

Female directors in European cinema

Key figures

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Table of contents

- Introduction
- Methodology
- Key findings
- Gender of film directors
- Film production by gender of directors
- Appendix

Introduction

In recent years, the public conversation around gender balance in the audiovisual sector has gained momentum and many institutions have launched initiatives or implemented measures to reduce the gender gap.

In this context, this report aims at helping to measure the gender divide existing among film directors in Europe. The first section provides a general overview of the gender of directors of European films produced between 2003 and 2017. The second part focuses on the volume and the share of European films by gender of directors, including information on film genres and admissions.

While this analysis of film directors evidently does not represent the entire film industry, it can provide some insight on the level of gender imbalance faced by professionals working in one of the main creative roles.

The analysis presented in this report draws on data from the [European Audiovisual Observatory's LUMIERE](#) database, which collates annual admissions to theatrically released films from a wide variety of sources, including national film agencies and statistics offices, inter-industry bodies, distributors' and exhibitors' associations, the trade press and a small number of private tracking bodies.

Composition of the sample

The study sample covers European feature films produced from [2003](#) to [2017](#) and released in cinemas in Europe between [2003](#) and [2018](#). The dataset only includes films for which we were able to track at least one commercial theatrical screening in one of the markets covered by the [Observatory](#). Only feature-length films were included in the analysis, leaving out compilations of short films and event cinema screenings (such as opera or concert recordings).

Films for which it was not possible to identify the directors were not taken into consideration for the purpose of this analysis. Films made by more than five directors were also excluded from the dataset, assuming that they were compilations of short films.

Year of production

Since this analysis aims at assessing gender balance in film production, the year of production has been chosen as an indicator instead of the release year. Therefore, films produced before 2003 or after 2017 are not part of the sample. Please note that the annual number of films produced in a given country as it appears in Lumiere may differ from official production figures, since the database only includes films that have been commercially released.

While the overall study sample for this analysis comprises films produced between 2003 and 2017, some subsections only refer to the year 2017 or to the period 2013-2017.

Origin of films

Since it is reasonable to assume that policy measures aimed at promoting gender equality in individual countries should have an impact on the production of national films, this report takes into account the origin of film works, rather than the nationality of directors.

In this study, a film is considered to be of European origin when produced and majority-financed by a European country. For the purpose of this analysis, 40 Member States of the [European Audiovisual Observatory](#)⁽¹⁾ (excluding Morocco) are considered European countries. However, the [LUMIERE](#) database only covers a maximum of 36 European markets⁽²⁾ for films produced between 2003 and 2017. Since [LUMIERE](#) tracks films based on admissions, the volume of film production in those countries that are not covered in the database might be underestimated (namely not including films that were only released in their national markets).

Please also note that there are differences in the coverage rate of individual markets in [LUMIERE](#) which can distort the direct comparability of statistical indicators between years or countries. This is particularly true with regard to the number of films on release.

- (1) Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom.
- (2) Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom & Ireland (treated as one market).

Gender categories for films

Based on the gender of the director(s), each feature film in the study sample was assigned to one of the following three categories:

- **films by female directors:** films directed by one or more women, excluding films by directors of both genders;
- **films by male directors:** films directed by one or more men only, excluding films by directors of both genders;
- **films by directors of both genders** (i.e., a film directed by two directors, one woman and one man).

Films were assigned to only one of these categories and were not double counted.

Films with shared authorship by directors of both genders were considered as a separate category, instead of calculating the level of involvement of each director on a proportional basis. A more detailed breakdown of the films by gender composition of the directors is available in the Appendix at the end of this report.

Key findings

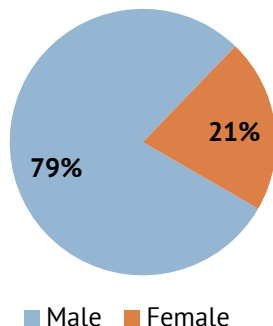
- ❑ Female directors represent 21% of all directors with at least one European feature film produced and released between 2003 and 2017. During this time frame, about half of female directors directed only one single film and less than one third worked on more than two films. In 2017, half of the films directed by women were presumably first features.
- ❑ A total of 3 618 films exclusively directed by women were produced and released in Europe over the period 2003-2017, which represents 17% of total films.
- ❑ The share of films by female directors only is growing slowly, reaching 19% of European films in 2017, up from 15% in 2003. This growth was mainly driven by an increase in the number of documentary films.
- ❑ Documentary is the genre with the highest prevalence of female directors: between 2013 and 2017, on average, 25% of documentary films were directed by women, compared to 15% for fiction and 11% for animation.
- ❑ France is the country with the highest number of films by female directors, accounting for 18% of all films directed by women in Europe between 2013 and 2017. However, the share of films by female directors out of the total number of films produced is higher in middle-sized production countries, topped by the Netherlands and Sweden.
- ❑ On average, films by female directors only generated 8% of total admissions over the period 2003-2017, compared to 17% of feature films directed by women. A plausible explanation for this discrepancy could be that women directors are less likely to be hired to direct high-budget films.

Gender of film directors

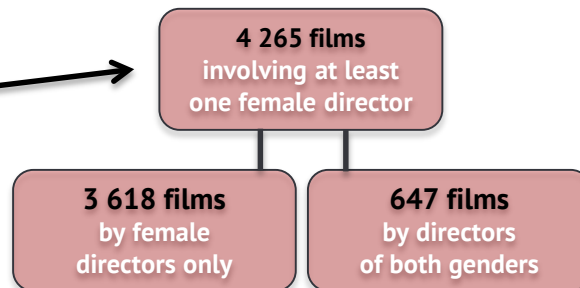
21% of directors of European films are women

- ❑ Female directors represent 21% of all directors with at least one European feature film produced and released between 2003 and 2017. In the context of this analysis, a total of 2 997 female directors were identified.
- ❑ During this time period, women were involved in the direction of a total of 4 265 European feature films (20% of total films), whether alone or in partnership with other directors.

Breakdown of directors of European films by gender (2003-2017)



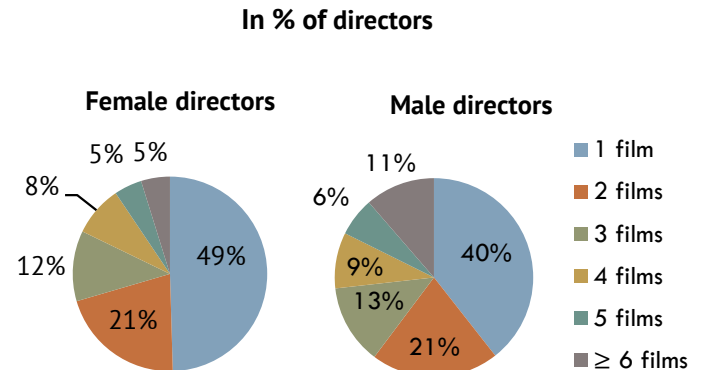
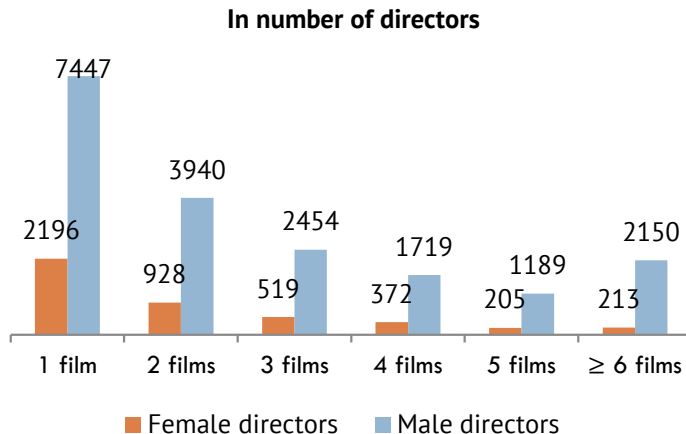
Breakdown of European films by gender of director (2003-2017)



49% of women directed only one single film, compared to 40% for men

- ❑ On average, each female director shot 1.4 films between 2003 and 2017, compared to 1.6 for male directors.
- ❑ Only 30% of female directors worked on more than two films in the period 2003-2017, compared to 39% for male directors.
- ❑ Only 5% of female directors shot six or more films during the same time period, compared to 11% for male directors.

Comparison of output of directors by gender (2003-2017)

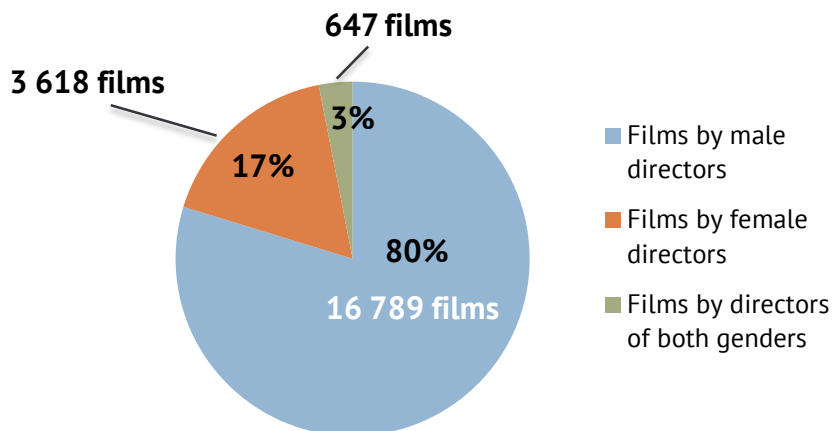


Film production volume by gender of directors

Films by female directors represent 17% of films produced between 2003 and 2017

- A total of 3 618 films directed by women were produced and released in Europe over the period 2003-2017, which represents 17% of all films in the sample.
- This compares to 16 789 films by male directors (80% of all films) and to 647 films by directors of both genders (3%).

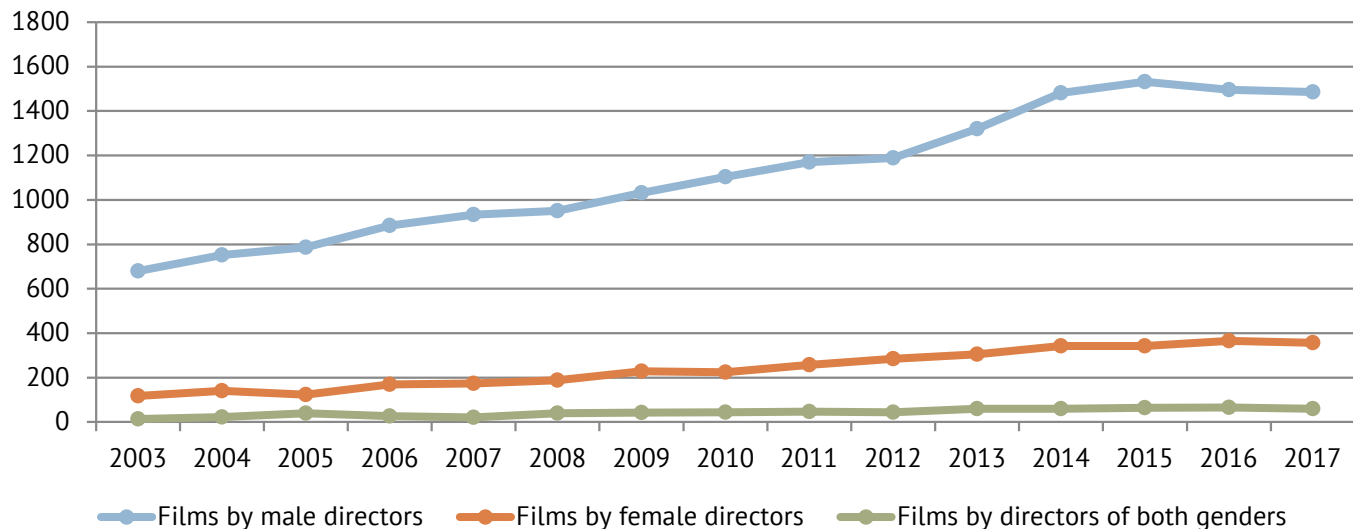
Number of European films produced and released by gender of director (2003-2017)



The number of films by female directors is growing ...

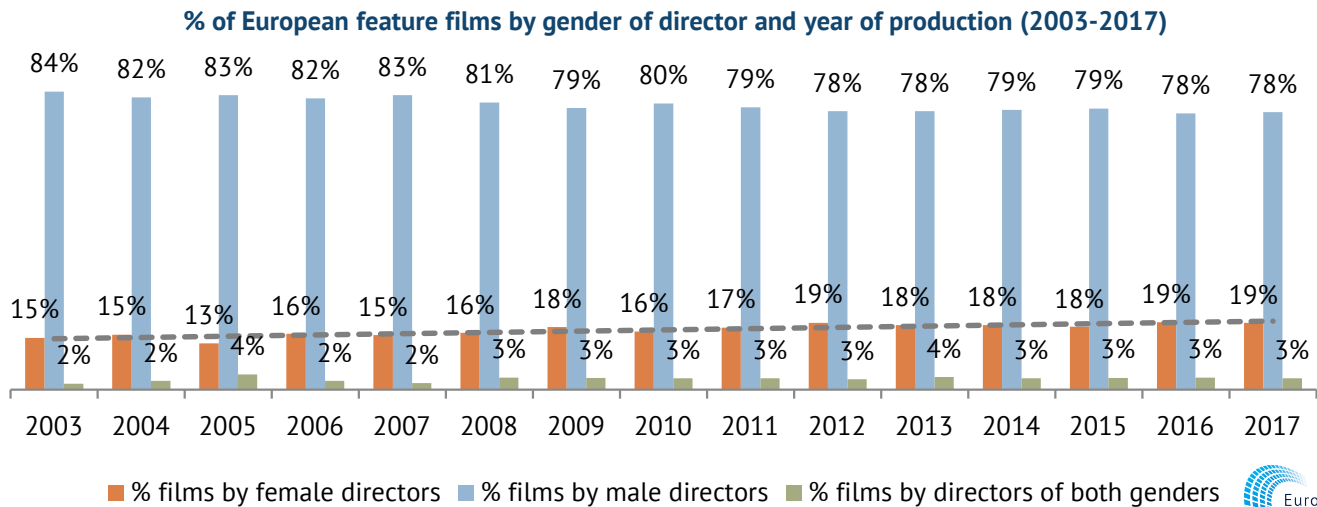
- A total of 357 feature films by female directors were produced in 2017, compared to 118 films in 2003.

Number of European films released by gender of director and year of production (2003-2017)



... but the share of films directed by women progresses slowly

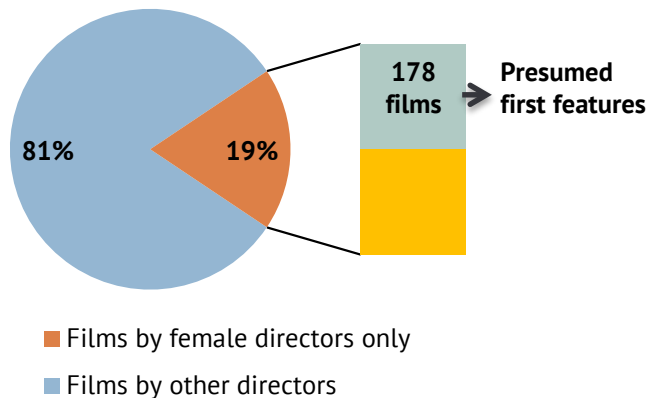
- ❑ The share of European feature films by female directors has slowly increased since 2003, rising from 15% to 19% in 2017 (20% for films of EU origin).
- ❑ This slow trend shows that the increase in absolute figures for films by female directors is linked to the overall increase in film production volume rather than to a significant proportional increase in film directed by women.



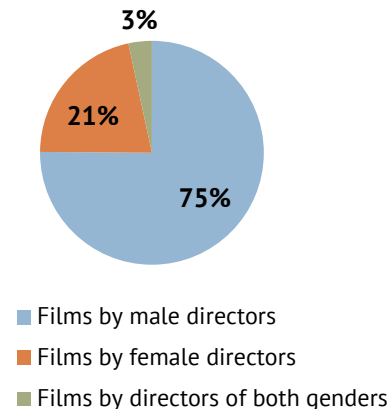
In 2017 half of the films by female directors were first features

- ❑ The Observatory estimates that in 2017, 50% of feature films exclusively directed by women were first features (178 films).
- ❑ Films by female directors represent 21% of all presumed first features produced in 2017.

% of presumed first features among European feature films by female directors (2017)



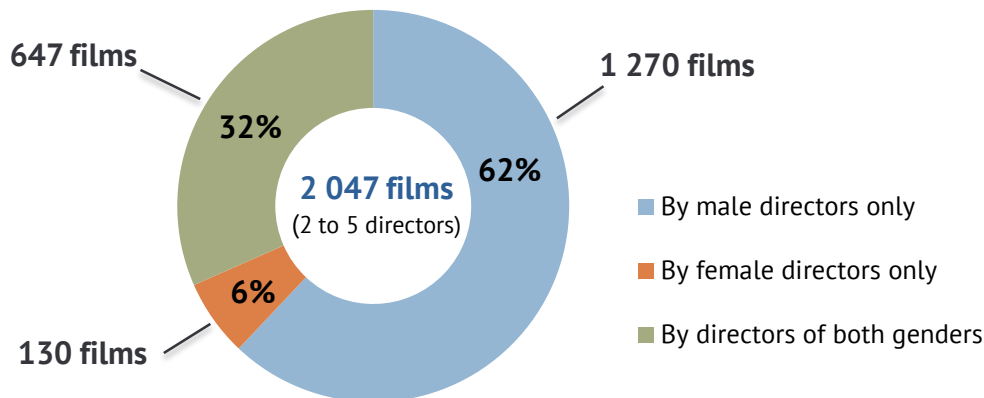
Breakdown of European presumed first feature films by gender of directors (2017)



The % of films exclusively directed by women is lower among co-directed films

- ❑ Concerning films involving from 2 to 5 directors (representing 10% of all films produced between 2003 and 2017), the share of films exclusively directed by women is 6%, which is lower than for all films (17%).
- ❑ In turn, films by directors of both genders account for 32% of all co-directed films.

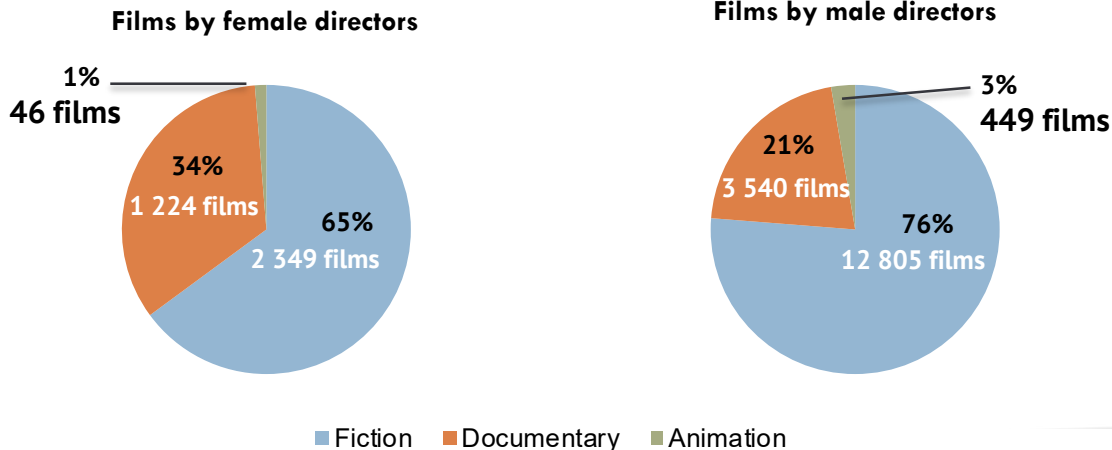
% of European films by multiple directors by gender composition of direction teams (2003-2017)



The majority of films directed by women are fiction films

- ❑ Cumulatively 65% of films directed exclusively by female directors produced between 2003 and 2017 are works of fiction (57% in 2017).
- ❑ The share of documentary films is significantly higher for films by female directors (34%) than for films by male directors (21%).

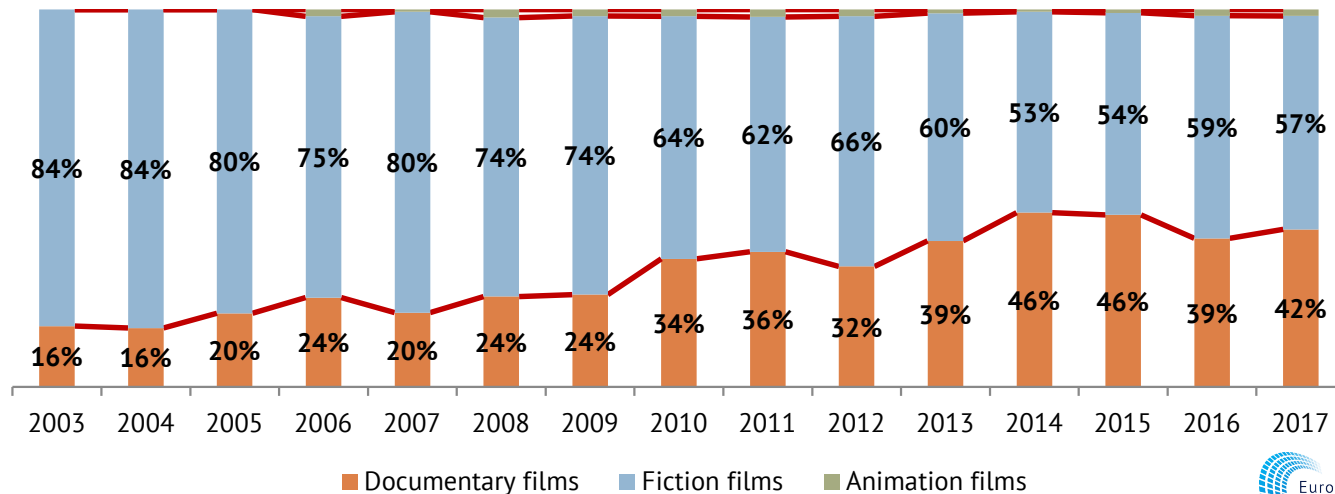
Breakdown of European film by film genre, by gender of director (2003-2017)



Documentaries have been driving the increase in the % of films directed by women ...

- The annual average share of documentary films among films by female directors has significantly increased since 2003, reaching 42% in 2017, up from 16% in 2003.
- This represents a higher increase compared to the overall evolution of documentary films in Europe over the same time period.

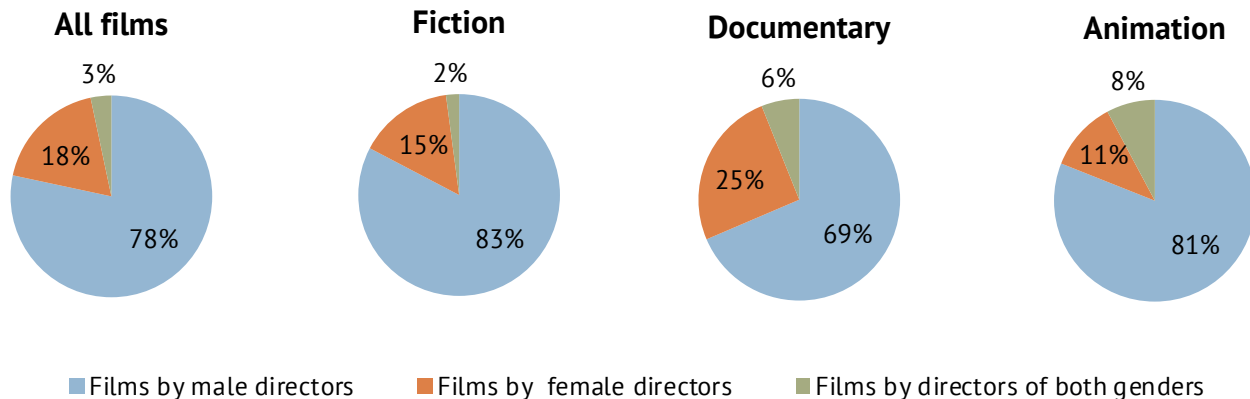
Breakdown of European films by female directors by film genre and by production year (2003-2017)



... and documentary is the genre with the highest presence of female directors

- Among films produced in the period 2013-2017, on average 25% of all documentary feature films were directed by women. This compares to 15% for fiction films and 11% for animation.

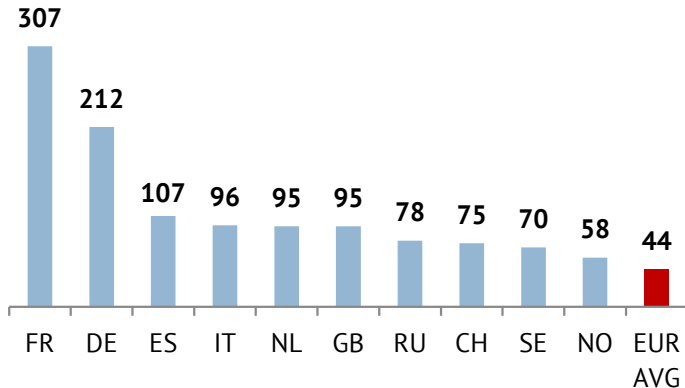
European films by gender of director and film genre (annual AVG 2013-2017)



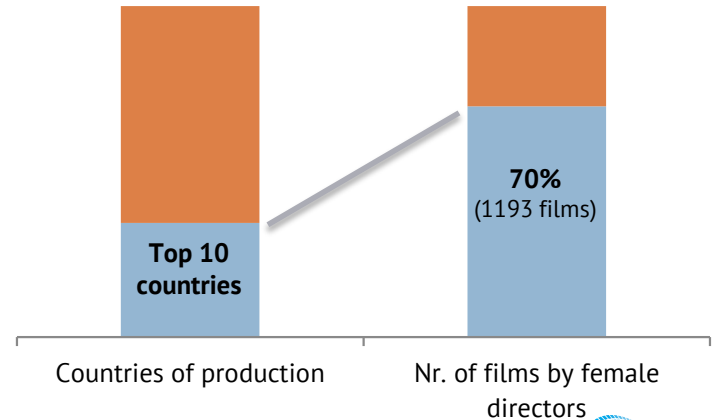
France is the country with the highest number of films directed by women ...

- ❑ 307 films directed by women were produced in France between 2013 and 2017. This is well above the European average of 44 films per year.
- ❑ The top 10 production countries of films by female directors account for 70% of the films directed by women, a very similar level of concentration as for films in general (72%).

European countries by number of films by female directors produced and released (2013-2017)



European countries of production versus number of films by female directors (2013-2017)



... but the % of female directors is higher in medium-sized production countries ...

- Considering films produced between 2013 and 2017, the share of female-directed films produced was higher (22%) in countries with a medium production capacity⁽¹⁾ than in countries with high or low production capacity.

European films by gender of directors and by production capacity clusters (2013-2017)

Country clusters	Films by female directors		Films by male directors		Films by directors of both genders		Total
	<i>Nr. of films</i>	%	<i>Nr. of films</i>	%	<i>Nr. of films</i>	%	
High⁽²⁾ >100 films per year	1 986	15%	10 596	82%	370	3%	12 952
Medium⁽³⁾ Between 30 and 100 films per year	1 300	22%	4 435	75%	217	4%	5 952
Low⁽⁴⁾ <30 films per year	332	15%	1 758	82%	60	3%	2 150

(1) Classification based on the number of films produced and released as they appear in the LUMIERE database.

(2) France, Germany, Italy, Russian Federation, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom.

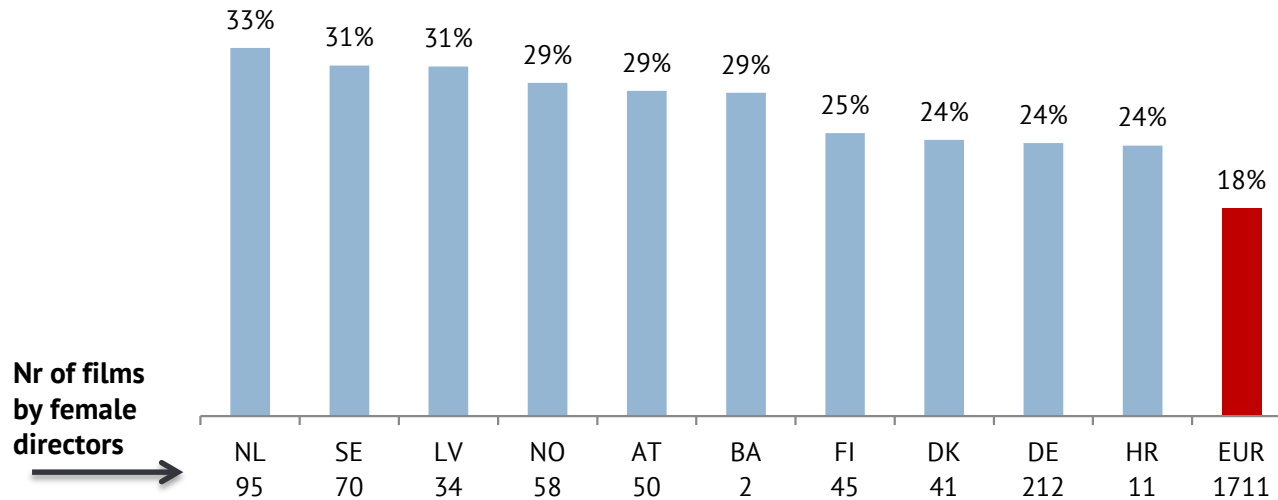
(3) Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland.

(4) Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Montenegro, Malta, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia.

... topped by the Netherlands and Sweden

- Between 2013 and 2017, the Netherlands and Sweden were the top production countries based on the share of films by female directors.
- Germany was the only country with high production capacity to rank among the top 10 countries.

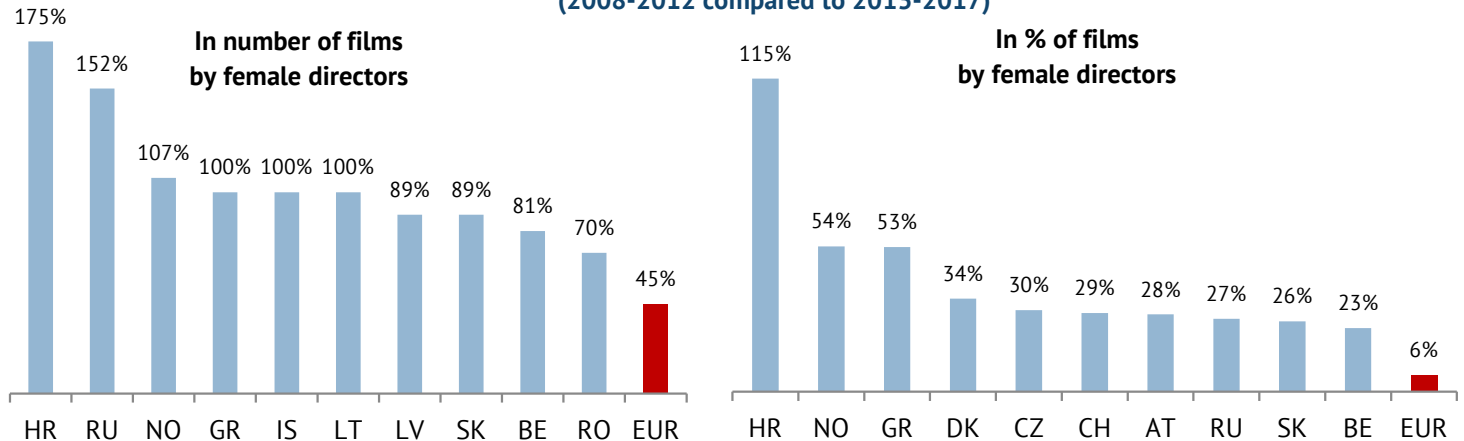
Top 10 European production countries based on % of films by female directors (2013-2017)



Growth was stronger in small and medium production countries

- ❑ Croatia and Norway were the production countries with the strongest growth both in terms of number of films and percentage share of films by female directors.
- ❑ In the Russian Federation, the growth in the number of films directed by women was mainly the result of a general increase in the production volume over the years.

**Top 10 European production countries by growth of films by female directors
(2008-2012 compared to 2013-2017)**



The % of admissions to films by female directors is lower than the % of films

- ❑ The share of admissions generated by films directed by women tends to be significantly lower than the share of films, regardless of the production capacity of the country of origin.
- ❑ One likely explanation is that female directors are entrusted with film projects with lower budgets than their male counterparts.

Admissions to European films by gender of directors and by production capacity clusters (2013-2017)

Country clusters by production volume ⁽¹⁾	% of films by female directors	% of admissions to films by female directors
High⁽²⁾ >100 films per year	15%	8%
Medium⁽³⁾ Between 30 and 100 films per year	22%	13%
Low⁽⁴⁾ <30 films per year	15%	8%

(1) Classification based on the total number of films produced and released as they appear in the LUMIERE database.

(2) France, Germany, Italy, Russian Federation, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom.

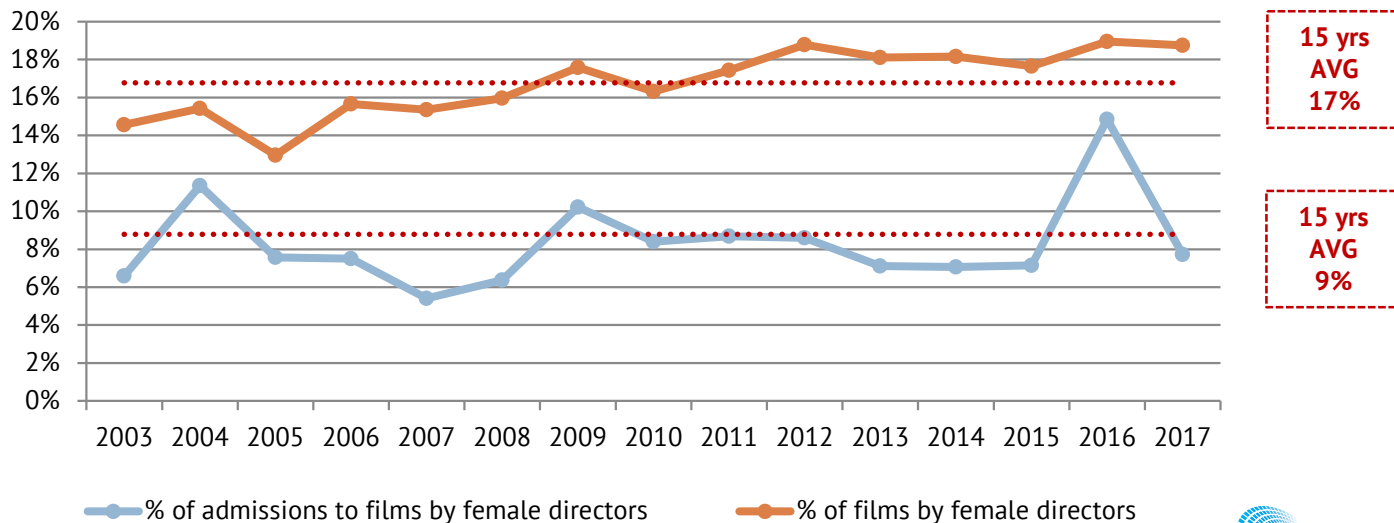
(3) Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland.

(4) Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Montenegro, Malta, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia.

Films by female directors only accounted for 8% of total admissions in 2017

- ❑ In 2017, films by female directors generated 8% of total admissions (in line with the 15-year average), compared to 17% of total films.
- ❑ In 2016, the unusually high share of admissions to films by female directors (15%) was the result of the box office success of the British comedy *Bridget Jones's Baby*.

Evolution of % of films by female directors and % of admissions (2003-2017)



Appendix

Table 1 - Gender composition of directors of European films (2013-2017)

	By female directors only	By male directors only	By directors of both genders	Total
Nr. of films	3 618	16 789	647	21 054
% of films	17%	80%	3%	100%

Table 2 - Gender composition of directors of European films: films by directors of both genders (2013-2017)

	Films by a majority of female directors	Films by a majority of male directors	Gender parity co-direction	Total
Nr. of films	11	48	588	647
% of films	2%	7%	91%	100%

Table 3 - Top films by female directors⁽¹⁾ by number of admissions in Europe, 2003-2017⁽²⁾

Rank	Title	Prod. year	Country of production	Director	Admissions in Europe 2003-2018
1	Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason	2004	GB / US / FR / DE / IE	Beeban Kidron	20 419 643
2	Bridget Jones's Baby	2016	GB / US / FR	Sharon Maguire	18 041 114
3	The Iron Lady	2011	GB / FR	Phyllida Lloyd	6 365 280
4	Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang	2010	GB / US / FR	Susanna White	5 880 178
5	LOL (Laughing Out Loud)	2008	FR	Lisa Azuelos	4 088 115
6	Je vous trouve très beau	2005	FR	Isabelle Mergault	3 893 116
7	One Day	2011	GB INC / US	Lone Scherfig	3 779 281
8	Coco avant Chanel	2009	FR	Anne Fontaine	3 754 993
9	Ivan Tsarevich i Seryy Volk 3 (<i>Ivan Tsarevich and the Gray Wolf 3</i>)	2016	RU	Darina Schmidt	3 326 535
10	La rafle	2010	FR / DE / HU	Rose Bosch	3 130 779

(1) Excluding films by directors of both genders.

(2) Includes films produced between 2003 and 2007 and released between 2003 and 2018. Includes admissions generated in 2018.

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