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### Diversity and Inclusivity of ESNS Exchange and Partner Festivals

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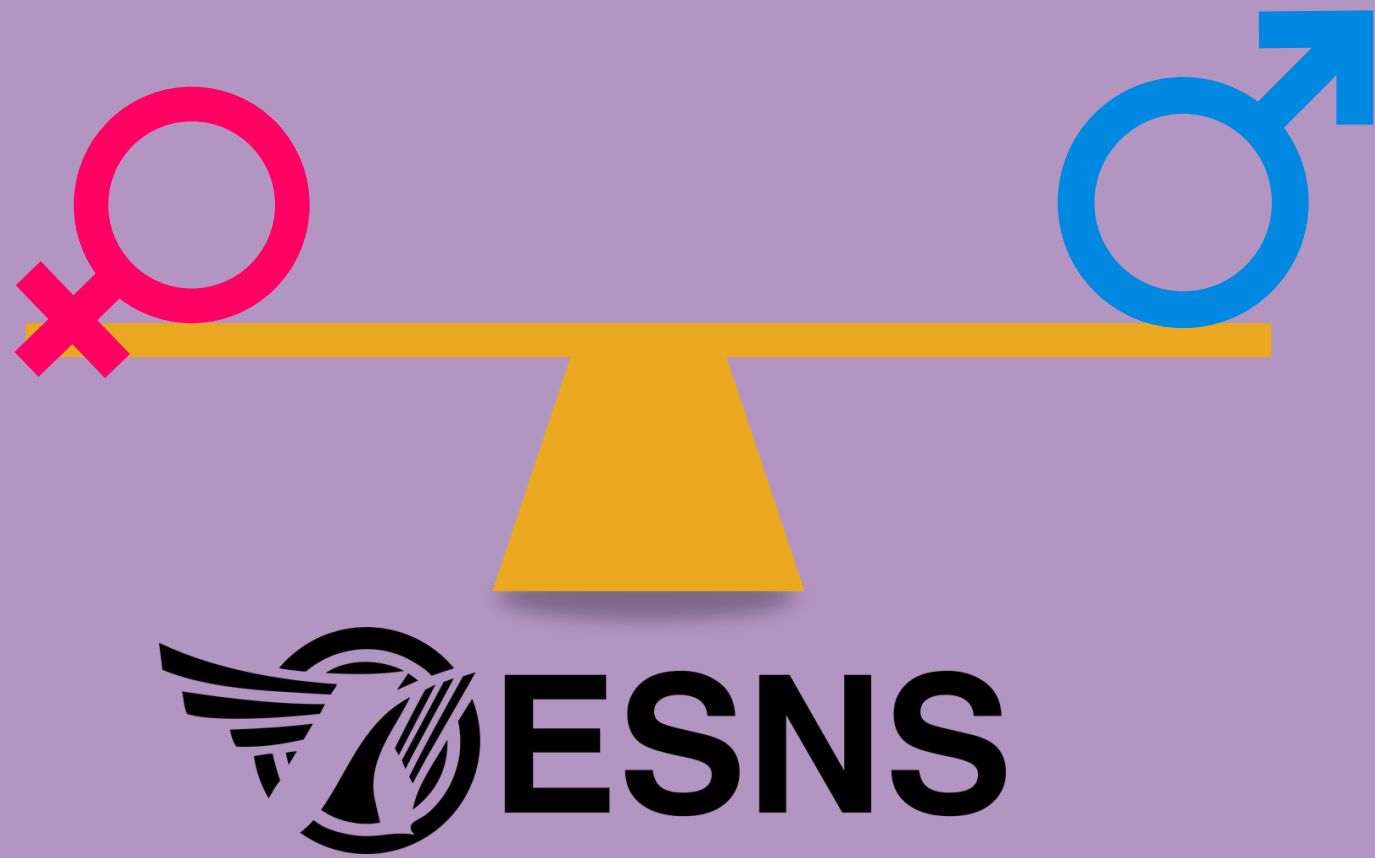
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# Diversity and Inclusivity of ESNS Exchange and Partner Festivals

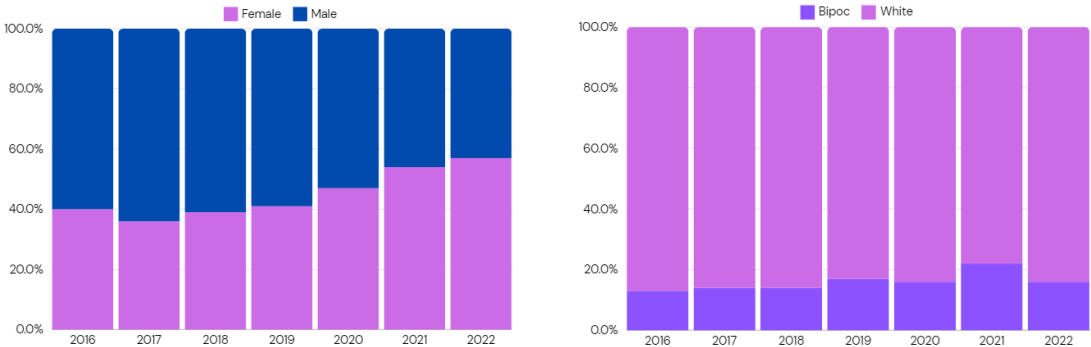


(Wo)Men at Work

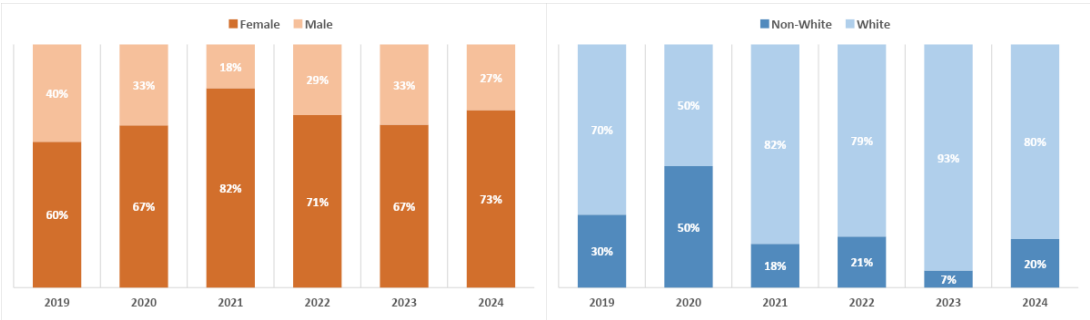
Diversity and Inclusivity of ESNS Exchange and Partner Festivals

During ESNS there are an incredible amount of emerging artists, looking to go international with their act. For the emerging acts, ESNS Exchange has helped them for over 20 years to dip their toes into the international scene. ESNS hosts thousands of industry professionals from around 400 international festivals (ESNS about section). Around 130 of those international festivals take part in the ESNS Exchange program.

ESNS is putting a lot of effort into diversity and inclusivity. Research by RUG students from 2023 showed how the representation of gender and race changed from 2016 to 2022. The results can be found in the graphs below. The term bipoc used in the graphs stands for black, indigenous, people of colour.



The main conclusions to be drawn here are that women have been increasingly more represented, and that the representation of bipoc has remained mostly the same. This also translates to some extent to the Music Moves Europe (MME) awards as seen in the graphs below. The average gender ratio is 70/30 f/m and race ratio is 24/76 bipoc/white.

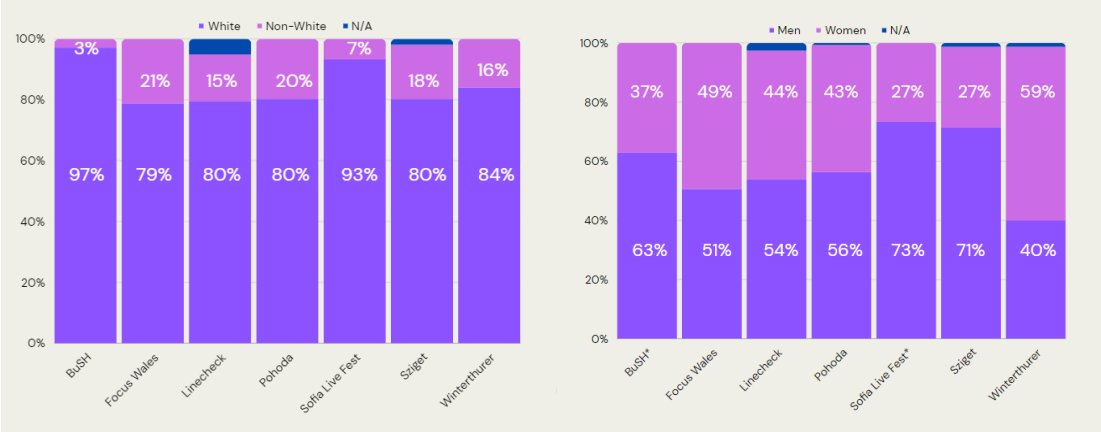


Gender Ratio MME 2019-2024

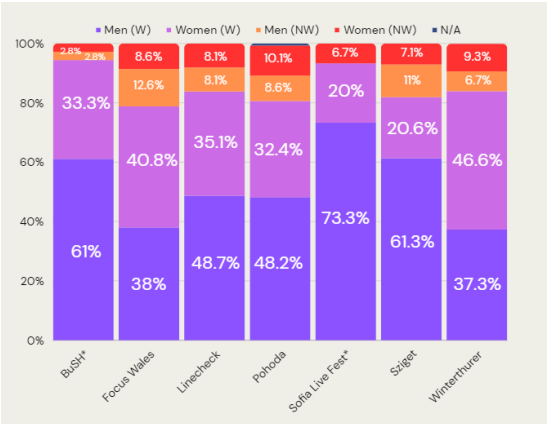
Ethnicity Ratio MME 2019-2024

Now, if diversity has improved over the years at ESNS, we might suspect an increase of diversity in the line-up of the festivals that take part in the ESNS Exchange program. Surprisingly, it has not translated into more diverse line-ups at these collaborating festivals. With an obvious discrepancy between the diversity in the lineups of ESNS and the participating festivals, the question that comes up is: what do the booking processes of these festivals look like?

To answer this question the research started with an analysis of the ESNS 2023 line-up and the line-ups of 7 partner festivals of ESNS, namely Bush (Hungary), Focus Wales (Wales), Linecheck (Italy), Pohoda festival (Slovakia), Sofia Live Fest (Bulgaria), Sziget (Hungary) and Winterthurer (Switzerland). The analysis of ESNS' 2023 Line-up shows a 49/51 f/m and 18/82 bipoc/white ratio. The ESNS acts that the 7 partner festivals booked for their own festivals portrayed similar ratios with a ~50/50 f/m and ~20/80 bipoc/white split. We compared this data to the 7 partner festivals, which can be found in the graphs below.



Gender and Ethnic Representation of 2023 Partner Line-ups



Gender and Ethnic Representation of 2023 Line-ups

The key points we got from this data is that (1) festival type does not seem to influence the diversity of the line-up much, (2) the gender balance of acts booked from ESNS by the partner festivals is around 50/50, even if the festival itself does not represent the same balance, and (3) the race ratio mostly favours white artists, which corresponds with the race diversity of the festivals.

With this data in mind, the interviews of the booking teams that represented 4 of these festivals followed. The questions of the interview focused on which ESNS acts bookers were interested in, what the booking teams look like, what their criteria for booking are, how diversity plays a role in the booking process and how this translates into the festival itself. What stood out from the interviews were the booking criteria and the ways the teams think about and implement diversity.

Regarding booking criteria, several points stand out.

Firstly, professionalism of the acts is important. The more professional the acts are, the higher the chances of being booked are. Professionalism was described as having a powerful production, dressing in a way that matches the act, a good act name, feeling comfortable with themselves and with the audience.

Secondly, partnerships seem to strongly influence the booking process. Formal partners, which are collaborating festivals and promoters, as well as informal partners which are determined by networks and industry type of employment, and freelance being involved with multiple festivals or other music related organisations. The reason for the influence of partnerships seems to mainly be risk reductions because these act as security mechanisms in terms of professionalism of acts.

Thirdly, the quality of the music and the performance. Basically, the music needs to be good and the performance should be at least somewhat captivating. There is a mentality amongst some bookers that “we do not care about who the artist is, as long as the music is good.”

Lastly, the trendiness of an act is important. If artists are already riding a (small) wave of popularity then it could be more interesting to book them as they could attract the fans.

When it comes to diversity there are several key aspects that came up during the interviews. All the interviewed festivals work with at least one female booker. However, important to note is that they mainly occupy secondary positions. The diversity within a booking team is also not an indicator that the diversity of the festival will be similar to the team itself. When it comes to a diversity specialist within the booking teams, only one of the festivals had one. The addition of such a role to a team does have an impact on the degree of the festival's involvement in diversity. The booking team stressed the importance of having tough conversations both within the team but also within the networks. The diversity officer has a degree of power by choosing to work with people with a similar vision or open to discussions about diversity and see it as something they continuously work on and learn about.

The degree of diversity of the line-up is also strongly influenced by the local political and socio-cultural climate. For example, in some countries the composition of local audiences (for example mostly white), and the political climate (the government can negatively intervene with culture) were given as obstacles towards achieving certain diversity criteria (mainly ethnically). On the other hand, a more diverse composition of audiences, richer musical offer and a supporting government that provides consistent funding, can have a more positive impact (European Commission Culture and Creativity, n.d.

<https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-and-creative-sectors/music/music-moves-europe>).

Money, unsurprisingly, also plays a big role. This is especially true for the headlining acts since the degree of mainstream success of popular acts are important to secure financial success. Big commercial festivals, such as Glastonbury, are criticized for not doing enough, in the sense that they have such high prestige, that certain headline adjustments would not influence their income in ways it does to smaller festivals (Sherlock and Bradshaw, 2017 <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-40273193>).

From the current research it seems that booking consists of very complex decision-making processes that are influenced by both social and aesthetic factors. In this regard, the highest power that festivals have is that they represent important nodes in the music industry networks, given their contribution to the increase in visibility of particular artists. Hence, their biggest influence seems to be in abiding to the musical wishes of the public and not to a more diverse line-up.

Several aspects can be found as reasons why diversity remains a difficult point.

(1) Team composition. When there are too few people in the booking team, people have to do too much and do not have enough time to focus on diversity. Appointing a dedicated diversity officer could help improve the focus on diversity (Scanlon, n.d.

<https://huntscanlon.com/do-all-companies-need-a-chief-diversity-officer/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CA%20lack%20of%20a%20CDO,levels%20to%20effect%20real%20change>).

- (2) Awareness. Some programmers seem to be unaware of the degree of the issue. Diversity can be a very sensitive topic and people get defensive easily. They tend to focus on how 'good' their festival is, based on the acts that are booked. This results in contradicting statements, reflecting an implicit booking bias. So, there might be a connection between the degree of awareness and the composition of the line-up.
- (3) ESNS Exchange might be seen as an opportunity to diversify, given that all acts booked from their pool by the festivals are at least 50/50, but interviews show that this might be just a coincidence.
- (4) Bigger festivals are more sensitive to the current mainstream politics of their environments, which is directly tied to economic revenue.

#### Shortcomings:

1. The pool of festivals contributing to our research was low compared to the amount of festival representatives attending ESNS
2. Not all festival interviews could be conducted due different reasons such as lack of time, no internet connection during the proposed time and miscommunication leading to unawareness of the intended interview.
3. The festivals who agreed to help with the research knew it was about diversity. This already shows a willingness to cooperate about the topic. Perhaps festivals who do not care about this issue might not want to give insights into their processes.
4. There is not a lot of time to do much more research than we could manage and the researchers are students who cannot spend full time on this project due to other courses and exams and such.

#### Potential research for next year:

1. There are of course many more ways in which people are diverse than just race and gender.
2. Going beyond the binary, so not just man/woman or white/not-white.
3. Increase the pool of festivals to make our results more reliable
4. Include other types of festivals (e.g. non-profit)
5. How other valuables (festival type, music genre, venues, audience development, music/success values) influence diversity.
6. Audience insight - how audiences perceive diverse/not diverse lineups, whether it has any influence on ticket sales
7. Look into the audience composition and what role diverse lineups plays in attracting audiences
8. Correlation diversity on stage and the diversity in the audience?

# Colophon

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