Count me in!

Report on the survey on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility and Belonging in the seat of arts festivals

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EUROPEAN FESTIVALS ASSOCIATION

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1. FOREWORD

By Ceyda Berk-Söderblom – Arts manager, curator, and festival programmer specialising in social inclusion, diversity, and inclusion management

The "Count me in!" campaign is an effort orchestrated by the European Festivals Association (EFA) to understand better how the festivals community is engaging with diversity work. It is about exploring what's happening across the network, highlighting good practices, learning from each other's successes and challenges. And, most importantly, it is about finding ways to support festivals in advancing their diversity efforts.

Our approach has been very much bottom-up, guided by one key principle: nothing about festivals without festivals. We have tried to build our process free from preconceived assumptions, ensuring that the work will be inspired, informed and shaped by real insights from the festival community.

It has been a privilege for me to support the EFA team in this journey. We started by working closely with the team, beginning with a strategic exercise. And the foundation of our process was the overarching concept of belonging, which guided us in breaking down key themes of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility into clear goals and actionable steps.

Our intense work transformed it into a dynamic, living document with multiple levels of focus. We have taken a deeper dive into understanding who the EFA community is. This includes the EFA office, governance, EFA Board, the festivals network supports, the people behind those festivals, and the broader network of stakeholders.

Building the survey was not without any challenges. EFA is made up of a diverse range of festivals, each with its own unique context, resources, capacity, and the communities it serves. That made it difficult to create just a few questions that would fit everyone perfectly. Question 10, which asks how festivals would describe the diversity of their teams, is a strong example. We avoided offering ethnic or racial categorisations or labelling individuals as marginalised, under-represented, or from different minority groups, such as gender minorities, or those with migration histories, in the answers. We wanted to emphasise the importance of self-identification. We wanted to encourage festivals to reflect on this question through sincere self-assessment, using their own interpretation of diversity – promoted through this campaign – as a foundation, while

considering their unique size, capacity, and operational models.

It is essential to recognise that diversity work is an ongoing process; we are imperfect, and we do not claim otherwise. My hope is that, moving forward, we can create space for meaningful and critical discussions that incorporate institutional critiques and non-Eurocentric perspectives into this work.

In closing, I want to express that we fully embrace the principles of a learning organisation. Advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging is an ongoing commitment that requires unlearning and relearning. This work is not only a journey of growth for the individuals involved but also for the organisation itself committed to implementing it. It is important to stay humble, as we are, understanding that every step forward, no matter how small, is meaningful, and that every effort counts.

I look forward to continuing this journey together.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE SURVEY

Festivals are heralds of celebrating the arts as windows to different worlds, connecting and involving people from all walks of life in a particular space and time span. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility and Belonging (DEIAB) have become essential priorities for society, more and more for politics, and hence for many arts festivals and the broader cultural sector. But what do these terms mean in practice? How much focus do festivals give on these concepts? What can festivals do and what can they not do? EFA invited festivals to share their practices and understand together the diversity of approaches and possibilities of the many actions that are taken (or not yet taken) by festivals around Europe and beyond through the “Count me in!” campaign, focusing on DEIAB in the seat of arts festivals.

The campaign was launched on 17 September 2024 and planned to finish on 31 October 2024. It was extended until 11 November 2024 to allow festivals to have a bit more time to answer because of the autumn holidays.

The campaign included a survey and a call for stories, inviting festivals to share their practices, challenges, and innovative approaches to DEIAB. The questionnaire proposed mainly multiple-choice answers, and all the time included a possibility to add something else, illustrating the richness of festivals' practices. The survey was also a way to collect resources such as policy documents and expert organisations to share with the festivals community. The call for stories concluded the survey inviting festivals to send inspiring stories, insights, experiences, and lessons learned from their DEIAB actions.

The EFA Team worked with Ceyda Berk-Söderblom on DEIAB during the Summer 2024. At the conclusion of this work, which included an internal survey of team members positioning themselves towards the topic and a few workshops online with Ceyda, EFA wrote a statement on its understanding of these notions that was validated by the EFA board. These definitions can be found in the annex.

EFA would like to thank Ceyda and all festivals - EFA Members, EFFEA Festivals, EFFE Label Festivals, Festivals ran by Alumni of The Festival Academy, Festivals registered on FestivalFinder.eu, and all the other festivals - that took the time to answer the survey, as well as the EFFE Hubs (Europe for Festivals, Festivals for Europe), the EU Cultural Networks, the Creative Europe Desks, and all festivals and other actors that have played an important role to disseminate the questionnaire in their respective country and around them.

EFA also addresses a special thanks to the main author of this report: the Budapest Observatory of Summa Artium, especially to Péter Inkei. Additionally, EFA is also very grateful to Audrey Brisack, Camille Durnez, and Paula Gozalvez, who have supported Peter in processing, analysing and interpreting the data collected and presented here below.

3. PRESENTATION OF THE SAMPLE

In total, the survey received 110 answers and 94 were processed in this report. We have excluded the answers that were too incomplete to be considered, mainly the ones that did not take the survey until the end, giving more details about their festival, and the duplications - some respondents took the survey twice.

General characteristics have been used for a deeper analysis of the responses of the survey. These relate to the countries and regions in which the festivals operate, the artistic disciplines they cover, the number of people involved in the staff, the number of artists they programme, and the number of visitors they attract. Some graphs illustrate these figures in annex.

3.1. Countries and regions

The respondents come from 34 different countries, mainly from the European continent. 11 festivals come from northern countries (Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), 22 from eastern countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Ukraine), 31 from southern countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Türkiye), 26 from western countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom), and 4 from countries outside of Europe (Australia, Pakistan, Uganda, USA).

3.2. Artistic disciplines

Given the rich content of most festivals, it is not easy to divide them by their main artistic discipline. There are relatively few festivals with a clear dominant genre. In the sample, dance, film, literature represent the smallest groups.

- Dance: 7
- Film: 6
- Literature: 6
- Multidisciplinary: 26
- Music: 24
- Theatre: 17
- Thematic: 8 (arts festivals with very specific focus on science, IT, environment and the like)

3.3. Staff

The number of people working within the festivals have been divided into 4 different groups. The festivals that have big teams with more than 30 people and very small festivals that employ less than 3 people are the smallest groups.

- Less than 3 people in the staff: 17
- Staff between 3-5 people: 31
- Staff between 6-30 people: 32
- More than 30 people in the staff: 14

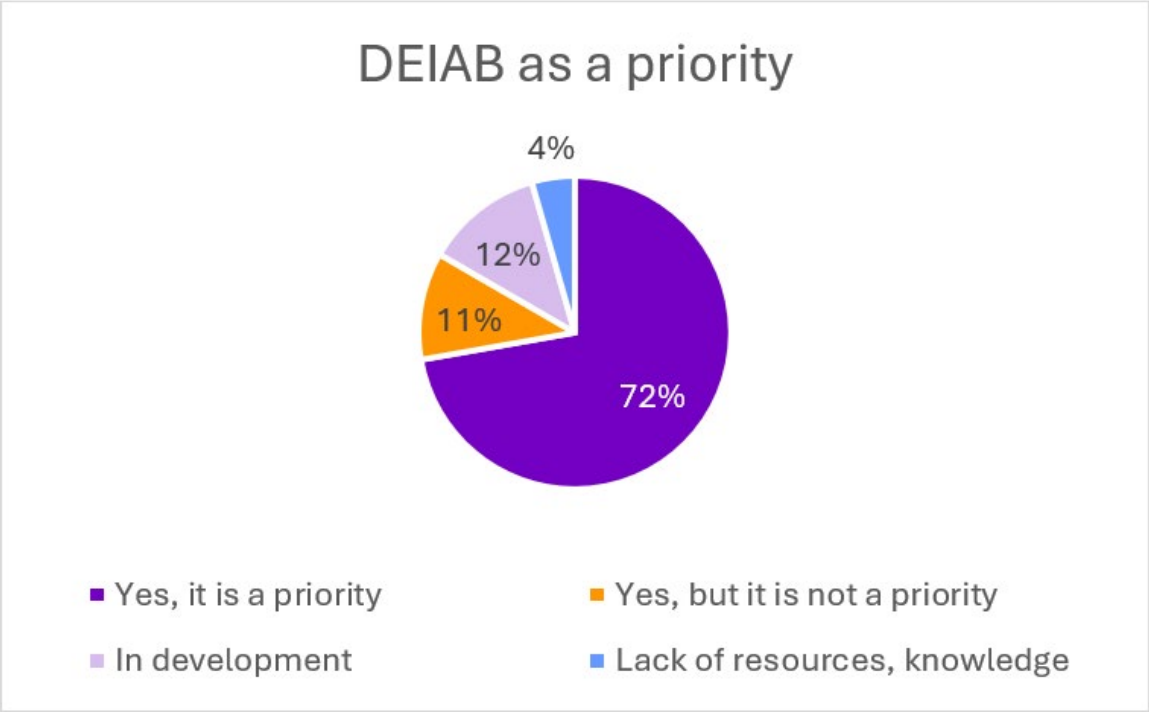
3.4. Artists

The festivals have also been divided into 4 groups regarding the number of artists invited.

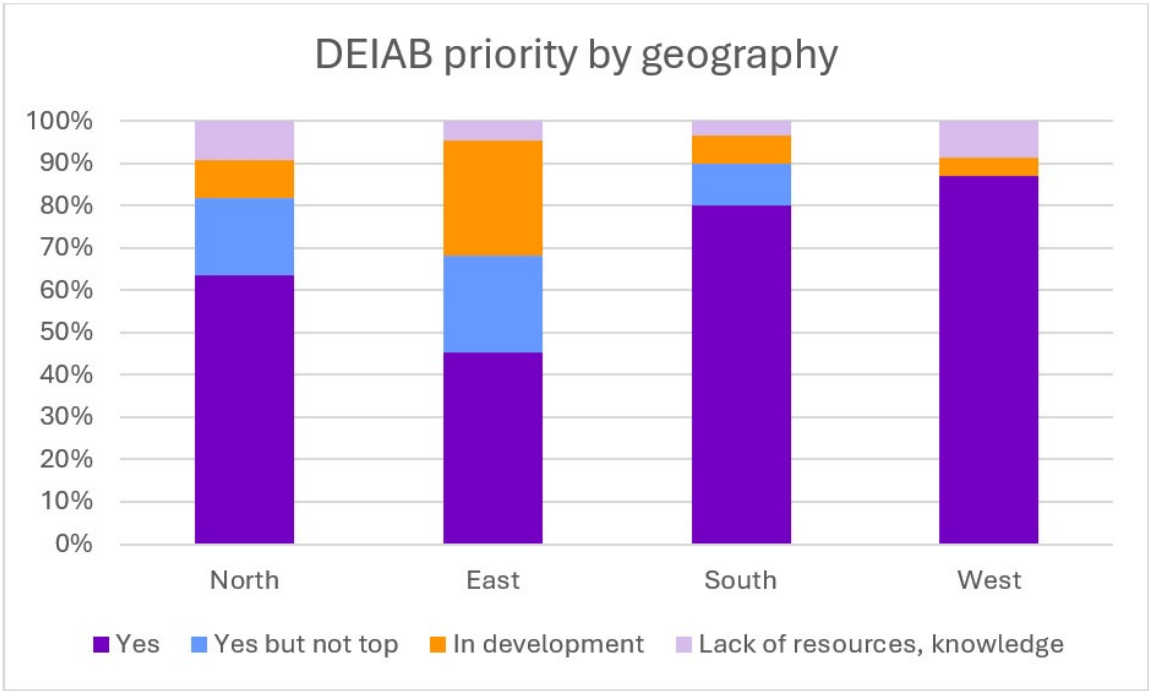
- Less than 30 artists: 22
- Between 30-100 artists: 31
- Between 101-500 artists: 23
- More than 500 artists: 14
- No answer: 4

4. COMMITMENT

First, the responding festivals were asked whether they engage with DEIAB and if Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility and Belonging actions are part of their policies. Predictably, by volunteering to participate in this survey, the vast majority of responses were positive, even if for 11% it is not the main priority within their work. At the other end, very few (4%) chose the answers "We would like to do it, but we lack the knowledge", or "We would like to do it, but we're short of resources". A small number of festivals have also mentioned that they don't engage with DEIAB actions because it is not a priority.



The survey reveals considerable differences by geography of the responding festivals. As a visible deviation from the rest of the sample, among the festivals in the northern and eastern part of the continent, less than 65 and 50% respectively claim DEIAB to be a policy priority. The composition by geographical region suggests the main direction of the transfer of experiences and skills between the festivals that will participate in the relevant EFA activities.



Here are two quotes from western respondents where DEIAB is a top priority:

> "*We are an international, intercultural community of persons engaged in achieving increasing understanding and co-operation between individuals and groups in support of democratic procedures and the elimination of violence, religious, ethnic and gender persecution, youth exploitation, homophobia and racial hatred through the process of art, education, culture and dialogue." Germany*

> *"We work towards a safe environment for everyone and how we actively monitor this. Change is not possible if we do not realise how we consciously and unconsciously maintain (white) supremacy." Netherlands*

From an eastern response with DEIAB engagement "in development":

> *"Change of mindset takes time, especially within a society that doesn't prioritise diversity, equity or inclusion." Croatia*

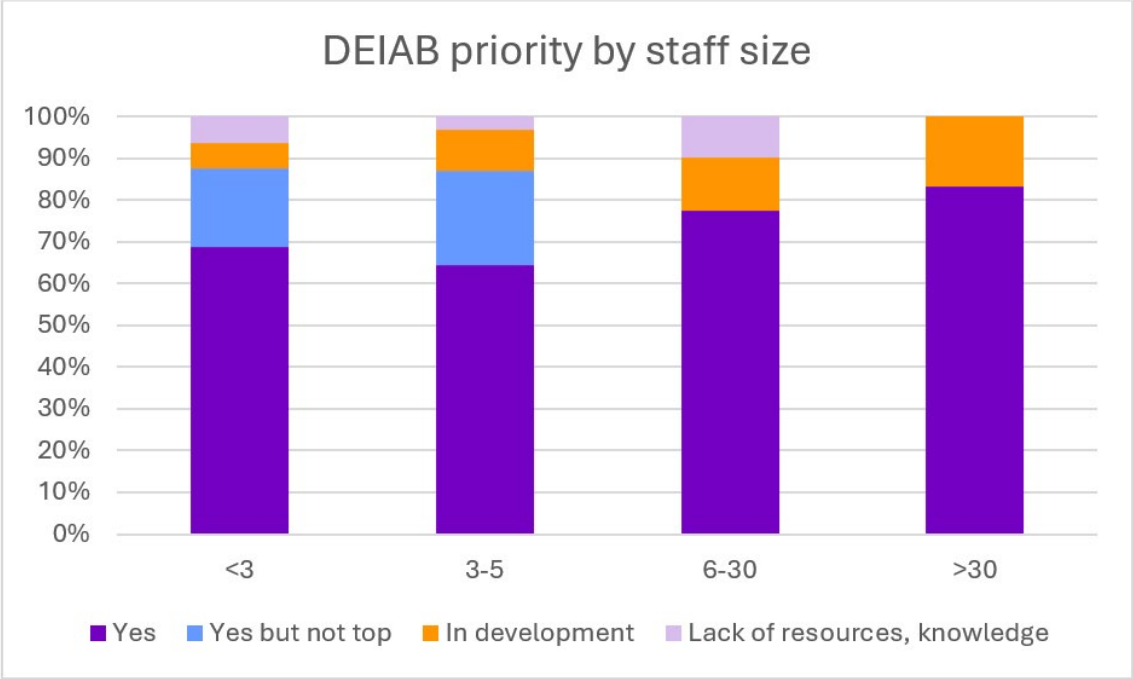
A northern festival stresses out the economical difficulties and lack of funding:

> *"Economic challenges and the passive landlords to refurbish our physical venue to make it accessible. To reinforce our mediators team is difficult due to the lack of funding." Norway*

A southern festival "would like to do it, but lacks the knowledge" it needs:

> "*Since the organisation is run by volunteers and is mostly seasonal, coming together to deliver the festival, the lack of resources and continuity cause challenges to delivering consistently a DEIAB vision and acting out a strategy. Its implementation remains somewhat informal, though to be developed further." Malta*

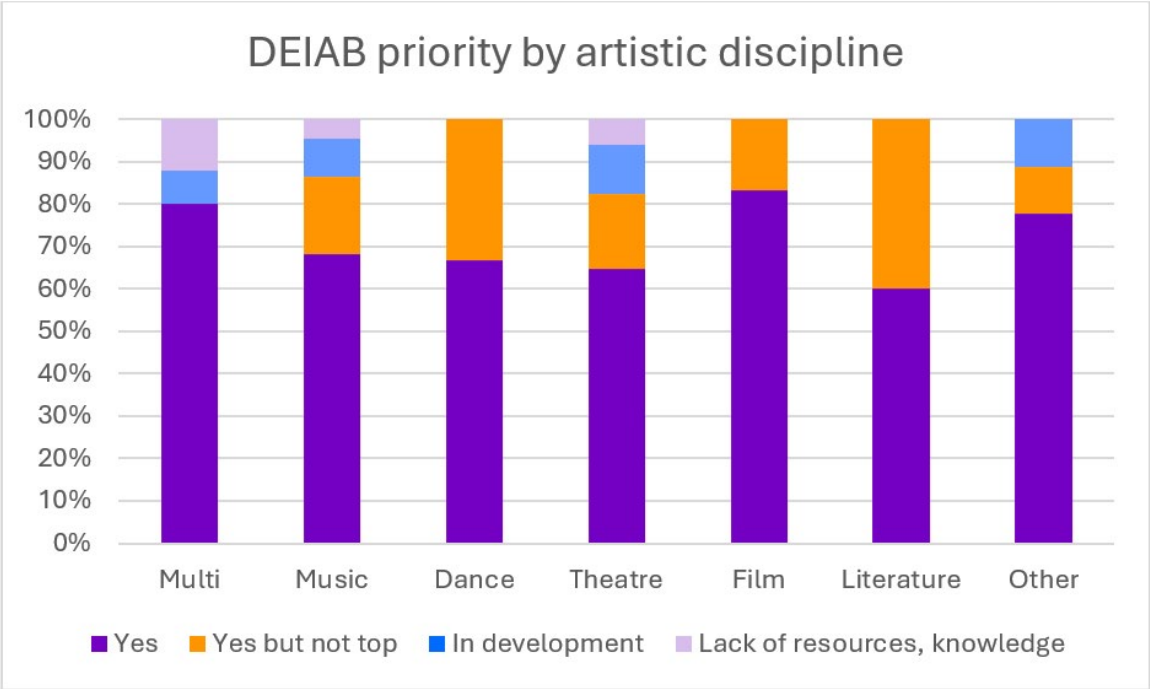
Comparing the level of policy engagement by the size of the staff of the responding festivals, the division is less prominent. The only odd case is large festivals (with staffs larger than 30): among them 83% treat DEIAB as a priority and has some weight in the remaining 17%, too ("Yes, in development). It is also interesting to see that among the teams with more than 6 people, none of them have answered "Yes, but it is not a priority".



Quoting a fairly large festival (with a 57-strong staff) where DEIAB is a policy priority:

> *"One of the aspects we are most proud of is our commitment to creating an inclusive and diverse community where people from all backgrounds can connect through art, music, and shared experiences. Over the years, we have built a platform that highlights diverse voices, including artists, speakers, and collaborators from various cultural and creative backgrounds." Germany*

Where the respondents' main art forms are concerned, theatre and music festivals show the greatest heterogeneity in terms of policy. What is common in the three smallest groups in our sample – respondents with a focus on dance, film, or literature – is that all of them declare at least a second-degree diversity priority.



Theatre festivals would quote considerable difficulties that prevent them from concentrating more on issues of diversity and inclusion, as expressed in this quote:

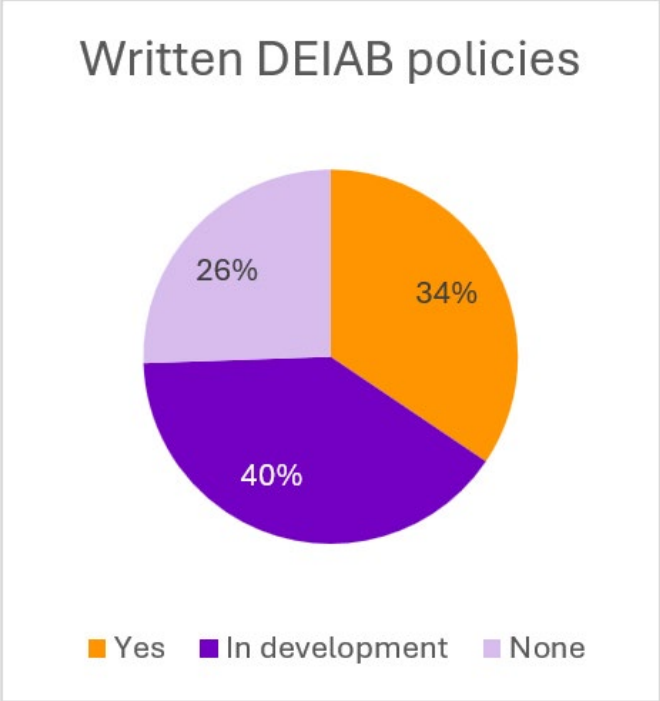
> *"There is a lack of resources within national and private funding systems. There is also a lack of knowledge and therefore of interest among the decision-making board, which decides how to allocate budget differently." Italy*

The quote from a literary festival illustrates that the power of the art is instrumental in developing diversity priorities:

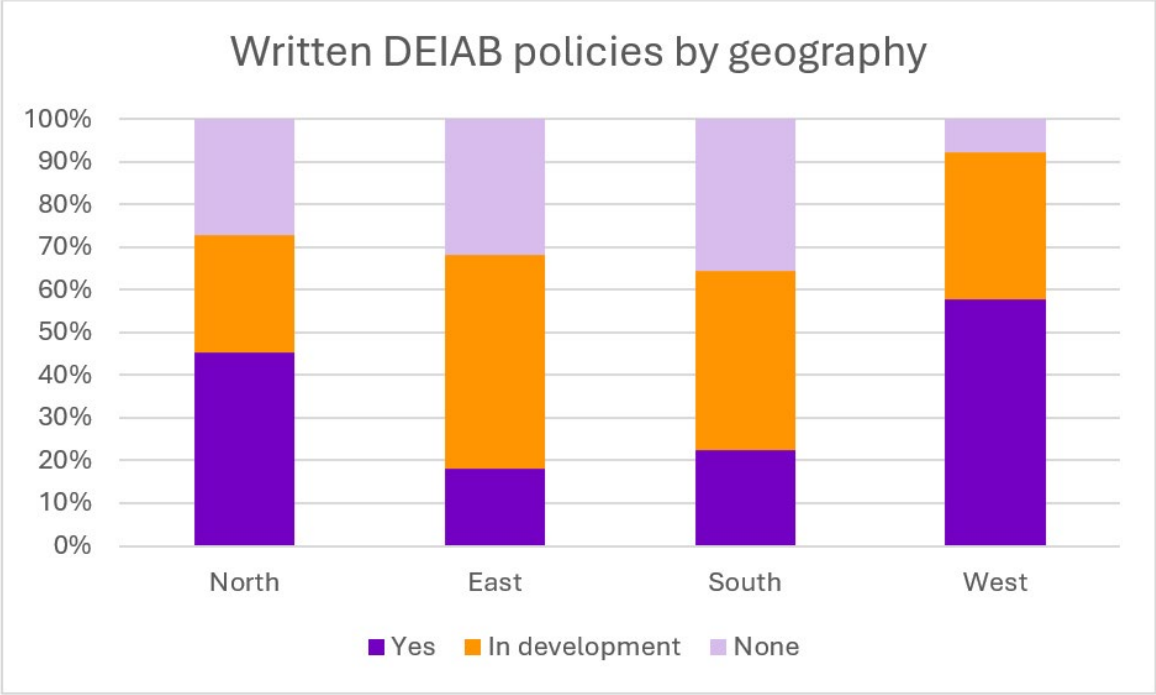
> *"The urgency for artists to create is as strong as the need for the audience to witness these types of performances." Netherlands*

The survey also inquired whether the festivals, "have written policies, guidelines or internal practices that address diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and belonging". The answers show a more balanced distribution among participants. The number of existing written diversity policies covers less than half of respondents for whom diversity is a priority. Taking the "in development" answers as a pledge, we can assume that most arts festivals will implement their DEIAB priority along guidelines established in written form.

Some examples of policies have been shared on the resource page published on the EFA website[1] to serve as examples for the festivals willing to develop such a document.



With the indicator of the existence of written, "official" diversity guidelines, festivals from the eastern countries do not stand out in answers to the question on DEIAB priorities. What is more, in the east only 32% admit to not having written materials even in development, less than the 35% in the south. It is worth notingthat more than half of western participants have written DEIAB policy.



1. www.european-festivals.eu/insights-stories/count-me-in-resources

Here is a western festival which is not only run along its own written diversity guidelines but also is keen to orient other operators in this regard:

> *"We have taken the time to write down the Amsterdam Fringe method, and to create a board game which helps us to address these topics, as to keep the conversation going. To share our ways of work, our success stories and fuck-ups." Netherlands*

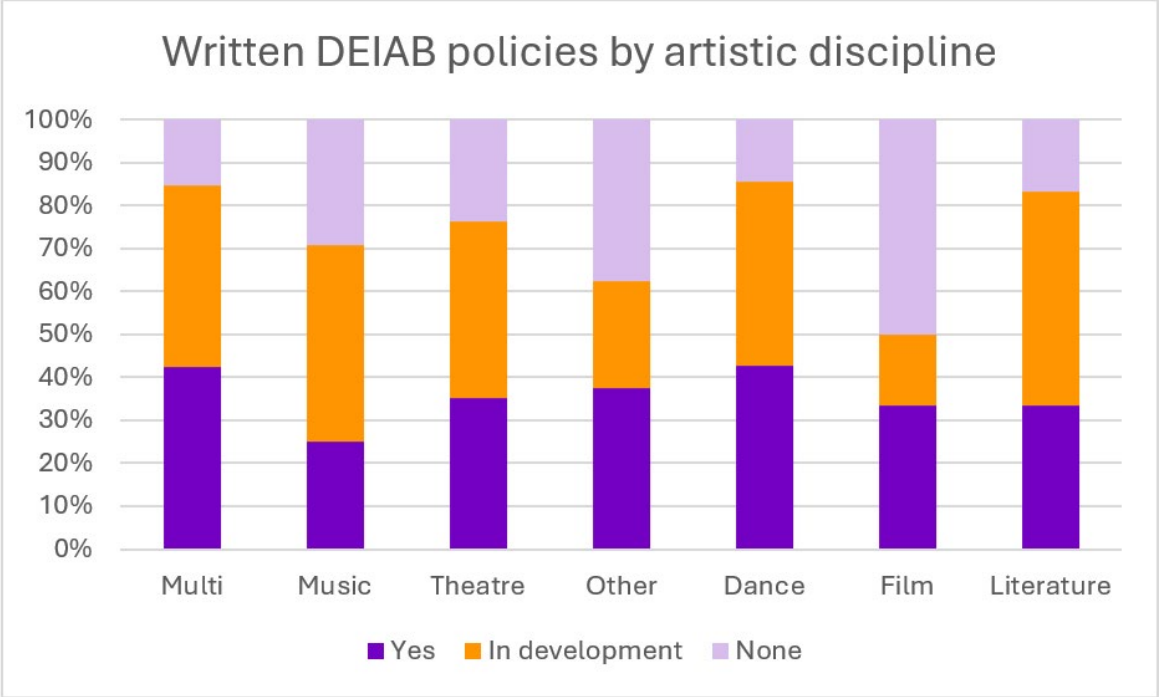
In fact, the absence of written policies does not mean the absence of such principles and practises (80% of the southern festivals have answered that DEIAB is a priority), as is expressed by this south-eastern participant in the survey:

> *"We are proud that we do not follow Western standards of DEIAB and give opportunities to top individual artists to define themselves beyond race, ethnicity and gender. As a result, we end up with the most effortlessly diverse group of artists." Türkiye*

Also, the lack of written internal policies can be counterbalanced by using external means to observe the realisation of goals:

> *"The festival employs an external evaluator who systematically assesses accessibility aspects and gathers feedback from attendees. He also conducts observations during the festival and engages in informal conversations with staff and attendants." Czechia*

Written DEIAB guidelines are the least numerous in music festivals. Film festivals offer the greatest room for development, as half of them have nothing written about diversity requirements, not even in development. That appears to apply fairly similarly to most types.



A quote exemplifies the amount and nature of challenges that overwhelm film festivals:

> *"The main problem is to find a venue which is accessible and fit with technical requirements of professional film screening, and the expenditure of accessibility features for films (audio description, closed caption...)." Türkiye*

Arts festivals that operate along established, written diversity priorities do so as a matter of fact, as expressed in the following quote:

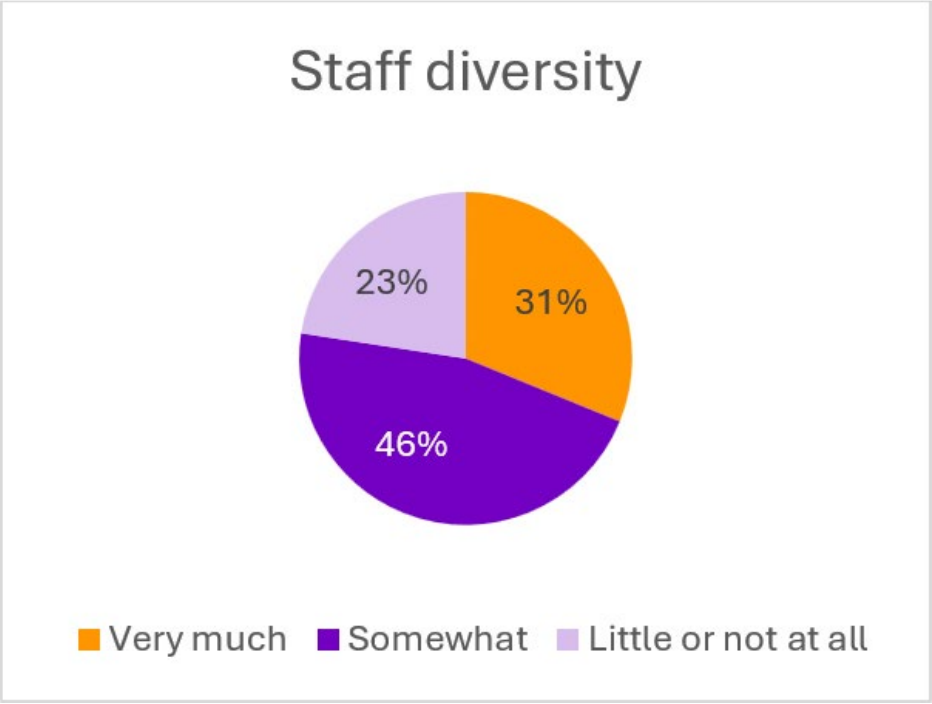
> *"This characteristic has been part of the concept and DNA of our festival since the very first edition." Germany*

The previous graphs show that there is not a strong correlation between the priority and written policies (e.g. southern festivals and music festivals).

Overall, the survey found that adhering to the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and belonging is a natural aspiration for the majority of arts festivals ("part of their DNA"). This applies quite similarly to most types of festivals, regardless of their size and dominant art form. Some distinctions emerge, however, along the geographical location of festivals, which represents the economic, social, political, cultural and historical context. This must be taken into consideration when formulating diversity requirements and designing means of implementation.

5. DIVERSITY

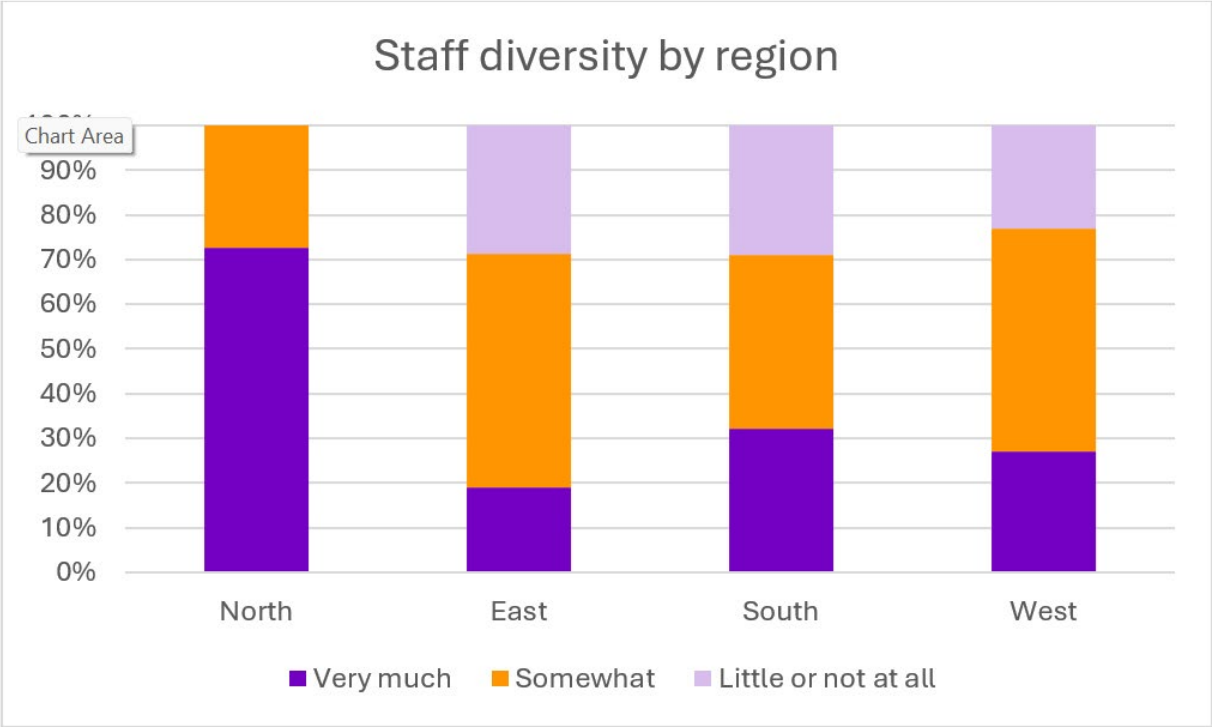
From the rich array of manifestations of the abstract term of diversity, the survey selected the composition of the operational and creative team behind the festival. Participants were asked to describe the diversity of their team, including staff and volunteers. The survey did not have specify whether to conceive diversity in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, age, or anything else. Respondents were expected to apply their own interpretation of diversity. Whether it is due to this intended ambiguity or not, nearly half of the festivals chose the middle way and identified their teams as somewhat diverse.



The group of those with little or no diversity (23% of the respondents) includes 21 responses in the following composition:

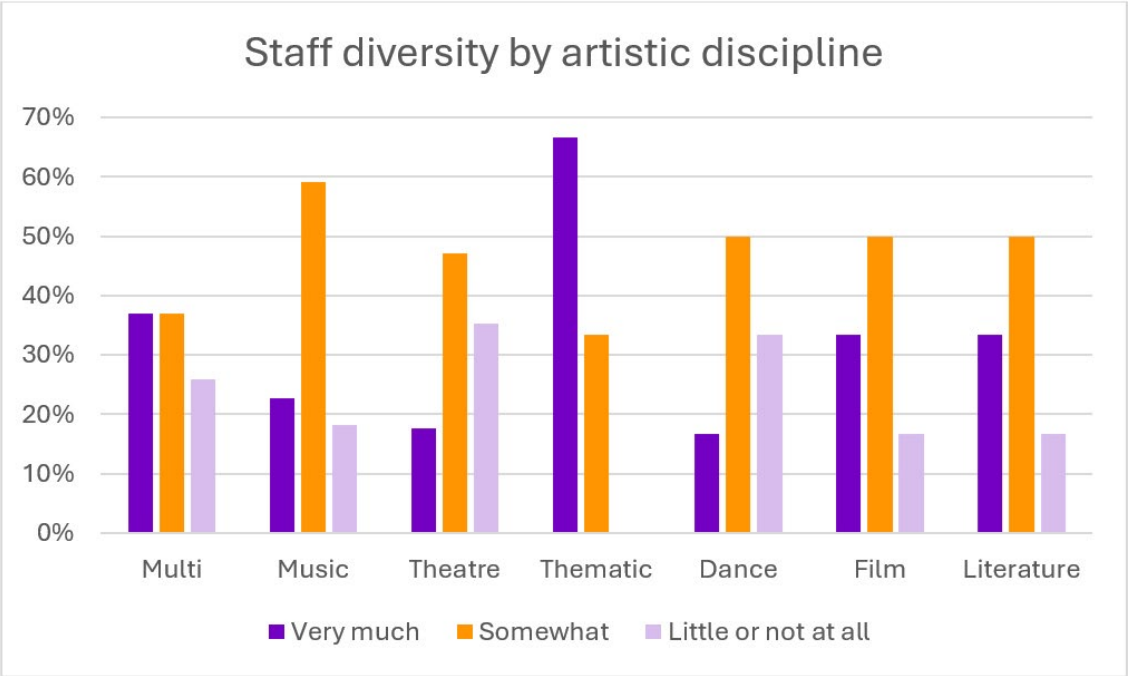
12 “Not very diverse”
4 “Not diverse”
2 “Prefer not to say”
3 “We would like to have a diverse team, but we're short of resources”

The responses revealed a clear distinction between northern participants and festivals from all other regions in Europe. Apparently in the north it is already taken for granted that festivals are expected to operate in a diverse team.



One would realistically assume that the larger the team, the easier to arrange for a diverse composition. As an interesting result of the survey, the responses did not confirm this assumption: no important correlation can be seen between the size and the diversity of the festivals' staff.

The artistic focus of the festival, on the other hand, reveals certain connections. While all the thematic arts festivals (with focuses on science, IT, environment, book, community) claim to operate with very diverse or at least somewhat diverse staffs, less than 20% of the dance and theatre festivals claim to be very diverse.



An expression of engagement by a thematic festival:

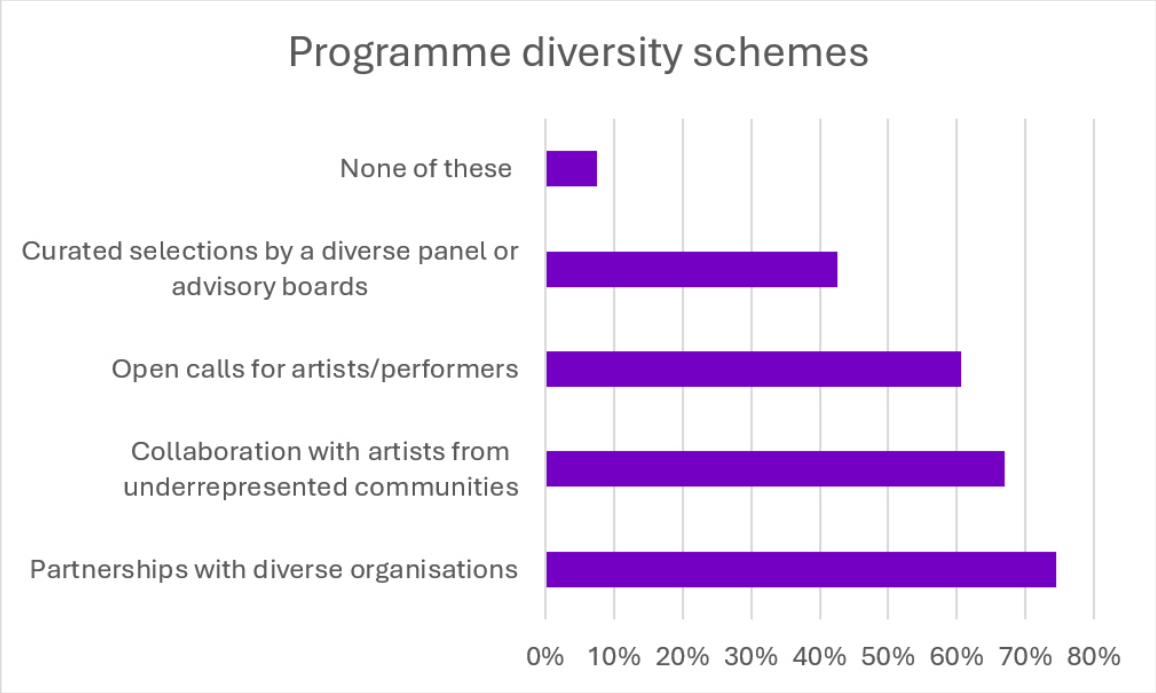
> *"We get great satisfaction from our easy accessibility to the location hosting the festival, an old historical site for the production of ceramics (as our festival deals prevalently with ceramic artifacts). The festival includes the participation of foreign artists, as well as of people with social and physical disadvantages." Italy*

Some festivals have raised awareness about the importance of diversity at the decision-making level:

> *"Look around you, look at the people making the decisions in your organisation – not just superficially, but in terms of different aspects of their lived experience. If the representation amongst the people who are purported to be driving the change and development in this area lacks diversity and therefore your work is viewed through one dominant lens, it will continue to be more of a struggle to do this work." UK*

> *"We need to ensure that diverse voices are represented not only in programming but also in decision-making and festival leadership is crucial." Cyprus*

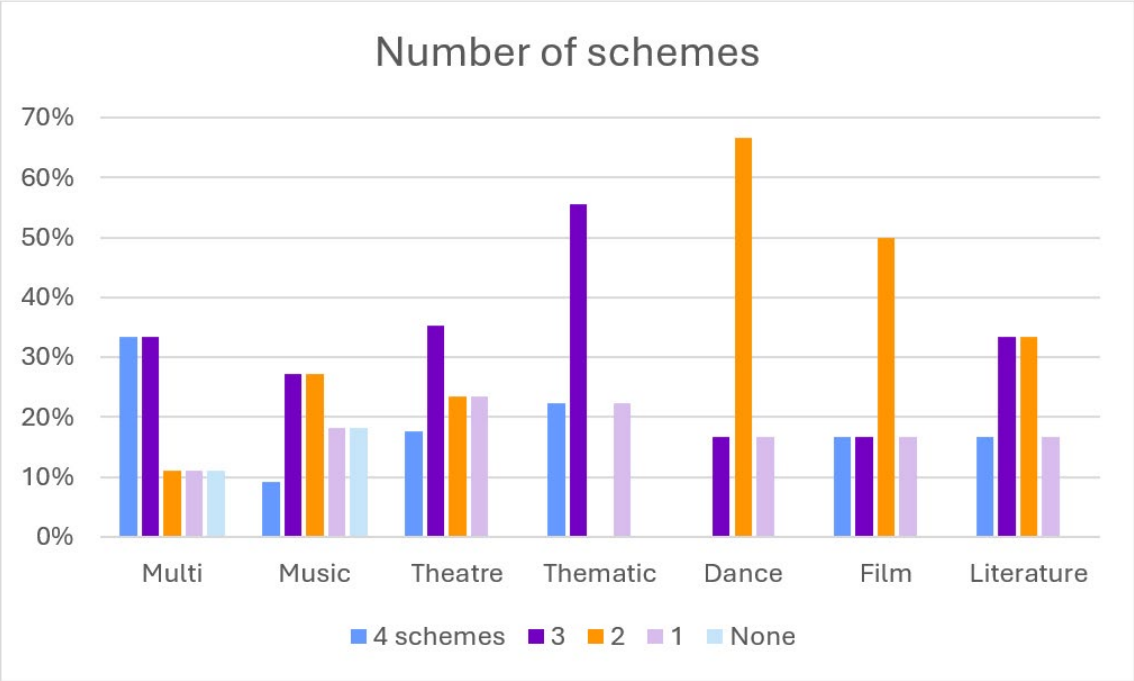
The survey also inquired about the ways in which the responding festivals cared about diversity on the stage, in their artistic programmes. For the question "How do you ensure diverse representation in your festival's programming?", festivals could choose among the following options:



For some festivals, aiming for a diverse programme is a daily routine:

> *"We do this through our booking department and internal policies. We check carefully that every day, in every slot. We programme artists from all over the world, from several countries in Africa, Asia or Latin America, even though we are not a world music festival." Spain*

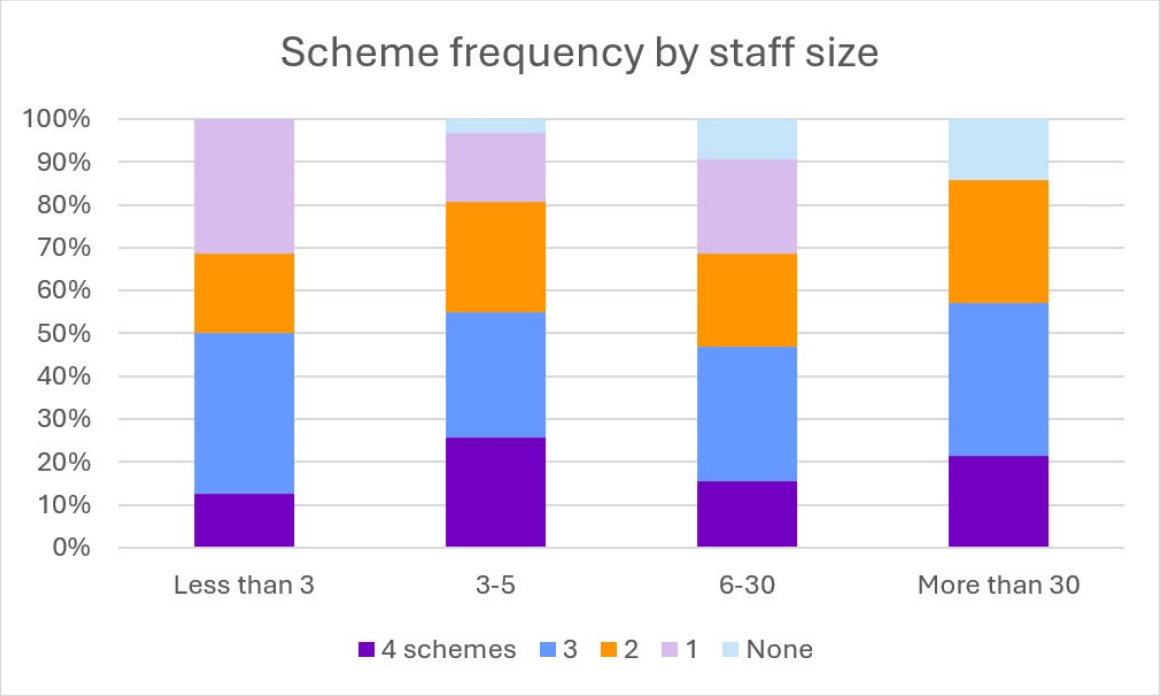
Festivals could choose more than one variant. In fact, a quarter of respondents ticked all four, claiming to have used all four methods to ensure that their programmes reflect diversity. Multicultural festivals – the largest group in the sample – particularly stand out in this respect, with the third applying the full range. At the same time, one in ten multicultural festivals admitted to using none of the four methods. Music festivals seem to be the least inclined to apply such sophisticated methods. One positive explanation is that, on the music scene, the diversity of performers is a given anyway. Or else, are they maybe too concentrated on their artistic agenda and pay less attention to other aspects of diversity?



One of the multi-genre festivals that uses the full range of schemes for diverse content answered:

> *"This year, we organised our festival across 16 cities in Türkiye's 7 regions, aiming to welcome people of all ages and successfully achieved this. We are particularly proud of having brought together both established and emerging artists from diverse disciplines to create a rich cultural experience." Türkiye*

Large festivals seem to show relative indifference towards the methods listed to deal with diversity within programmes. The most likely explanation is that, in their case, the large team and the size of the programme guarantee a varied selection of the offer.



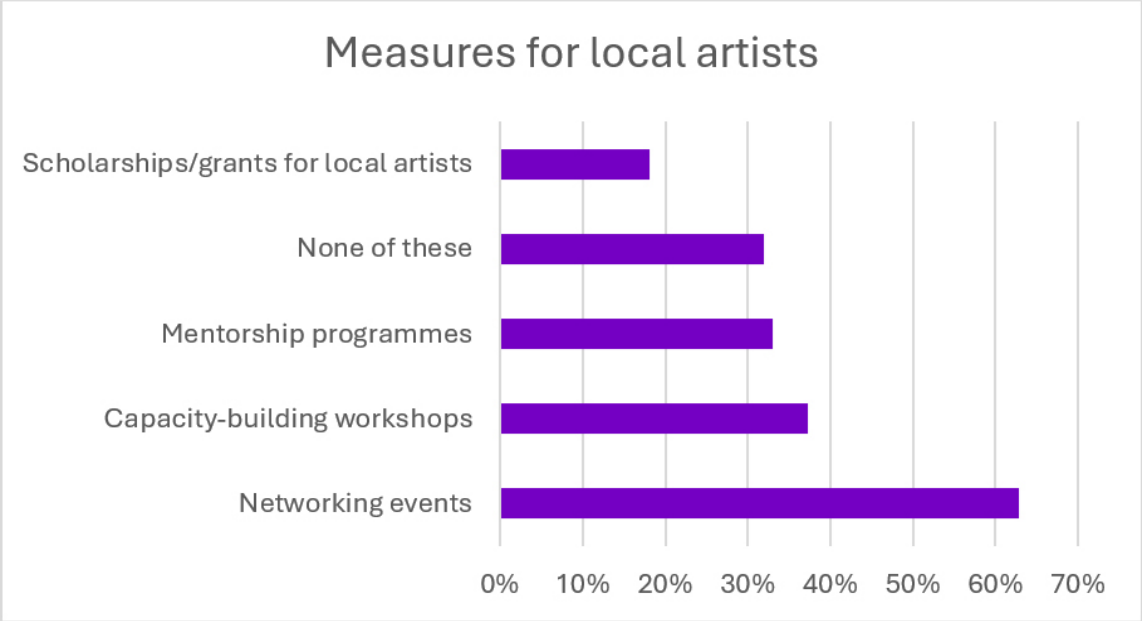
A festival run by two and employing 3 of the schemes that figure in the survey:

> *"We have programmed one of our ten concerts to be interpreted by groups formed by DEIAB people. We are aware that without their different 'look', that of the most disadvantaged, our vision of the world will never be complete." Spain*

The two angles that the survey applied to discover the affinity of arts festivals towards diversity – manifested namely in the composition of their teams and the use of sophisticated methods in their programming – has shown that the largest room for development to improve diversity is among festivals that fit most to the arts festival label (music, dance, theatre) across Europe – except maybe those in the north.

6. EQUITY AND INCLUSION

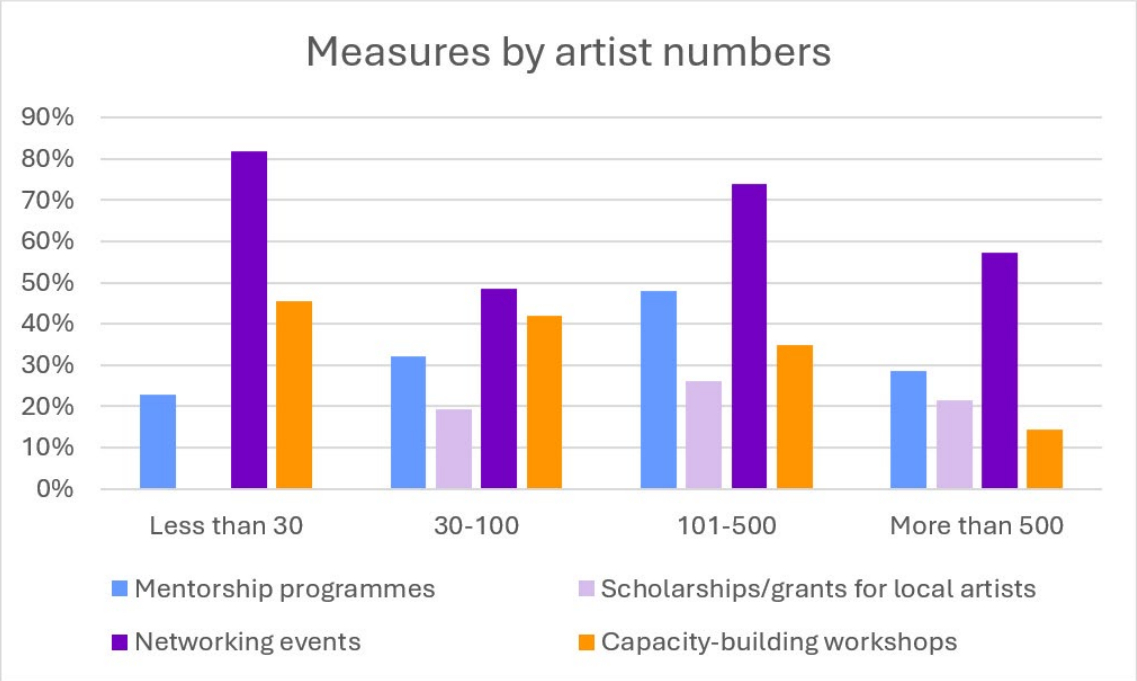
The survey touched upon the issue of equity with a question about the initiatives that the respective festivals apply to support local artists and cultural workers from underrepresented communities. Here, respondents could choose among four measures (and of course could complement with additional solutions).



A quote from a Nordic festival shows its commitment to supporting artists from all backgrounds.

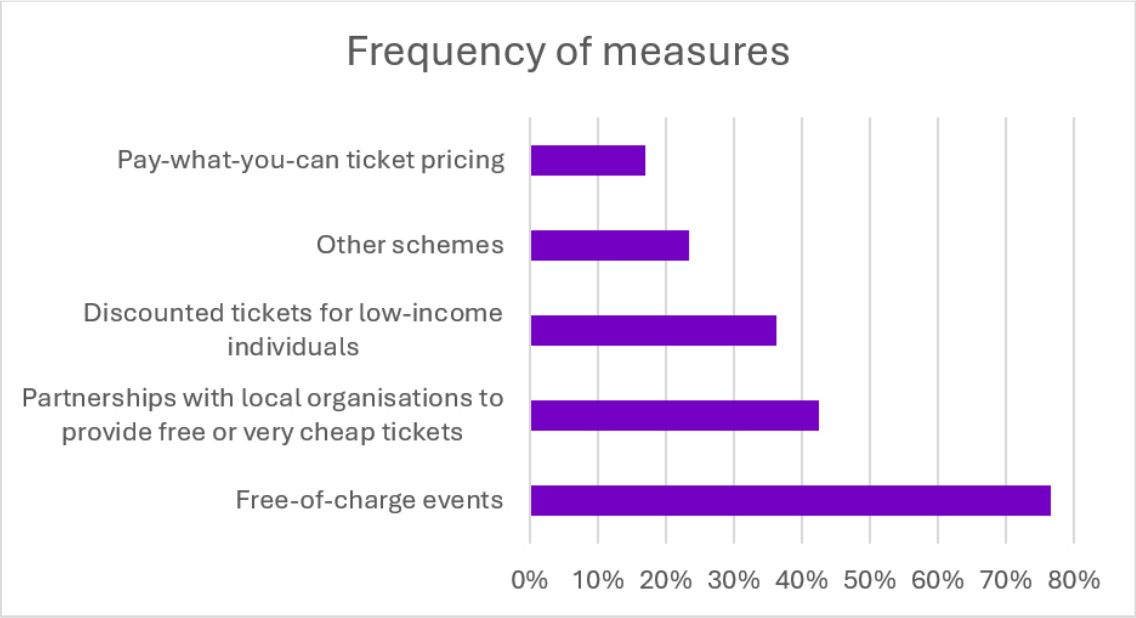
> *"Our festival promotes aesthetics, art forms, techniques, artists who apply and embody them, but were systemically excluded - to the point of being brought to the brink of loss of livelihood, collapse or abandonment of their careers and ideals." Norway*

The total number of artists in a festival has an impact on the measures applied in favour of local artists. Providing scholarships to local artists is out of the question where less than 30 artists perform. These small festivals compensate it in great numbers with networking events. On the other hand, almost every second mid-large festival with 101-500 performers can afford themselves to provide grants to local artists. The largest festivals do not seem to excel in this regard. Capacity-building workshops are applied in this group in the lowest frequency.



Festivals have limited chances to equalise the many social inequalities, of which the disadvantageous positions of various segments of the artists is only one. Addressing the case of local artists, however, is symptomatic of festival organisers' general attitude towards the complex issue of equity. The responses in the survey indicate that there is much to do in this regard.

Similarly to the other domains of the DEIAB remit, the term of inclusion covers a variety of cases and manifestations. From these the survey addressed the issue of economic barriers, in other words deprivation due to poverty. To the question "How does your festival address economic barriers for attendees?" the respective solutions were proposed in varying proportions. Part or all of the programme is provided free of charge in 77% of the cases. The risky scheme of leaving the entry fee to the visitors is applied in only 17%.



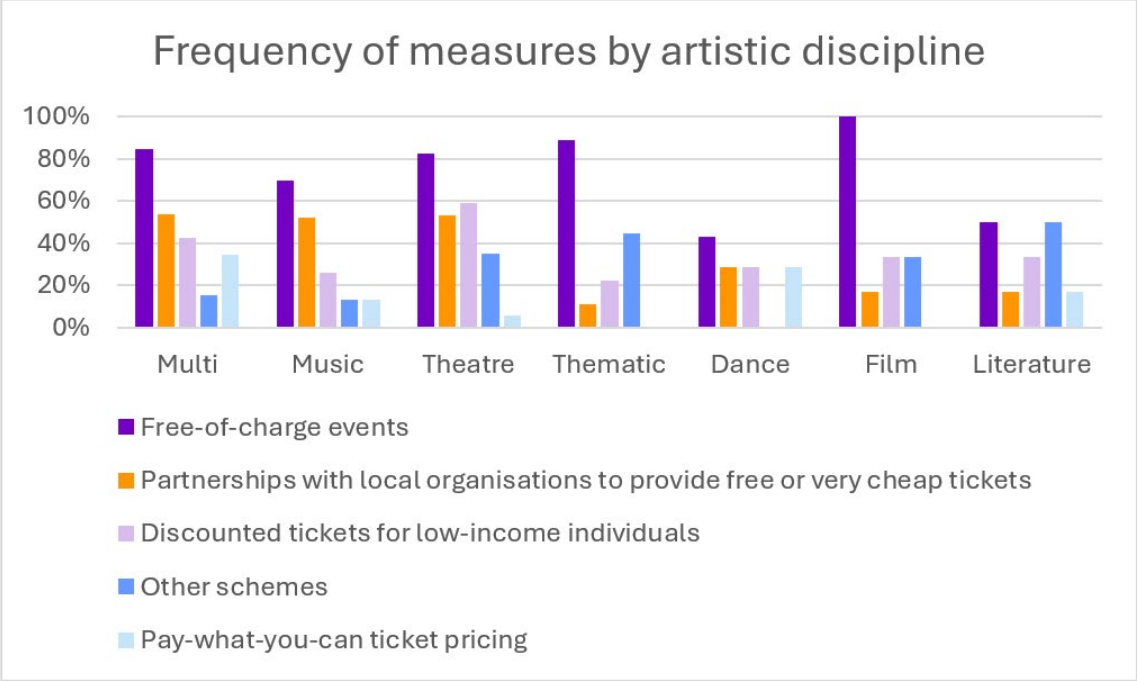
Here are some interesting practices from festivals at this level.

> *"The festival's pricing policy has always aimed to be as accessible as possible. Since 2022, we have been experimenting with recommended ticket prices, offering the public the chance to choose from a range of prices to suit their situation without having to provide proof." France*

> *"We work with 'Suspended ticket': audience members can pay an extra ticket which we give to someone who can't afford one." Switzerland*

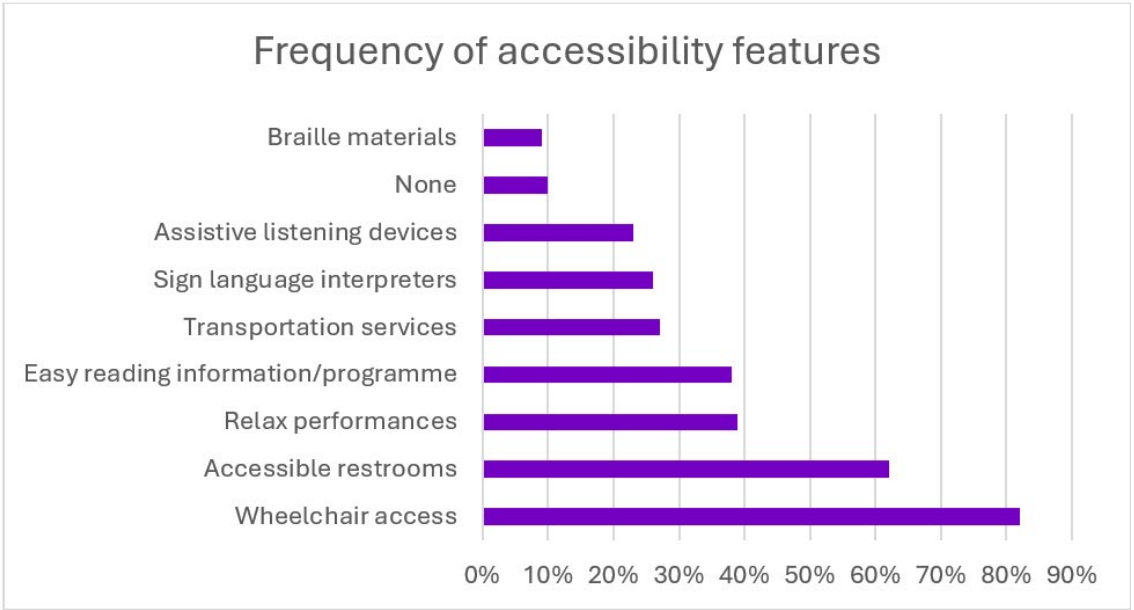
> *"Private sponsors and Foundations pay the amount of the tickets to have free shows in the programme." Italy*

Looking at the different kinds of festivals by the main focus of their programme, we find that free entrance is the easiest response to the economic barrier. All film festivals offer such opportunities while only half of the literary events do so. Thematic festivals, too, offer free entry and they are the least inclined to administer discounts and partnership deals.



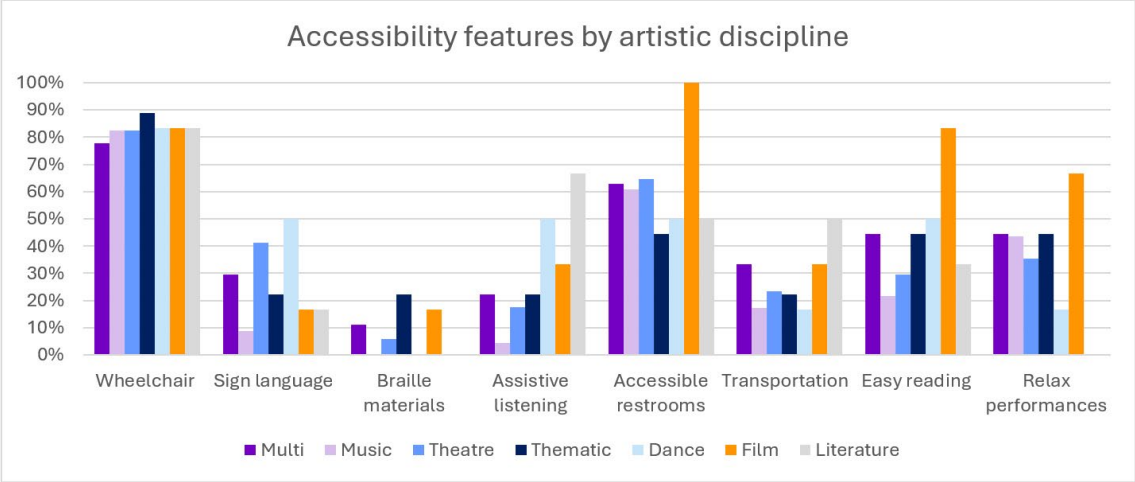
7. ACCESSIBILITY

"What accessibility features does your festival provide for attendees with disabilities?" – the survey inquired about the various means by which festivals assist those in need with this question. Over 50% of responses reported about aids to people with a disability while the other features showed smaller frequency. 10% of festivals admit to doing nothing in this area.

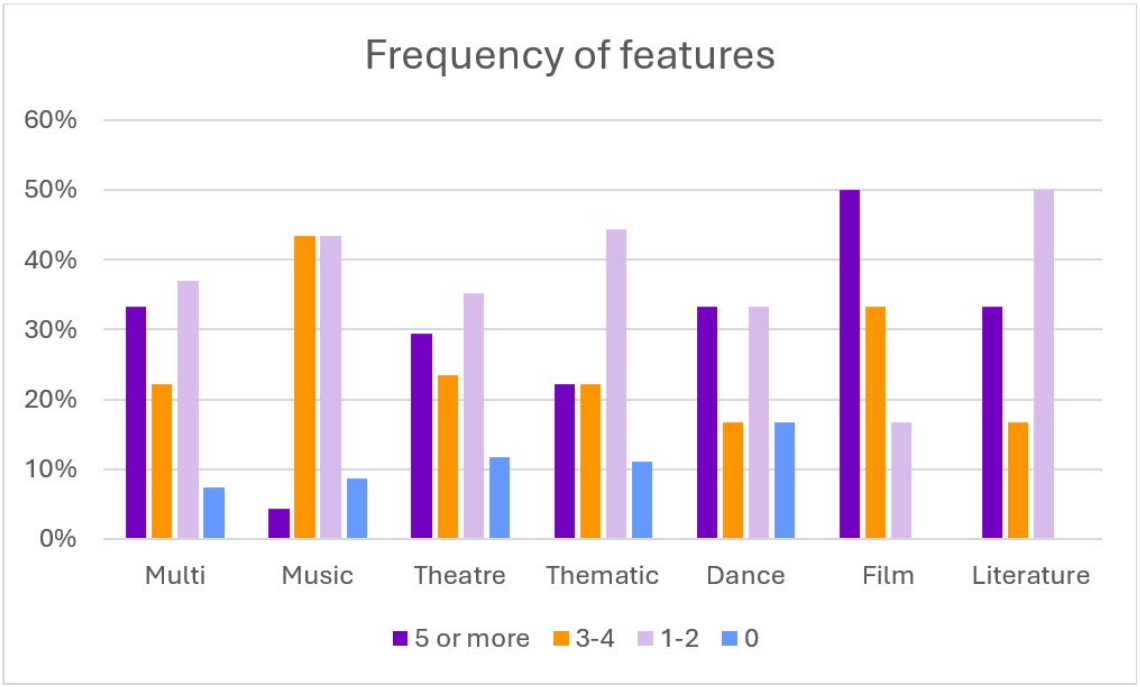


Regarding festival genre, we can see full capacity in one instance: all participating film festivals have accessible restrooms and offer easy reading features and relax performances (Cambridge Dictionary: a performance in a theatre that is designed to be suitable for people with autism, people with certain mental health conditions, or anyone who might need to leave the room sometimes, who does not like loud noise or flashing lights, etc.) well above the average.

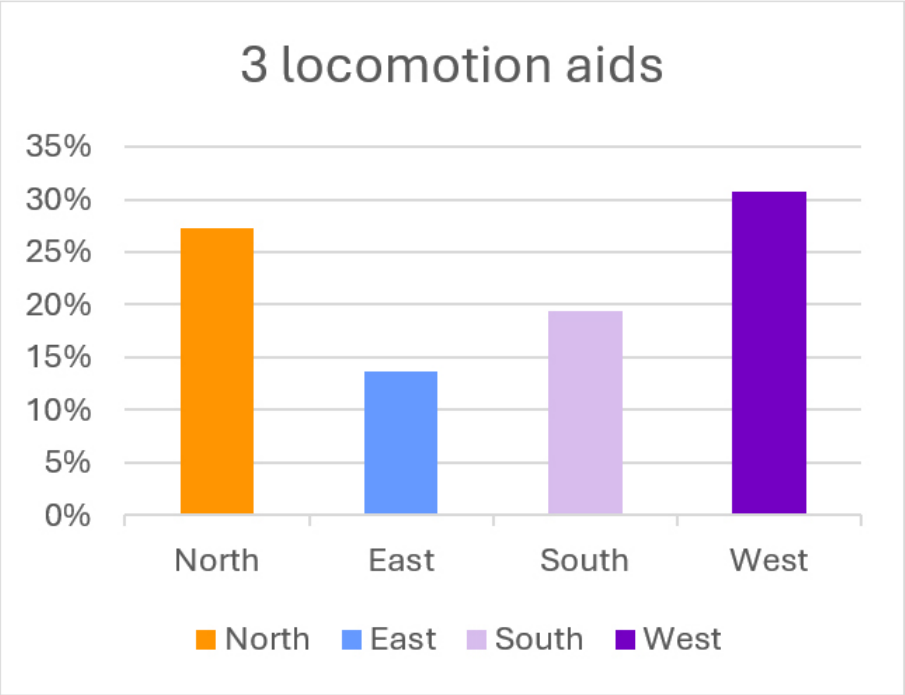
Wheelchair access is a facility provided by almost all festivals, with no differences between the artistic disciplines they represent.



Film festivals stand out in terms of variety of features for the disabled visitors, with 5 or more solutions at every second cinema festival. This occurs rarely with music festivals, but they use 3-4 features at greater frequency than any other genre type.



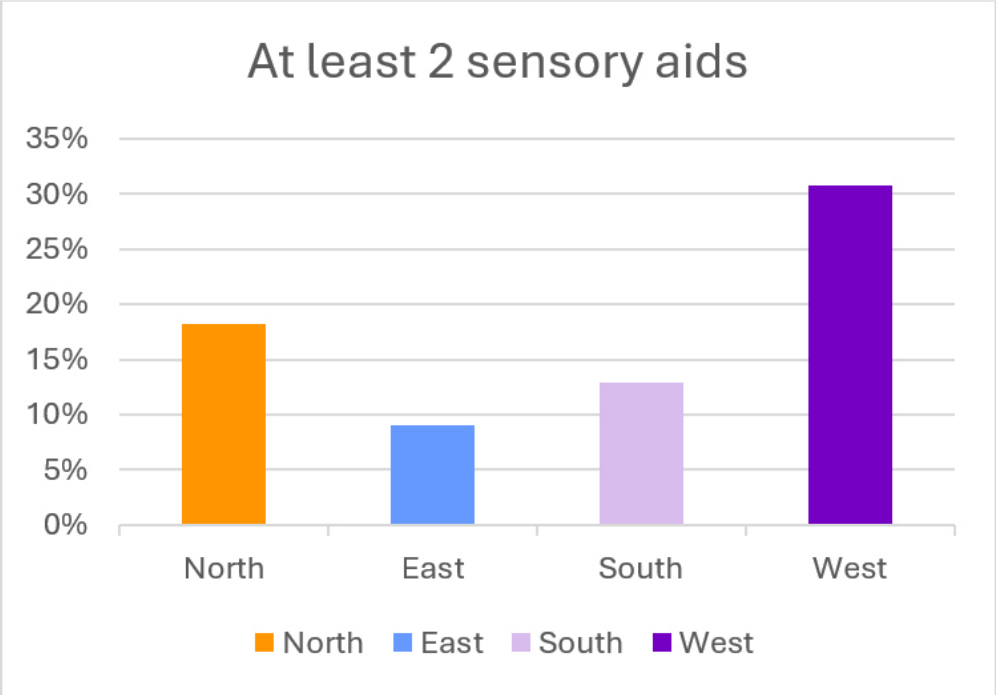
Among the assistance aids three relate to physical disabilities: wheelchair, special restrooms and transportation aids. Northern and western festival organisers are generous about these locomotion features.



There are festivals whose very mission is to focus on physical accessibility and challenges:

> *"Since the founding of our network in 2006, accessibility has been an essential part of our work. Through our founding member, the director of a mixed abled dance, numerous productions by mixed ensembles and dance artists have been realised." Germany*

Even greater is the advantage of the western festivals about aids linked to hearing and visual challenges: sign interpretation, braille texts, and easy reading information. Combining with the preceding the survey suggests that nearly a third of festivals in western Europe offer all three kinds of locomotion aid and at least two sensory assistance features.



8. BELONGING

Festivals, by definition, are inherently cohesive. Conscious and dedicated efforts, however, can make this natural impulse more effective. The spontaneous responses given by survey respondents to various questions testify the variety of initiatives through which they promote the cause of belonging.

Local collaboration is key:

> *"We collaborate with local community centres in the peripheries, inviting their existing groups and communities into our activities." Italy*

> *"We endeavour to network with certain under-represented communities and co-operate with institutions where under-represented communities are active." Germany*

An important dimension of these initiatives is aimed at the local community of the event, and an important form is educational and community engagement:

> *"We have our own school big band from three schools in three cities and two federal states in the region, which performs one evening at the festival every year (always sold out)." Germany*

"We also have a foundation that works with high schools in the area teaching students how to organise their own music festival throughout the whole year." Spain

To help local talent is a special mission of many festival organisers:

"The theatre has a residency programme that supports local and national creations by emerging artists." Spain

"We work with local artists in our region (a conflict zone) and create collaborations between them and international artists." Türkiye

"Culture in Kharkiv now survives. Many musicians have left the city. We simply try to support those who remain, regardless of their background." Ukraine

When asked about challenges in their diversity aspirations, the participants of the survey were particularly eloquent about their relevant experiences. Out of 94 festivals, 38 specifically mentioned issues related to community and belonging. Their insights highlight the complexities of fostering inclusivity while balancing resources, audience engagement, and cultural sensitivity. The following explores key challenges that festivals face in building a true sense of belonging and community.

Challenges in building community and belonging

In engaging diverse communities, festivals often struggle to attract audiences from different cultural backgrounds, particularly when events are held in centralised urban locations.

"It's harder to get people from different cultural backgrounds to come to a downtown city festival. However, when we programme in other neighbourhoods where communities of different cultures reside, we can reach them directly." Sweden

This underscores the importance of decentralisation to bridge gaps between festivals and under-represented communities.

Overcoming prejudices and cultural barriers

Many festivals encounter resistance from local communities, making integration efforts difficult.

> *"Integration of the local community, which still has prejudices about implementing the above-mentioned initiatives, happens to be the most challenging task." Bulgaria*

This highlights the need for a long-term engagement, education and advocacy to shift perspectives and create a more welcoming environment.

Financial and logistical constrains

Limited funding is a recurrent issue, particularly in ensuring accessibility for marginalised communities and people with disabilities:

> *"One of the main challenges we've faced is limited financial resources to ensure full accessibility for people with disabilities and marginalised communities." Cyprus*

> *"Expanding to new cities requires additional funding, local partnership, and resources for venue adaptation to ensure accessibility for all audience members." Slovenia*

Many festivals are actively seeking alternative funding to sustain inclusive programming, but financial limitations remain a significant barrier to do so.

Language and communication barriers

Language diversity presents an inclusion challenge, both among audiences and artist.

> *"Some authorities are also not very open to all initiatives, and language remains a key obstacle for full participation." Serbia*

> *"Language barriers among diverse artist communities also present a challenge for full inclusion." Cyprus*

Addressing these challenges requires multilingual communication strategies, translation services, and proactive efforts to include non-dominant linguistic communities.

Audience participation and representation

Some festivals report difficulty in attracting diverse participants to certain activities, even when accessibility measures are taken.

> *"Even when we had offered sign language translations, it was hard to convince the beneficiaries to come for poetry recitals." Spain*

> *"People with disabilities are used to social exclusion and sometimes cannot imagine that our festival is actually accessible to them." Germany*

The psychological and historical barriers to participation suggest that outreach efforts must go beyond accessibility and actively foster trust and invitation.

Institutional and structural resistance

Some festivals operate within cultural institutional environments that do not fully support DEIAB efforts.

> *"Regressive consciousness of our local country and people with regressive thinking about DEIAB is a reality." Italy*

> *"We faced a campaign against Ukrainian artist engagement, claiming they steal opportunities and resources from local artists." Ukraine*

These structural obstacles require strong advocacy, partnership, and persistent engagement to promote DEIAB values within resistant environments.

The responses from these 38 festivals illustrate the complex and multifaceted nature of implementing DEIAB initiatives. While financial, logistical, and cultural issues persist, many festivals remain committed to fostering community and belonging. The recurrent themes of decentralisation, inclusive communication, and institutional advocacy suggest that progress is possible but requires long-term commitment.

The survey invited respondents to express their needs in their own words. They were asked to identify resources or support that would help them improve their DEIAB practices. Many responses focused on community interaction and the issue of belonging.

Community partnerships

Festivals recognised the importance of working directly with diverse communities to expand their reach.

> *"We need additional partners from diverse communities who know how to reach people who often are not part of the mainstream marketing channels. Community representatives who hold influence can serve as promoters and advocates." Sweden*

Engaging organisations, local leaders, and cultural mediators can help festivals foster stronger connections with marginalised communities and build trust throughout representation.

Financial support for inclusive programming

Several festivals mentioned that they are facing financial limitations, and that these are the biggest barriers to expanding accessibility and representation in their communities.

> *"With more contributions from institutions, we could expand the range of affordable tickets and ensure equal opportunities for participation." Italy*

> *"We lack the resources to make our festivals fully accessible. For example, inviting blind participants would require significant additional funding, which is hard to secure." Germany*

Increased funding, grants, and sponsorship dedicated to DEIAB initiatives would enable festivals to make meaningful structural changes, such as providing adaptive technology, sign language interpretation, and inclusive venue designs.

Training and knowledge sharing

Festivals express a strong interest in learning from best practices and improving DEIAB knowledge.

> *"More exchange with inspiring festivals, create a learning network, visiting beautiful initiatives, a bigger team to be able to offer more costumed support." Belgium*

> *"We are looking for training opportunities on how to engage communities and implement DEAIB best practices in a sustainable way." Italy*

> *"Workshops on cultural sensitivity, accessible event management, and intersectional inclusion would help our team grow." Germany*

By offering training programmes for festival organisers, staff, volunteers and artists, festivals can create more informed, inclusive and proactive environments.

Support from local authorities

Some festivals face institutional resistance or lack of official support for their DEIAB initiatives.

> *"We hope to receive more support from local municipalities with the logistics needed to organise large-scale events." Bulgaria*

> *"A more appropriate cultural policy would make a big difference. We are lobbying for legislative changes that would support diversity in the arts better." Slovenia*

Better governmental and institutional backing could lead to policy improvements that make inclusivity a fundamental requirement rather than an optional add-on.

Targeted outreach and audience development

Festivals identify the need for more effective audience engagement strategies.

> *"We need better information on how to attract new audiences and engage under-represented groups." Romania*

> *"Even when we provide accessible programming, participation remains low because communities are not aware or don't feel invited." Montenegro*

Investing in specialised outreach efforts, multilingual communication and direct community involvement can bridge the gap between festivals and potential attendees who may feel excluded.

International networking and artistic residencies

Several festivals emphasise the importance of cross-border collaboration.

> *"We mostly join other network events to share our work and contacts." Netherlands*

> *"We are looking for international collaborations that engage diverse local communities." Latvia*

> *"Residency programmes for artists from different backgrounds would enrich our festival and strengthen cultural exchange." Germany*

Participation in global network and cultural exchange initiatives could help festivals diversify their programming and learn from successful DEIAB practices elsewhere.

Increased accessibility measures

Some festivals pointed out specific groups that remain under-represented due to accessibility challenges.

> *"As a music festival presents the sound of the city, we realised we were missing out on engaging a very specific audience: the deaf community." Portugal*

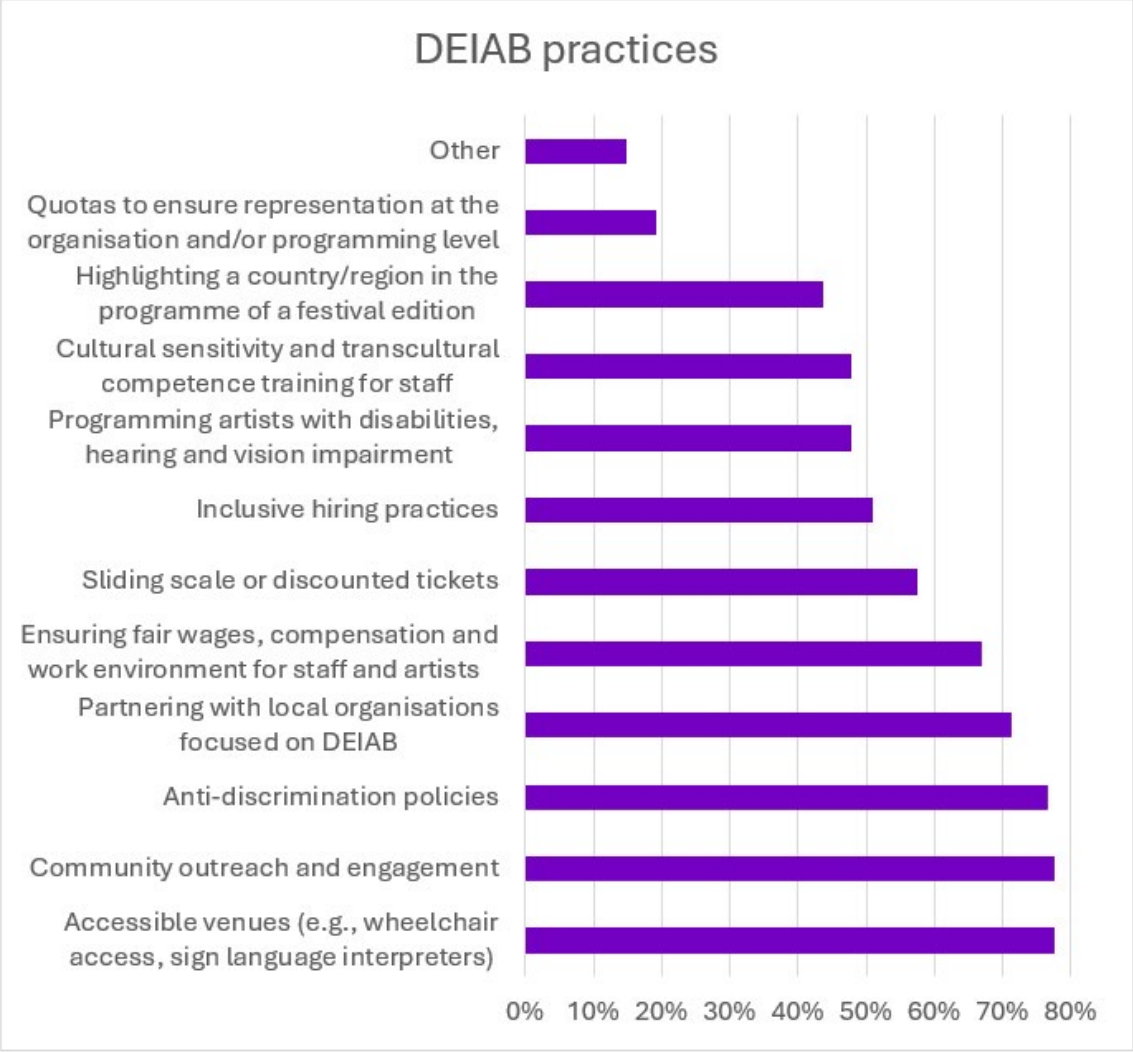
"Providing better access for people with disabilities requires additional logistical planning and financial investment." Türkiye

Dedicated accessibility professionals and funding for inclusive adaptations would allow festivals to accommodate a more diverse audience.

The responses of 16 festivals illustrate the interconnected challenges of funding, outreach, accessibility, and institutional support.

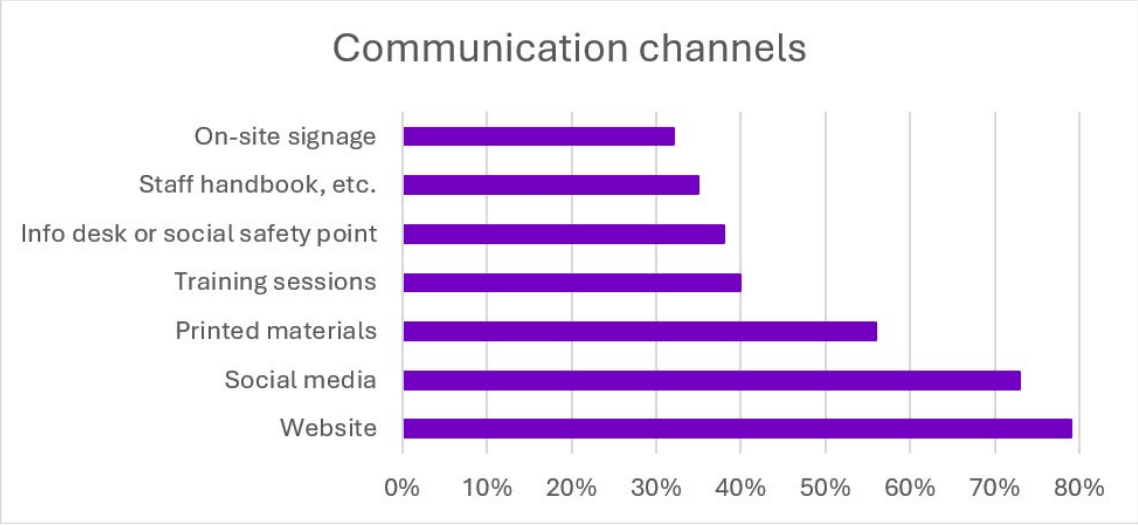
9. PRACTICES

The participants were asked about the DEIAB practices implemented at their festivals. The varieties in offer were acknowledged in very high proportions. The fact that the "other" option was selected by very few respondents show the validity of the scale of the relevant practices.



It is interesting to see that only accessible venues have been selected by more than 70% of the festivals, and quotas to ensure representativity collected less than 20% of answers.

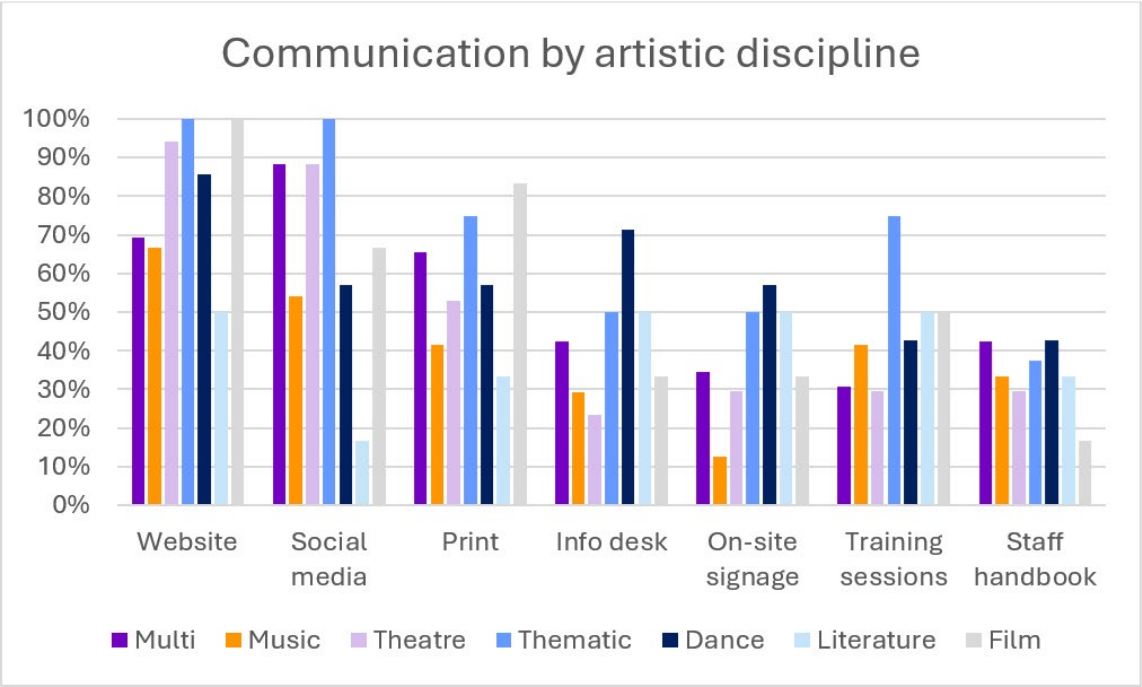
The survey focused also on the techniques used by the festivals to address the various challenges. The relevant question was not directed to marketing communication and general visitor information, but only in relation to diversity actions: "How are DEIAB values communicated to festival staff, volunteers, artists, and participants?" The responses indicate that besides the obvious digital channels, other methods are also frequently used.



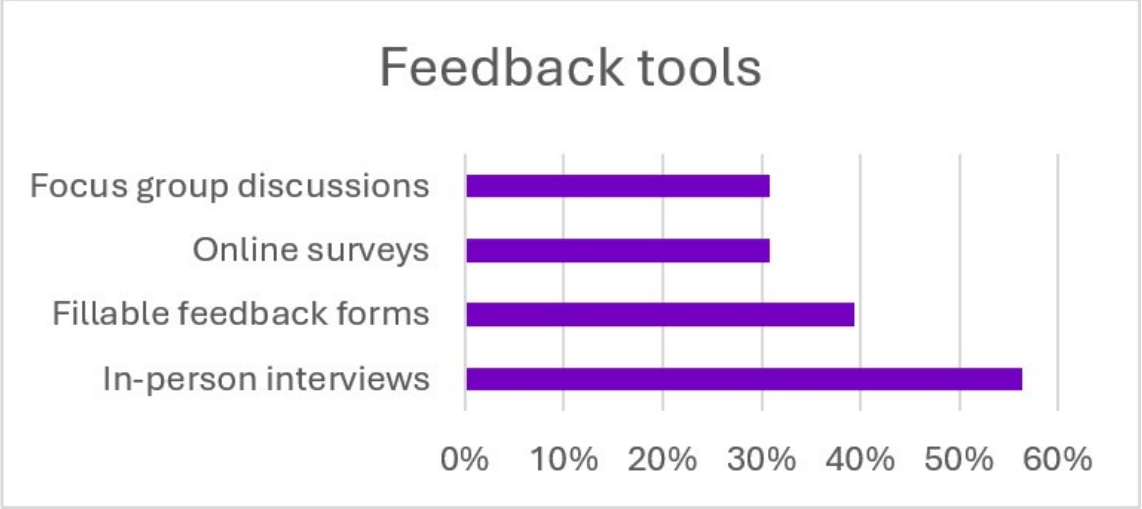
Diversity is a sensitive terrain, and so is its communication:

> *"I see all items listed above slightly racist and offensive. Why should a cultural entity which is organically diverse shout about an organic diversity within the collective if it is not inherently racist. We are organically diverse without any mention of that on our website, social media or printed material." Türkiye*

The analysis by artistic discipline showed that literature festival organisers use both digital channels and print materials less often than any other kind of festivals. On the other hand, concerning the electronic solutions, thematic festivals are nearly fully equipped. Film festivals use a lot of prints and digital channels, but no staff handbooks or internal policy guides.

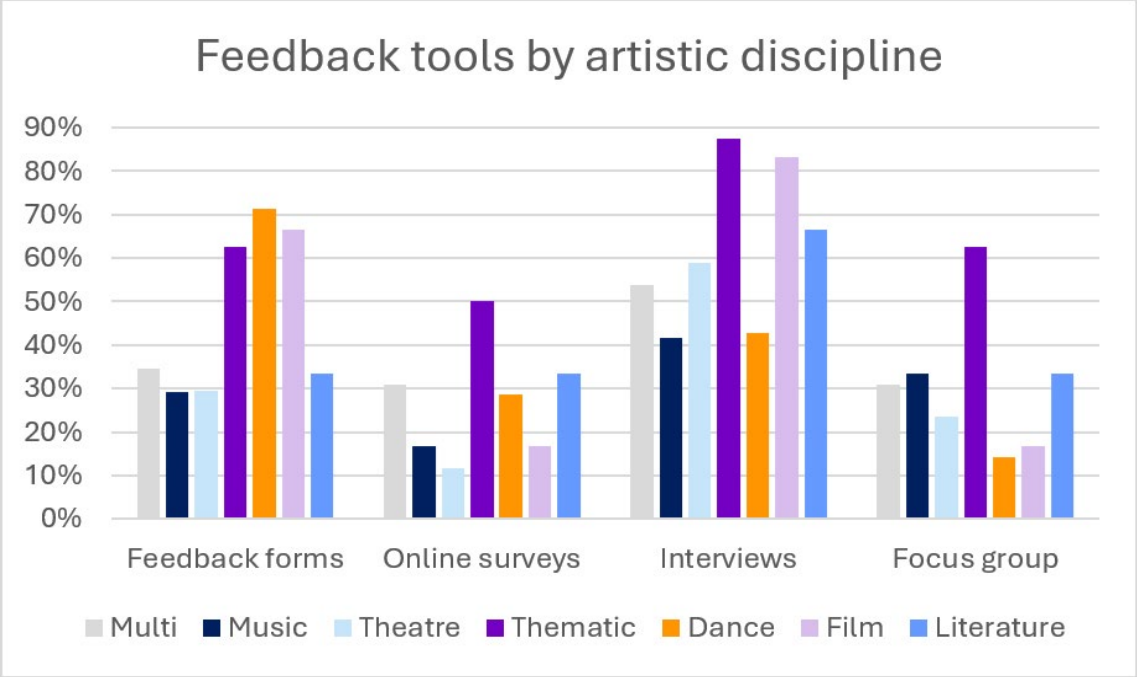


When the feedback on diversity actions is at stake, face-to-face interviews are the most preferred approach. More than half of the participants in the survey resort to this interpersonal form of monitoring the effects of their actions. At the other end, six festivals admitted to using only the most basic channels, namely the website and social media.

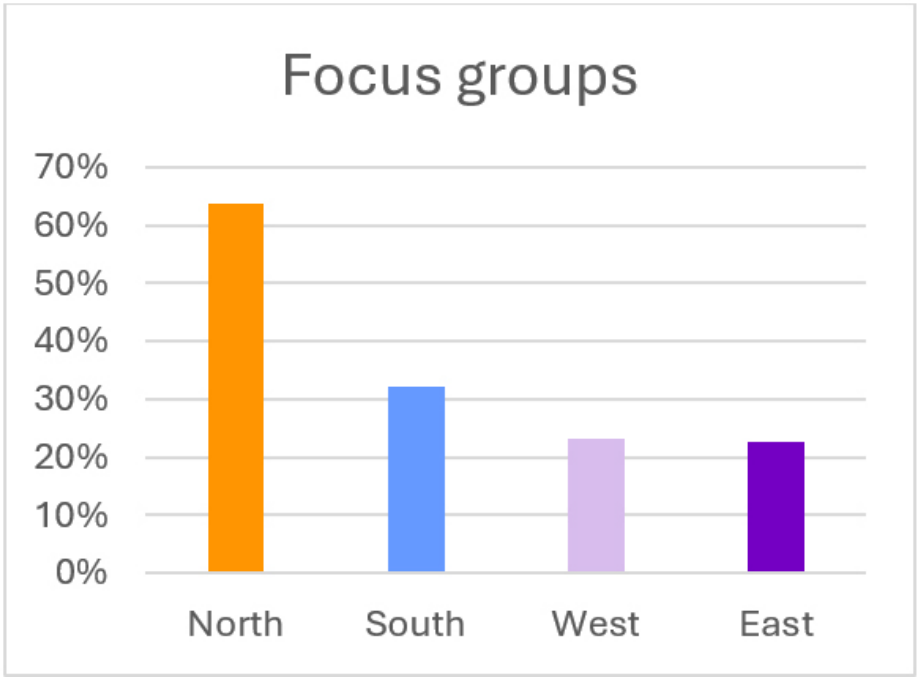


"We invite participants to share food, drinks and thoughts with each other, critique the edition that has just concluded and offer suggestions for the future - particularly in relation to our priorities that we are inclusive, accessible and sustainable." Spain

Theatre festivals are least inclined to administer online surveys although more than half of them are prepared to conduct in person interviews when curious about the impact of their initiatives.



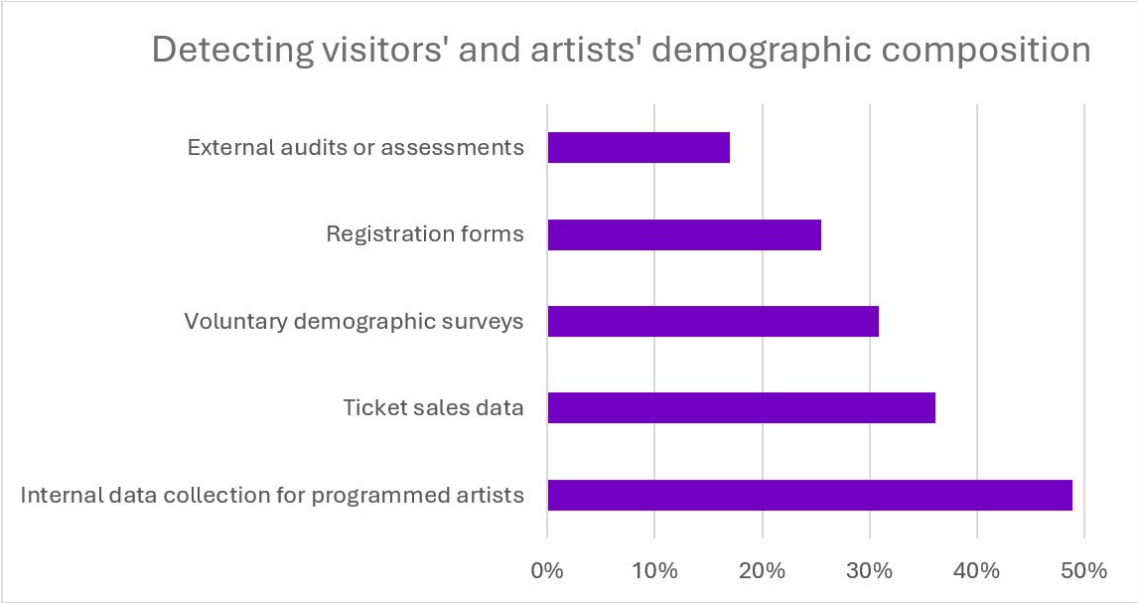
Running focus groups requires special knowhow and yet 61% of thematic festivals in the survey indicate its usage. Most of the thematic festivals in the survey are from the north of Europe, which explains the high rate of applying focus groups as a feedback technique among northern respondents. On the other hand, very few film and dance festivals apply this method.



Nevertheless, focus groups are not exclusive to the north:

> *"We invite focus groups (we pay them to visit the festival) and organise feedback moments with them." Netherlands*

The survey inquired about the ways in which the festivals were trying to build knowledge about the demographic composition of their public as well as of the artists in their programmes. The respondents could choose from 5 techniques. 70 festivals out of the 94 reported the use of the 5 altogether 149 times (as they could choose from more than one option), but only 2 multi-genre respondents have ticked all four methods. The remaining 24 participants admitted not using any of these methods or they were still in development.



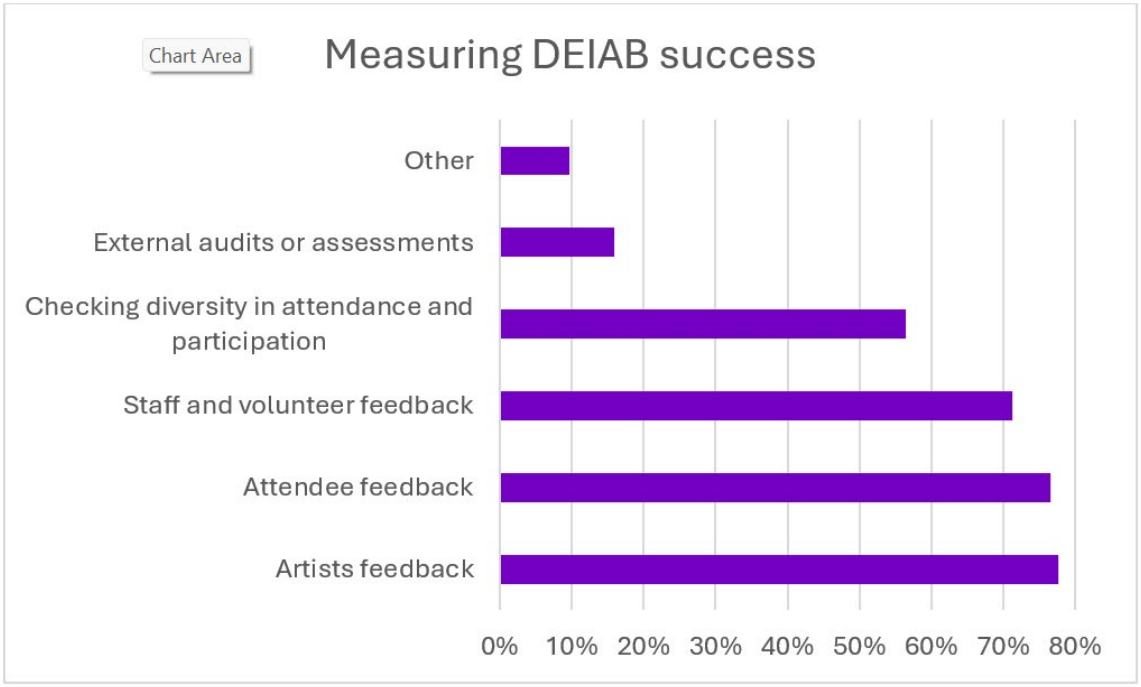
Some striking conclusions are that none of these methods are used by more than 50% of the participants. As the most frequent choice, festivals collect information about the background of their artists. This may imply a deeper inquiry than the information they get by nature during the processes of recruitment and contracting.

One of the respondents in Italy uses an app to collect data.

Another festival uses a mix of different tools:

> *"We conduct a fieldwork combining qualitative methods (Participative-action research, interviews, participative observation) with quantitative methods (participant surveys)." Türkiye*

Another important aspect of feedback, if not the most important, is learning about the success of their activities in terms of diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging. The responses to the question about the methods used by the respondents confirm that the festivals that volunteered to participate in this survey constitute a particularly committed group. In line with the high proportion of respondents considering diversity as a priority (as previously indicated), the five available options were checked 265 times by 89 festivals (5 did not select any). That explains the very high percentages (between 56-78%) who reported about using the respective methods.



It is good to note that very few actually proceed to external audits and assessment. This is probably because it is not something required by funding authorities, and that festivals do not use them because external experts might be pretty expensive.

In the other, these 2 festivals have underlined interesting points regarding success:

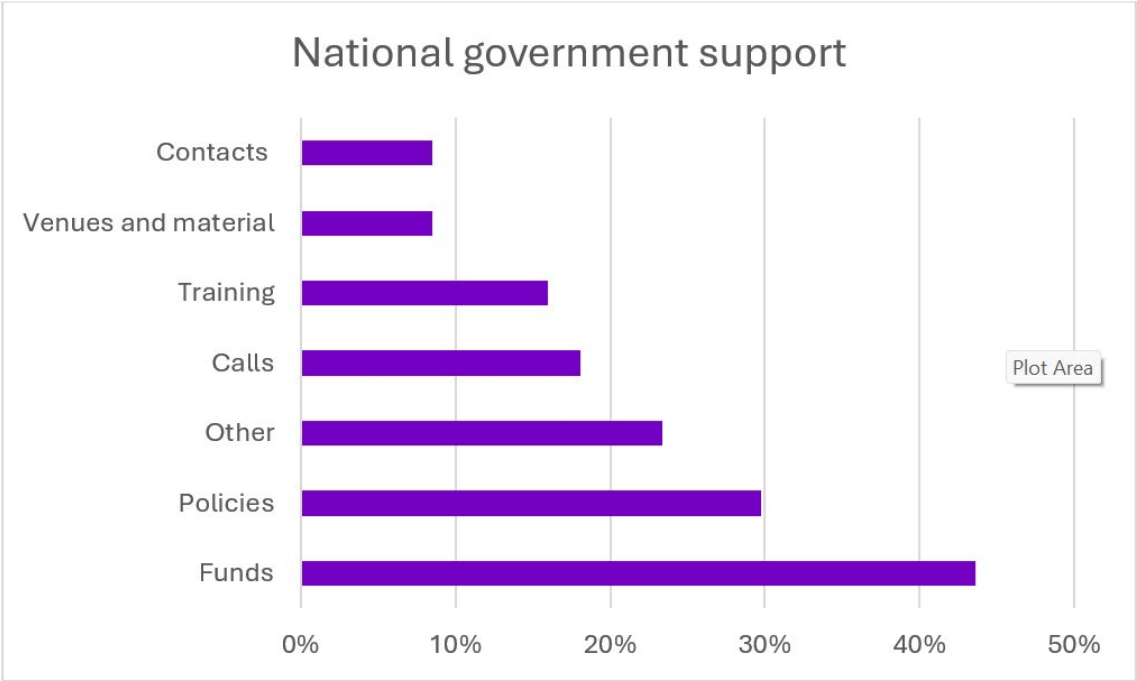
> *"We can always do better. Societal changes happen fast and we must never sleep on our guard." Iceland*

> *"You cannot be a festival for 'everyone'. Who represents 'all' groups of people. But, being aware of this fact already helps our team to keep an open attitude, and not pretend we're already very inclusive." Netherlands*

10. AUTHORITIES' SUPPORT

Festivals were asked what means and resources their governments provide, both at the national and local levels, to support DEIAB practices in this sector. The results are sobering.

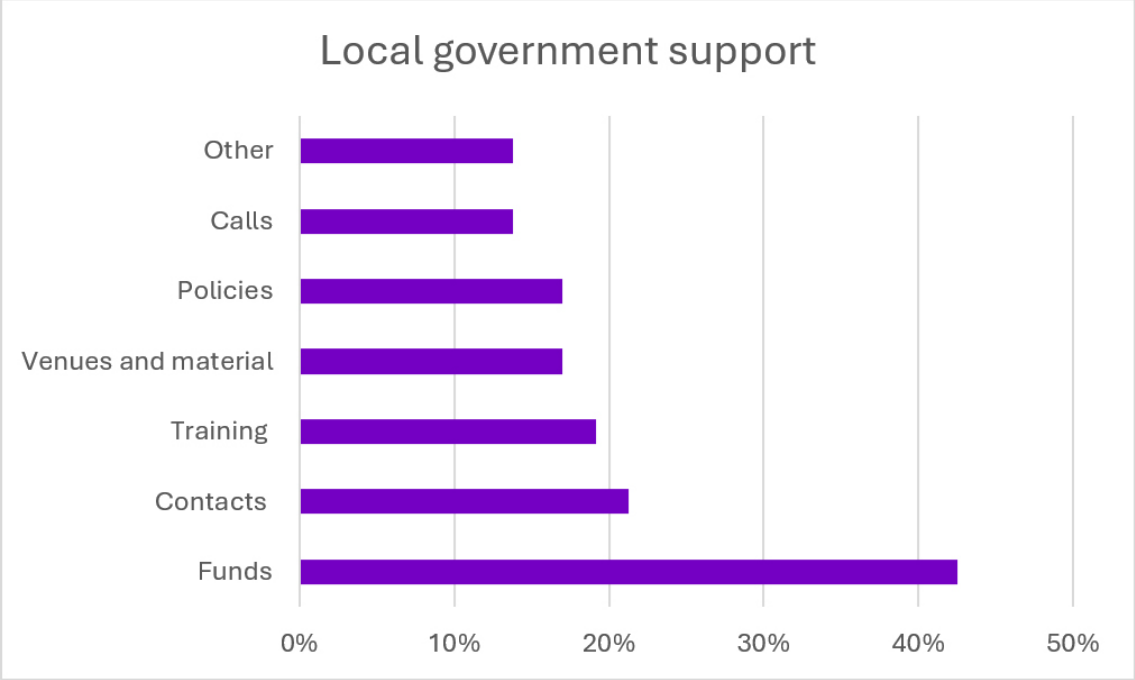
Only 60% of respondents were able to name at least one of the listed avenues of central government support, with the obvious "funds" ranking first. Most of the relatively high "other" responses specified the lack of government support. The wording of these suggests that the funds, policies, calls, etc. selected by participants do not necessarily imply targeted government interventions focused on DEIAB but rather encompass general support for arts festivals.



The share of those who could select at least one form of support from the local (regional or municipal) level is even smaller than from the national level, 57% vs. 60%. Also, while some 20% of festivals don't receive any support from government at the national level, this number reaches 30% at the local level.

Sometimes public authorities don't understand correctly initiatives by festivals, which are then punished:

> *"To improve accessibility, we have had to compromise and not to bring some big, expensive and inaccessible shows. This was interpreted by our Culture capital funds jury as 'working with niche' and resulted in 30% funds cut to our festival." Latvia*



Again, it is almost certain that instead of funding and calls dedicated to diversity interventions (which the question hoped to explore), the responses imply general financial subsidies arriving at arts festivals, as pointed out by this Portuguese festival:

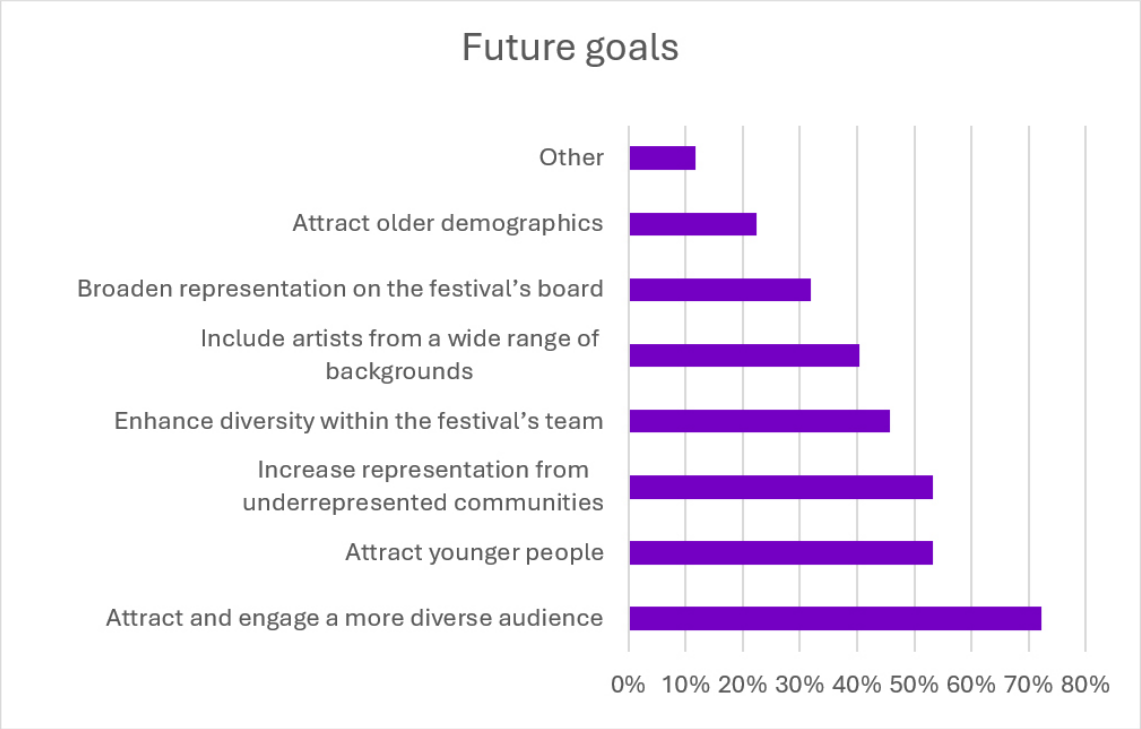
> *"We seek municipal partnerships to guarantee funding for the festival, so that we do not need to charge for ticket sales." Portugal*

Comparing national and local situations, differences are worthy of note in two instances. Regarding the existence of policies (on DEIAB or on festivals) the rate is 17% on local vs 30% on the national level. On the other hand, local governments give more support in terms of contacting experts and relevant organisations than the national governments, 21% vs 9%.

This part of the survey suggests that increased efforts are expected from public authorities in providing means and resources to the festivals in general, and to increase their diversity work in particular.

11. WISHES, DREAMS

To conclude with the way ahead, here is how festivals listed their needs regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility and belonging that should be further addressed.



The most striking need is to attract and engage a more diverse audience. It reaches almost 70%, reinforced by the commitment to attract younger visitors. It is important to note that all 94 participants responded to this question. This includes 4 that ticked none of the 7 options offered but mentioned other methods they were planning to follow: these latter were dominated by commitments to increase care about disabilities.

Festivals around Europe and beyond share a common vision, to create more inclusive, accessible and culturally rich spaces that truly reflect the diversity of their community. Sometimes, they face financial constraints and structural challenges. They wish for festivals that are not only events, but platforms where social change, artistic innovation and meaningful connections happen.

A repeated theme among the answers to the survey is that festivals would like to have a deeper engagement with their communities. Festivals want to move beyond performative inclusivity and cultivate meaningful relationships with their audiences, marginalised groups, ensuring that all voices are represented in one way or another.

The general feeling is that through partnerships they can empower their local communities to shape festival programming actively rather than simply being invited to attend.

Financial sustainability remains a major concern for the big majority of festivals, yet they are optimistic about securing more funding for their diversity work. They hope for a stronger institutional support, to allow for equitable participation.

Many dream of making their events barrier free and 100% accessible, from ticketing pricing to physical accessibility, ensuring no one is left behind.

There is also a shared ambition to expand artistic exchange among festivals and have international collaboration. Festivals are part of a global cultural ecosystem, where knowledge can be shared and residencies can enrich the programmes and bring new perspectives.

12. EFA CARES

EFA has learned a lot from the survey. All the answers received provided useful information to lead EFA's actions in the upcoming months and years.

Hearing their stories and having the chance to conduct interviews with some of the festivals that took part in the survey allowed EFA to see how festivals are really invested in the DEAIB topics, and the impact that those strategies are having in their communities. You can read and listen to them on FestivalFinder.eu.[2] The call for stories goes on and festivals can continue to send their initiatives and experiments so that they can be shared with others and highlighted on EFA's platforms.

2. Count me in! stories: www.festivalfinder.eu/news/count-me-in-stories-online

The lack of knowledge and resources should not be an issue. There are many initiatives, compilations and guides that exist and can be used for free. EFA is commited to continuing to bring festivals together so that they can exchange views on their DEIAB practices, and bring innovative and inspiring examples to their attention.

Diversity work applies within EFA itself. The "Count me in!" campaign kicked off with a statement endorsed by the EFA Board and Team.[3] A further step was taken in April 2025 with the development of Caring Principles for the Arts Festivals Summit in Edinburgh.[4] This document is a first reflection on how to build a caring and respectful environment in EFA's events and make it explicit. It is a collaborative document on which participants are invited to share their suggestions.

EFA hopes to have raised awareness and interest of this topic and provided some ways for festivals to initiate or move a step forward in their diversity work. Festivals can be laboratories of DEIAB practices and should not be afraid in experimenting new ways of working within their teams, with the artists they programme, and the audiences that are attending, as well as with the audiences they wish to welcome. EFA will continue to act as a sounding board for what is happening on the field, and to support festivals in their needs and requests to be active players in our complex and constantly changing societies.

3. DEIAB Statement: www.european-festivals.eu/news/efa-diversity-equity-inclusion-accessibility-and-belonging

4. EFA Caring Principles: www.european-festivals.eu/files/EFA-Cares-AFS2025-draft-25April.pdf

13. ANNEXES

13.1. Definitions: what does DEIAB mean to EFA

The following definitions elaborate on how EFA interprets the terms diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and belonging, and explain why festivals should serve as pioneering agents in implementing these principles.

Diversity

We acknowledge that people's visible and non-visible differences based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, physical and cognitive disabilities, religion, education, socioeconomic status, age, language, physical appearance, etc., uniquely shape their identities, impacting societal roles and opportunities. Festivals working on diversity are open to having this diversity represented on all levels and put orchestrated efforts to dismantle barriers within the cultural sector.

Equity

Equity is a process that recognises that privileges, advantages, obstacles, and barriers exist in every structure and system and acknowledges that not everyone starts from the same place due to existing privileges and barriers. Advancing equity means continuously working to address these imbalances. Unlike equality, which treats everyone the same, equity, which treats everyone fairly, focuses on providing the resources needed for everyone to flourish and succeed. Festivals committed to equity will work to enhance fairness in their practices, processes, and resource distribution.

Inclusion

By embracing and valuing each person's unique qualities, we harness the power of diversity. True inclusion means everyone feels respected, participates in decision-making, and can share their ideas. Inclusion promotes well-being within teams and fosters a sense of belonging for individuals. Festivals create inclusive spaces where people feel comfortable being themselves and engaging with others respectfully, even with differing views.

Accessibility

Accessibility means creating an environment where everyone, including persons with disabilities, can participate fully. Accessibility covers a range of areas, including physical access, facilities, information, digital content, social inclusion, and financial support. In festivals, this can be achieved in various ways, such as creating conditions for inclusive participation, offering physical spaces, a digressive ticketing policy, designing accessible websites and documents, and using assistive technology.

Belonging

Belonging is a feeling of being genuinely part of a group, team, community, or society where you are not just accepted but valued and included. In the workplace, it means feeling like a valued team member with a real sense of connection with colleagues. Belonging is often considered an antidote to loneliness and isolation. Festivals can offer a strong sense of community and belonging as they bring people together, encourage cultural exchange, and play a crucial role in nurturing creativity and self-expression.

13.2. Distribution of participating festivals by country

Australia: 1
Belgium: 3
Bulgaria: 2
Croatia: 2
Cyprus: 1
Czechia: 7
Finland:1
France: 3
Germany: 8
Greece: 2
Hungary: 1
Iceland: 1
Ireland: 2
Italy: 11
Kosovo: 1
Latvia: 1
Malta: 5
Montenegro: 1
Netherlands: 5
North Macedonia: 1
Norway: 2
Pakistan: 1
Portugal: 2
Romania: 1
Serbia: 1
Slovenia: 2
Spain: 6
Sweden: 7
Switzerland: 2
Türkiye: 4
Uganda:1
Ukraine: 2
United Kingdom: 3
USA: 1

Total: 95

EUROPEAN FESTIVALS ASSOCIATION

Sainctelettesquare 17
1000 Brussels - Belgium
T: +32 2 644 48 00

www.european-festivals.eu
info@efa-aef.eu

COUNT ME IN ! diversity

EUROPEAN FESTIVALS ASSOCIATION

The Count me in! survey and campaign was carried out by the European Festivals Association, under the coordination of Audrey Brisack, Director Network and Communication, with the continued support of Ceyda Berk-Söderblom - Arts manager, curator, and festival programmer specialising in social inclusion, diversity, and inclusion management, and co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.

The report is mainly written by the Budapest Observatory of Summa Artium.

THE BUDAPEST OBSERVATORY

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