



**FIA CHARTER**  
FOR GENDER  
EQUALITY  
AND EQUAL  
OPPORTUNITIES

## PREAMBLE

The FIA Charter for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities has grown out of extensive work by the International Federation of Actors, dating from 1975 to the present day, in documenting the inequalities and discrimination experienced by women in the performing arts. While progress has been made, it has been slow and inadequate. Combating discrimination and promoting equality remains a core concern of FIA.

FIA believes that all performers should enjoy equal rights and equal opportunities in the profession, backed by meaningful social and economic guarantees. The present Charter gives expression to the ongoing work of FIA and its member trade unions to achieve equal opportunities for performers across a number of key areas.

It is clear that women performers face a range of obstacles and challenges that impact significantly on their working conditions and careers. A wide body of research, including surveys carried out by the Federation and its member unions, testify to this fact. Women performers face shorter careers, lower wages, a narrower choice of work and a difficult work-life balance. These difficulties are bound up in two major factors: contractual and working conditions and artistic considerations. Both must be addressed in order to achieve equality between male and female performers.

The question of the portrayal of women and the representation of their experience is an important one in relation to artistic freedom. Arguably, this is lacking where screen and stage fail to explore the full range of women's lives and experience.

The Charter recognises that some of the issues highlighted are more specific to women, such as unequal pay for equal work in relation to male counterparts, lack of female roles, age discrimination, etc., but maintains that equal opportunities are of benefit to all performers. Many of the issues highlighted in relation to social protection, work-life balance, childcare and sexual harassment affect both men and women performers.

Adoption of the present Charter commits the member unions of FIA to actively promoting equality in negotiations, contracts and collective agreements. Just as important, it commits them to creating the conditions within their own union structures which will encourage women members to play a full and active part.

FIA calls on its membership to continue to be a voice advocating for equal opportunities in the arts, as well as for a balanced representation of men and women on stage and screen, free of stereotyping and sexualisation. FIA condemns any infringement of the rights of performers or restriction of their opportunities to pursue careers in the Arts and to participate in the cultural activity of nations; and affirms that all performers must have full and equal access to all the professional and social advantages obtained by the workers in the sectors in which they are active. FIA calls upon its member unions to promote full equality within the trade union movement itself.



## INTRODUCTION

During the last one hundred years, women have slowly been assuming their rightful position in the professional workplace, one hard-won step at a time. The performing arts are a very particular and important workplace within this general movement for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is worth noting that the performing arts are, and have historically been, a “gender integrated” profession, which is to say that performers can do the same work, in the same way, regardless of gender, without a segregated attribution of tasks. This means it has been ahead of professions like the legal or medical professions for example, which are only now becoming fully gender-integrated. This makes the persistent inequalities in the working lives of male and female performers all the more shocking and unacceptable. Secondly, the arts have an important role in representing society and the portrayal that it offers carries a special responsibility as it affects perception. Thus portrayal of women affects their perception and place in society in general. Artistic representation is expected to be bold and to dare to question social norms, to open up new possibilities and look beyond the status quo. It should not be satisfied with reproducing stereotypes that society is seeking to question and move away from. It is failing to mirror or look beyond the status quo. Thus both the working conditions in the performing arts and the artistic work that it produces are of key relevance to the issue of equal opportunities in society generally.

While attitudes have changed and opportunities have increased in recent years, women who choose to work in the performing arts still face a long list of inequalities that reduce both their opportunities and their earning power. It is vital that all those working in the industry really engage with this issue in order for change to happen. The recorded media and live performance sectors must equally share responsibility for achieving gender equality amongst performers and work towards the elimination of stereotyped or sexualised portrayal.

The surveys carried out by FIA and by its membership have shown that the most pressing problems in relation to equal opportunities for performers often correspond to those to be found across the labour market more generally. In particular the issue of the lack of employment opportunities is repeatedly highlighted as a problem. There are fewer opportunities for women performers and those available are often of less substance and remuneration than those available to men. Equally, it is difficult for all performers, men and women, to combine their working lives with caring responsibilities. Other issues identified in relation to equal opportunities included: age discrimination, gender stereotyping and the objectification of women and their sexuality, as well as the problem of unequal pay for equal work.

Many countries have attempted to set up social security and social assistance services specific to women. Regulations are often created by legislation, but poorly enforced. And even where social security and services in themselves might be satisfactory, these seldom meet the special needs of the performer.

The present Charter offers an overview of the key challenges facing performers in relation to gender equality and equal opportunities, setting out the key areas of actions for unions in each case.



## WORKING TO ENSURE EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK AND EQUAL WORK OPPORTUNITIES

Women in the performing arts earn less than men. They do so for two reasons. There are far fewer employment opportunities available for women and these dwindle further as they reach their forties, fifties, sixties and beyond. Women are frequently paid considerably less than male performers for comparable work.

There is a dearth of significant roles written for women in film, television and theatre scripts, and the scope of roles is more limited for women. There is also an inequity in the ratio of roles for women and men. The choice of repertoire and casting compound this. Women’s experience and voices are not seen as universal and are not equally valued and present in representation.

The vast majority of dancers are women, and the majority of work opportunities are directed at female dancers. Nevertheless, the average earnings of the employed male dancer is above that of the employed female dancer. Male dancers tend to enjoy leading positions and roles.

Further, child-care expenses bite into performers’ income and for women, this situation may be further compounded by a drop in earnings and employment opportunities from her mid-thirties.

### KEY AREAS OF ACTION

- Working to ensure that all performers have equal access to training and professional development throughout their careers.
- Working to ensure equal pay for equal work and more and better employment opportunities for women.



## GENDER STEREOTYPING AND AGE DISCRIMINATION

The problem of gender stereotyping continues to interfere with the equitable distribution of roles to women. Scripts still do not adequately reflect the actual role and participation of women in modern society, nor take into account the large number of women in the audience. Such stereotyping in the portrayal of women perpetuates a negative role-image of women to the population at large.

There is a dearth of roles available to women who do not conform to a narrow stereotype of female attractiveness. This narrow vision leads to an unrealistic portrayal of women in film, theatre and television. Our stages and screens must show women of all shapes, sizes, races and ages, and, in so doing, will mirror the existing society it purports to represent.

Pregnant women performers do not appear to the extent that pregnant women normally do in society. Pregnant dancers cease work when their condition starts to show, even when they are physically fit to continue performing.

With the onset of maturity and despite artistic experience women performers find a dramatic decline in employment opportunities. A conservative industry, heavily coloured by gender stereotypes defines young and attractive women as employable and older women as unemployable. When older women performers are cast and directed they often find themselves to be the subject of gender stereotyping to an even greater extent than younger women.

Conservative decision making, which is often more pronounced in the commercial sector, combined with the narrow perception of "what audiences want" leads to a situation where scripts promoted tend to offer limited and stereotyped female roles rather than reflecting the realities of modern life.

Offensive sexist portrayal of women persists in advertising and heavy use of gender stereotypes in advertising directed at children is of particular concern..

### KEY AREAS OF ACTION

- An ongoing commitment to highlight, question and work to change gender stereotypes.
- Working to do away with gender stereotyping on stage and screen
- Tackling the issue of age discrimination and its impact on performers

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Ensuring fair working conditions and a workplace free of bullying and harassment is an important area of work for trade unions and policy-makers. Sexual harassment is a problem that cuts across all strata of society. Sexual harassment has got nothing to do with sex. It has to do with power and the misuse of power.

Auditions and roles requiring the portrayal of intimate scenes are a part of the working lives of many performers. However, they can create a vulnerability to sexual harassment, both during casting and production. As performers, we must be able to portray every aspect of human life, also intimate ones. But this must be done gently, handled professionally and motivated artistically in a legitimate way. We do not want men and women performers to endure the feeling of being unjustly or exploitatively exposed. Auditions requiring nudity may be a legitimate request under some circumstances, but it is easily abused. Unions have a vital role through the support and protection that they can offer.

### KEY AREAS OF ACTION

- Working to ensure that performers are free from sexual harassment during all stages of their work and that there are adequate support mechanisms in place.
- Intimate scenes in auditions, rehearsals and performance must be artistically legitimate and handled professionally, so that all performers feel safe at work and so that gender stereotyping is avoided

## UNFAIR AND DEGRADING EXPLOITATION OF PERFORMANCES

Although many countries have developed specific provisions in their collective agreements on how to deal with nude scenes, the conditions may be ignored or abused. Performers may be asked to audition nude without having the right to name their personal representatives and have them present. Some producers abuse nude scenes in production publicity.

This is further exacerbated by the ease with which such content can be extracted and used out of context for a range of purposes on the internet, leading to a situation which is painful and unfair for the performer.

### KEY AREAS OF ACTION

- Supporting and upholding the moral rights of performers' in relation to their work
- Ensuring vigilance in relation to work taken out of context and unfairly exploited.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION, CARING RESPONSIBILITIES AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

FIA's most recent survey on performer employment and the impact of gender and age (2008: "Age, Gender and Performer Employment in Europe") highlighted the particular difficulties faced by performers in their working lives. Performers generally find themselves on the lower rung of any earnings ladder, they all too seldom have access to social programs and benefits, unlike many other of society's low-wage earners. In many countries artists do not qualify for unemployment insurance. Insufficient income may mean that they neither have access to pension plans nor do they qualify for increased medical insurance coverage. This is due to the sporadic nature of their work and resulting difficulty in complying with qualifying periods and conditions etc., as well as with a perception that performing is somehow "not real work".

Dancers, who as a general rule, are denied work opportunities even in the early stages of pregnancy, are rarely eligible for special maternity benefits during this time. Yet, protection of women in special circumstances in relation to maternity leave is a key part of equal opportunities.

Due to the nature of their work and the constraints that it entails, performers may find themselves at a disadvantage even in countries with state-supported child care facilities. Child care is not usually available in the evenings nor do child care facilities offer the flexibility that a film or television performer working on a night set might require. Long-term care facilities for children of performers on tour are difficult to find and expensive, forcing many performers, particularly single parents, to turn down work opportunities.

Absences due to maternity, paternity or parental leave, as well as other caring responsibilities also create a particular challenge for performers, as it is often difficult to return to the workplace, it is not always easy to get back in and be considered for upcoming opportunities. There is a need for unions to actively support performers in this position – for example by engaging with professional training centres to offer support for the return to work.

### KEY AREAS OF ACTION

- Working to promote consideration for the status of the artist and the need to appropriately tailor social protection, pension and health schemes to the circumstances of performers.
- Working to ensure that performers enjoy adequate maternity/ paternity/ parental leave and benefits, as well as child care provisions.
- Working to support and facilitate the return to work after a period of absence due to parental or other caring responsibilities.



## EQUALITY IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

Unions must place themselves and their structures at the core of their work to promote equality and equal opportunities. Without this internal focus and awareness, other efforts may well be rendered meaningless.

Many of FIA's affiliates have taken steps to redress the discrimination against women performers so evident in the industry in which they work. There is a numerical strength of women in the performing arts and in their own union ranks. They have made efforts to address the problems women face, introduce policies to actively encourage the participation of women members in decision-making, and take affirmative action aimed at achieving a percentage of women on the union leadership bodies in line with the percentage of women members. In spite of this, more needs to be done.

### KEY AREAS OF ACTION

- Create the conditions to ensure women performers to effective and equal representation by and within their trade unions at all levels of decision-making.
- Work to promote equal representation of women in the entertainment industry at all levels of decision-making.

## SUGGESTED ACTIONS FOR APPLYING THE CHARTER

In adopting the FIA Charter for Women Performers, FIA's affiliates commit themselves to effect changes in the entertainment industry.

To facilitate the work of its member unions in undertaking this work and advocating for change, FIA has developed a Handbook on Promoting Gender Equality and Combating Gender Stereotypes in the Performing Arts, offering a wide range of ideas and examples as a basis for action in this area. It is a companion document to the present Charter and can be downloaded free of charge on the FIA website.

Amongst other measures, unions should consider doing the following:

- **Endorse** the aims of the FIA Charter for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities,
- **Hold** national workshops, seminars, conferences, to discuss the implementation of the FIA Charter for Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities,
- **Commission research** into the status of women performers in relation to access to roles and the level of fees paid for work comparable to that of their male colleagues,
- **Monitor** work opportunities and earnings on a continuing basis,
- **Publicise** amongst producers, writers and directors the need to accurately reflect the roles of men and women in modern society,
- **Negotiate** with employers on the implementation and adherence to equal opportunity principles,
- **Set up** joint management / union committees to monitor the implementation of equal employment policies,
- **Promote** among employers a code of conduct to combat sexual harassment at work,  
**Ensure** that collective agreements guarantee that performers required to appear nude will be given :
  - contractual notice of such a requirement,
  - the guarantee of a close set in film and television,
  - control over any publicity still or outtake which depicts nude scenes,
- **Revise** collective agreement language to exclude references to one gender only,
- **Provide** child-care at union meetings,
- **Promote** provision of child-care to performers during non-standard hours of employment,
- **Promote** the equal treatment of all performers in health and pension plans,
- **Secure** from government arts funding authorities a commitment to equal opportunity programmes being made a condition of grants to those companies being subsidised,
- **Set up** and resource a union equal opportunities committee to analyse all developments from a gender perspective and encourage equal participation in union activities.

