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# Finally, beyond status quo? Analysis of steps taken to improve gender equality in the European audiovisual sector in light of the #MeToo movement

Dilara Asardag<sup>a</sup> and Marlen Komorowski<sup>b,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Communication Sciences, Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland; <sup>b</sup>JOMEC—School of Journalism, Media and Culture, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK; <sup>c</sup>Imec-VUB-SMIT (Studies on Media, Innovation and Technology), Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels, Belgium

## ABSTRACT

This research examines the situation of women and the initiatives implemented to support women in the audiovisual sector in Europe in light of the #MeToo movement. Our study is grounded in critical feminist cultural theory. We engaged primarily in secondary data analysis of two study objects: (1) reports and studies that highlight the situation of women and (2) secondary data on initiatives and practices that aim to change the situation of women. We also conducted eight interviews. Although the representation of women in the audiovisual sector is still estimated to be 20–30%, there exist initiatives and actions aiming to support women by different means to reach equality in the labour market, tackle sexual harassment and gender stereotyping, and create visibility. These initiatives include networking opportunities, mentoring and training programmes, regulatory measures, psychological and legal support, and data gathering and provision. The success of the initiatives can depend on the organisational and funding structure/public support. Most initiatives involve NGOs, public service broadcasters (PSB), film festivals, public institutions, and film funding bodies. Finally, we recommend going beyond the notion of visibility while adopting an intersectional approach to action and data collection.

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## KEYWORDS

#MeToo; gender equality; audiovisual sector; popular feminism; intersectionality

## Introduction

The audiovisual (AV) sector has been the starting point of worldwide heated debates, protests, and shocking revelations of incidences of sexual harassment against women under the umbrella of the #MeToo movement. The #MeToo movement gained renewed momentum in October 2017 after women came forward with allegations of sexual harassment and assault by movie producer Harvey Weinstein (Perraudin 2019). In March 2020, Harvey Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison (BBC 2020).

Since 2017, the #MeToo movement has had immense impact. It has inspired debates and shun light on initiatives across Europe, as stories came to light about harassment or assault in the workplace, often by men in positions of power. The #MeToo movement has deep roots in the film sector but very quickly became part of the whole AV sector in Europe. For instance, in 2018, the film director Dieter Wedel was the first German celebrity who became a focus of the #MeToo debate.

**CONTACT** Dilara Asardag  [dilara.asardag@tuni.fi](mailto:dilara.asardag@tuni.fi)  Communication Sciences, Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences, Tampere University, Kalevantie 4, Tampere 33100, Finland

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Several actresses accused him of violent sexual assaults in the 1990s (Simon and Wahba 2018). In Sweden, several women used #MeToo to confront the TV presenter Martin Timell, whose TV4 broadcasts were dropped shortly after (The Local 2017). Even before the #MeToo movement, it was widely acknowledged that the situation for women in the AV sector needed to be improved. This necessity of improvement was highlighted by, among others, the Sarajevo Declaration in 2015, which called for the implementation of policies to reduce the gender imbalance in the European AV industry. However, the aftermath of the #MeToo movement in 2017 created a new public consciousness and a broader discussion about the implications of inequalities women face in terms of salaries, labour conditions, funding, career paths, and more. This awareness brought forth the visibility of existing initiatives that aim to support women in the AV sector, as well as the introduction of new ones.

Although there has been a strong momentum for such initiatives through the #MeToo movement, this exists side by side with increasing backlash and misogyny. The backlash comes not only from the rhetoric and actions of far-right politicians and conservative discourses around the victimisation of men but also from women themselves (DW 2018; Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Lisnek, Wilkins, and Ekstrom 2022). Anti-genderism is a flexible but coherent ideological construct that is consciously used by right-wing populists worldwide (Graff and Korolczuk 2022, 93). Just like populist leaders, the movements' key ideologues are self-proclaimed defenders of freedom and democracy, which, in their view, have been hijacked by liberals and leftists. Anti-gender activists claim to represent 'the true' civil society, which aims to replace bureaucratised and alienated elites with foreign-funded non-governmental organisations and supranational institutions. This includes EU-level gender mainstreaming efforts as well as gender being considered as 'Ebola from Brussels' by right-wing actors (Graff and Korolczuk 2022, 93). Also, some claim that women's voices about the #MeToo movement cause victimisation of men (Lisnek, Wilkins, and Ekstrom 2022). The backlash can be exemplified with the debates about #MeToo in France by women themselves. In January 2018, French actress Catherine Deneuve and other artists wrote an open letter that the wave of denunciations by women about sexual assault in the wake of the #MeToo movement was a 'witch-hunt' and a threat to sexual freedom (DW 2018). Therefore, due to the developments around the #MeToo movement in Europe as well as the simultaneous existence of misogyny, we argue that it is now the time to look back on the developments in the AV sector in Europe and ask the question: What impact did #MeToo have on the AV sector in Europe, and what can we learn from it to move forward? In fact, much can be observed to have happened in the AV sector in Europe in terms of impact in light of the #MeToo movement, including the collection of new data, the publication of new reports, the signature of pledges, and the building of new and strengthening of previously existing initiatives and actions that aim to support women in the AV sector in Europe.

The main aim of this paper is to provide an opportunity for critical reflection on the development of the situation of women in the AV sector in Europe and, we hope, to provide policy learning for policymakers, academics, and private and public stakeholders. We engaged foremost in secondary data analysis and interviews by looking at existing data about women in the AV sector in Europe and the ongoing initiatives that support them. We attempt to make our analysis in light of contemporary academic reflections on feminism. Our findings propose an entry point for those seeking specific support in designing and implementing interventions for the situation of women and aim to foster academic debate about rationales, intervention logics, and the opportunities and limits of analysing and understanding impacts regarding resisting sexual harassment and endorsing gender equality. The specific impacts include the collection of new data, the publication of new reports, the signature of pledges, and the building of new and strengthening of existing initiatives and actions that aim to support women in the AV sector in Europe to reach equality in (a) the labour market, while (b) tackling sexual harassment and (c) gender stereotyping and (d) creating visibility. Our paper is structured as follows. First, we will provide an overview of important and relevant theories and debates in the literature regarding feminism. Second, we will outline the methodology applied in the paper in more detail. Third, we will outline our findings by giving insights into the situation of

women in the AV sector in Europe and by discussing and presenting initiatives and actions from the sector in light of critical feminist cultural theory.

## Theoretical background

Our study is grounded in critical feminist cultural theory, taking into account the concepts of popular feminism and popular misogyny, postfeminism, and neoliberal feminism. Based on an analysis of various examples from advertising, politics, internet forums, and campaigns from both feminist and men's rights organisations, Banet-Weiser argues in her book *'Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny'* (2018) that 'popular feminism' and 'popular misogyny' exist simultaneously and rely on networked relationships (Kim 2019). Banet-Weiser (2018) refers to popular feminism as practices and conditions accessible to a broad public, from organising marches to hashtag activism and commodities. She argues, however, that the visibility of popular feminism with examples appearing on television, in film, on social media, and on bodies is important, but this form of feminism often fails to transform patriarchal structures (Banet-Weiser 2018). Popular feminism flourishes along a continuum of spectacular, media-friendly expressions, such as 'celebrity feminism' and 'corporate feminism', that achieve more visibility, whereas expressions that critique patriarchal structures and systems of racism and violence are hidden (see Gill 2011, 2016; McRobbie 2009; Rottenberg 2014).

Corporate and media-friendly popular feminism emerged from the increasing visibility of gender gaps in dominant economic spheres, such as a lack of female CEOs and film directors, a lack of women in technology and media fields, and an increased awareness of sexual harassment within corporate sectors, including media and technology (Banet-Weiser, Gill, and Rottenberg 2019). However, it has been argued that initiatives to tackle these gender gaps often take an insufficient approach and do not embrace intersectionality. Scott (1991) calls this the 'add women and stir' sort of liberalism, where the presence of women is sufficient to call it 'feminism.' Scott (1991) argued that having more bodies on the table is important but that their mere presence does not necessarily 'challenge the structure that supports and builds the table in the first place'.

Popular feminism is considerably similar to the concept of 'evolved' feminism influenced by a neoliberal society and named 'postfeminism' and 'neoliberal feminism' (Banet-Weiser 2012; Gill 2007; Kim 2019; McRobbie 2004; Rottenberg 2014). The postfeminist ideal, a constellation of ideas about the 'pastness' of feminism, locates women now as autonomous agents who are emancipated from outdated sexism and patriarchal restrictions (Gill 2014; Kim 2019). Indebted to these social changes, women are now free and can take the responsibility to achieve their success through self-development and skills acquisition (Banet-Weiser 2012; Gill 2007; Kim 2019). Gill (2014) argues that the postfeminist sensibility posits that 'all battles have been supposedly won', which renders inequality increasingly difficult to speak about.

The postfeminism concept is relevant in this context because it can explain the backlash against the #MeToo movement and its consideration as a threat to the sexual freedom of women by some artists in France. Banet-Weiser's understanding supports this (Banet-Weiser 2018), as she points out that 'popular feminism' and 'popular misogyny' exist simultaneously. Moreover, neoliberal feminism attempts to obtain gender equality by situating women as individualised, entrepreneurial, and creative subjects capable of balancing family and work through the effective mobilisation of resources (Rottenberg 2014). Neoliberal feminism is also important for our analysis because we realise that women are increasingly encouraged to take risks, be entrepreneurial, and be resilient in the very competitive AV job market (Morgan and Nelligan 2015; Rottenberg 2014).

Banet-Weiser et al. (2019) argue that social and digital media have been the most visible platforms for popular feminism, where for example, an explosion of feminist hashtag activism is observable: from #bringbackourgirls to #solidarityisforwhitewomen, #yesallwomen, #NotOkay, and #MeToo. Critical academic studies related to this contemporary feminism generally investigate modern feminism's broader visibility and signification through advertising, politics, hashtag movements,

internet forums, and campaigns. More specifically, feminist academic hashtag movement studies usually examine the role of social media in women's discursive activism in the US, Europe, and various other contexts (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir 2021; Fileborn and Loney-Howes 2019; Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2018; Nanditha 2021; Sweeny 2020). Moreover, following the impact that the #MeToo movement has had and still has and the recent demands for a 50/50 dispersion between men and women with regard to positions in the film industry, gender equality issues have advanced to the forefront in discussions considering the working situation in the AV sector. It is pointed out that these discussions have appeared in various national contexts in print and social media, as well as in academic work (see, e.g. Jansson et al. 2020; Liddy 2020; Marghitu 2018; Meziani and Cabantous 2020; O'Brien 2019). It is revealed that gender inequality exists across the AV sector and that there are regional differences in how women experience their work and career situations (Wallenberg and Jansson 2021). Understanding these differences and their impacts is very valuable for planning and creating initiatives to support women in the future.

Therefore, in our research, by realising the momentum of the #MeToo movement in the European AV sector and the simultaneous existence of misogyny and the postfeminist condition, we would like to offer an alternative route to academic studies that examine the #MeToo movement as discursive activism by looking at the empirical steps taken and actual initiatives implemented for women in light of the #MeToo movement. Based on existing discussions about popular feminism, we aim to give insights beyond popular feminism, as it is driven by #MeToo in the AV sector in Europe, and shine a light on developments in the industry beyond mere visibility and popular discourse.

Nevertheless, we argue that it is essential to consider the current state of affairs in the sector in terms of general gender disparity, labour access, and representation. We wonder if such a highly visible sector in the media, such as the AV sector in Europe, can possibly not have an impact on structural changes? In this way, we are aware that we should not take into account every visible action, step, and articulation as a genuine feminist attempt, as social and structural constraints exist. At the same time, however, it is important not to degrade every action, step, and articulation as another demonstration of a failed feminist attempt that does not bring any agency or improvement to the situation of women. This is especially important when we observe that gender mainstreaming attempts have faced a lot of backlash in recent years. Grounded in critical feminist cultural theory that takes into account popular feminism, popular misogyny, postfeminism, and neoliberal feminism and considering both the potential positive impact of the momentum of the #MeToo movement as well as the negative ramifications, this study aims to offer new insights by looking at the actual initiatives and data provided in the AV sector in Europe.

## Methodology

In this research, we utilised a secondary analysis methodology. The secondary data analysis was built on a review of previously collected data and insights in the area of interest (Johnston 2017). Secondary information was compiled utilising desk research and was complemented with eight interviews. We built the interviews on a semi-structured and open-ended approach. We interviewed eight leading experts between June 2019 and January 2020 who represented or whose work dealt with women's initiatives in Europe's AV sector. The people we interviewed included Diana Elbaum (founder of Le Boostcamp, Belgium), Francine Raveney (founder of EWA, European level), Marie-Claire Isaaman (CEO of Women in Games, UK), Ruth Lemmen (co-founder of Womenize!, Germany), Sandra David (equal opportunities commissioner and chair of the Equal Opportunities Conference of ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) and ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen), Germany), Patrizia Simone (analyst at the European AV Observatory, European level), Else Christensen-Redzepovic (project manager at Voices of Culture, European level) and Sarah Brunet (Policy Officer European Commission, DG Connect, European level). We paid attention to the fact that our interviewees would represent

different fields of the AV sector in Europe as well as different initiatives implemented. They contributed their lived experiences of organising various European-level initiatives and were chosen according to the perceived impact of their work. Some interview candidates who represented different European countries were extremely busy during the time of the interviews; therefore, several other potential participants were excluded from the study.

**Interviewees can be seen in the table below:**

	Organisation	Interviewee Position	Location	Website
<b>Interviewee 1</b>	Le Boostcamp	Founder	Belgium	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/leboostcamp/">https://www.facebook.com/leboostcamp/</a>
<b>Interviewee 2</b>	EWA (European Women's Audiovisual Network)	Founder	European level	<a href="https://www.ewawomen.com">https://www.ewawomen.com</a>
<b>Interviewee 3</b>	Women in Games	CEO	United Kingdom	<a href="https://www.womenin.games.org">https://www.womenin.games.org</a>
<b>Interviewee 4</b>	Womenize!	Co-founder	Germany	<a href="https://www.womenize.net">https://www.womenize.net</a>
<b>Interviewee 5</b>	ARD and ZDF	Equal opportunities commissioner and chair of the Equal Opportunities Conference of ARD and ZDF	Germany	<a href="https://www.ard.de">https://www.ard.de</a>
<b>Interviewee 6</b>	European AV Observatory	Analyst	European level	<a href="https://www.obs.coe.int/en/web/observatoire/">https://www.obs.coe.int/en/web/observatoire/</a>
<b>Interviewee 7</b>	Voices of Culture	Project manager	European level	<a href="https://voicesofculture.eu/about/">https://voicesofculture.eu/about/</a>
<b>Interviewee 8</b>	European Commission, DG Connect	Policy officer	European level	<a href="https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarah-brunet-742453b/?originalSubdomain=be">https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarah-brunet-742453b/?originalSubdomain=be</a>

We interpreted the data through a meta-analysis methodology because drawing lessons from the evaluation of a single initiative or from a limited number of narratives labelled as 'best cases', while common, has its limitations (Edler et al. 2016). This meta-analysis allows us to systematically take advantage of the numerous evaluations of data and initiatives that have been published. This study attempts to create additional value by producing frequent comparisons that synthesise the effects of women's initiatives. We have found that critical feminist scholarship often focuses on the discursive and connotative dimensions of feminist articulations, usually neglecting the empirical ramifications of practices/initiatives geared towards gender equality. For these reasons, the idea of a structured effort to learn from the extensive array of evidence both fills a gap and offers promising opportunities for new insights.

We focused on two study objects: (1) reports and studies highlighting the situation of women in the AV sector in Europe and (2) secondary data on initiatives and practices aiming to intervene and change the situation of women in the AV sector in Europe. We systematically compiled, analysed, and interpreted the findings of the (1) reports and evaluated the (2) initiatives, taking into account the differences in contexts and methods, thus allowing in-depth, yet contextualised, learning from them. The goal was to build recommendations that could be used to move forward regarding women's issues. Still, it should be highlighted that a meta-analysis in this context needs to be conducted with care and has limitations in how the findings can be interpreted, given the idiosyncrasies of interventions, their contexts, and uneven data availabilities. We also do not claim that the data presented here covers all reports and initiatives that exist in Europe (this is also due to language barriers). In this study, we included European countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, France, and Belgium, but due to the mentioned language barriers, Southern European countries like Spain and Portugal are excluded from this study. Still, based on our approach, we are confident that our analysis is robust.

## Findings of the meta-analysis

### *State of affairs*

The timeframe of the data of the reports we analysed was 2014–2019. In the eye of the #MeToo movement, many reports and studies have received much attention. This situation makes the AV sector unique compared with other European sectors in terms of access to statistics. Academic research on Europe (except feminism studies that primarily look at female representation in AV content) in this area is still rare. We found that reports in some countries are unavailable or could not be identified, while data from several sources are available in other countries. There is clear imparity. We identified data on the level of Europe and, specifically, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Finland. [Table 1](#) shows the detailed meta-analyses conducted.

Based on the analysis, we comprehend that the most detailed data on women in the AV sector in Europe can be found for directors, screenwriters, producers, and employees of public service broadcasters (PSBs). Studies are regularly conducted by various organisations that report on different matters concerning women and use different methods and data. Organisations that publish studies on women in the AV sector in Europe include film funding institutions, initiatives that represent women in the AV sector, higher education institutions (HEI), public and private broadcasters, public bodies and ministries, and associations of industry occupations.

Looking at the findings of these different studies, we can conclude that there is apparent gender disparity in the AV sector in Europe. We can summarise the findings based on the data presented in [Table 1](#) as follows:

1. The share of women in the AV sector in Europe is broadly estimated at 20–30% (depending on the occupation, position, and sub-sector).

For example, the European Women’s Audiovisual Network (EWA) published a 2016 report that studied female directors in seven European countries. Based on the report, in Europe, only one in five films is directed by a woman (21%) (EWA 2016). Other reports support this finding (e.g. European AV Observatory 2019).

2. Additionally, different studies demonstrate a clear pay gap and issues regarding labour conditions, funding, and career paths for women. The B.B.C., for instance, published its first gender pay gap report in 2017, which showed a median pay gap of 9.3% between women and men. (BBC 2019)
3. Still, some differences need to be taken into account, as some countries do better than others in terms of gender equality.

Northern European countries do better than Eastern European countries. For example, the Swedish Film Institute revealed in its study that they achieved the goal of 50% female filmmakers for the period 2013–2016 (The Swedish Film Institute 2018). In contrast, the Slovenian Film Fund published a study that found that in certain years between 2012 and 2017, not a single feature film by a female director was supported by the fund (Slovenian Film Fund 2018).

4. Women are also better represented in specific sub-sectors (with the video game sector having the lowest share of women) and in certain genres. (this is the case for children’s films and documentaries, for example)

The European Audiovisual Observatory (2019) found that the prevalence of female directors is higher in documentaries than in fiction and animation. The International Game Developers Association



**Table 1.** The systematic overview for meta-analysis of existing study findings on the state of women in the AV sector in Europe.

Organisation	Type of Organisation	(Main) Object of Study	AV Sub-Sector Studied	Geographical Level Studied	Methodology	% Women representation
Creative Europe MEDIA Programme (2019)	Governmental Organisation	Female Directors Applying for MEDIA Programme Funding	Film	Europe	Programme Data	29% (applicants)
EURIMAGES (Ruiz 2019)	European Council Film Fund	Female Directors Applying for EURIMAGE Funding	Film	Europe	Programme Data	31% (funded)
European AV Observatory (2019)	Governmental Organisation	Female Directors	Film	Europe	Lumiere Database	21%
European Women's Audiovisual Network (EWA 2016)	NGO	Female Directors	Film	Europe	Survey	21%
McETES New York University (Jones 2017)	HEI	Female Directors	Film	Europe	Lumiere Pro World Database	17%
European Broadcasting Union (EBU) (2019)	Union of Broadcasting Organisations	Employees in Public Service Media	TV	Europe (member of EBU)	Survey	45%
International Game Developers Association (2015)	NGO	Female Workers in the Games Industry	Video Games	Europe	Survey	22%
The Universität Wien (2018)	HEI	Female Directors Applying for Austrian Film Institute Funding	Film	Austria	Programme Data	20% (funded)
French Centre National du Cinéma (CNC 2014)	Film Funding Institution	Female Directors Applying for CNC Funding	Film	France	Programme Data	25% (applicants)
FFA (German Filmförderungsanstalt) (Hochfeld, Iffländer and Prommer 2017)	Film Funding Institution	Management Positions in Filmmaking	Feature Films and Documentaries	Germany	FFA Data and Mediabiz Data	26%
HFF MUNICH (2016)	HEI	Female Directors	Film	Berlin Film Festival	Festival Data	29%
CNR (Istituto di Ricerche sulla popolazione e le politiche sociali) (Dea 2017)	Public Research Institute	Female Directors Applying for CNC Funding	Film	Italy	Programme Data	12% (funded)
Slovenian Film Fund/Slovenian Film Centre (2018)	Film Funding Institution	Female Directors Applying for Slovenian Film Fund Funding	Films (Cinema)	Slovenia	Programme Data	12% (funded)
Swedish Film Institute (2018)	Film Institute	Female Filmmakers (key roles)	Film	Sweden	Swedish Film Institute's Internal Databases and the Swedish Film Database	50%
BBC (2019)	Public Service Broadcaster	B.B.C. Senior Female Leaders	TV	UK	Internal Data	44%
ARD (2018)	Public Service Broadcaster	ARD Female Employees	TV	Germany	Internal Data	50%

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued).

Organisation	Type of Organisation	(Main) Object of Study	AV Sub-Sector Studied	Geographical Level Studied	Methodology	% Women representation
YLE (2019)	Public Service Broadcaster	YLE Key Roles (Female Journalists, Editors and Producers)	TV	Finland	Internal Data	55%
SACD (2018)	Author Society	Female Management Board Members of Public Broadcasting Companies	TV	France	Internal Data	36%
Creative Skillset (2016)	UK-wide strategic skills body	Female Workers in the Games Industry	Video Games	UK	Survey	19%

found that only 22% of workers in the gaming industry identified as 'female' (European Parliament 2018).

5. Finally, women are better or worse represented depending on the occupation in the AV sector in Europe.

This is the case, for instance, for a stronger underrepresentation in senior positions such as management and leadership roles for women and more representation in costume design.

The Fraunhofer Institut, on behalf of the FFA (German: Filmförderungsanstalt), supports this with its findings on the German film sector. They found that while costume design as a profession has an overrepresentation of women (89%) and editing is relatively equal (51%), professions in sound (3%) and cinematography (6%) have a meagre percentage of women (Hochfeld, Iffländer, and Prommer 2017).

### ***Initiatives, actions, and organisations***

Our study of initiatives covered the period from the 1970s until 2020. We conducted interviews between June 2019 and January 2020. Based on our analysis and the interviews conducted, we have found that there are many initiatives and organisations that work on gender balance and equality in the AV sector in Europe. Compared to other industries, the AV sector has a unique position in which women have access to and are supported by a vast European-wide network of organisations. [Table 2](#) shows a detailed meta-analysis of the identified initiatives and organisations.

Geographically, we have found initiatives on European, national, and global levels. While one has been in place as far back as the 1970s, 10 have been implemented in 2016 or after, meaning in the last 7–8 years. European AV SCD (2011–2018), The Women in Film & Television International (1970s), Wave Women in AV (2014), European AV Entrepreneurs (EAVE) (1988), Collective 50–50 (2016), EWA (2012–2013), ARD Cross Mentoring Programme (2011–2012) and Women in Games (WIGJ) (2009) have been in place before the #MeToo movement. However, the initiatives from Voices of Culture (2019), European AV Observatory (2019), Creative Europe Media (2019), EURIMAGES (2018–2020), Le Boostcamp (2017), Cannes Film Festival/Festival Community (2018), Rise Initiative (2018), THEMIS (2018), and Womenize! (2019) have been implemented after the #MeToo movement. Some of these initiatives cover the AV sector in a rather overarching manner (film, video, and other screen-based media), while others focus specifically on the film, TV, and video game sub-sectors. Following the analysis of the organisations and initiatives in more detail, we came to the following conclusions:

1. Initiatives and actions aim to support women in the AV sector in Europe by different means. This includes the goals of (a) reaching equality in the labour market, (b) tackling sexual harassment and gender stereotyping, and (c) creating visibility.

When initiatives aim to create (a) equality in labour market access, they mainly focus on access to leadership and management positions, payment inequalities, diversity in the workspace, and work – life related problems like stress management. This finding was well supported in our interviews. In our interview, Marie-Claire Isaaman defines the organising principle of Women in Games as 'Equality, it's our North Star'. She points out that everything they do is in the service of achieving lasting equality for all women throughout the game industry and beyond. Additionally, (b) sexual harassment has become a prominent topic for initiatives and organisations, especially since #MeToo. For example, THEMIS is an initiative that explicitly attempts to tackle sexual harassment in the industry by providing legal and psychological support to women. We have also identified initiatives that tackle (c) gender stereotyping and discrimination by making role models visible, combating bias, and enhancing the positive and equal representation of women. For example, as indicated in our interview, Womenize! is a platform for 'Heroes-women' who have inspirational personalities that



**Table 2.** The overview of identified and analysed initiatives and organisations working on women's issues in the AV sector in Europe.

Organisation	Type	Geographical reach	Date founded	Target group	Sector/ sub-sector	Main Focus of Organisation/initiative					
						Networking	Mentoring & training measures	Regulatory measures	Legal & psychol. support	Data collection	
The social partners (management and labour) of the EU Audiovisual Social Dialogue Committee (European AV SCD)	European Commission initiative	Europe	2011–2018	Women	AV			X			X
Voices of Culture European AV Observatory	European Commission initiative Public service organisation (not an EU body but part of Council of Europe and mandated by European Commission)	Europe Europe	2019 Gender Data Collection since 2019	Women Female directors	AV Film						X X
The Women in Film & Television International (WIFTI)	NGO	Global	1970s	Women, non-binary people	AV	X	X				X
WAVE Women in AV European AV Entrepreneurs (EAVE)	NGO Professional organisation	US/UK/Global Europe/Global	2014 1988	Women Female professionals	AV AV	X X	X X				
Creative Europe MEDIA EURIMAGES Collective 50–50 European Women's AV Network (EWA)	EU programme European Council Film Funds Film festival campaign NGO	Europe Europe Europe/Global Europe	2019 2018–20 2016 2012–13	Women Women Women Women	Film Film Film Film			X			X X X
Le Boostcamp	NGO	Belgium	2017	Female directors	Film	X					
Cannes Film Festival/Film Festival Community Feminist/Women's Film Festivals	Film festivals/film festival community Film festivals	Europe/Global Europe/National	2018 n.a.	Women Women	Film Film	X X		X		X	
Rise Initiative	Non-profit group	UK/Europe	2018	Women professionals	TV				X		
SVD Europe Women	Network	Europe/Global	n.a.	Women professionals	TV		X				
THEMIS	Joint Initiative of professional associations, broadcasters and cultural institutions	Europe/Global	2018	Women	TV						X

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

Organisation	Type	Geographical reach	Date founded	Target group	Sector/ sub-sector	Main Focus of Organisation/Initiative				
						Networking	Mentoring & training	Regulatory measures	Legal & psychol. support	Data collection
ARD Cross Mentoring Programme/Executive Development Programme	PSB	Germany	2011–12	Women	TV		X			X
B.B.C. 5050 Project/Expert Woman Programme	PSB	UK	n.a.	Women	TV		X			X
Creative Assembly	Video game developer	UK	n.a.	Women/girls	Video games	X				
Women in Games WIGJ	NGO	Europe	2009	Women/girls	Video games	X				X
Womenize!	NGO advocacy group	Germany	2019	Women	Video games	X				
G into Gaming	Campaign	UK	n.a.	Women	Video games	X				

motivate others. Finally, social media stories/revelations through #MeToo demonstrate how campaigning can have a strong impact on the public debate and create (d) visibility for women's issues.

2. To achieve these goals, many concrete actions and activities exist that support women in the AV sector in Europe. This includes the (a) provision of networking opportunities, (b) mentoring and training programmes, (c) regulatory measures, (d) psychological and legal support, and (e) data gathering and provision.

We have found that many organisations offer events, debates, workshops, and conferences, among others for (a) networking. For example, the Women in Games conference is organised annually to represent the diversity of talent in the industry. When organisations and initiatives offer (b) mentoring and training, this often includes achievement programmes for young women, workshops, coaching programmes, research, mentoring, and training. For instance, the ARD Cross Mentoring Programme encourages women to take leadership positions. If (c) regulatory measures are used, they include official quotas, parity in selection committees of film funding bodies, and soft quotas promoting the financing of films realised by women. For instance, EURIMAGES has taken a proactive approach towards gender equality and commits to 50/50 funding of film. (d) The provision of legal and psychological support by organisations involves services and support for women suffering from sexual harassment in the AV sector. For example, the Cannes Film Festival arranged a harassment hotline for women in 2019. Finally, organisations and initiatives tackle official data disparity on gender-related matters by encouraging and carrying out (e) gender-based data collection. For example, the European AV Observatory has started developing a neutral strategy for gender-based data collection

3. What actions are taken and how successful initiatives are can depend on the organisational and funding structure/public support. Most initiatives involve (a) NGOs, (b) public service broadcasters (PSB), (c) film festivals, (d) public institutions, and (e) film funding bodies.

Based on the published reports of the initiatives and our interviews with leaders of the initiatives and experts from the field (see above), we also interrogated the success of the initiatives analysed. We found that it was often reported that initiatives of (a) NGOs often struggle with securing finances. However, such initiatives are often highly engaging and open for women to participate, while they are driven by single, ambitious women who work on women's issues besides their jobs. Such NGO-based initiatives include Women in Film & Television Finland and the WIFT Nordic Network, which are particularly noted for their grassroots-level engagement. (b) PSBs are highly proactive throughout Europe, working on gender balance. Also, (c) film festivals have many initiatives to support women. For example, the campaign #5050x2020 was launched at the 2016 Cannes Film Festival when the Swedish Film Institute hosted an event titled 5050 by 2020: an action plan with respect to distribution of public funding to creative positions. Several national film commissions and film institutes followed the campaign shortly after this event. The (d) European Commission, the European Council, and related/affiliated organisations are particularly ardent in supporting gender equality. These involve, for example, the social partners (management and labour) of the EU Audiovisual Social Dialogue Committee, Voices of Culture, the European AV Observatory, and (e) film funding bodies like Creative EUROPE Media and EURIMAGES. Such organisations are often involved in gender mainstreaming efforts, data gathering processes, visibility creation, and funding offers. For example, the '2018–2020 EURIMAGES Gender Equality Strategy' (EURIMAGES 2017) and the Voices of Culture (2019) (European Commission) brainstorming report were published.

4. Finally, we found an disparity of actions and initiatives for women in the AV sector regarding the coverage of sub-sectors, countries, and occupations.

Some initiatives are overarching (covering different sectors: film, video, and other screen-based media). They can have local branches and influence from north to south. However, it can be perceived that Northern European countries such as the UK, Finland, Germany, Sweden, and Belgium offer better resources and initiatives to tackle gender inequality than Southern and Eastern European countries. Most initiatives support women directors/professionals/or simply women workers in the film sub-sector, followed by the TV and videogames sub-sector. Official systematic data collection can be observed to take place more robustly for the film sub-sector.

## Discussion and conclusion

Even though much has changed in the AV sector in Europe in the face of the #MeToo movement, this study shows that there is still a 20–30% gender gap in access and representation in the labour market. This gender gap is still a significant problem and needs to be acknowledged. Banet-Weiser (2018) rightly argued that popular feminism, which can include gender mainstreaming efforts at the European level, is, in fact, indebted to liberal feminism's critique of gendered exclusions in the public and corporate spheres. Accordingly, this corporate-friendly popular feminism emanates from the increasing visibility of a gendered disparity in dominant economic spheres.

Although looking at gender gaps, disparity, and exclusions and engaging in gender mainstreaming debates do not always offer a fully structural critique, we still think that such research is important, especially during our contemporary moment when European gender mainstreaming and gender equality policies are under misogynist attack (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). Therefore, according to our research, we can point out that although improvements can be observed in the AV sector, women's lack of representation in leadership and management positions, as well as access to employment and funding, requires urgent action for the European AV sector.

Moreover, we found that gender gaps result from systemic failures that are not easy to overcome. Because AV products like films are risky to produce (high investment and insecure return), the so-called glass cliff effect becomes prevalent where the aim is to repeat a previous success by re-using the same formula (Bielby and Bielby 1996). If the same formula is constantly repeated due to uncertainty, this results in overrepresentation of male directors who have been previously successful and underrepresentation of female directors who entered the occupation later. The glass cliff is the phenomenon of women in leadership roles being likelier than men to achieve such a position when the chance of failure and risk is highest (Ryan and Haslam 2005).

Associated with the risk of hiring women in the AV sector, there is also the notion that women may encounter negative stereotyping and labelling. This has been called the celluloid ceiling, which means that while women are increasingly present, key positions and leading roles are seldom filled with them (Lauzen 2012). It becomes a form of sexism when these stereotypes are seen as a factor in whether or not to hire someone (Gill 2014). This is supported by the lack of permeability between genres and formats in this study. Professional disadvantages arise for women, as they are more frequently associated with less commercially successful genres (like children and documentary films) and high-budget movies are very rarely directed by women. This can be summarised under the 'empty field' phenomenon, i.e. the institutionalisation of male dominance in the AV sector since the 1930s has had a lasting impact on gender inequality until today (Bielby and Bielby 1996).

The fast pace of the changing AV sector and the importance of networks are often cited as drivers of the gender gap. Women are often blocked at certain career stages in the AV sector for various reasons (Wright, Baxter, and Birkelund 1995). For example, in Europe, there is still a division of household work and the maintenance of the family, which needs to be balanced between men and women (EIGE 2016). Therefore, the prevalence of temporary employment and freelance work in the AV sector leads to income insecurity and issues with work – life balance, which disproportionately places women at a disadvantage (Eikhof 2012). Additionally, in the AV sector, returning to employment is often difficult after career breaks, which significantly includes caring for one's children after childbirth for women (Wing-Fai,

Gill, and Randle 2015). The impact of career breaks in the AV sector can be disproportionate due to the changing forces in the industry, which means that it is necessary to always keep up to date and to adapt to the changing requirements and skills needed for creative work with resilience.

In this context, the AV producers increasingly need new skills, including entrepreneurial savviness, confidence, and a risk-taking attitude, to compete in the new AV market (Morgan and Nelligan 2015). If we take women into account, the need for the formation of such neoliberal subjecthood aligns well with what Rottenberg (2014) critiques as 'neoliberal feminism': the attempt to obtain gender equality by situating women as individualised, entrepreneurial, and creative subjects who are capable of balancing family and work through the effective mobilisation of resources. We argue that although some women belonging to a higher stratum of society can perform this neoliberal subjectivity and compete in the labour market, this may not be true for all women, especially those from disadvantaged financial and educational backgrounds. In addition, the various entanglements of social stratification, such as class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, and disability, may further contribute to their disadvantaged positions.

Research into inequalities within the cultural and creative sectors points to the absence of debate and found that companies do not seem to be aware of the inequalities that are present (Gill 2014). Discussion and awareness are necessary to create gender equality. However, since the #MeToo movement, a lack of debate might not be the case for the AV sector anymore. Still, the inequalities in the AV sector go beyond the harassment and assault of women. Nevertheless, not talking about inequality and being silent can be a strategic choice for women to avoid damaging their valuable reputations (Thanki and Jefferys 2007). Recognising that problems are not isolated but exist within a more extensive structural system across the entire AV sector is vital to creating change.

Another reason for hindering open discussion that has been described in research is the influence of so-called postfeminism, which stresses that 'all the battles have already been won' regarding gender equality and which constitutes the idea that differences between men and women are now at the individual level and are no longer a general problem (Gill 2014). Based on these systemic failures and the threat of ongoing misogynist tendencies in the AV sector that hinder gender equality and based on the findings of the meta-analysis, we developed several recommendations to move forward in the future:

- (1) Data collection remains a cornerstone of any sustainable gender equality agenda to monitor the implementation of different action plans and to measure actual progress. Yet, there are still wide-ranging gaps, imparity, and inconsistency in the data availability and data gathering methodologies of existing studies. To fight gender inequality and misogyny in the AV sector in an evidence-based manner, robust data collection and analysis methodologies need to be devised. Although the actions of the European AV Observatory provide improvement in this regard (see above), there is still work to be done. This was pointed out poignantly in our interview. Taking into account the fact that the challenge is the lack of data, Patrizia Simone from the European AV Observatory stated in the interview, 'It is true that in principle you can pursue gender equality for the sake of it. However, evidence and data help to obtain a clearer picture.'
- (2) We recommend going beyond the notion of visibility while adopting an approach to action, strategic data collection, and focusing on underrepresentation in not-so-visible sectors and occupations. Critical feminist scholars argue that in our contemporary moment, popular feminism and celebrity feminism, with their media-friendly expressions and visibility, fail to offer a structural critique and change systems of racism and violence (Banet-Weiser 2018; Gill 2011). Although, on the one hand, publishing figures on celebrities, female directors, and high-ranking AV professionals may pave the way for the AV sector to be a springboard and a pioneer, there is clearly the need to go beyond visibility and focus on equality 'behind the scenes' in the AV sector.

- (3) Furthermore, we recommend adopting an intersectional approach to women in the AV sector in the future. While our analysis did not focus on intersectional data, we found that there is still a lack of publishing of intersectional data and initiatives and support in this regard. Our interview supports this point well. Marie-Claire Isaaman, the CEO of Women in Games, reminded us during our interview that ‘when 50% of the population is talked about, it is also important to comprehend the intersectionality of the 50% and all the diversity that it encompasses: the various entanglements of social stratification such as class, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, creed, disability that give us a fuller picture’. Critical race theory scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) was the first to elaborate on the provisional concept of intersectionality to demonstrate the inadequacy of approaches that separate systems of oppression, isolating and focusing on one while occluding the others (Carastathis 2014, 305). The intersectional lens should be an overarching key line because the overlap of various social identities (class, age, race, sexual orientation, and disability) actively and simultaneously contributes to systemic discrimination on the grounds of gender. Questions have already been asked as to why a movement like #MeToo has had an impact only when wealthy and often cis women came to the spotlight of the movement, excluding transwomen of colour, gender non-conforming people, and indigenous women, even though the issues of violence and assault have been key struggles in feminist, women of colour, and trans-activisms for a long time? (Koivunen, Kyrölä, and Ryberg 2018, 3). In the future, we recommend that different bodies emphasise intersectional data collection, and we think that an intersectional approach should be embedded within the aims, purposes, and practices of the initiatives already established as well as those to be established. Importantly, the adoption of an intersectional lens also allows us to think about the category of woman and examine the situation of transgender women as well as gender-non-conforming and gender-queer people in the audiovisual sector.
- (4) It is clear that going beyond the sexual harassment and violence debate, #MeToo brought renewed momentum with regard to debates on different domains and regions of gender inequality in the European AV sector. However, it is explicit that a forward-looking systematic evaluation of initiatives on a long-term basis is necessary for the longevity of a consciousness-raising and robust analysis of initiatives’ impact. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the existence of differences between various initiatives, for example, between European bodies to multiple NGOs, film festivals, PSBs, and public institutions, to comprehend the differences in the tasks and responsibilities they can accomplish in alignment with their resources and skill force with regard to gender equality and the potential of synergy that can be created between them for future research. It is also important to take into consideration the differences in women’s situations in different sectors and regions when creating and implementing policies. As our analysis showed, there are considerable differences in gender representation and the availability of initiatives across regions and countries as well as industries and occupations in the AV sector in Europe. Therefore, these individual conditions should be understood and play a key role.
- (5) New participatory and ethnographic methodologies that consider participants’ feelings and thoughts could be adopted to evaluate and measure the impact of initiatives. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the #MeToo movement to fully acknowledge and go beyond, in Chamberlain’s (2016) words, its affective temporality. Through this unique temporality, Chamberlain (2016) points out, feminism can make space for affective ties to create intense moments of activism in which surges of feeling catalyse and sustain mass action. However, to further develop this galvanised action against injustice and achieve long-term success, a prolonged assessment of actions/initiatives and consciousness raising is inevitably important.

Although the AV sector is in a special position as the springboard of the #MeToo movement and women are already supported by diverse Europe-wide initiatives and networks, there is still much work to be done. An intersectional, participatory, and cooperative approach to decision-making, data collection, and impact analysis is key to achieving ever-lasting gender equality. A visionary approach to future action related to gender equality must take into account the latest developments in the AV sector in a multidimensional manner. Redzepovic rightly claims in our interview that 'increasing the longevity, endurance, and sustainability of consciousness-raising fundamentally starts with education at a young age'. Taking into account the above recommendations, best practices need to be identified, while clear, long-term strategies need to be adopted. Although there have been many improvements, data show that there are still other problems that women in the AV sector in Europe encounter, in addition to the broader misogyny and backlash that is prevalent. However, overall, we think the progress, actions, and changes in the AV sector in Europe resulting from the novel public consciousness can be a locomotive for other sectors. We argue that stakeholders and political actors can learn from the AV sector to create tangible actions through the broader consciousness of issues, the gathering and availability of data in the last couple of years, and the willingness of political stakeholders to act.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributors

*Dilara Asardag* completed her Bachelor's studies in Media and Communication at the Goldsmiths College, University of London and her Master's studies in Media and Global Communication at the University of Helsinki. Comprehending how bodies, worlds and discourses come into being and get constructed through the media where power is enacted, secured and resisted is central to her research interests. Justice and equality are important components of her work. She is interested in researching feminist and LGBTIQ rights activism, as well as hate speech, misogynist/homophobic/transphobic speech and disinformation online. Moreover, she has a keen interest in performing arts and visual cultures. Currently she works as a doctoral candidate at the Tampere University and her project is related to gender-based violence, online and offline advocacy/activist campaigns and subjectivity construction by the feminist and LGBTIQ people, activists and organizations. She is the YECREA Representative for Women's Network.

*Prof. Marlen Komorowski* is senior researcher at the research centre imec-SMIT-VUB (Studies on Media, Innovation & Technology) in Brussels and Guest Professor at the VUB for European Media Markets in the Communication Sciences International Masters programme. She is also working as Senior Research Fellow for Media Cymru, a five-year collaboration at Cardiff University aimed to turn Cardiff and the surrounding capital region's media sector into a global hub for media innovation. As a researcher, her work focuses on media and creative industries-related projects, impact analysis, industry clustering, ecosystem and value network analysis, new business models and the impact of the digitisation on industries and firms. She has developed an expertise on media and creative industries in the last 5 years through independent and contract research projects on European, local and regional level. She published relevant articles in that context in renowned international, scientific journals. Her first book with the title "Creative Cluster Development" was published by Routledge in 2020. Find out more about her projects, research and publications via: <https://researchportal.vub.be/en/persons/marlen-komorowski/>

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