

The European Commission Teams With Advocacy Group 50/50 to Ramp Up Female Representation in Film, Media Sector

By Elsa Keslassy ▾



On the 30th anniversary of Creative Europe's Media Programme, the [European Commission](#) in association with the advocacy group 50/50 is launching a big diversity and inclusion campaign aimed at ramping up the representation of women in the film and news media sector.

Dubbed CharactHer, the campaign was designed to foster inclusion, empower women and highlight inspiring female professionals from all across Europe working as directors, showrunners, cinematographers, key grip, stunt performers, music composers, VFX supervisors, colorists, journalists and in the video game industry. These are all fields where women are still widely outnumbered by men.

The campaign is also meant to squash stereotypes and encourage young women to pursue careers in domains that are traditionally considered to be "masculine."

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Even at Cannes, which was the first festival to sign a gender parity pledge in 2018 thanks to the org 50/50, there is still a long way to go. Indeed, there are only four movies directed by women out of the 24-title competition.

“Now you have lots of producers and studio managers who are women. Yet nothing much changed for the directors. There are hardly any female directors in the cinema. In small films sometimes, but not the very big films. In Europe you had quite a lot of women directors, but we didn’t [in Hollywood],” Jodie Foster, this year’s Cannes’ Palme d’Or honoree, said during a talk at Cannes.

The CharactHer campaign will be introduced by Věra Jourová, the vice president of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, who is a driving force behind the initiative.

“Today, in Europe, only one film in five is directed by a woman. We want this to change,” Jourová tells *Variety*. “And this is not only about directors — we see in the campaign that there is a wide change of professions in the media and audiovisual sectors which are less known but very exciting.”

At its launch event, scheduled today, the program will highlight Hind Bensari, a Moroccan-born documentary filmmaker, Safia Kessas, a radio journalist, Uèle Lamore, a music composer, Anca Damian, a Romanian director, and Anne Rasmussen, a Danish stuntwoman. Each are portrayed in videos that were directed by Bensari and will be unveiled during the presentation. The event will also be attended by Delphyne Besse, a film executive who is an active board member of the org 50/50.

“I would say that the only trap that can prevent us from realizing our dreams lies in ourselves. It takes work to find our voice and be conscious in all our actions, to evolve as artists, but also as human beings. And always without fear, reinvent ourselves, so we live the present and not the past,” said Damian.

Bensari's first documentary, "475: Break the Silence," received critical acclaim and helped spark a civic movement that succeeded in repealing a Moroccan law allowing men accused of rape to marry their victims. Hind's latest feature documentary, "We Could Be Heroes," world-premiered at Hot Docs International Film Festival in 2018 where it won the best international documentary award.

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Kessas has been working for the Belgian public broadcaster RTBF since 2000, and has also been an editor at La Première, the biggest radio channel in French-speaking Belgium. She founded a feminist news project called "Les Grenades," which is part of RTBF, and she's in charge of the broadcaster's diversity plan.

Lamore is a Franco-American artist who works as both a conductor and a music composer.

Jourová, whose work revolves around setting policies promoting democracy, media pluralism and the fight against disinformation, says the CharactHer "campaign brings together women and media."

“These topics are very close to my heart and at the core of my work. We have to make sure that women take a center stage of our recovery efforts following this pandemic,” says Jourová. She also says the “media and audiovisual sectors are not just like any other business, they are essential for our European values, for democracy and diversity.”

This European Commission has recently taken several steps to advance gender equality. Earlier this year, it pushed forward a proposal for a directive enforcing the principle of equal pay of equal work. The directive’s goal is to reach gender-equal pay in Europe by 2025. Jourová says the EC is mobilizing E.U. funding as part of the campaign.

This year, 17 features world premiering in Cannes received the support of the Media Program.

Another key aspect that the EC is looking at is to help female helmers continue making films beyond their directorial debuts. In 2018, the proportion of women who have directed a first and second feature film was 23% and the figure dropped to 15% for a third film and more. The situation hasn’t changed much since then.

Access to financing is also crucial for female directors. “Providing financing for female filmmakers is instrumental in changing the paradigm — we can’t be present at festivals if our films are pending at the development phase,” said Antoneta Alamat Kusijanovic, the director of “Murina,” which is premiering in Directors’ Fortnight on Saturday.

During her talk, Foster pointed out that misconceptions about women in position in leadership within the film industry. “People don’t understand women. They don’t know how to talk to you when you’re in a position of authority. And I think it’s my responsibility to educate the people with whom I work to teach them how they can be directed by a woman.”

Matt Donnelly and K.J. Yossman contributed to this report.

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