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# WHERE ARE THE WOMEN DIRECTORS?

REPORT ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE EUROPEAN FILM INDUSTRY

*European Women's Audiovisual Network*  
2006-2013

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The European Women's Audiovisual Network (EWA) report, *WHERE ARE THE WOMEN DIRECTORS? Report on gender equality in the European film industry*, is the culmination of a two-year process and brings together comparative research from seven European countries: Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. It is a response to growing concern worldwide about the marginalisation of female directors in our film culture and aims to provide the evidence to inform policy change at national and European level.

EWA's report calls for affirmative action to change the status quo. It makes fifteen recommendations, many based on best practice, which will address the challenges female directors face in sustaining their careers. EWA believes strongly in the powerful impact of the audiovisual media on our societies. By realising female directors' full potential our industries will be strengthened and diversity of form and perspective will be more successfully represented on our screens.

This study has been written and led by Holly Aylett (Birkbeck College, University of London) under the Project Direction of Francine Raveney (EWA Head of PR). Whilst the study was organised and managed by the EWA Network it was carried out with the support and collaboration of many institutions, including: the Austrian Film Institute, the Croatian Audiovisual Centre, CNC (France), the University of Rostock, Birkbeck College (University of London), Centre d'histoire culturelle des sociétés contemporaines (CHCSC – Université de Versailles/Université Paris-Saclay), Direzione Generale Cinema/MIBACT (Italy), Swedish Film Institute, Creative Skillset (UK), the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University and the British Film Institute. It was prepared on the basis of detailed quantitative and qualitative research involving approximately 1000 industry professionals from throughout Europe.

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MORE INFORMATION ON THE RESEARCH:  
[EWAWOMEN.COM/EN/RESEARCH-.HTML](http://EWAWOMEN.COM/EN/RESEARCH-.HTML)

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**M**ore women directors means more women on screen, behind the camera and in cinemas and will have a direct impact on society. On top of the impact on the film industry, EWA's unique pan-European research reveals almost universal agreement on the fact that more female-directed films in circulation would impact on the representation of women, promote equality and encourage tolerance in our society.

Considering the average of all seven nations included in the study, 90% of all respondents agree that more films directed by women would have a direct impact on the representation of women on screen, 85% think it would have a positive impact on the status of women in society and 84% think it would change attitudes to sexuality.

Based on the results of national reports covering the period 2006-2013, EWA proposes several policies for change around three key stages in women's professional development: preparing the ground in school education, encouraging women directors into the industry, and sustaining women's careers through targeted strategies.



## 1\_ PREPARING THE GROUND IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

The most popular actions advocated by the respondents in this field are measures such as developing school film clubs (90%) or offering media literacy as part of children's school curriculum (90%), to encourage understanding of cinema as an art form and to deconstruct how stereotypes are formed. In this context, respondents in Italy also emphasised the value of designing projects for film education in schools which introduce female role models in the film industry and show films directed by women, to promote gender equality and to encourage girls to embark on film careers. Interestingly, 86% of respondents also felt there should be more films as source material in school curricula.



## 2\_ ENCOURAGING POTENTIAL WOMEN DIRECTORS

For each of the factors suggested as ways of encouraging women directors into the industry, respondents in the UK were notably more affirmative than those in other European countries. Exhibiting more films directed by women received nearly universal support in the UK (97%, compared with the European average of 84%), indicating that measures to incentivise greater film circulation should be taken. There was also high support, about 94%, for measures to affirm women's presence at every stage of their early careers – in education, in their transition from training to careers and in developing more film projects.





### 3\_ POLICIES TO SUSTAIN FEMALE DIRECTORS' CAREERS

The most important policy measure to sustain female directors' careers, supported by 92% of all respondents, would be to encourage greater equality on commissioning panels, closely followed by measures favouring greater equality in policy-making committees and by compulsory data-gathering on gender equality (88%). Once again, support for policy change was higher in the UK across all options than in other European countries, including support for quotas, whereas France by contrast was the

country with the lowest support for any targeted measures regarding funding or quotas. Respondents in Italy also felt that support for the distribution of women's films was amongst the most relevant tools.

It is worth noting that almost 70% of respondents supported using quotas to achieve equality targets. Support for this measure in the participating countries ranged from 58% in France to 83% in the UK. There was also universal agreement that much more is needed to support women's films in reaching their audience.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Furthermore, the most important way to encourage women to direct is by showing more of their films on television and cinema screens. This unique report shows that there is broad support for policy change, including measures to:

- Address the under-representation of female directors in educational programmes;
- Equalise the distribution of public funds;
- Achieve equal representation and greater awareness on commissioning boards;
- Incentivise producers to support female directors;
- Provide much greater support and a targeted strategy for publicity, advertising and distribution.

EWA's 15 recommendations to change the European film industry and help it take gender inequality seriously are available on EWA's website ([ewawomen.com](http://ewawomen.com)), and within the report's Executive Summary.

## ZOOM ON... European key findings

Only one in five films in the seven European countries studied is directed by a woman (21%). This means four out five films are NOT directed by a woman.

- The vast majority of funding resources (namely 84%) go into films that are NOT directed by women.
- Low funding perpetuates the scarcity of female-directed films in circulation, in turn affecting the markets' willingness to invest and thus creating a vicious circle.
- There is a significant difference between the proportion of female directors graduating from film schools (44%) and the overall proportion of female directors working in the industry (24%). The talent exists but the potential is not exploited.



### THE UK

In the UK, 94% of respondents felt that gender inequality exists, one of the highest results from the 7 nations in the study.

Although no national registry of directors is available, an estimate would give an average of 12% of female directors for independent films and about 22% for feature film directors.

When it comes to learning skills, 51% of respondents said they trained at film school. For those who did not go to film schools, most indicated that they were self-taught through practice (53%). When asked about the best route to the industry, most respondents considered the most important route to be making shorts or documentaries (87% and 78% respectively), just ahead of film school (70%). It is interesting to note that there is a higher than average confidence in pathways through theatre (47%) and directing TV drama (43%) in the UK than in the rest of Europe. The number of applicants for places at film school is consistently far higher than the places available for both men and women. Whereas women comprise on average 32.6% of the overall number of applicants they form 45% of the graduates, so the conversion

rate from applicant to graduate is more favourable for women and has consistently remained so with the exception of one year, 2010.

When it comes to state funding<sup>1</sup>, between 2006 and 2013 most of the money was awarded to male directors, who enjoyed an overall share of 88.6% over the period. There were some large annual fluctuations. Female directors' share of fiction budgets averages at 11.3% and shows a decline over the period, whereas female directors' share of documentary budgets is higher, at 17.8%. In terms of progression, there has been a slight increase in female directors' share of lottery funding for fiction, but the more significant upward trend has been in documentaries, where female directors' share increased from a minimal base to account for almost 40% of available funding. It should be noted, however, that the overall number of documentaries was low. In fiction, female-directed films have received on average about 13% less funding than male-directed films.



<sup>1</sup> In the UK, state funding for independent production is distributed primarily through the British Film Institute (BFI) but also through the agencies of the nations and regions. Given the difficulty of accessing comparative, gender-based statistics, EWA's report has focused on the BFI Lottery Fund, which is monitored by the BFI's Research and Statistics Unit.

→ However, the average spend by the BFI Lottery Fund for female fiction is the highest in Europe (681 000 euros).

Digging deeper into the average budget for films supported by the BFI Lottery Fund, the figures show that male directors dominate in the high budget category (81.2%) and that female directors' share is more appropriate in the low and medium budget categories, respectively 35.3% and 36.9%.

Most UK respondents identify the competitive struggle to secure funding (92%) as the biggest challenge and source of discouragement they face, followed by the scarcity of role models (88%). Two thirds of UK respondents, the highest in comparison to other national results, believe that private funders react negatively to projects directed by women. Women are seen as "high risk", particularly for higher budget productions, and there is felt to be a bias towards certain narratives such as action drama, and male-led story lines.

Female directors' overall share of releases is 16.2%, indicating an average of one in six films directed by women. This is higher than the proportion for all independent releases. However, it is low for fiction and without the improvement in the share of documentary releases, which has more than doubled in the period (from 8% to 22%), women's overall share would be in decline.



## ITALY

In Italy, according to the Italian copyright collection society (SIAE), among registered authors in 2014, up to 25% are female<sup>2</sup>.

The route to directing for men and women starts mainly through directing short films and documentaries. Film schools are another starting point, more substantial for men (85%) than for women (68%). In the National Film School (Scuola Nazionale di Cinema), the average share of female applicants across all courses is 39%, indicating a relatively balanced composition. The share of female applicants is confirmed by the share of female graduates, that is, 41.5% of all graduates. The scenario changes dramatically when focusing on film directing courses: only 17% of all applicants for the film directing course are female, meaning that women are discouraged from engaging in directing from a very young age. From the results to EWA's questionnaire, men appear to make their minds up about their directing career at an earlier age and actually start it sooner than women do. On average, men shoot their first film at a younger age (20 years old) than women (25 years old).

Regarding funding, across all national film funding schemes, the female directors' share is 11% and the male share is 89%. The Italian national fund does not distinguish between live action and documentary, as there is no specific fund for documentaries.

As regards factors discouraging women from directing, the spectrum of answers to the questionnaire is narrow, so all the factors are mentioned frequently. It is worth noting that both men and women think that women are discouraged from directing mainly because of job instability issues.

<sup>2</sup> The scope of the SIAE Register includes film directors, screenwriters and dubbing dialoguists.

Men and women have different views on the impact of the director's gender on financiers. 78% of male respondents believe gender has no impact on public funders or on private investors either (58%). 46% of female respondents agree that gender has no impact on public funders, whereas 41% reply that it affects the decision negatively.

In the overall period 2006-2013, only 9.2% of releases were directed by women, as compared to 90.8% by men. The market share of films directed by women was 2.7% while the share for male-directed films was 97.3%.



## FRANCE

In France, 30% of female and 37% of male respondents felt that there was gender inequality, one of the lowest results amongst the 7 nations in the study. The figures appear to be indicative of a relative lack of awareness concerning gender discrimination.

Although there is no register of directors available, research shows that over the period 2009-2012, the percentage of female directors rose from below 20% to 28.6%.

Between 2009 and 2013, the percentage of female directors who received national funding remained lower than their male counterparts with an average ratio of 80/20.

In comparison with the other countries, France has a significantly higher number of directors coming from film school (60% of the respondents). Of those who had not been to film

school, the majority indicated that they were self-taught through practice. Directors identify film school as the most important route to directing (86%), followed by making shorts (85%) and documentaries (81%). Admissions figures from La Fémis show that women's share of admissions is about 45%.

In France, the CNC supports independent companies whose work contributes to the diversity of films shown in cinemas. As a result, women benefit from a generous system compared to other countries: women's share of national funding remained steady during the 2006-2013 period, averaging 19.2%, with a slightly higher share for documentaries. There are significant discrepancies regarding the available support for first and subsequent films but these are not reflected in the EWA charts. As shown in the 2014 CNC reports, women get less money when their film is shortlisted and their average budget per film is 1.7 times lower than for their male counterparts.

For women respondents in France, there are three perceived main challenges that affect their progression as a director in the industry: family commitments, competition for funding and lack of confidence.

From 2006-2013 there was an increase in the annual percentage of women's share of fiction films, from 15% to 27%, and a slightly lower increase for documentaries, from 19% to 24%. Only in one year (2009) have female-directed films reached a 20% share of the box office. The figures for progression in average box-office admissions show a slight decline in the share for fiction films directed by women, and a rise in the share for documentaries. However, the differentials between men's and women's films are considerable.

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Kering is a proud supporter of EWA as part of the *Women in Motion* programme and the Group's commitment to improving the status and visibility of talented female professionals of the film industry



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