

## **Do more films by women mean more women's films?**

### Moderator

**Ms Francine Raveney**, Project Manager, Eurimages, and Head of PR (and former director) of the European Women's Audiovisual Network

### Speakers

**Ms Lina Kaminskaitė-Jančorienė**, cinema and media historian, researcher, NGO Meno Avilys, Lithuania

**Ms Anca Damian**, director, writer and producer, Romania

**Ms Anna Serner**, CEO, Swedish Film Institute

**Ms Marianne Slot**, film producer, Denmark and France

### Rapporteur

**Ms Susan Newman-Baudais**, Project Manager, Eurimages

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### **What obstacles did panellists identify for the greater participation of women?**

All four panellists provided examples demonstrating the difficulties encountered by women working both in front of and behind the camera. This begins with the erasure from the canon of the work of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century women pioneers of cinema, thus depriving succeeding generations of role models, and continues up to the present day, with women filmmakers and professionals tending to be confined to lower cost, less prestigious projects, and women's acting careers limited by age and perceived capacity to draw an audience. Films that reach wide audiences tend to be more costly and are rarely directed by a woman or have a principally female cast. As a result, women apprehend society through the gaze of men. This situation arises because the power structures at this level are dominated by male decision-makers who perceive female directors and women's films generally as inherently more risky and this perception is echoed by distributors (companies that make the films available for cinema screening and promote them) who believe that films with female characters do not attract audiences. Finally, notions of quality in film are societal constructs which involve conscious or indeed unconscious biases that can work against women professionals in the film industry.

### **What recommendations do panellists make for action?**

The primary focus should be to address imbalances in the power and decision-making structures in the film industry. Public institutions play an important role in financing film production in many countries world-wide and should aim for parity in the composition of decision-making and selection committees, but also in governance structures. Quotas in the gender distribution of film funding can be put in place (or can be used as a threat!) but continuously monitored targets have proved easier to implement. Implementing change in the private sector which is instrumental in the production of big budget, high impact films is more difficult, but awareness can be raised by civil society groups (networking groups were mentioned specifically) and change can also come from the regulatory environment (for example general quotas for female company directors). Gendered research should be fostered, as where this has been undertaken, it can often be demonstrated that women filmmakers do not represent an economic risk, but instead bring new audiences and ensure creative

renewal. The impact of unconscious bias in decision-making should be acknowledged and training should be systematically proposed to help overcome this. Finally, more objective and broader criteria for the measurement of “quality” in film should be implemented, focussing for example on the relevance of the story for the audience, originality and filmmaking craft, with less importance placed on the critical reputation of the director.

**To which stakeholders are these recommendations addressed?**

These recommendations can be addressed to governments, but are especially relevant to public bodies active in the film sector.

**Key conclusions**

As a popular medium, film has high impact and plays an important role in shaping perceptions in society. Though the film industry around the world has begun to address questions of gender, research has shown that women filmmakers tend to be excluded from making the high budget films that reach the widest audiences. As a result, only one side of the human story is told.

Correcting imbalances in power and decision-making structures in the industry, moving away from unconscious constructs of expected quality towards more objective and broader definitions and challenging with data the probably erroneous perception that women’s films involve more risk are three of the main areas for action identified.

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