



Gender Equality in Theatre



**Suggestions and recommendations for
publicly funded theatres, policy makers
and funders at the local, national and
European level**



This paper distils ideas and recommendations for Gender Equality in theatre.

In 2021, ETC published its first landmark study on Gender Equality and Diversity in European Theatres. Among conclusions that men dominate job categories of playwright, director, and technical staff, the research uncovered the “remarkable” gender impact of decision makers in theatre: female authors and directors are more likely to select diverse teams than male counterparts. The conclusions were supported by the publication of a set of policy recommendations.

Since then, the ETC network has continued to focus on issues of diversity and inclusion in European theatres, through large-scale artistic collaboration projects on non-dominant voices such as Young Europe IV. Given the strong desire within the network to repeat the initial research on gender equality in European Theatres, ETC commissioned a second study on Gender Equality in European Theatres, which is accompanied by these policy recommendations.

The updated recommendations identify the importance of achieving parity in the theatre workforce and in directors and playwrights programmed on stage. They highlight the importance of efforts to include more women and non-binary artists, and of inclusive language and diversity monitoring to tackle a patriarchal culture, homophobia, and precarious working conditions.

As the policy recommendations are informed by the ETC’s new study on Gender Equality in European Theatres, they are aware of the study’s limitations: it is based on data from 13 theatres in 11 European countries, which is a small sample of the entire European theatre sector.



Publicly-Funded Theatres

The Workplace

- » **Continue to monitor diversity**, particularly during the recruitment process. Research shows that diversity decreases when it is not assessed. In addition, several interlocutors in the recent ETC study on Gender Equality in European Theatres expressed concern about the fragility of progressive changes on diversity, which they said were the result of external pressures rather than internal support.
- » **Ensure the corporate culture is more inclusive** so that women and non-binary people feel entitled to apply for managerial positions in all departments. ETC's research revealed a gendered distribution of managers, with women more frequently managing human resources, costumes or design, while men manage technical services or security.
- » **Train employees** to be aware of gender bias, to support colleagues to overcome issues such as a lack of recognition, or fatigue due to legitimacy issues.
- » **Take care to integrate transgender**, gender-fluid and non-binary people into teams working in theatres, through hiring practices and in offering a safe working environment.

- » **Consider setting numerical targets** in strategic plans for diversity and creating a position for gender advisor or diversity officer.

The Programmes

- » **Improve space given to women's creative work on stage.** ETC's recent research found little change in the number of playwrights and directors selected by theatres since 2021: Two-thirds of the shows are directed or written by cisgender men, compared with 20-25% by women.
- » **Take advice from transgender, non-binary and gender-fluid artists.** Theatres responding to the ETC research stressed that the actions of artists themselves (collective actions by unions, or in requesting that a transgender character be played by a transgender actor) were key elements in promoting diversity. In addition, take care to include transgender, gender-fluid and non-binary artists, directors and playwrights and characters in the programming and on stage.
- » **Monitor programming** to check which directors and playwrights are programmed, which characters take centre stage, and which actors and actresses are visible. This is a point emphasized by the theatres that responded to the survey: raise awareness of the problem, set targets, monitor programming, and be careful to programme shows that address gender issues in general and LGBTQIA+ issues in particular.
- » **Consider using inclusive language** in programming and external communication.



Policy Makers and Funders at Local and National Levels

- » **Continue to support laws on equality** that are adapted to the local context. Theatres participating in the ETC research stressed that these laws are the primary factors in promoting diversity, and that European, national, regional and municipal policies promote a context for gender equality.
 - » **Provide theatres with the autonomy** to develop an internal policy adapted to their realities, and to manage their theatres in a manner that is not interfered with by legislation.
 - » **Conduct education and awareness** raising among the general public, politicians and people working in the cultural sector to tackle a patriarchal culture and issues such as homophobia, transphobia and biphobia.
 - » **Consider obliging establishments receiving public funding** to develop diversity plans. National theatres seem to employ the most men and give the most space to shows created and performed by men. The theatres that sell the most tickets are often also those that favour men the most, and it is likely that these establishments are among those that receive the most public subsidies.
- » **Improve working conditions for theatre professionals.** In particular, take the issue of motherhood seriously to provide relevant career adjustment, including financial and emotional support, and in taking parenthood into account in the evaluation of CVs and therefore in the access to subsidies and positions of responsibility.
 - » **Continue to push** for equal pay and more broadly on the social rights of workers in the sector.



Policy Makers at the EU Level

- » **Continue to follow ETC policy recommendations** on gender equality from 2021. These include supporting longitudinal studies of equality and diversity in cultural institutions across Europe; supporting the research and publication of a catalogue of good practices in programming; supporting mechanisms and programmes that focus on improving diversity and gender equality; and considering the Voices of Culture report on 'Gender Equality: Gender Balance in the Cultural and Creative Sectors'. The theatres responding to the recent ETC research called for legislation, training, networking and the sharing of experience between countries and establishments.
- » **Be mindful of new pressures** on theatres caused by geopolitical instability. This includes the impact of the war in Ukraine, but also a form of censorship by governments. In addition, theatres are affected by the radicalisation of certain sections of the population, sexist attacks and attacks on LGBTQIA+ communities. The fight for human rights remains an important mission for the EU, including freedom of expression for artists.



Conclusion

While national contexts vary, it is important to emphasise the importance of addressing a patriarchal cultural and precarious working conditions for women.

The **policy recommendations in this document** are designed for publicly-funded theatres, national funders, and EU policy makers, in the context of ongoing cuts to public funding, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the climate crisis. They draw deeply on learning from the latest ETC research on Gender Equality in European Theatres, which does have some limitations: relatively few ETC theatres responded to the survey, and it is possible that those that did were among the establishments already aware of the issues. Secondly, only gender diversity was tested, while other elements of diversity (such as race and sexual orientation) were not questioned.

The **recommendations identify** the importance of achieving parity in the working of theatres, and also in programming through the choice of directors and playwrights. They highlight the importance of efforts to include more women and non-binary artists, and of inclusive language and monitoring diversity to tackle a patriarchal culture, homophobia, and precarious working conditions.

By **implementing these recommendations**, we aim to ensure that the theatre sector thrives by reflecting and representing local communities. ETC aims to **fight** for these requirements in upcoming programmes and advocacy actions.

About ETC

As the largest network of public theatres in Europe, ETC has 63 members from 31 countries, reflecting the diversity of Europe's vibrant cultural sector.

Founded in 1988, ETC promotes European theatre as a vital platform for dialogue, democracy and interaction that responds to, reflects and engages with today's diverse audiences and changing societies.

ETC fosters an inclusive notion of theatre that brings Europe's social, linguistic and cultural heritage to audiences and communities in Europe and beyond. Powerful and professional ETC governance ensures that the network will thrive and grow, taking into consideration the latest trends and developments.

The ETC's current three-year programme of activities, "TRANSFORMATIONS – Recharging European Theatres and Audiences in a Post-Covid World", offers Member Theatres many opportunities and project possibilities. This comprehensive, groundbreaking programme is supported by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

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