

Recalibrating Diversity

We often think of Europe as a haven for diversity and gender equality. But as “The New Wave” European Parliamentary report on anti-gender movements points to (2025), the truth is much more uncomfortable and urgent.

Sweden for example, for a long time the European benchmark of gender equality, is rolling back its equality and diversity measures in film policy and has suggested deleting several parts of such initiatives from public service regulations. At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic, Trump's policies offer a taste of the consequences of such dynamics. Observing a stagnation or decline in gender equity and inclusion measures across Europe, the DIGISCREENS team traced

how diversity practices work: which stories are being told, how streaming platforms and public broadcasters balance social responsibility with market logic, and who from the audience feel represented on screen. We uncovered a pattern:

Diversity is often treated as a branding strategy or, at best, as compliance with national regulations – but not as a democratic necessity, and certainly not something to work with in depth.

The goal seems to be expanding audiences rather than transforming culture. Inclusion and representing difference are spoken about in terms of numbers, not narrative complexity.



Illustration by: Marine Malet, screenshot. Credits: NRK, Movistar+, Canal+, Netflix, LRT

DIGISCREENS compares how different European societies understand and interpret diversity and takes a deep critical look at how it is treated on European screens, behind the scenes, and in the eyes of film and television audiences. Our results reveal a troubling truth: more often than not, what we see is not diversity, but rather the illusion of it.

On the one hand, public audiovisual agencies in Europe roughly deal with diversity through increasing the number of women behind the camera with soft (Norway) and hard quotas (Spain) or monetary incentives (France). On the other hand, commercial platforms like Netflix have so far seen diversity and inclusion as a brand strategy to capture progressive-minded audiences concerned with these issues. In both public and private sectors, diversity is also often interpreted as offering a geographically and linguistically varied catalogue.

But what about ethnicity, sexuality, disability, age, or neuro-divergence?

Real diversity goes far beyond binary gender metrics and a business model. We asked:

which are the identities that are represented in all their complexity, and which are those that are merely ticked off on a funding or production checklist?

Queer and migrant audiences in particular voice frustration over flat and stereotyped portrayals of characters who, despite being supposed to represent them, ultimately offer little scope for identification. Time and again, these characters appear only to fill quotas – rarely given the same depth or authenticity as others. They are present, but almost never in the spotlight.

Our investigation bridges off-screen production dynamics and on-screen representation. By bringing together public broadcasters, content creators, cultural funding bodies, and, crucially, audiences from diverse backgrounds, we challenged and questioned the often tokenistic inclusion of marginalised characters on screen. And by doing so we built spaces for confrontation, reflection, and change.

Our findings push decision-makers and industry actors to operate a shift in mindset and change how diversity is imagined: not as a checkbox, but as a matter of keeping Europe moving forward as a union of democratic states.

By showing the importance of inclusive and diverse representation for more democratic societies, our project calls for strong European policies and fair funding structures that defend inclusion and equality as the endangered values they are.