, reliance on established networks and a lack of structured career development for youth in film.

While innovative practices exist, such as Austria's regional labs, Belgium's youth-focused festivals and France's integration of cinema into education, systemic gaps remain. Structural underfunding, competitive access and fragmented support mechanisms hinder consistent growth for young filmmakers. To strengthen the future of European cinema, cross-border cooperation, inclusive mentorship schemes and targeted investment in youth-led film projects are essential. The table below presents an assessment of the current state of support for youths within the six countries under study, focusing on three key areas: policies, industry initiatives, and practical examples. Each



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aspect is assessed and categorised based on the extent and effectiveness of actions currently implemented.

Country	Policy Development Status	Industry Initiatives	Key Practices / Examples	Summary Evaluation
Austria	Youth policies prioritise voluntary/social engagement but lack explicit focus on film. National support includes early-career initiatives like Startstipendium and the Austrian Film Institute Talent Lab.	Regional programmes and federal schemes support first/second-time filmmakers. Limited centralised youth film strategy.	Free Film Funding Salzburg; Cine Art Styria; support for “commercially difficult” graduation films	Offers solid entry-level support and innovation, but lacks national youth strategy. Strong in regional experimentation and artistic originality, but fragmented access.
Belgium	Policies exist at regional levels; no unified national youth film policy. The Flemish region prioritises film education and engagement.	VAF Wildcards; Matière Première; youth festivals	Jeugdfilmfestival Antwerpen; Filemon International Film Festival; collaborative school initiatives	Grassroots support is strong, but underfunding and gatekeeping limit long-term development



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France	Strong institutional support and integration of film into education	Passeurs d'Images; CNC's regional image education centers	Ma classe au Cinéma; Ciné Junior; Aide sélective à la distribution	Most advanced in policy and training, but competitiveness limits access for newcomers
Greece	Few specific film policies; broader funding available	Hellenic Film Academy's Film Factory; "GREECE 2.0"; film schools	Chania Film Festival's youth programme; Metropolitan College training	Education-focused support exists, but lacks youth-specific industry integration and national strategy
Poland	Youth engagement policies exist but limited alignment with the film sector.	Polish Film Institute offers limited schemes for emerging youth talent. No dedicated youth film policy or strong institutional programmes.	Polish Film Institute offers limited schemes for emerging youth talent. No dedicated youth film policy or strong institutional programmes.	Gaps in strategic planning for youth in film. Lacks integrated, accessible pathways from education to industry.
Spain	National youth strategy	Film support remains general, not youth-specific.	Interministerial initiative A Renewed Partnership with Youth targets minorities and intersectionality. Film support remains general,	Promising inclusive agenda, but lack of film-specific youth initiatives and underdeveloped support mechanisms. Fragmentation remains a barrier.



			not youth-specific.	
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Figure 8: Comparative Analysis of the Situation of Youth in the Film Industry Across Six Countries (Fringes) 2025.

6.4. Recommendations for enabling environments

The following table presents characteristics and practices deriving from the six countries analysed that support women migrant and young people in the film industry, characterised by integration, equity and targeted support

	Women	Migrants	Young people
Policy Initiatives	Integrated gender equality in: - National film law - Funding criteria	Integrated diversity and migration in: - specific national policies for diversity in the film industry - Public funding	Policy for Young people' support: - Integration of film into education. - Youth policies with explicit focus on film. - National support for early-career initiatives. - Unified national youth film policy open for additional regional initiatives.
Industry Initiatives	Public support for women creatives in film: - Data collection	Institutional support for migrant creatives in film:	Institutional support for young creatives in film:



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	- Training - Funding for women-led projects - Gender-sensitive workshops - Diversity strategies from national institutions - Film schools and collectives promoting inclusivity	- Mentorship programmes and cultural support platforms. - Regional and NGO-driven programmes. - Educational initiatives.	- Regional programmes. - Federal schemes support for emerging filmmakers. - Centralised youth film strategy.
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Figure 9: Recommendations for Enabling Environments to Support Women, Migrants and Young People in the EFI (Fringes) 2025.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS ON INNOVATION FOR EUROPEAN FILM CREATORS TO POLICYMAKERS AND THE INDUSTRY

Recommendation 1: Data gathering

It is positive that data regarding women is rather available, although still not in terms of intersectional categories. However, data regarding diasporic filmmakers and young, emerging creators is rather scarce. Possible reasons are that interviewees from some countries – such as Belgium – indicate that data gathering regarding those groups is difficult given legal constraints. Therefore, we argue that gathering data would be essential to help these groups gain their respective place in the industry.

Recommendation 2: Be aware of gatekeeping

Both Belgium and Greece appear to have some kind of gatekeeping with regard to support emerging filmmakers (i.e. some specific support applications demand experience or previous projects but only for one applicant - if multiple applicants; which implies that emerging filmmakers need more experienced filmmakers (gatekeepers) as coworkers). This way, the available support programmes beginning filmmakers are turning to, are rather limited. Therefore, we recommend that policy makers



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and support mechanisms are aware of these structural obstacles and subsequently foster equality regarding young filmmakers. Concretely, this means that young filmmakers should not depend on more experienced filmmakers to receive support and we strongly advise policy makers to design support mechanisms solely dedicated to supporting young filmmakers.

Recommendation 3: Incorporate a Wildcard system

In Flanders, Belgium a rather unique system can be found that supports young, graduating filmmakers: the so-called Wildcard system. This system offers a financial incentive with accompanying guidance from an experienced filmmaker or producer to graduating filmmakers, which offers them possibilities in creating their next film. In more recent years, the Wildcards are almost exclusively awarded to minority groups and are therefore a means to foster equality by trying to close structural gaps in the financing system and accompanying guidance and can thus be perceived as a kind of bridge building. Consequently, we argue that European countries implement a similar financial incentive with a mentoring system.

Recommendation 4: Open the box

Policymakers and national institutions must develop targeted Institutional strategies that are aimed to enhance filmmaking support outside of the dominant or mainstream networks, formats and practices. They should pay attention to the ways in which social and political claims on inclusion, equity and respect, coming from under-represented groups at large from across Europe can be supported in forms of storytelling, production, funding and distribution systems that connect communities, local authorities and media.

Recommendation 5: Defragmentation of policies

Although cultural policy lies firmly in the jurisdiction of member states, it is crucial that national institutions engage proactively with each other across Europe and design a Magna Carta of opening the spaces for creators. This is a crucial step in ensuring innovation in storytelling, production processes and connection with audiences and citizens is enhanced and supported. This form of Magna Carta would include fundamental principles to address a. Under-representation of the social groups we discussed; b. structurally create low risk funding and opportunities for high risk creative work for specific categories, both thematic and demographically focused; c. construct avenues for the showcasing and incorporation of fringes work into mainstream EFI functions; d. Promote intercultural and international within Europe collaborations at the level of the groups discussed.



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8. RECOMMENDATIONS OF INNOVATION FOR EUROPEAN FILM CREATORS

We are aware that recommendations to European film creators are largely addressing individuals in the first place. This list does not aim to shift the responsibility of inclusion and plurality to the shoulders of under-represented groups, rather to emphasise the need for more connection, alliance building and proactive effort to bring about systemic change, beyond the storytelling content and process. We are also fully aware that this form of activism and engagement cannot be maintained through fierce will alone nor do we imply it. We provide recommendations as a way of distilling the insights from our interviewees and share those with further communities in the sector.

The following should be read as a signposted proposal for young, newcomers and creators in some form of beginnings. We hope that they can be extrapolated for women creators to reflect on ways alliances for example can further create spaces for development and visibility; and for established creators to enable these forms of connection and space making.

Recommendation 1: Build Alliances and Share Competencies

European film creators are encouraged to actively build alliances with peers and organisations across their respective industries, focusing on areas of specialisation and resource sharing. By collaborating with others who have complementary skills and expertise, creators can pool technical resources, share knowledge and co-develop innovative projects that might not be possible individually. Such alliances not only have the potential to strengthen creative output, but may also foster resilience and adaptability in a rapidly evolving film landscape, enabling filmmakers to better navigate challenges and seize new opportunities together.

Recommendation 2: Engage and Innovate within Educational Structures

European film creators would benefit from proactively seeking partnerships with youth and/or under-represented communities friendly institutions, including film schools, regional film funds and film festivals. By building these connections, they can benefit from mentorship, advanced training and access to technical resources, while also increasing the visibility of their work through established networks and collaborative projects. Moreover, by actively engaging with educational and festival platforms, it could help attach their projects to reputable institutions, enhance professional development and contribute to a stronger, more innovative ecosystem for original filmmaking in Europe.



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Recommendation 3: Organise in education (e.g. student unions) and lobby to expand curricula

European film creators are encouraged to actively engage with educational settings, such as student unions and academic committees, to advocate for the expansion and diversification of film curricula. Taking the initiative to promote learning opportunities that provide a deep understanding of both local and transnational industry contexts can include national film landscapes and European-wide funding and distribution systems. They should equally make use of accessible online courses, interactive webinars and industry panels to stay informed about evolving opportunities and challenges.

Additionally, European film creators would push innovation when prioritising participation in cultural sensitivity and anti-bias training. By engaging in spaces focused on cultural awareness-especially for those working with migrant and diaspora stories- one can develop the skills needed to accurately and respectfully represent diverse perspectives. These efforts will not only broaden the range of voices in European cinema, but also contribute to a more inclusive and dynamic film industry overall.

Recommendation 4: Self-education and contextual awareness

Creators find themselves in a process of autodidactic development; they would benefit from prioritising further self-education about the diverse social, cultural, and industry contexts in which they operate. Take the initiative to learn about the histories, challenges and opportunities facing different groups within the film sector, including issues related to gender, migration and youth. Actively seeking out resources, workshops and peer discussions that expand their awareness and sensitivity to these topics.

Recommendation 5: Fostering Pluralistic, Anti-Hierarchical, Creative Spaces

In the same vein, creators should strive to create and participate in pluralistic, flat-hierarchical creative spaces that are both safe and genuinely inclusive. This means advocating for and upholding clear codes of conduct, supporting mental health, and maintaining zero-tolerance policies for discrimination and harassment. Champion intersectionality by ensuring their creative spaces embrace diversity not only in gender, age and origin, but also in the complex, overlapping identities. By embedding these values in their work and collaborations, they help cultivate a film culture where



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a multiplicity of voices is valued and where innovation and collaboration can thrive free from systemic barriers.

Recommendation 6: Simplify Funding Access and Expand Visibility

European film creators are encouraged to fully utilise available funding schemes by creating and distributing straightforward, easy-to-understand guide that explains application processes and eligibility requirements, making these opportunities accessible to a wider range of filmmakers. They should equally participate in online film festivals and explore other affordable digital alternatives to traditional distribution, such as VOD platforms and social media. These strategies not only help demystify funding and support for newcomers, but also enable filmmakers to build visibility, connect with diverse audiences and showcase their work on an international stage without prohibitive costs.



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