

Gender Representation in the Short Film Industry

Survey Results by Vincent Langouche

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1. Introduction

As an industry, the short film world is widely considered to be more progressive and inclusive than its feature film counterpart. It is believed to be more equal in terms of providing representation and creating working opportunities for women/womxn & non-binary identifying film professionals.

This assumption is not arbitrary. With short films usually being different from features in terms of both production costs and modes of distribution, they are often seen as being more inclusive as they contain less 'barriers to entry' that the more formalised modes of feature film funding and distribution generally contain. Short films are widely considered a stepping stone that exists between emerging filmmakers and their first long term project. Thus, shorts can provide ground data about the state of gender equality amongst new filmmakers, often before said filmmakers enter more formalised film industry structures.

All of this also resonates with (short) film festivals themselves, with a feeling that they are less prone to commercial pressures and freer to experiment with their structures. There is a sense that they are more inclusive for people looking to enter the business in other roles aside from filmmaking — such as programming & marketing.

However, no clear data is available to prove this assumption.

Therefore, Short Film Conference, Clermont-Ferrand International Short Film Festival & Internationale Kurzfilmtage Winterthur are collaborating to create a tool that will produce numbers and analyze statistics in the short film industry in order to promote collective awareness and nurture action when deemed necessary.

Our goal is to collect clear, objective data with the intent to encourage equality and inclusion. We believe the true diversity of our world needs to be represented, on screen and off. We hope this questionnaire and its forthcoming results will inspire programmers, curators and festival directors from all over the world to reflect.

This survey will produce new statistics with the ambition of covering the following aspects of our field: (1) disparity between male, female & non-binary selected directors in competition & in retrospective sections at (short) film festivals, (2) the organizational configuration of the teams of said festivals and (3) the recognition of female and non-binary talent in the context of awards and jury structures.

2. Data

The aim was to collect data from at least 50 short film festivals from all over the globe, primarily stemming from the Short Film Conference membership network. Data was gathered through a survey, held between November 2020 and March 2021.

Next to some general information, input was gathered on submissions, selections and the festival teams. For submissions and selections, the data ranges from 2015 to 2019, with the emphasis on those two years.

Not all festivals can easily access the requested data. 27 festivals managed to answer the first question, with the result shown in Fig. 1. About half of the festivals don't collect data on gender for various reasons.

Is the gender of the director asked for on your submission form?

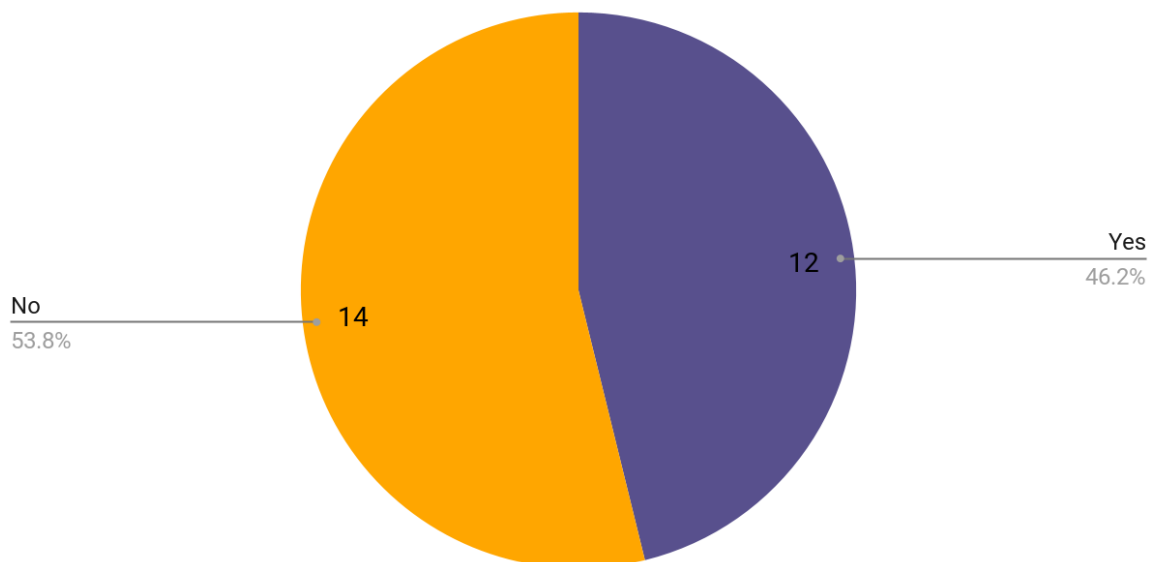


Figure 1: Data gathering of festivals.

Festivals were able to elaborate and answers ranged from “I don't see the point, we select films based on their intrinsic merit”, “We don't believe this will improve gender inclusion” and “Our submission platform doesn't provide this option.”. Three festivals would like to include this question in the future.

Regarding the platform issue, FilmFreeway only collects gender data on the submitter, who is often not the director of the film. We have been in contact with FilmFreeway about changing this and they are willing to address this and are looking into the matter.

This result already shows the data gathered and discussed further on is not always complete. Some festivals don't ask for the gender data and have to assume the gender based on names and pictures, which restricts them to assuming the gender to be either male or female. As a result, this report mainly shows the balance between male and female in the short film industry. Some festivals did include non-binary data, which is included in the results, but does not show the full picture.

Not all festivals were able to answer all questions. When discussing averages over multiple festivals, the number of festivals who answered the specific question will be mentioned. Especially the data on submissions is sparse. In these cases, sometimes only 4 festivals could add data to this research.

3. Composition of short film festival teams

The largest datasets are on the compositions of the festival teams. The festivals were asked to give the number of male, female, non-binary and other people working in different functions for the festival.

There might be some overlapping data, since people might have multiple functions working on a film festival. This does however give a clear indication of the gender balance in these separate functions and short film festivals overall.

Gender balance per function (2019)

Averages over multiple (min. 13, max. 21) short film festivals

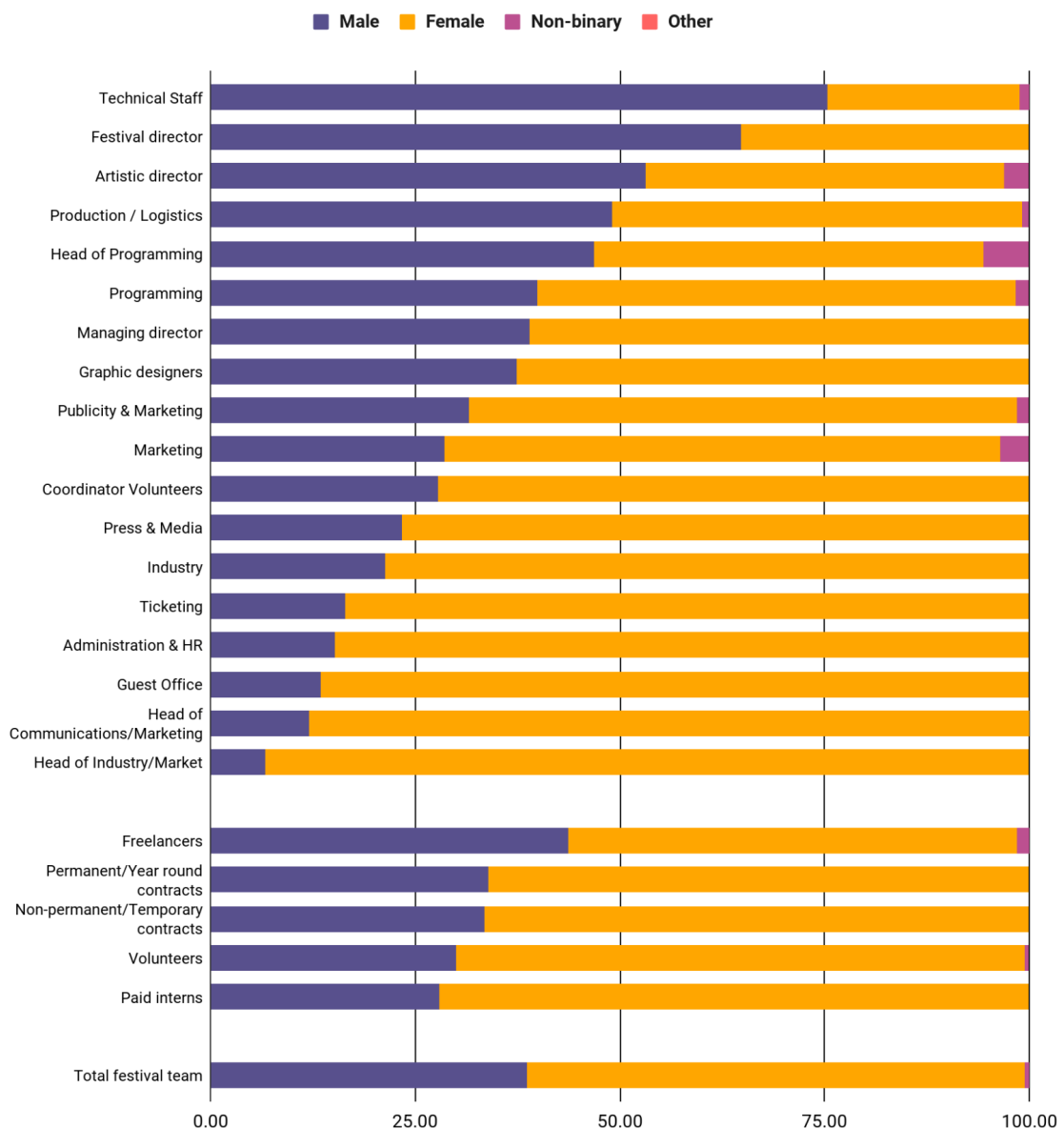


Figure 2. Gender balance within short film festival teams in 2019

Fig. 2 shows how female dominated the short film festivals are. For the complete teams, on average 61% of the people working for short film festivals are female.

Only three functions have more men: Technical Staff (75%), Festival director (65%) and Artistic director (53%). Two of those are upper management, but managing directors (61%), head of programming (53%) and head of industry (93%) are more likely to be female or non-binary in the short film industry.

Again, it has to be stressed that some of the datasets don't include information on non-binarity, hence the main takeaway is the male/female balance.

4. Submissions

There is not a lot of data on submissions of the first few years the survey asked for, but 9 festivals were able to give data on their submissions received in 2019.

Fig. 3 shows the averages over multiple festivals throughout the years. The evolution throughout the years might be the result of more festivals being added to the data pool. Either way, this seems to be a positive trend, increasing the number of submissions by female and non-binary directors year by year.

Directors of submitted films (2015 - 2019)

Averages over multiple (min. 4, max.8) short film festivals

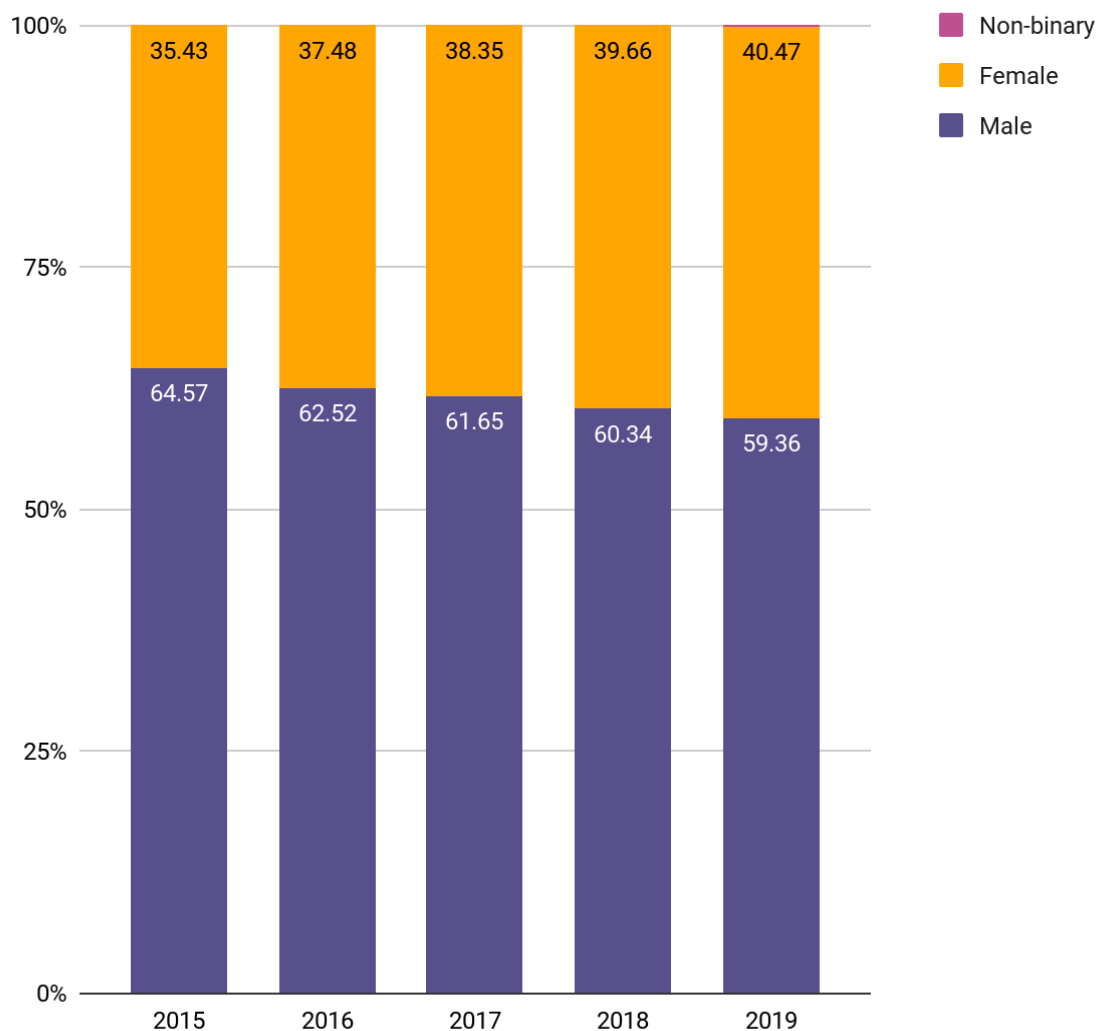


Figure 3: Gender of directors of submitted films.

Comparing international with national submissions give similar, but very limited results due to the low number of data points.

5. Selected filmmakers

Fig. 4 is the same graph as in the previous section, but with regards to selected filmmakers instead of submitted films. In the survey, emphasis was laid on the first and last year, so these yield a more nuanced picture. The 2015 data comes from 11 festivals, 2019 from 14 festivals.

Directors of selected films (2015 - 2019)

Averages over multiple (min.4, max.14) short film festivals

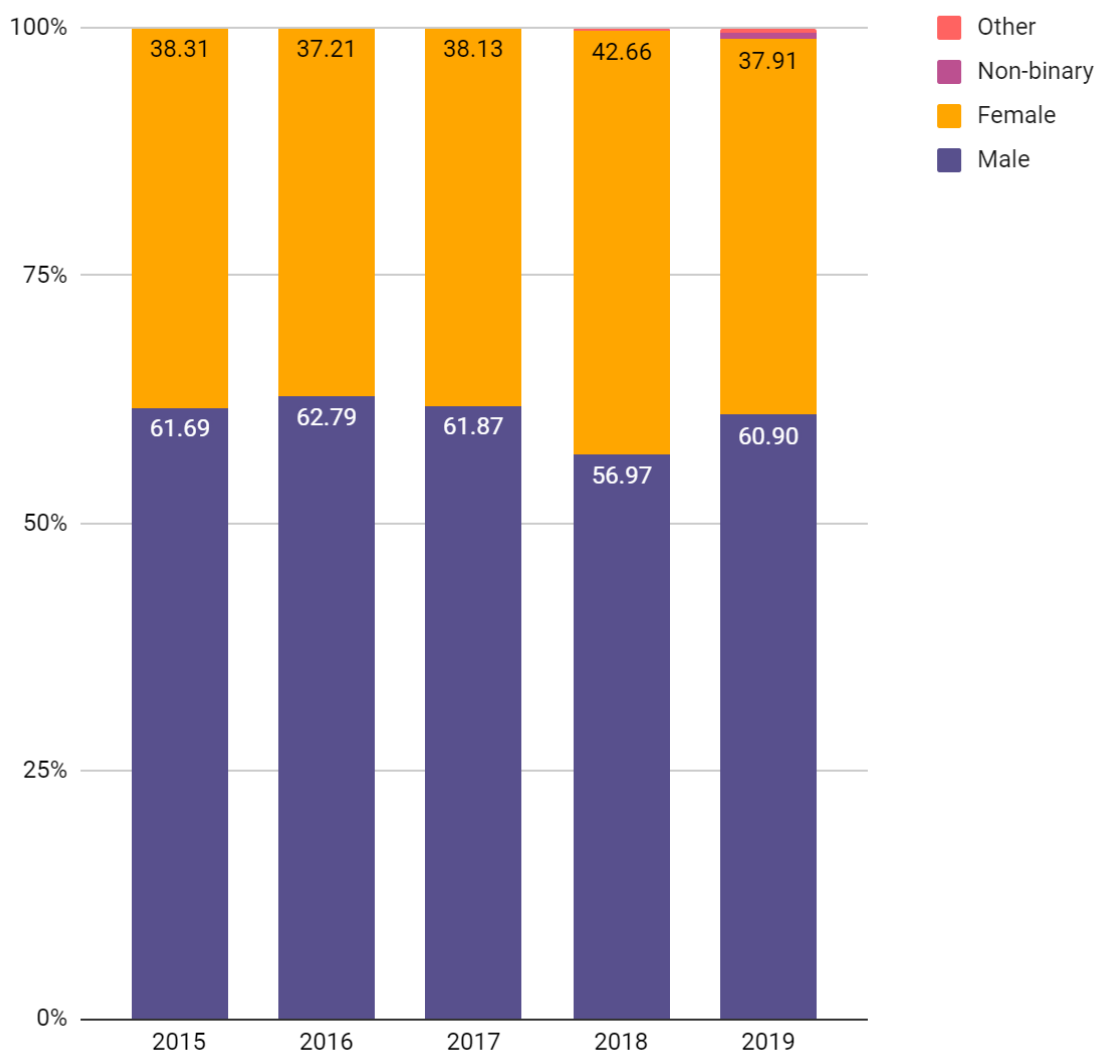


Figure 4: Gender of directors of selected films over the past five years.

There seems to be less of an evolution in this graph, compared to the submissions. Section 6 makes a side-by-side comparison.

Over the past 5 years, on average, a festival selection is about 60% male.

Figures 5 and 6 give a more detailed look on the festival selections in 2015 and 2019, splitting it up into the national and international competition, youth programs, retrospectives and other programs. Comparing both graphs, the retrospective programs jump out. Going from predominantly male in 2015 to gender balanced in 2019.

Directors of selected films (2015)

Averages over multiple (min. 7, max. 12) short film festivals

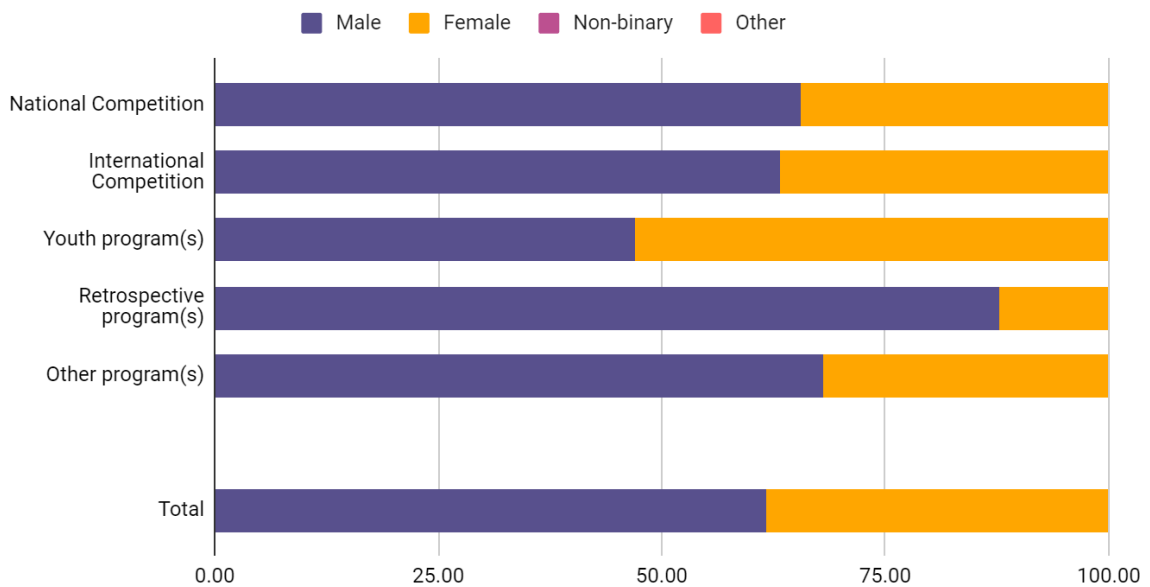


Figure 5: Average festival selections in 2015.

Directors of selected films (2019)

Averages over multiple (min.7, max 16) short film festivals

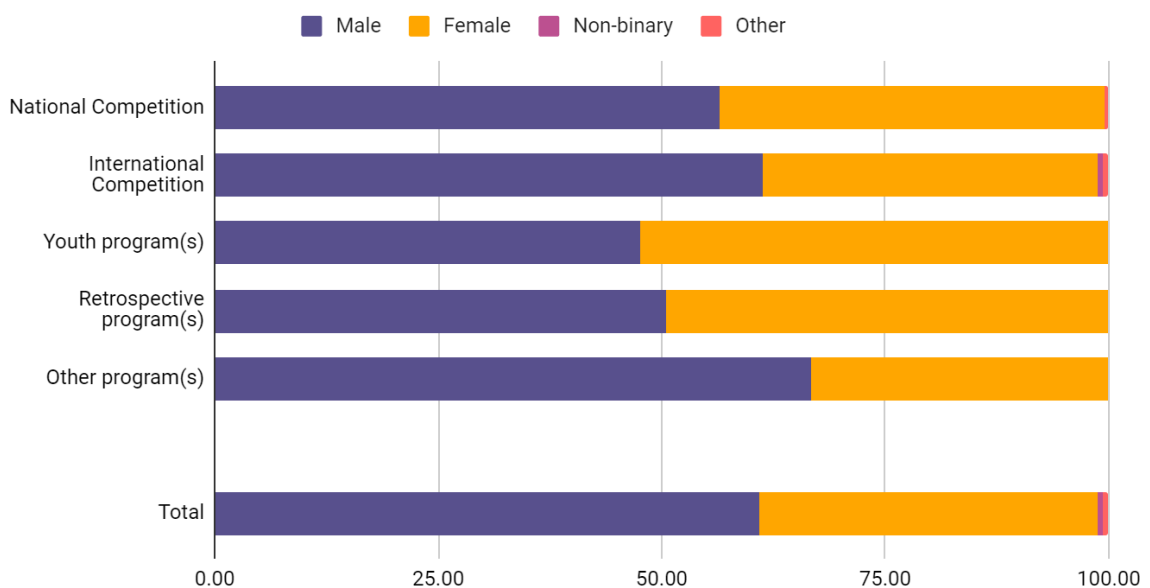


Figure 6: Average festival selections in 2019.

6. Submissions vs. Selections

Fig. 7 compares submissions with selections over a five year span. The percentage of male/female submissions is completely in line with the percentage of male/female directors in the final festival selection.

It was noted before that the selection numbers are quite stable, hovering around 60% male, so with the rising amount of female/non-binary submissions, it would be interesting to see where this is going.

Submissions vs Selections (2015 - 2019)

Averages over multiple short film festivals (4-14)

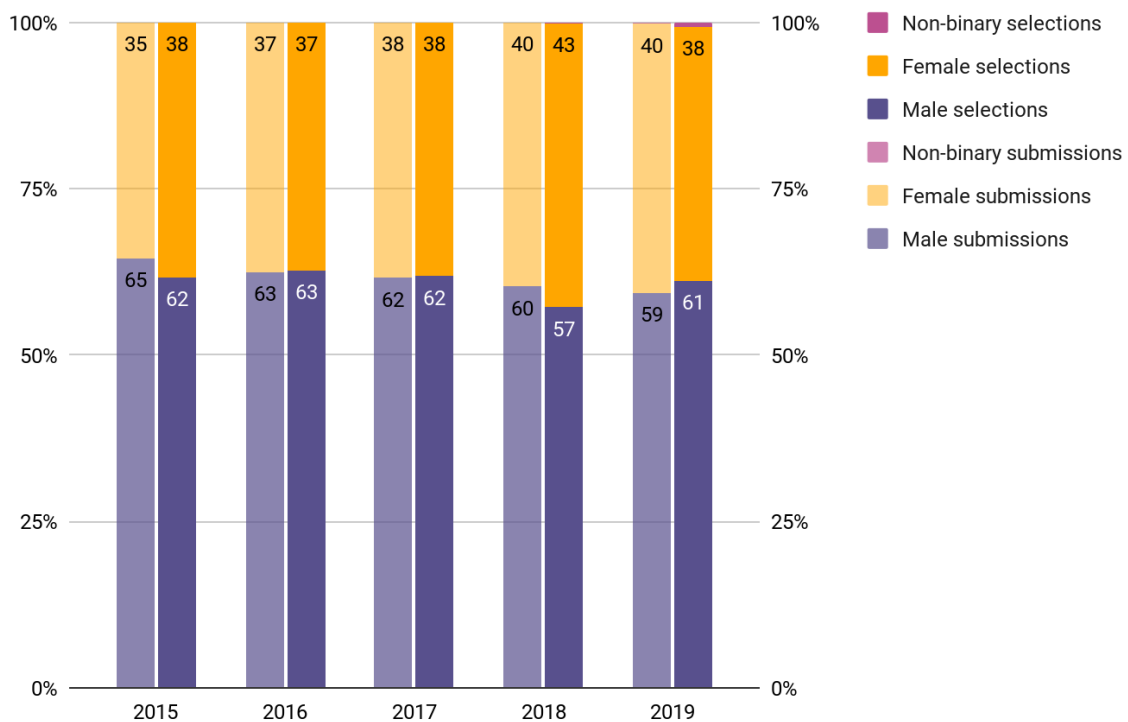


Figure 7: Comparing submissions to selections.

Keep in mind that data on non-binary or other genders is lacking for most festivals, their gender data being based purely on a male/female distinction.

7. Programmers vs. Selection

The festivals were asked whether their programming team is tasked to pay attention to gender equality in its choices. Fig. 10 shows two out of three festivals ask their programmers to pay attention to gender equality.

Is your programming team asked to pay special attention to gender equality in its choices?

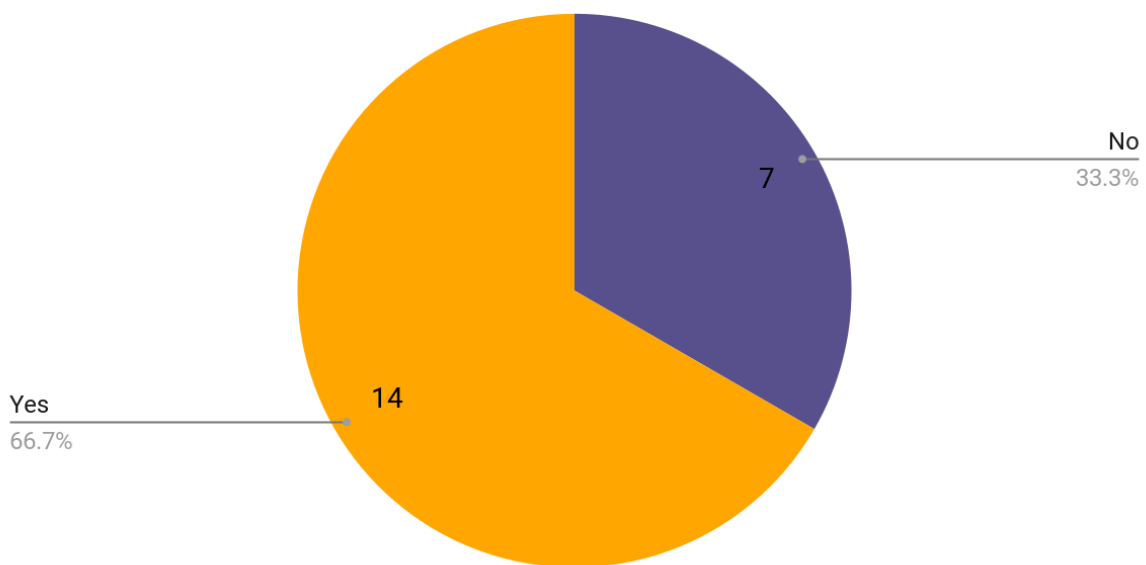
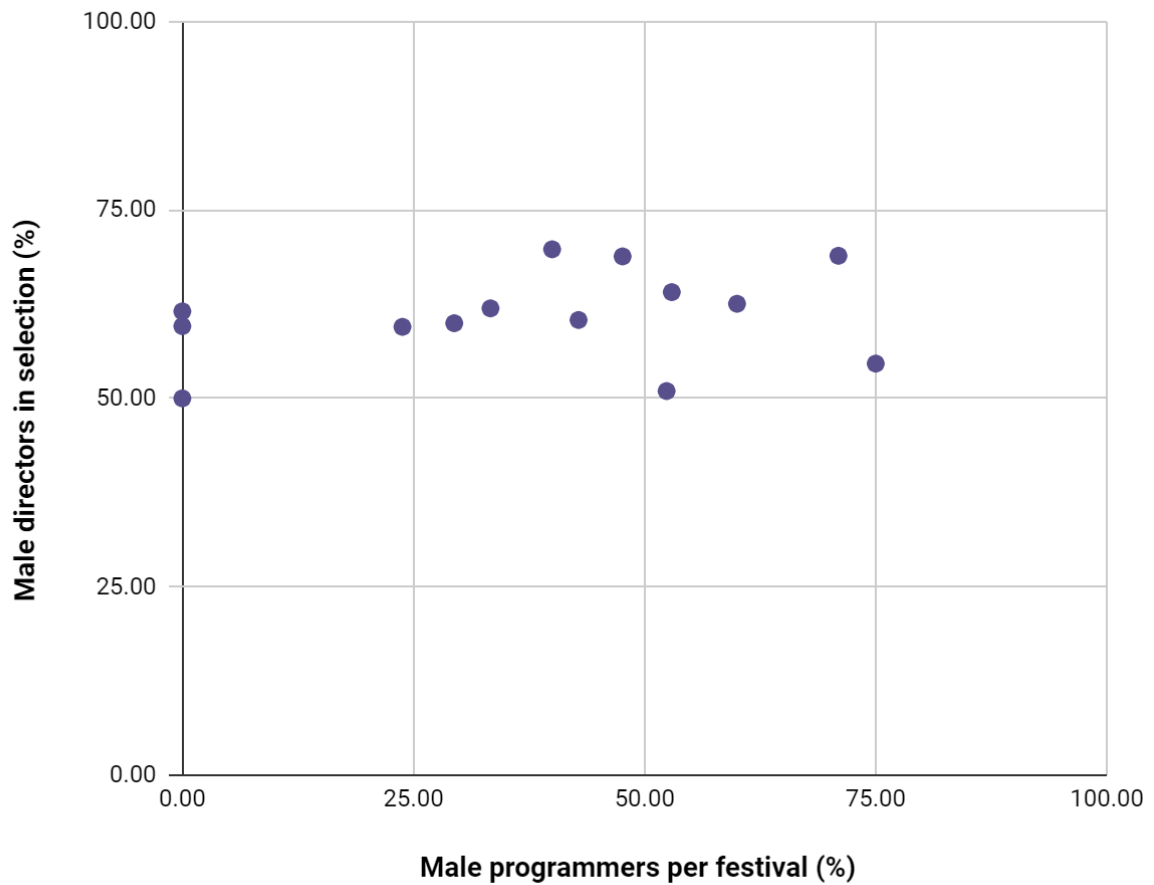


Figure 10: Programming team.

Fig. 11 takes a look at a possible correlation between the gender of the programming team and the gender of the selected directors. Does a predominantly male programming team select more films by male directors? The answer is yes, but not more than a predominantly female/non-binary selection team.

Male programmers vs. male selection (2019)

Each dot represents a different festival



First of all, there are more festivals with a predominantly female/non-binary selection team, which are represented by the dots on the left side of the graph (9 vs 5).

Secondly, all festivals have a selection of between 50-70% male directors, as all dots lie in the upper half of the graph.

Instead of comparing 4 datasets (male, female, non-binary, other), looking at the percentages of male programmers and male directors gives a clearer picture, effectively grouping the other three (female, non-binary, other) together.

While there are no 100% male programming teams, three festivals have completely female programming teams.

8. Festival Juries & Awards

Figure 8 shows the jury compositions averaged out over multiple festivals. In general the juries seem well balanced. Only the youth competition jury stands out as being more female, but this only takes 5 festivals into account.

Gender balance in juries over the last 5 years

Averages over multiple (min. 5, max 15) short film festivals

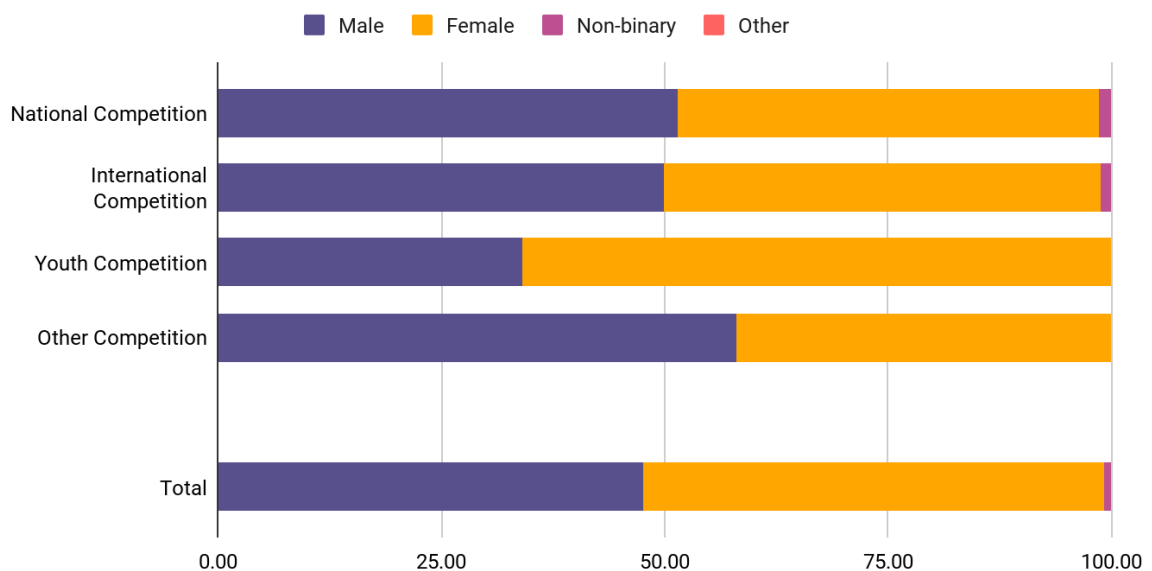


Figure 8: Jury composition

Figure 9 shows the award winners of 2019 were predominantly male. In total, 64% of the award winners averaged over 18 festivals, were male. With the selection being 61% male, this does look logical.

Award winning directors (2019)

Averages over multiple (min. 10, max.18) short film festivals

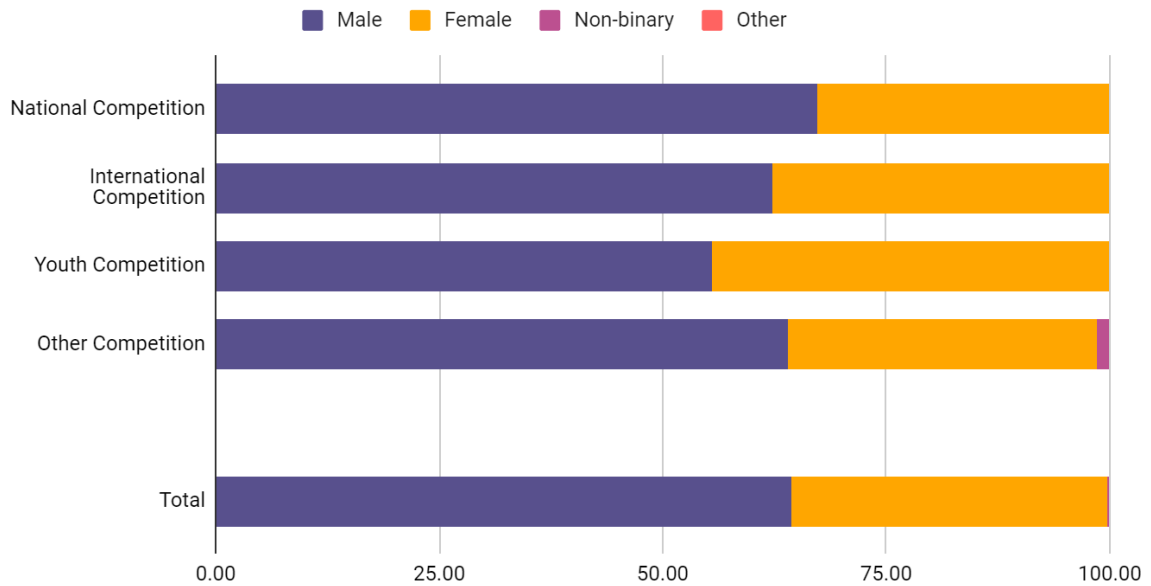


Figure 9: Gender of award winners.

9. Conclusions

In terms of team composition and juries, short film festivals are in general very well balanced.

The short films themselves predominantly have male directors (over 60% of the submissions). There however seems to be a small trend towards more female and non-binary submissions over the last few years.

In the selection process female or non-binary directors are not held back. The same percentage of female filmmakers that submits a film gets into the final festival selection. The biggest change over the last five years is in retrospective programs, going from mostly male directors to 50/50 male/female directors featuring in retrospectives.

At the end of the festivals however, it's mostly male directors (64%) taking home the awards, as averaged over 18 festivals. This percentage relates directly to the share of selected male directors.

initiated by



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