

# AWARDS, LIKE IT OR NOT, ARE THE CURRENCY OF OUR INDUSTRY



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This white paper addresses the persistent issue of gender inequality in the advertising industry, focusing on the career progression of women in creative roles and the significant impact of creative awards. Despite progress in gender equality, only **24%** of creative awards in Europe have been awarded to women over the past five years. The DEI Task Force of the European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) has highlighted this issue and offers ten actions for change.



# INTRODUCTION

The long-standing issue of women leaving the advertising industry underscores the need to address this trend and explore methods for enhancing the development and growth of women's careers within the industry.

The 2023 Global DEI Census confirmed a concerning trend that the industry urgently needs to address: one in seven global marketing industry members considers leaving due to DEI shortcomings, a problem that has a significantly greater impact on female colleagues, with the figure narrowing to one in six. The DEI Task Force of the EACA has tackled the industry gender gap in various ways, including the "She's a Keeper" Playbook on good practices to keep female talent in agencies. This playbook states that only 11% of female advertising practitioners manage to reach senior positions in creative roles<sup>1</sup>.

"Creative Equality" focuses on the career trajectory of female creatives and the significant role of creative awards in their professional growth.

<sup>1</sup> <https://eaca.eu/industry/diversity-equity-inclusion/she-is-a-keeper-playbook-page/>



**Roshanak Fatahian**

Client Director  
& DEI Director  
NORD DDB



# WHAT'S IN A CREATIVE AWARD?

Creative awards play a significant role in the advertising industry by recognizing and celebrating exceptional work, motivating creatives to strive for excellence and helping to advance careers and attract new business opportunities.

1. **Recognition and validation:** Winning a prestigious creative award can validate the hard work, talent and skills of the creatives involved in a project. It serves as a recognition of their excellence in the field and can boost their reputation within the industry.
2. **Motivation:** Being recognized for their work can be a powerful motivator for creatives, driving them to continue pushing the boundaries and producing exceptional work. It also fosters healthy competition within the industry, encouraging creatives to strive for excellence.
3. **Career advancement:** Winning a creative award can open doors to new opportunities and help advance the careers of the individuals involved. It can lead to better job prospects, higher salaries and a stronger professional network.
4. **Increased visibility:** Creative awards often draw significant media attention, leading to increased visibility for the winning projects and the creatives behind them. This exposure can help attract new clients, collaborators and projects.
5. **Industry benchmark:** Creative awards help establish benchmarks for quality and innovation within the advertising industry. They set standards for what constitutes exceptional work, inspiring others to aim for similar levels of excellence.
6. **Client trust and credibility:** When an agency or creative team wins a prestigious award, it can help build trust and credibility with current and potential clients. It demonstrates the agency's ability to deliver high-quality, innovative work, and can often lead to new business opportunities.

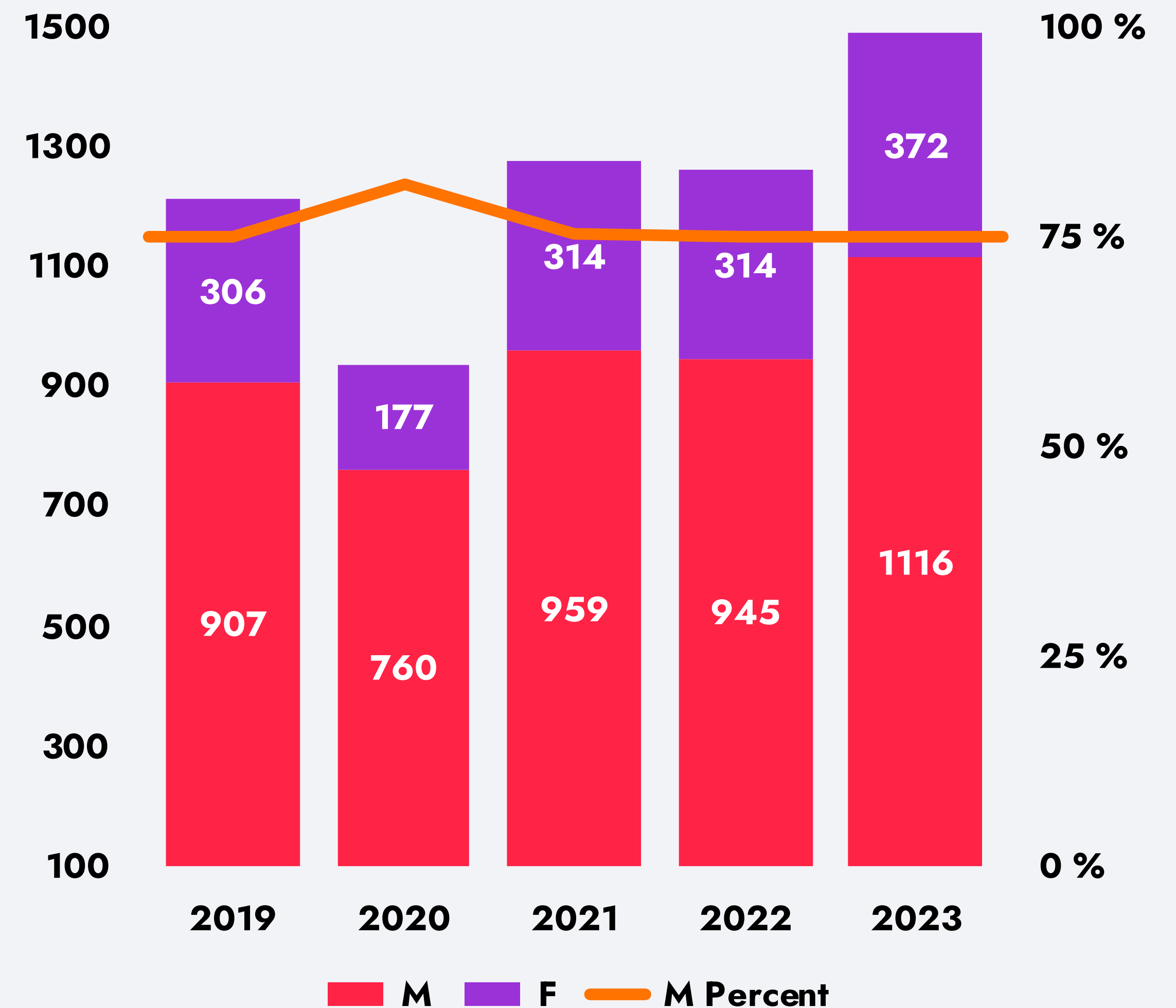


# BY THE NUMBERS

Given that winning creative awards holds significant importance for professionals in creative roles, these results are cause for concern. Creative careers heavily rely on the ability to showcase creative awards. So, what is the true picture?

We have compiled results from sixteen European countries, pinpointing the most creative award show in each country, as well as some pan-European and global awards such as Eurobest and Cannes Lions. Over the past five years (2019 – 2023), the distribution of winners in each country's top creative competitions reveals a stark gender imbalance, with only **24%**<sup>2</sup> of the top awards going to women. This would not have been surprising during the 1960s Mad Men era; however, today, Europe is considered the world's best-performing region in terms of gender equality<sup>3</sup>. It is clear, the industry still has a lot to do.

**Distribution of Gold and Grand Prix Awards Among Creatives in Europe (2019-2023)**



This chart illustrates the distribution of Gold and Grand Prix awards among creatives in Europe from 2019 to 2023. The creative roles included in this analysis are ECD, CCD, CD, Art Director, and Copywriter.

<sup>2</sup> Creative Equality In Advertising, see methodology page 39

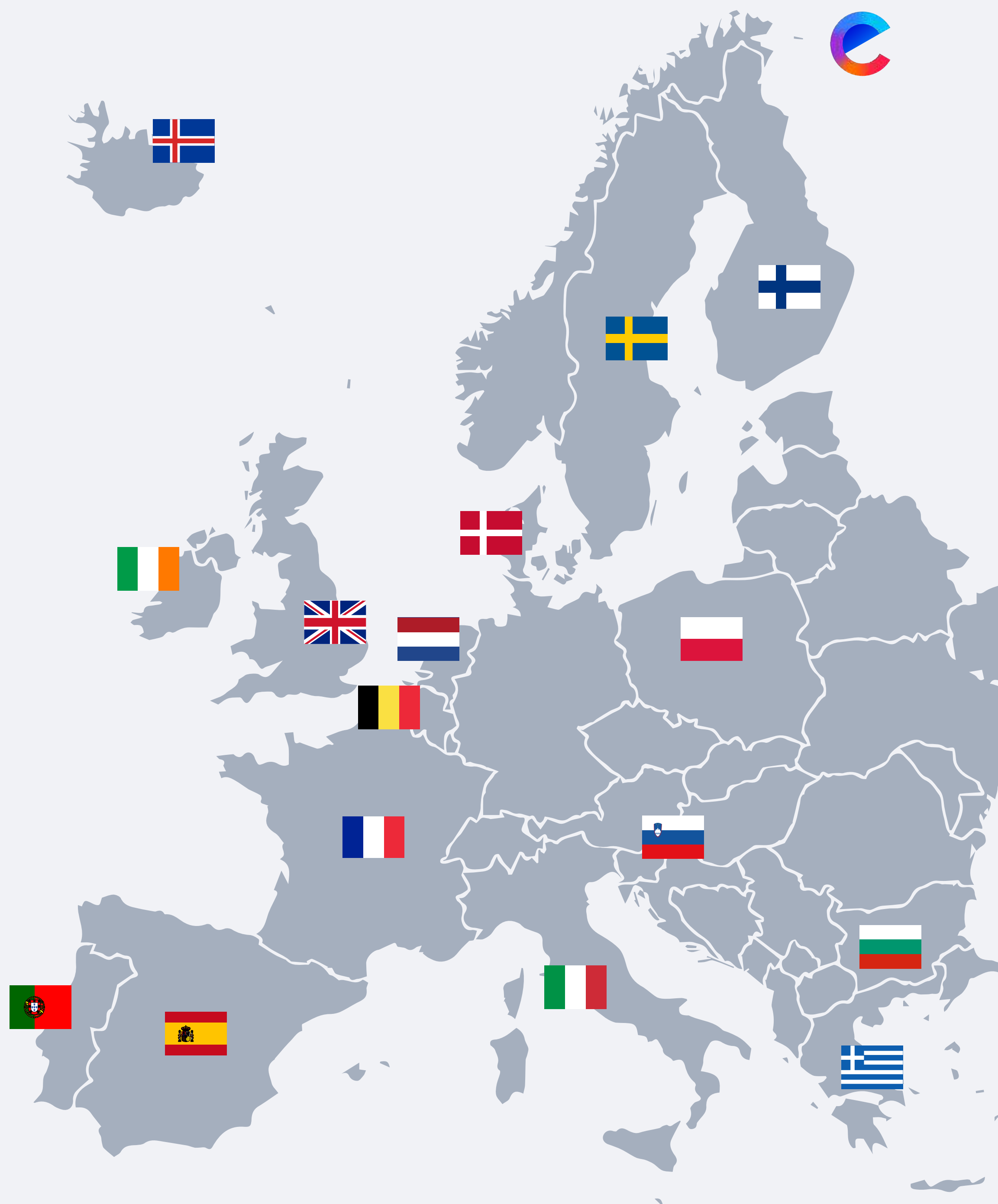
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.idea.int/blog/map-analysing-progress-and-setbacks-gender-equality-europe>

**76% OF**  
**GOLDS AND**  
**GRAND PRIX**  
**ARE AWARDED**  
**TO MEN**



**TOTAL (2019-2023)**

	Male	Female	M %	F %
<b>Belgium</b>	<b>306</b>	51	<b>86 %</b>	14 %
<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>76</b>	30	<b>72 %</b>	28 %
<b>Denmark</b>	<b>158</b>	41	<b>79 %</b>	21 %
<b>France</b>	<b>228</b>	32	<b>88 %</b>	12 %
<b>Finland</b>	<b>129</b>	61	<b>68 %</b>	32 %
<b>Greece</b>	<b>391</b>	314	<b>55 %</b>	45 %
<b>Iceland</b>	<b>123</b>	47	<b>72 %</b>	28 %
<b>Italy</b>	<b>709</b>	250	<b>74 %</b>	26 %
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>132</b>	21	<b>86 %</b>	14 %
<b>Netherlands</b>	<b>85</b>	33	<b>72 %</b>	28 %
<b>Poland</b>	<b>228</b>	32	<b>88 %</b>	12 %
<b>Portugal</b>	<b>515</b>	91	<b>85 %</b>	15 %
<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>267</b>	96	<b>74 %</b>	26 %
<b>Spain</b>	<b>367</b>	97	<b>79 %</b>	21 %
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>186</b>	78	<b>70 %</b>	30 %
<b>UK</b>	<b>787</b>	207	<b>79 %</b>	21 %





**Eurobest**

	Male	Female	M %	F %
<b>2019</b>	<b>320</b>	49	<b>87 %</b>	13 %
<b>2020</b>	<b>97</b>	27	<b>78 %</b>	22 %
<b>2021</b>	<b>229</b>	62	<b>79 %</b>	21 %
<b>2022</b>	<b>146</b>	32	<b>82 %</b>	18 %
<b>2023</b>	<b>93</b>	44	<b>68 %</b>	32 %

**Cannes Lions**

	Male	Female	M %	F %
<b>2019</b>	<b>124</b>	22	<b>85 %</b>	15 %
<b>2020<sup>4</sup></b>	/	/	/	/
<b>2021</b>	<b>335</b>	198	<b>63 %</b>	37 %
<b>2022</b>	<b>159</b>	61	<b>72 %</b>	28 %
<b>2023</b>	<b>137</b>	43	<b>76 %</b>	24 %

<sup>4</sup> No awards due to covid-pandemic.




# COUNTRY BREAKDOWN

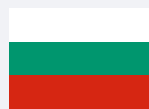
The definition of Creative in this report is Executive Creative Director, Chief Creative Director, Creative Director, Art Director and Copywriter. The awards considered in the calculations are those that have won Gold or Grand Prix, where applicable. The calculation of Gold or Grand Prix winners is based on the total number of such awards given out. A single team can win multiple awards, which means that one person could win several awards depending on the number of teams they are part of.

The competitions that the calculations are based on are, according to EACA, the foremost creative competitions in each respective market.







Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Belgium (Creative Belgium)	<b>2019</b>	<b>60</b>	17	<b>77</b>	<b>78 %</b>	22 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2020</b>	<b>77</b>	7	<b>84</b>	<b>92 %</b>	8 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2021</b>	<b>41</b>	10	<b>51</b>	<b>80 %</b>	20 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2022</b>	<b>74</b>	7	<b>81</b>	<b>91 %</b>	9 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2023</b>	<b>54</b>	10	<b>64</b>	<b>84 %</b>	16 %	GOLD+GP


Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Bulgaria (Fara)	<b>2019</b>	<b>21</b>	5	<b>26</b>	<b>81 %</b>	19 %	GOLD
	<b>2020</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
	<b>2021</b>	<b>19</b>	8	<b>27</b>	<b>70 %</b>	30 %	GOLD
	<b>2022</b>	<b>18</b>	10	<b>28</b>	<b>64 %</b>	36 %	GOLD
	<b>2023</b>	<b>18</b>	7	<b>25</b>	<b>72 %</b>	28 %	GOLD




Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 <b>Denmark</b> (Creative Circle)	<b>2019</b>	<b>31</b>	4	<b>35</b>	<b>89 %</b>	11 %	GOLD
	<b>2020</b>	<b>38</b>	8	<b>46</b>	<b>83 %</b>	17 %	GOLD
	<b>2021</b>	<b>30</b>	11	<b>41</b>	<b>73 %</b>	27 %	GOLD
	<b>2022</b>	<b>21</b>	5	<b>26</b>	<b>81 %</b>	19 %	GOLD
	<b>2023</b>	<b>38</b>	13	<b>51</b>	<b>75 %</b>	25 %	GOLD


Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 <b>France</b> (Stratégies de la Publicité)	<b>2019</b>	<b>53</b>	5	<b>58</b>	<b>91 %</b>	9 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2020</b>	<b>27</b>	8	<b>35</b>	<b>77 %</b>	23 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2021</b>	<b>50</b>	6	<b>56</b>	<b>90 %</b>	10 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2022</b>	<b>54</b>	7	<b>61</b>	<b>89 %</b>	11 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2023</b>	<b>44</b>	6	<b>50</b>	<b>88 %</b>	12 %	GOLD+GP




Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 <b>Finland</b> (Vuoden Huiput)	<b>2019</b>	<b>31</b>	21	<b>52</b>	<b>60 %</b>	40 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2020</b>	<b>43</b>	13	<b>56</b>	<b>77 %</b>	23 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2021</b>	<b>33</b>	15	<b>48</b>	<b>69 %</b>	31 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2022</b>	<b>22</b>	12	<b>34</b>	<b>65 %</b>	35 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2023</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/


Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 <b>Greece</b> (Ermis)	<b>2019</b>	<b>138</b>	104	<b>242</b>	<b>57 %</b>	43 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2020</b>	/	/	/	/	/	/
	<b>2021</b>	<b>114</b>	97	<b>211</b>	<b>54 %</b>	46 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2022</b>	<b>60</b>	52	<b>112</b>	<b>54 %</b>	46 %	GOLD+GP
	<b>2023</b>	<b>79</b>	61	<b>140</b>	<b>56 %</b>	44 %	GOLD+GP




Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Iceland (Lúðurinn)	2019	/	/	/	/	/	/
	2020	/	/	/	/	/	/
	2021	/	/	/	/	/	/
	2022	<b>69</b>	25	<b>94</b>	<b>73 %</b>	27 %	GOLD
	2023	<b>54</b>	22	<b>76</b>	<b>71 %</b>	29 %	GOLD


Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Italy (ADCI)	2019	<b>211</b>	77	<b>288</b>	<b>73 %</b>	27 %	GOLD+GP
	2020	<b>177</b>	45	<b>222</b>	<b>80 %</b>	20 %	GOLD+GP
	2021	<b>180</b>	54	<b>234</b>	<b>77 %</b>	23 %	GOLD+GP
	2022	<b>40</b>	31	<b>71</b>	<b>56 %</b>	44 %	GOLD+GP
	2023	<b>101</b>	43	<b>144</b>	<b>70 %</b>	30 %	GOLD+GP




Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Ireland (ICAD)	2019	5	0	5	100 %	0 %	GOLD
	2020	77	13	90	87 %	13 %	GOLD
	2021	8	0	8	100 %	0 %	GOLD
	2022	35	5	40	88 %	13 %	GOLD
	2023	7	3	10	70 %	30 %	GOLD


Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Netherlands (ADCN)	2019	8	0	10	100 %	0 %	GOLD+GP
	2020	12	5	17	71 %	29 %	GOLD+GP
	2021	22	7	29	76 %	24 %	GOLD+GP
	2022	23	15	38	61 %	39 %	GOLD+GP
	2023	20	6	26	77 %	23 %	GOLD+GP




Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Poland (KTR)	2019	53	5	58	91 %	9 %	GOLD+GP
	2020	27	8	35	77 %	23 %	GOLD+GP
	2021	50	6	56	89 %	11 %	GOLD+GP
	2022	54	7	61	89 %	11 %	GOLD+GP
	2023	44	6	50	88 %	12 %	GOLD+GP


Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Portugal (CCP Portugal)	2019	68	0	68	100 %	0 %	GOLD+GP
	2020	96	10	106	91 %	9 %	GOLD+GP
	2021	114	17	131	87 %	13 %	GOLD+GP
	2022	81	30	111	73 %	27 %	GOLD+GP
	2023	156	34	190	82 %	18 %	GOLD+GP




Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Slovenia (SOF Slovenia Awards)	2019	83	33	116	72 %	28 %	GOLD
	2020	32	10	42	76 %	24 %	GOLD
	2021	61	16	77	79 %	21 %	GOLD
	2022	47	16	63	75 %	25 %	GOLD
	2023	44	21	65	68 %	32 %	GOLD

Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Spain (Gran Premio Nacional de la Creatividad)	2019	41	9	50	82 %	18 %	GOLD+GP
	2020	61	10	71	86 %	14 %	GOLD+GP
	2021	99	35	134	74 %	26 %	GOLD+GP
	2022	57	16	73	78 %	22 %	GOLD+GP
	2023	109	27	136	80 %	20 %	GOLD+GP



Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 Sweden (Guldägget)	2019	31	8	39	79 %	21 %	GOLD
	2020	23	5	28	82 %	18 %	GOLD
	2021	42	7	49	86 %	14 %	GOLD
	2022	44	23	67	66 %	34 %	GOLD
	2023	46	35	81	57 %	43 %	GOLD

Country	Year	Male Members	Female Members	Total	Male %	Female %	Award
 UK (Creative Cricle)	2019	73	16	89	82 %	18 %	GOLD
	2020	70	35	105	67 %	33 %	GOLD
	2021	96	25	121	79 %	21 %	GOLD
	2022	246	53	299	82 %	18 %	GOLD
	2023	302	78	380	79 %	21 %	GOLD



# THREE THOUGHTS FROM ALI HANAN, CEO CREATIVE EQUALS

**1. Retaining Female Talent from Universities:** The huge 'unlock', in my opinion, is retaining women from universities and entry-level positions. For example, in the UK, 60-70% of ad college students are women. We lose a lot of this talent in the first couple of years of their careers as they enter the industry expecting equality and instead find themselves subject to significant bias. A good strategist friend of mine, Kathryn Ellis, wrote a piece of research on this called 'Lost Girls' in 2018 [here](#). The other critical juncture is motherhood/career breaks. While we don't know the exact numbers, what we do know is that the numbers drop off substantially just at the point where women are stepping into leadership. Without role models at the top, this also impacts women at the bottom.

**2. Improvements in Eurobest and Cannes Lions:** Eurobest and Cannes Lions are showing an improving picture, possibly due to more diverse and inclusive winning work, more diverse juries or improvements in creative departments. The Ascential Group, for instance, has made a significant effort to diversify their juries. In the

past, male-dominated juries awarded their networks and male-dominated categories. Minimizing bias in jury rooms is critical and even being invited to be on one supercharges your career and network. Jury rooms are also where senior relationships are forged.

**3. Global Disparities in Female Representation:** From what I've observed, attitudes toward the profession vary greatly around the globe. For example, there are almost no female creative directors across the entire continent of Africa. I hear anecdotally that there is great representation in Russia as it's seen to be a male profession.

These disparities highlight the need for both local and global approaches to addressing gender inequality in advertising. This isn't just about fairness; it's about harnessing the full spectrum of talent and creativity that our industry needs to thrive.



# TIP OF THE ICEBERG

The results and numbers presented in the white paper indicate the extent of the disparity, shedding light on an alarming issue that quantifies the problem. This analysis did not include the seniority of the women in the teams, and accessing deeper data might reveal an even more dire picture, truly representing only the tip of the iceberg.



**TO TRULY UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM, IDENTIFY THE UNDERLYING STRUCTURAL ISSUES AND DETERMINE WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ADDRESS THE GENDER IMBALANCE, THE WHITE PAPER INCLUDES INSIGHTS FROM DIFFERENT EXPERTS WITHIN THE INDUSTRY. THESE INSIGHTS PROVIDE VALUABLE PERSPECTIVES ON POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND THE DIRECTION THE INDUSTRY NEEDS TO TAKE TO FOSTER A MORE EQUITABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN IN ADVERTISING.**



# WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY



**Ali Hanan**  
CEO Creative Equals



**Christian de la Villehuchet**  
President EACA | Havas  
Global Chief Integration Officer



**Pascale Nader**  
Creative Strategist and Lecturer, HU  
University of Applied Sciences Utrecht



**Chaka Shobani**  
President & Global CCO, DDB WW



# ALI HANAN

CEO Creative Equals

The stark gender disparity in creative award wins is alarming and points to deeply rooted systemic issues within the advertising industry. While these stats are fresh, 24% is something to celebrate (surprising, I know). When I first started my career in 1999, just 3% of the world's creative directors were women, so this figure is decades of progress. Having experienced the bias first-hand, I set up Creative Equals when this figure had reached 12% in 2014 (making it my full-time job in 2016) taking over a decade to move 9%. At that time, there were more men called Dave than women on the juries and very few women walking up on stage.

**“BACK IN 2014,  
THERE WERE MORE  
MEN CALLED DAVE  
THAN WOMEN ON  
THE JURIES.”**



# SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENDER GAP IN CREATIVE AWARD WINS:

- 1. Historical Bias and Stereotypes:** Advertising has been a male-dominated field for decades. Despite progress, these biases still linger, affecting how opportunities are distributed and whose work gets celebrated. From our own research women are penalised for taking time out of their careers, which is why we set up CreativeComeback. Often, just when they're stepping up to critical leadership roles, along comes a career break and with the idea 'you're only as good as your last piece of work', women's careers stall. It's difficult to return with a gap in your folio.
- 2. Leadership Representation:** The lack of women in senior positions means fewer advocates for female creatives. This impacts the likelihood of their work being nominated and recognised. In the UK, the number of creative directors is around 28%, however, in countries like Switzerland, it's only 20%. In Africa, there are very few female creative directors at all across the entire continent.
- 3. Workplace bias:** From our own research, as career paths are subject to huge biases, creatives are promoted based on whether they win awards or new business. The challenge is access to opportunity as women are often put on the 'stable' or 'female' accounts (finance/beauty, etc) where the parameters of the brand are defined. When it comes to pitching, women are also not invited to the pitch table. To note, for women of colour and particularly Black women in Western markets, intersectional bias is about 10-20% access to less opportunity, unequal pay, etc.
- 4. Networking and Mentorship:** Men often have stronger networks and mentors who can help them navigate the industry and gain visibility. Without female role models, the cycle continues.
- 5. Work-Life Balance:** Women disproportionately bear caregiving responsibilities, which can limit their ability to take on high-stakes projects that lead to award recognition. This feels like it's moved on since the pandemic, however, we still hear of long hours cultures.

**“THIS IS NOW AN URGENT CALL TO ACTION FOR US ALL TO REEVALUATE HOW WE RECOGNISE BIAS AND PROMOTE TALENT FASTER TO SPEAK TO OUR CONSUMER BASE, AS ACROSS EVERY AGE GROUP, WOMEN DOMINATE PURCHASING DECISIONS.”**





# CHRISTIAN DE LA VILLEHUCHET

EACA President and Global Chief  
Integration Officer at Havas

I am deeply shocked by these statistics. There is absolutely no justification for this disparity. However, I do understand the results, as the primary gap between men and women is their access to top creative positions. This disproportionate access likely explains the outcomes we see.

**“THE PRIMARY GAP  
BETWEEN MEN AND  
WOMEN IS THEIR  
ACCESS TO TOP  
CREATIVE POSITIONS.”**



# SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENDER GAP IN CREATIVE AWARD WINS:

- 1. Disproportionate Representation:** The core issue stems from the significant gap in access to top creative roles. Women are often not given the same opportunities as men to reach these positions, which is reflected in the award outcomes.
- 2. Barriers Perpetuating the Gender Gap:** There are two main barriers frequently cited by top creative executives. Firstly, they claim that the role of Chief Creative Officer is incompatible with family responsibilities, as these positions often require extensive travel, which women with children supposedly cannot manage. Secondly, they argue that the high pressure and demanding nature of these roles are too much for women. I strongly believe we can address the first issue by providing better support systems. As for the second argument, I completely disagree. Women can handle pressure just as well as men, often with added sensitivity, emotional intelligence and care.
- 3. Impact of Unequal Award Distribution on Professional Growth:** The winner takes it all, as we say. So, over time, the relatively unequal distribution of awards penalizes those who win less. It can become a vicious cycle if we do not find ways to rebalance this.
- 4. Need to Change the Disparity in Creative Awards:** First, we need to empower women to believe they can achieve top creative positions by providing confidence and support. For instance, Havas has the Femmes Forward Frida program to elevate women with high creative potential. Secondly, agencies must remove family-related obstacles and offer the necessary support for women to thrive. Lastly, this gender gap reflects broader societal issues. As men and women share responsibilities more equally at home, this gap will naturally diminish. The advertising industry can play a crucial role in accelerating this change by avoiding gender stereotypes in its content and promoting more equitable behaviour and attitudes.

**“PEOPLE ARGUE THAT THE  
HIGH PRESSURE AND  
DEMANDING NATURE OF  
A LEADERSHIP ROLE IS  
TOO MUCH FOR WOMEN.  
I COMPLETELY DISAGREE.”**





# PASCALE NADER

Creative Strategist and Lecturer, HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht

The award is the final product, the tip of the iceberg, but the entire process leading up to it needs attention. Changes are happening, but I worry that they are sometimes merely superficial. Everyone talks about DEI, but the implementation does not always follow. A lot needs to be done, which is why we help our students develop the skills and competencies to have a fairer and more just perspective towards others, no matter how different. It's not an easy task because of inherent biases and preconceptions, but we are working towards it. Change will inevitably happen.

**“THE AWARD IS THE FINAL PRODUCT, THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG, BUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS LEADING UP TO IT NEEDS ATTENTION.”**



# SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENDER GAP IN CREATIVE AWARD WINS:

- 1. The Impact of Agency-Client Dynamics and Industry Lingo on Gender Disparities in Creative Awards:** I think two main factors could explain this issue. First, there's the agency-client relationship and the power dynamics involved. Marketers face major challenges and look for creative counterparts who mirror them. So, if the marketing team is male-dominated, having a senior male creative role becomes reassuring. Second, the lingo used in advertising reflects this dynamic. We often use phrases like 'you need to have balls in advertising'. It's an expression, but very indicative of the male-dominant industry. It's often used when the agency needs to push back on clients. This dynamic often puts women in a position where they are seen as either weak or sensitive. If a woman stands her ground, she is often labelled as aggressive or difficult to work with. The system sets up a sense of (male) superiority or supremacy, at least mentally. In academia, the tension between male and female professionals is not as present, although DEI topics are addressed in the curriculum. Students feel this tension during internships, especially with male supervisors. Cultural background also plays a role, as perceptions of hierarchy and superiority differ across cultures.
- 2. Lack of Work-Life Balance:** The first barrier might seem like a cliché, but we have to mention it – working in advertising doesn't leave much room for a personal life. It's day, night, and weekends. While Europe makes efforts to preserve balance, it doesn't always work, especially on global portfolios. Personal life becomes secondary and at some point, this conflicts with women's biological clocks and other personal desires. I've seen colleagues cry because they didn't have time to see their babies. In interviews, it used to be acceptable to ask about relationships or kids, implying, "Do you plan to have kids?". This still indirectly impacts recruitment decisions.
- 3. Unequal Client Distribution:** The second barrier is the distribution of agency clients among creative teams. Women creatives might more often work on brands and briefs that aren't focused on winning awards, impacting their opportunities for recognition.



**4. The Importance of Diverse and Unbiased Juries:** Winning awards has become the ultimate goal for creatives and agencies, and is undoubtedly a springboard for professional growth. Greater inequality in award-winning means fewer growth opportunities. That said, an award is only as good as the ones judging it. We need to look at the jurors and the jury. How diverse are they? Do they represent genders, minorities, and diverse ethnicities? That's the starting point. When they are diverse, are they genuinely able to set aside their biases when judging a campaign? That's the most challenging aspect. The jury should be as diverse as possible because they determine what constitutes good work. The awards will unlikely be fairly distributed if the jury isn't diverse.

**5. Integrating Sustainability and DEI from Briefing to Execution:** We train our students to become creative strategists, emphasizing sustainability—not just for the planet but also for people (DEI). As future professionals, sustainability will be integral to their work and way of doing business. I'm currently working on a project designing "the new sustainable creative brief." This methodology rethinks the briefing and creative process, integrating sustainability and focusing on the people working on it - as well as the deliverables. If we want to see change at the awards level, we have to start at the creative-briefing level. This will lead to a change from beginning to end; from strategic input to creative output. Ultimately, we all aim to keep creativity at the forefront of what we do. But it should be a creativity that unites and does not alienate nor frustrate anyone. There is still a long way to go in this regard.

**”CHANGES ARE HAPPENING,  
BUT I WORRY THAT THEY ARE  
SOMETIMES MERELY  
SUPERFICIAL. EVERYONE  
TALKS ABOUT DEI, BUT THE  
IMPLEMENTATION DOES NOT  
ALWAYS FOLLOW.”**





# CHAKA SOBHANI

President & Chief Creative Officer,  
DDB Worldwide.

Disappointing, disheartening but not surprising. Unfortunately the rate of change is not happening alongside the need for change. We have another generation feeling the same pain and discrimination of those from past decades. There has, of course, been progress but what can I say, it's simply unacceptable where we are and it's upon all of us to make this the most important issue in all our businesses. It's the most pressing issue when it's comes to our people and societally, but it's equally as critical to improving our creativity and output as an industry.

**“IT’S THE MOST PRESSING ISSUE WHEN IT’S COMES TO OUR PEOPLE AND SOCIETALLY, BUT IT’S EQUALLY AS CRITICAL TO IMPROVING OUR CREATIVITY AND OUTPUT AS AN INDUSTRY.”**



# SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENDER GAP IN CREATIVE AWARD WINS:

- 1. A Complex Issue Rooted in the Psychology of Unconscious and Conscious Bias:** I think the reasons are both simple and complex. The simple truth is that a large number of creative departments around the world are still made up of many more men than women. There have been some great strides made in the past few years to balance that out at an entry level but the overall is still majority male. And especially at a senior level. The complex truth is why? What is it about our human psychology that still perpetuates unconscious (and conscious) bias when it comes to hiring, promoting and giving more opportunities to one group over others? Education and awareness as an industry is obviously key but unless we genuinely get real and delve into the reasons for these biases, and talk about them openly in our places of work, we will not engage everyone to move the dial in the way we desperately need to.
- 2. Lack of Senior Female Leaders and Business Prioritization:** The lack of senior female leaders, and where this issue sits on the

business agenda are two key barriers to gender equality in advertising. The former speaks for itself, especially when you look at the statistics. But for that to change, this issue has to become a critical business imperative, as important and with as much daily attention given to it as new business. It needs the engagement of everyone across the business, and not just a few stand alone initiatives.

- 3. Unequal Awards Deter and Limit Talent:** The affect is incredibly widespread and damaging. From the basic awareness of talent, and the opportunities they are missing both internally in their places of work and also in terms of their career progression and movement to other employment. It also acts as a deterrent to brilliant young talent who unsurprisingly aren't attracted to or excited by the thought of joining an industry they don't see themselves in, part of or able to be successful in. The broader creative world is so brilliantly varied and accessible, we have to earn the right to give every reason for the next generation to join us, and also to retain our best talent.



#### 4. **Making Gender Equality a Top Business Priority for Industry**

**Improvement:** I've said it before, but this genuinely needs to become as important as new business in each organisation. There are no excuses. And targets and ambitions should be open and transparent. We can't blame or reprimand. I think that's what can hold us all back. The fear of getting it wrong. Honest conversation, clear actions and a true sense of accountability is what matters and is necessary. If it doesn't work, that's ok, try something else until it does start to work. But again, this issue can't be number 3 on the company agenda. It is firmly number 1. And the rewards are so obvious. It will make our creativity better. Our industry better. And society better. What could be more important or motivation than that.

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# TAKE ACTION!

1. **Make Gender Equality a top business priority:** It will improve creativity, the industry and society.
2. **Promote Diversity in Leadership:** Increase the representation of women in senior roles to ensure diverse perspectives in award processes.
3. **Promotion bias:** Data shows that women don't get the same feedback as their male colleagues, are less likely to get mentored, are less likely to get invited to pitch and are less likely to get invited to participate in briefs with the potential for award-winning work. All of these biases must be addressed if we are to create a level playing field as well as transparent criteria for promotion.
4. **Bias Training:** Regularly conduct bias training for all employees, especially those involved in award decisions.
5. **Flexible Work Policies:** Promote flexible work policies to support a better work-life balance.
6. **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs to help women navigate the industry and gain access to high-visibility projects.
7. **Transparency in Awards Processes:** Ensure transparency in award submissions and nominations to identify and address biases.
8. **Celebrate Diverse Talent:** Actively seek out and celebrate diverse talent through internal and external recognition programs.
9. **Integrate Sustainability and DEI from Briefing to Execution:** Review and rethink the briefing and creative process to integrate sustainability and focus on the people involved, as well as the deliverables.
10. **Take action:** If it doesn't work, that's ok, try something else until it does start to work.



# METHODOLOGY

The definition of Creative in this white paper is Executive Creative Director, Chief Creative Director, Creative Director, Art Director, and Copywriter. The awards considered in the calculations are those that have won Gold or Grand Prix, where applicable. The calculation of Gold or Grand Prix winners is based on the total number of such awards given out. A single team can win multiple awards, which means that one person could win several awards depending on the number of teams they are part of.

The competitions that the calculations are based on are, according to EACA, the foremost creative competitions in each respective market.

# ABOUT EACA

The European Association of Communications Agencies (EACA) represents more than 2500 communications agencies and agency associations from nearly 30 European countries which directly employ more than 120.000 people working in advertising, media, digital, branding and PR agencies. EACA promotes honest, effective advertising, high professional standards and awareness of the contribution of advertising in a free-market economy, encouraging close co-operation between agencies, advertisers and media in European advertising bodies. EACA works closely with EU institutions to ensure freedom to advertise responsibly and creatively.

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# THE TASKFORCE



Aoife McCleary



Bertille Calinaud



Claudia Díaz



Delphine Castanet



Elaine Grell



Miranda Bird



Myriam Domínguez Seda (Coordinator)



Faye Raincock (Chair)



Felicia Wijnveen



Laure Jolibois (Coordinator)



Leila Siddiqi



Lina Corrigan



Roshanak Fatahian



Maja Baumschabel



Riikka Maria Lemminki



Sofie Antorini



Rebecca Woodley



Pascale Nader



Pawel Tyszkiewicz



Valentina Bussolari