



INTERNATIONAL
FEDERATION OF
CINEMATOGRAPHERS
FOR THE ART OF CINEMATOGRAPHY

BEHIND THE LENS

Working conditions, pay, social security and discrimination – the situation of cinematographers and camera crews in Europe

November 2025

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Contents

SETTING THE STAGE

1. **Introduction – Kurt Brazda, Chair of the IMAGO Working Conditions Committee**
Behind the Lens, Under Pressure
Glamour Meets Precarity: An overview of the challenges cinematographers face today — often invisible, but deeply felt.
2. **Foreword – Elen Lotman and Bojana Andric**
If you Can See it, you can be it: Towards a more inclusive cinematography
Chairs of the IMAGO Diversity and Inclusion Committee
3. **Foreword – Dr. Cristina Busch**
No sustainable audiovisual sector without fair work
Legal Advisor to the IMAGO Working Conditions Committee
4. **Foreword – Paul René Roestad**
IMAGO as it's best.
Former President and Former General Secretary of IMAGO
5. **Survey Methodology – Giving Voice to the Professionals**
How the data was gathered and whose voices are represented.

WHO ARE EUROPE'S CINEMATOGRAPHERS?

6. **Demographic Snapshot**
Age, gender, nationality and more — who makes up the field today?
7. **Professional Pathways**
Training, experience and the career structures shaping the profession.

WORK REALITIES AND CHALLENGES

8. **Working Conditions on Set and Beyond**
Exploring the day-to-day realities of the profession.
9. **Pay, Working Time and the Economics of Cinematography**
10. **Mobility, Travel and Representation**
The demands of working away from home and how interests are (or aren't) protected.
11. **Social Security and the Precarity Problem**
What happens when the job ends — or life intervenes?
12. **Health issue and work pressure**

13. Job Satisfaction, Insecurity and Professional Concerns

14. Harassment, Mistreatment and Discrimination
Addressing the darker aspects of workplace culture.

WHO ARE EUROPE'S CINEMATOGRAPHERS?

15. Conclusion – What Needs to Change
Key takeaways and policy implications for a fairer, more sustainable profession

16. Annex

17. Table of Figures

18. Table Index

Setting the stage

1. Introduction – Kurt Brazda, Chair of the IMAGO Working Conditions Committee

Behind the Lens, Under Pressure

*Glamour Meets Precarity: An overview of the challenges cinematographers face today
— often invisible, but deeply felt*

Few industries are as misunderstood when it comes to actual working conditions as the audio-visual sector. Red carpets are rolled out with great fanfare, with beautiful people walking through the flashing lights of cameras, later receiving applause, awards and accolades. Rumors of dream salaries abound and VIPs—or those who consider themselves as such—flood the scene with their entourages, eagerly searching for cameras to capture their presence and affiliation with the glamour community. What a dream it must be to work in this industry!

There is no doubt about the outstanding artistic, technical and organisational achievements of this sector in Europe. Yet, when you pull aside this glittering curtain, a very different world is often revealed. Behind the flawlessly designed backdrops, one often finds exploitation, insecurity, abuse of power and precarious working conditions.

After more than ten years, the IMAGO Working Conditions Committee, in collaboration with the IMAGO Committee for Diversity and Inclusion, conducted a second study on the working conditions of camera crews in Europe — and the results speak a very clear and compelling language. The study was once again carried out under the legal guidance of Cristina Busch, a Barcelona based lawyer who has an in-depth knowledge of the dynamics of the European film industry.

Over the course of nearly a year, data was collected from across Europe and analysed by FORBA, a renowned institute which specialises in scientific studies of working environments and social standards.

This survey focused on several key areas of particular interest. One of these was the question of when and in what form employment contracts are issued. The findings show that a too large number of respondents do not have a fully finalised contract when they start work. This lack of formal agreements opens the floodgates to exploitation and abuse of power.

The audiovisual sector has long served as a blueprint for the rapidly changing world of work that we are currently facing and will continue to face in the near future. Our 2012 study revealed a significant shift towards solo self-employment among cinematographers, a trend that remains prevalent today. Despite their clear dependence on clients, however, these individuals do not benefit from labour laws or collective bargaining agreements, leaving them the weaker party in any contract negotiations.

The general weakening of film professionals is also evident in extreme working hours, often with lit-

tle or no adequate compensation. A widespread and justified fear persists, that standing up for one's rights may mean losing the job. In fact, some production companies even maintain "blacklists" of individuals who advocate for their own rights and those of others. This fear often leads professionals to keep working even when their health would dictate otherwise. The question that has emerged in recent years — "Does filmmaking make you sick?" — can now, unfortunately, be answered with "yes" in an increasing number of cases.

The logical consequence of prolonged self-exploitation is chronic burnout, which frequently leads to occupational disability and, ultimately, the loss of livelihood. Medical research now confirms that long-term stress and the resulting disruption of natural biorhythms can cause serious physical illnesses such as diabetes and cancer. The findings of our study also indicate alarming trends in this regard.

Forced budget cuts, whose legitimacy is highly questionable given the audiovisual sector's revenues, have particularly affected production schedules, shortening them significantly while extending the daily working hours beyond 12 hours. Simultaneously, the work pace has accelerated, leaving even young professionals struggling to keep up. The risk of accidents in our industry is steadily increasing, particularly when colleagues drive home after excessively long workdays.

Many have drawn their own conclusions and left the profession. But where are people over 50 supposed to go? The industry's mindset exacts a particular toll on those whose experience is vital for nurturing the next generation. Seasoned professionals are no longer hired due to cost-cutting measures, as their age alone marks them as 'underperformers' who no longer meet neoliberal performance expectations. The result is blatant age discrimination, which leads many into entrenched poverty in old age.

One might assume that the #MeToo movement has raised awareness of power abuse and discrimination in the audiovisual industry. However, much is still being swept under the carpet, with victims and witnesses staying silent for fear of losing their jobs.

The study clearly highlights the systematic weakening and even dysfunction, of union representation in too many countries. In a period of global digital transformation, solidarity-based advocacy is the only real chance of preserving humane working conditions.

The study sets out concrete demands and recommendations to be presented to European policy-makers and audiovisual sector stakeholders. We believe that meaningful improvements can only occur when there is pan-European awareness of just how unacceptable the situation truly is. We hope that this study will serve as a helpful tool for colleagues to assert their legitimate interests.

The IMAGO Working Conditions Committee, with its committed members from across Europe, all actively engaged in professional practice and in shaping Europe's audiovisual identity, will continue to closely monitor working standards in our industry and act. Our goal is to combine high recognition for camera professionals with the recognition of acceptable working conditions.

The urgently needed recognition of Europe as a democratic stronghold of human rights is inseparable from the European Union's genuine commitment to ensuring a dignified world of work. Europe must become social—or it has no future.

Kurt Brazda
Chair, IMAGO Working Conditions Committee

2. Foreword – Elen Lotman and Bojana Andric

If You Can See It, You Can Be It: Towards a More Inclusive Cinematography
Chairs of the IMAGO Diversity and Inclusion Committee

The result of a year's long study that you are holding in your hands is not only a long-awaited insight and an important milestone. It is also power. Because information is the most powerful weapon for someone who wants to change the world. And as the numbers in this study speak louder than words - cinematography is in dire need of a change.

Next step is to figure out what needs to be done.

Because the issue with diversity in cinematography is a systemic problem, the response needs to be systemic too. It means very many small changes in all levels of the industry.

Firstly, for younger generations, mentorship shadowing or credit-maker programs to support their entry into the industry. And more visibility of minority cinematographers so that all young people could see themselves as cinematographers.

Secondly, for more experienced professionals, the glass ceiling can start cracking if their work is promoted and is seen by agents, producers, media and festivals. Visibility of all kinds of cinematographers is important -- as we have repeatedly said in our Diversity and Inclusion Committee events on festivals: "if you can see it, you can be it". But for early and mid-career cinematographers, it is also important to be seen not only as lensers, but also as parents, partners and simply humans with a private life. This can give hope to the people who have reached a crossroad and are facing a decision whether to choose between cinematography and living.

Thirdly, for the most seasoned cinematographers, we have to tackle ageism persistent and under addressed issues.

Discrimination tends to have a compounding effect: in cinematography, if you are a woman, you have less opportunities to prove your merit. If you are from a minority ethnic, these opportunities lessen even more. Adding to it your sexuality, physical capacities, neurodiversity and also age – can lead to a complete lack of possibilities to prove your merit, because all of these idiosyncrasies stack on top of each other and push people to the margins where they have less and less choices. What is the next domino effect step if one has less choices? Having to accept conditions and circumstances that one would not accept if one had a choice. This pushes people deeper and deeper down the passion exploitation rabbit hole.

And the true irony of it all is that - with all these aforementioned characteristics being part of your identity, what you really are is a unique, experienced, empathetic, resilient person who has seen many different slices of life. Isn't it something every cinematographer should really strive for? Isn't a unique personality with a unique creative voice someone every director and producer should look for in order to create the most idiosyncratic images for their film?

So, let's all collectively make sure that the future of cinematography is where everyone has a chance to prove their merit - with their work.

Elen Lotman ESC and Bojana Andric
IMAGO Diversity and Inclusion Committee

3. Foreword – Dr. Cristina Busch

No sustainable Audiovisual Sector Without Fair Work
Legal Advisor to the IMAGO Working Conditions Committee

The audiovisual sector is a pillar of Europe's cultural identity and creative economy, with cinematographers at its heart. Having participated in one of the first European surveys on working conditions for cinematography professionals, also developed by the IMAGO Working Conditions Committee, in 2012, I am honoured to present the findings of this collaborative effort. This project is driven by the shared belief that the well-being of the people behind the camera is inextricably linked to the vitality and competitiveness of the European audiovisual industry.

This study was conceived in response to persistent concerns regarding job stability, fair treatment, health and well-being and equal opportunities for cinematographers across Europe. The Working Conditions Committee and the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion have drawn on a variety of expertise and viewpoints to collect, analyse and interpret data from professionals in the field. The aim is to present an accurate and nuanced picture of both the enduring issues and new developments shaping the profession today.

European institutions have long recognised the importance of the audiovisual sector in safeguarding cultural diversity and promoting innovation. However, as this report reveals, the rapid digital transformation, changing production models, growing global competition and rise of artificial intelligence have introduced significant new challenges for creative professionals. Across Europe, cinematographers and their crews have voiced collective concern that the increasing implementation of AI in image creation, lighting and post-production threatens jobs security, undermines established professional roles and requires urgent adaptation of sector-specific protection measures. Alongside long hours, precarious contracts and the need for continuous professional upskilling, issues such as mistreatment, discrimination, health concerns and heightened work demands are becoming increasingly prominent. These are not isolated issues, but systemic problems with direct implications for the quality, sustainability and inclusivity of European content.

The findings highlight the urgent need for coordinated action at the European level. National solutions alone are no longer sufficient to ensure fair pay, social protection and supportive working environments for all audiovisual workers; only through solidarity and shared policy initiatives can this be achieved. This aligns with the commitment of European institutions to support the recovery, transformation and long-term resilience of the sector.

European institutions, national authorities, social partners and stakeholders from the creative and audiovisual sectors are invited to consider the insights and recommendations presented in this report. Placing the lived experiences of cinematographers at the heart of policy discussions can foster a creative environment where talent thrives, diversity is celebrated and European audiovisual works continue to inspire audiences worldwide.

I extend my deepest gratitude to all who contributed their voices to this survey. Your experiences are the foundation upon which a stronger, more inclusive audiovisual sector can be built.

Dr. Cristina Busch

Legal Advisor to IMAGO Working Conditions Committee

4. Foreword - Paul René Roestad

IMAGO at it's best.

Former President and Former General Secretary of IMAGO

One of the main reasons IMAGO was established was through international collaboration to work to strengthen cinematographer's authorship/co-authorship rights of the image. And in addition, to work to improve cinematographer's working rights, by sharing information, building international collaboration and solidaric support over the borders. In several countries cinematographers are recognized as having authorship rights today, many more are not. And many cinematographers have acceptable working conditions, many more have not. And in several countries, established working condition rights for cinematographers are under attack and worsening, as this survey clearly reports. 12-15 hour working days are not uncommon in several places, fair payment for pre- and post- work is in many places rare, as are fair compensation for extensive overtime work. Fear of black-listing is common.

It is high time for IMAGO to address these challenges.

Some of the problems are caused by many cinematographers being self-employed and therefore not protected by national employment laws that regulates working hours, salary, employment contracts, sick pay and fair salaries. But many are not self-employed because they choose to be, too many are self-employed because of the nature of their work and because of unacceptable production demands.

IMAGO is not a Union, but as cinematographers we need to inform our colleagues, exchange information over the borders, we need to be clear about what we feel is acceptable and what we feel is not and to support colleagues when necessary, when we see colleagues experience working conditions that are grossly unfair. This is in my mind the responsibility of all cinematographers and this is what the members of the IMAGO Working Conditions Committee use their free time to make sure is focussed on through this very important report. We must never forget the responsibility we have to inform the World around us and to raise our voices when change is needed.

This is why IMAGO was established. This is IMAGO at it's best.

Paul René Roestad FNF

Former President and former General Secretary of IMAGO.

5. Survey Methodology – Giving Voice to the Professionals

How the data was gathered and whose voices are represented.

This report is based on a wide-reaching online survey designed to capture the lived experiences of cinematographers working across Europe. Developed jointly by FORBA and IMAGO, the survey gathered insights from nearly 500 professionals using a broad distribution strategy through professional networks, social media and industry associations. While random sampling was not possible due to the absence of a central registry of cinematographers, a diverse and representative range of voices was reached. The methodology prioritised accessibility, inclusion and relevance across European contexts, providing a robust foundation for the findings that follow.

The study on the working conditions of cinematographers was organized as a quantitative online survey. The questionnaire was developed in cooperation between FORBA and IMAGO. A simple pretest was conducted to test the comprehensibility of the questions' wording and of the response categories. The questionnaire covered the subject areas as follows:

- ☐ General sociodemographic background
- ☐ General questions on the professional background
- ☐ Working conditions
- ☐ Pay setting and working time
- ☐ Working away from home
- ☐ Representation of interests
- ☐ Social security
- ☐ Health issues and work pressure
- ☐ Job satisfaction and concerns
- ☐ Mistreatment and discrimination

The survey's target population was the total of currently working cinematographers at least in Europe. However, sampling proved to be difficult as no register or list of contact details of currently working cinematographers was available. To reach the total of this population and to ensure that all members of the target population had an equal opportunity to participate in the survey, the link to the survey was distributed in many ways and using various channels. It was promoted by the different cinematography IMAGO members/affiliates and non-member societies and by using the IMAGO infrastructure. In addition, the link was also distributed by newsletters, via social media, on webpages and via calls among colleagues. All invitations to the survey were accompanied by prompts to distribute the link among colleagues and other organisations applying the snowball technique. These are the societies directly contacted and social media used:

- ☐ IMAGO Diversity and Inclusion Committee members' list – approx. 20 members who are all representatives of their organisations. They were asked to fill out the survey themselves but also to spread the word in their societies and circles.

- Email to Estonian Society of Cinematographers' members' list – 18 members – who were asked to fill out the survey but also to spread the word in their societies and circles.
- Women in Cinematography WhatsApp Community – approximately 100 members.
- Manaki Brothers' festival WhatsApp group – 100+ members.
- Baltic Film and Media School alumni Facebook group – 1,713 members
- Tallinn University Baltic Film and Media School newsletter.
- Women in Cinematography Instagram story – 4,153 followers and reposts.
- The first pre-WIC list of the campaign initiators – 27 members who are all representatives of organisations – asked to fill the survey but also spread the word in their organisation or group.

The survey was also mentioned in several traditional media appearances, e.g. an article in Cinematography World. This allowed to reach a large number and cover a large proportion of the target population despite a lack of contact details available. However, due to this approach, it is not possible to estimate concrete response rates, response biases or survey coverage. However, this approach allows for the assumption that a significant share of the target population could be reached (and included in the survey).

This manifold approach including different organisations developed over time. Consequently, the survey period extended the usual time frame. The survey started in May 2024 and was open till January 2025. The questionnaire was completed by 604 people. However, for the purpose of the below analysis in this report not all respondents could be included. Several respondents living outside of Europe participated in the survey. This includes countries like the USA, Turkey, Iran, among others. These countries offer very different contexts and conditions for the work of cinematographers among each other but also compared to European countries. Simply including them would distort the outcome of the analysis and limit its significance. The same holds true for some European countries, e.g. Serbia and Armenia. To avoid a too heterogeneous survey population, the analysis in this report focuses on the European Union (EU) member states and the non-member states United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland. The latter do not feature the same contexts and conditions for the work of cinematographers but show sufficient similarities with the EU member states such that they can be included in the analysis. Correspondingly, 108 responses of participants from other European or non-European countries could not be considered in the analysis. Unfortunately, there are not enough survey participants from outside the European Union to allow a separate clustering (and analysis) of participants (and their responses) from these countries. In total, 496 respondents are included in the analysis of this report.

Although a random sampling of all cinematographers was not feasible, when drawing conclusions from the survey for the target population the adequate margin of error has to be applied. For 496 respondents and a proportion of 50% the margin of error is 4.4% with a 95% confidence interval. Hence it can be statistically assumed that the result in the target population is between 45.6% and 54.4% with a 95% probability if all members of the target population had the same chance to participate in the survey. For other proportions the margin of error is slightly lower and for questions not answered by all participants it would be slightly larger. The following report on the outcomes of this survey however does not extrapolate on the population; therefore, the margins of error are not calculated and reported for each outcome.

Who are Europe's Cinematographers?

6. Demographic Snapshot

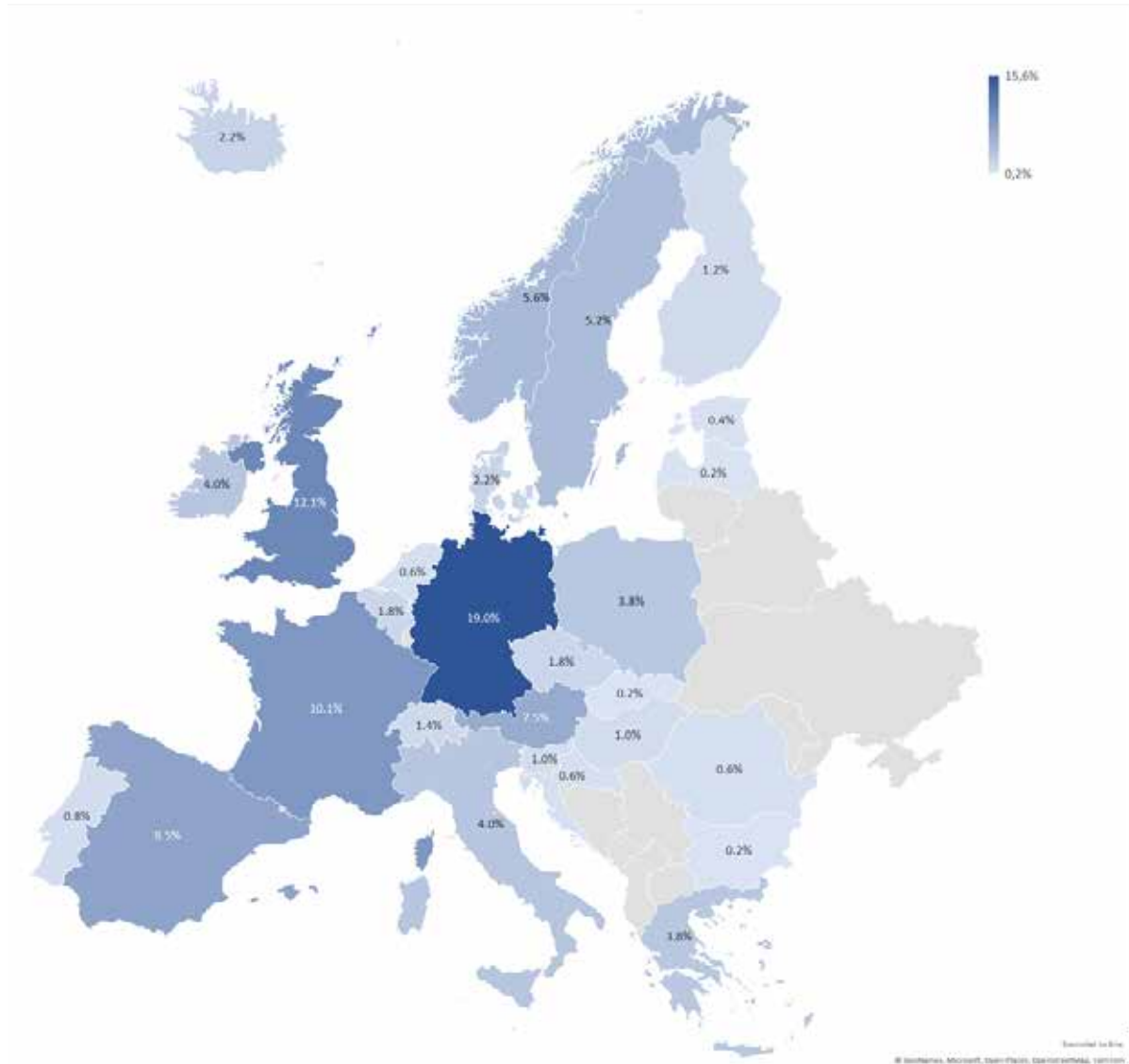
Age, gender, nationality and more — who makes up the field today?

This chapter offers a snapshot of the people behind the camera: cinematographers working across Europe who participated in the survey. It presents data on their countries of residence, age, gender, education and family roles. While some countries are more strongly represented than others, the results reflect important trends — including the profession's high level of education, age distribution and continued gender imbalance. These insights form the basis for understanding how broader working conditions affect different groups within the profession.

The majority (82.1%) of the survey participants are living in a country of the European Union or in the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Iceland or Norway. Of these, 19% are living in Germany, 12.1% in the United Kingdom, 10.1% in France, 8.5% in Spain and 7.5% in Austria. For the other countries, the share is below 6%. Figure 1 shows a map illustrating the distribution of the survey participants among the European countries included. Table 1 in the annex shows the number of participants by country.

Figure 1 Map: Share of survey participants (EU27, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland)

Share of survey participants by country EU27 and United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland



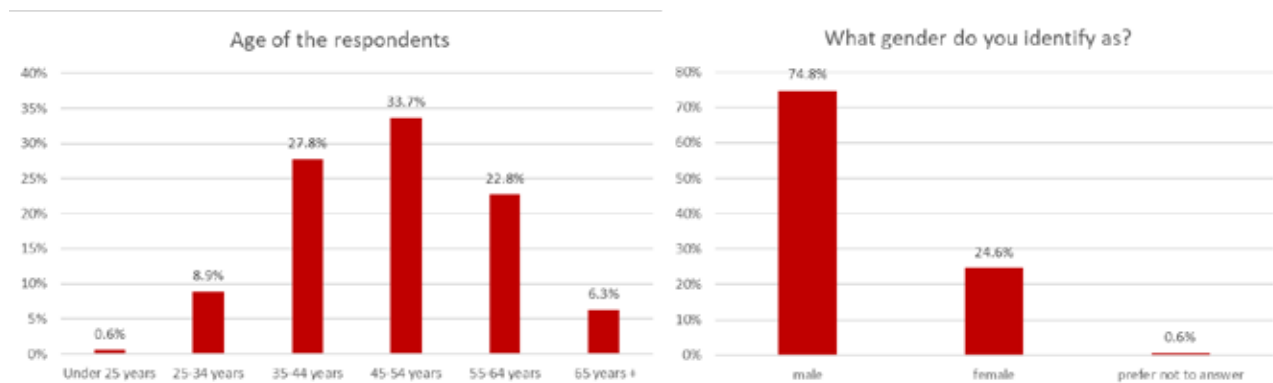
Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 496

The distribution of the survey population of cinematographers does not mirror that of the general population across the European countries. Respondents living in Germany and Austria are overrepresented within the survey population compared to the general population, whilst France, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Spain are underrepresented. However, as there is no reliable information about the distribution of cinematographers across Europe, it is impossible to correct for a potential bias in the survey participation.

33.7% of the cinematographers surveyed are between 45 and 54 and 27.8% between 35 and 44 years old. Thus, the survey population is slightly older compared to the EU labour force in general according to Eurostat¹. Within the general labour force in the EU, 25.3% are between 45 and 54 and 19.2% between 35 and 44 years old. The difference is particularly pronounced in the lower age groups, with 20.3% between 25 and 34 years of age among the work force in general in contrast to 8.9% among the surveyed cinematographers. This, however, can be partly explained by the educational background of the survey participants. 77% stated to have completed tertiary education which includes university and college education. 22.6% completed secondary education, leaving just 0.4% with primary education. These results indicate that the surveyed cinematographers are among the higher educated professions in Europe.

Like other professions in the cultural and creative industries², cinematography is strongly male dominated. 74.8% of the respondents identified as male and 24.6% as female.

Figure 2 Age and Gender of respondents



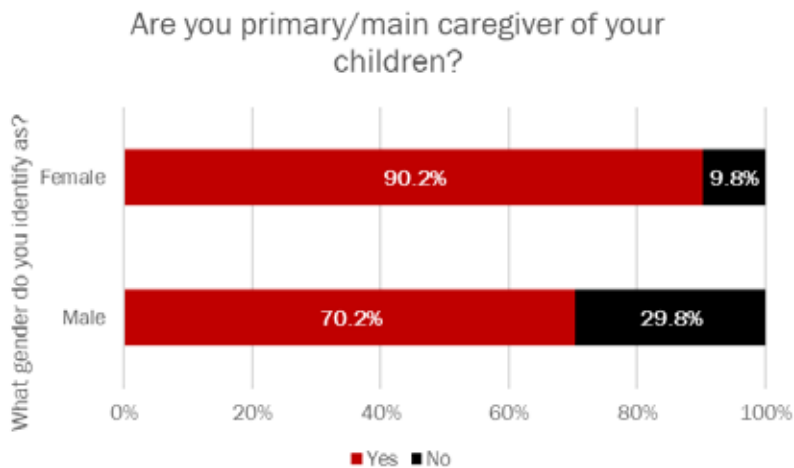
Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 496

When it comes to the family situation, 64% stated having children. Of these, 33.3% have one, 51.1% two, 12.7% three and 2.8% more than three children. 73.9% of the surveyed cinematographers with children are also their primary or main caregiver, though with a significant difference by gender. 90.2% of the female cinematographers are their children's primary caregiver in contrast to 70.2% of the male survey participants. 14.3% of the participants are also the main caregiver for other family members or parents with no significant difference by gender.

¹ For comparison the data available from the Eurostat online database has been used. The most recent data, however, is just available for 2023: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_egan_custom_15973371/default/table?lang=de (accessed on 25.03.2025)

² See for example the survey among audiovisual authors from 2019 by Mart Willekens, Jessy Siongers, Lucas Pissens and John Lievens: <https://www.saa-authors.eu/file/600/download> (accessed on 25.03.2025)

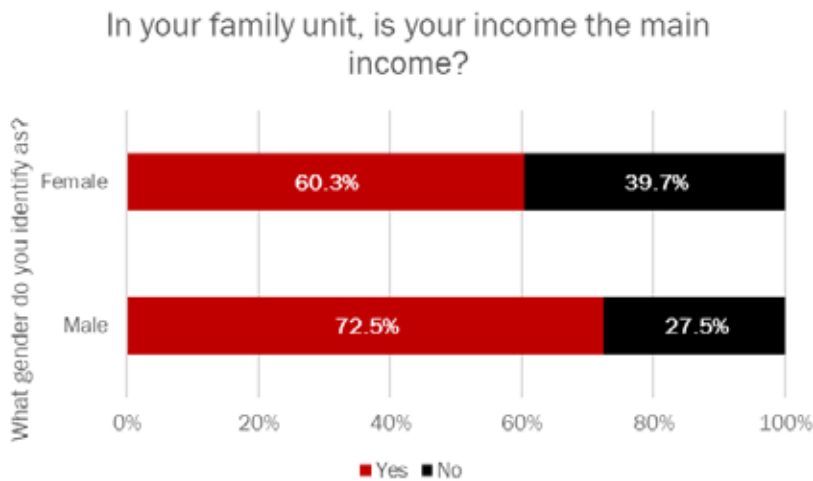
Figure 3 Primary/main caregiver by gender



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 313

the majority (68.8%), their income is also the main income for their family, though this is significantly lower for female (60.3%) than for male (72.5%) participants.

Figure 4 Main family income by gender



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 488

7. Professional Pathways

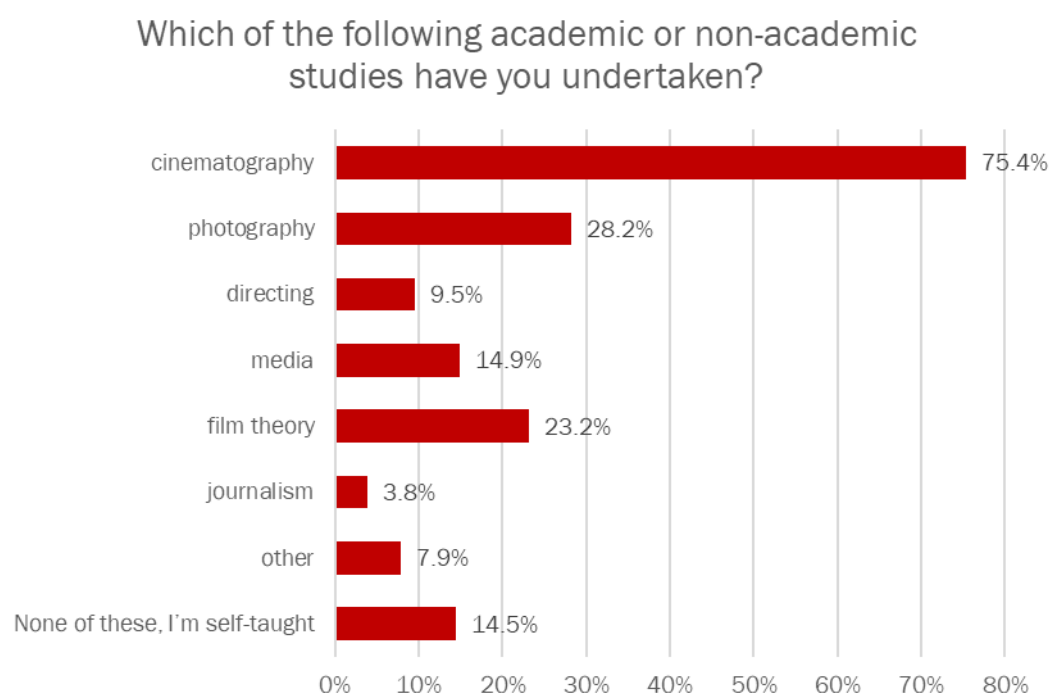
Training, experience and the career structures shaping the profession.

Cinematographers in Europe build their careers across a wide spectrum of media formats, reflecting both artistic ambition and market realities. The majority of respondents report working in cinema (79.8%), TV series (64.1%), documentaries (50.2%) and TV films (49%), with many also active in advertising and commercial work (43.3%). This diversity illustrates the range of pathways through which cinematographers sustain their professional lives — often moving fluidly between genres and platforms. These patterns are shaped not only by creative interests but also by industry structures, funding models and access to training and networks.

Most of the survey respondents have completed a cinematography-specific education or training to become a professional (75.4%). Other trainings and educations, especially photography and film theory, have also been pursued (28.2% and 23.2%, respectively) and some also in addition to cinematography-specific education as this was asked in a multiple response format.

17

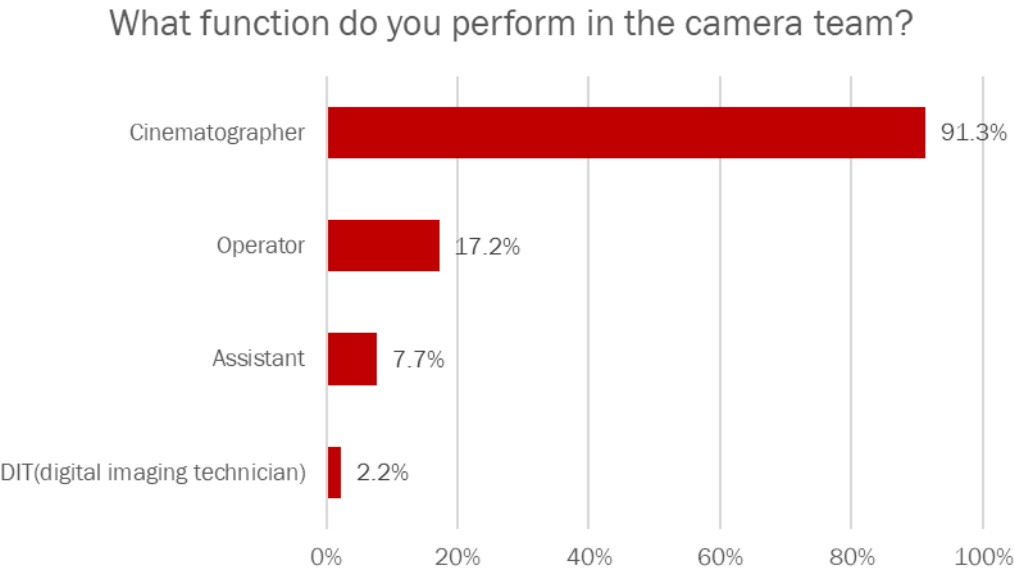
Figure 5 Specific training undertaken



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 496 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

Nearly all survey participants work as cinematographer (91.3%), some as or additionally as operator (17.2%) and few as assistant (7.7%) or digital imaging technician.

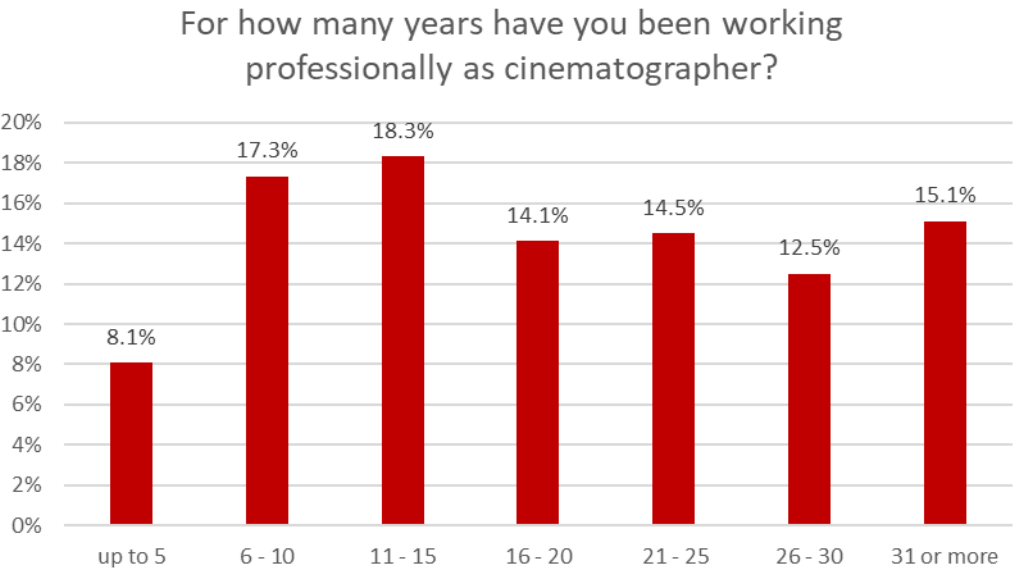
Figure 6 Function in the camera team



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 494 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

8.1% are working up to five years as cinematographers. Calculated by five-year steps, the other respondents are distributed fairly evenly across the various categories, with the last category containing 31 years and more of working experience as cinematographer, which 15.1% indicated.

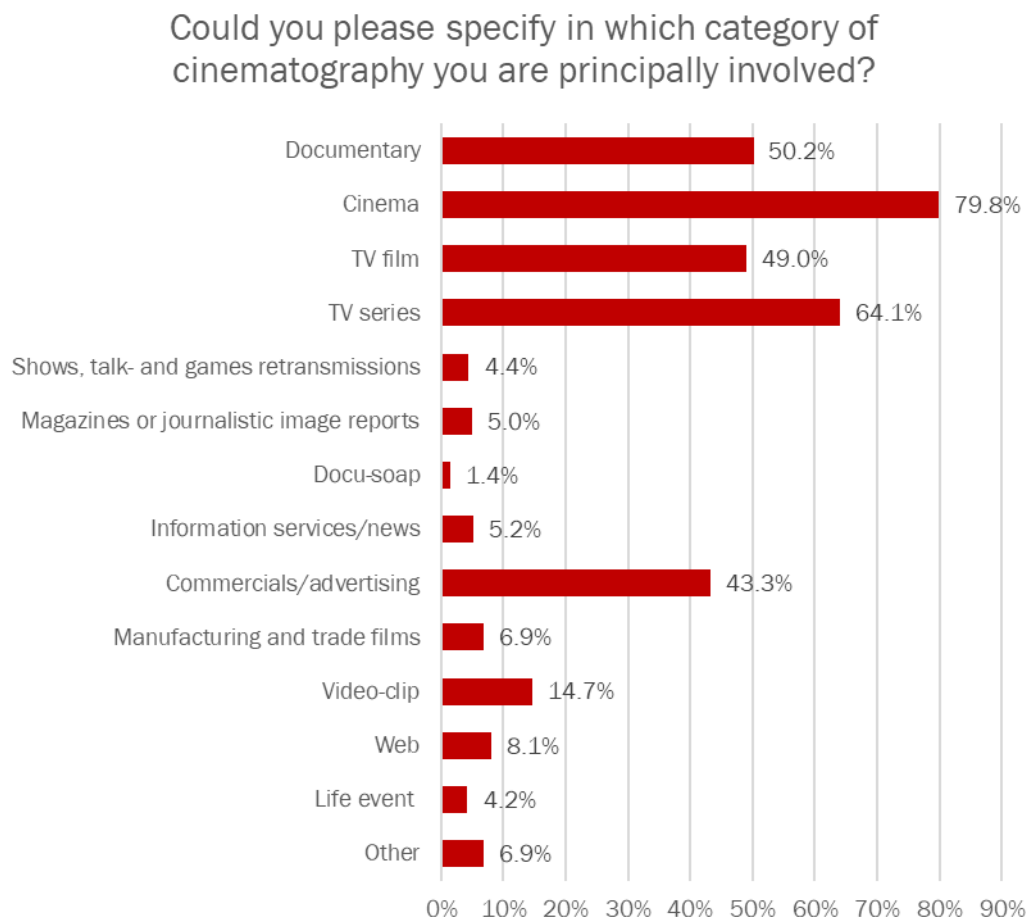
Figure 7 Years worked as cinematographer



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 496

Cinema and TV series are the predominant categories of cinematography the survey participants are working in. 79.8% of the participants are working within the category of cinema and 64.1% in TV series. Around half are also working within the categories of documentary and TV films and 43.3% are working for commercials or advertising. Since a multiple response set has been established to ask this question, most participants indicate that they are working in several categories at the same time.

Figure 8 Category of cinematography



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 496 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

Work realities and challenges?

8. Working Conditions on Set and Beyond

Exploring the day-to-day realities of the profession.

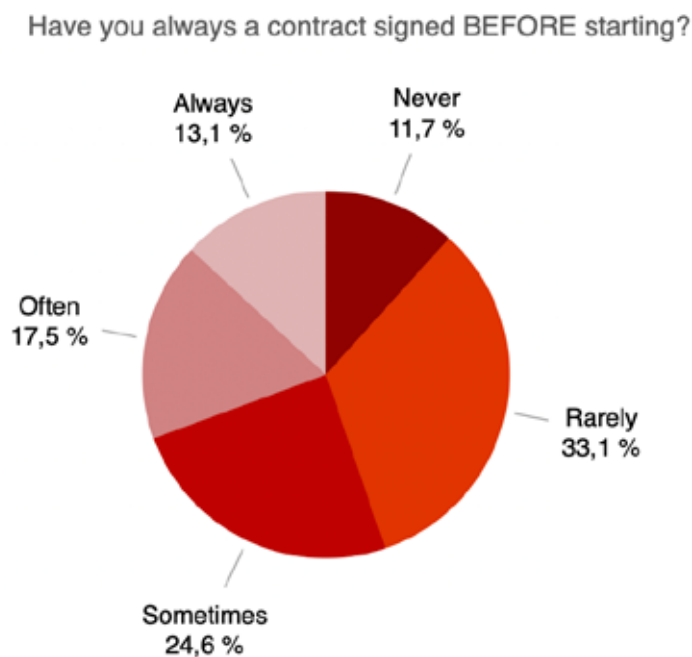
Unpredictable schedules, long gaps between jobs and fluctuating income are part of the daily reality for many cinematographers. According to the survey, nearly two-thirds of respondents experienced a break of more than three months without paid work in the past five years — a stark indicator of employment precarity in the field.

This chapter explores the realities behind such figures — including irregular work schedules, project-based employment and the lack of predictable income. These patterns are not only financially precarious but also have wider implications for personal well-being, career development and social protection.

20

Less than one-third of the cinematographers surveyed can sign their contract always or often before they start to work. Nearly half of the respondents have their contract never or rarely signed before starting to work.

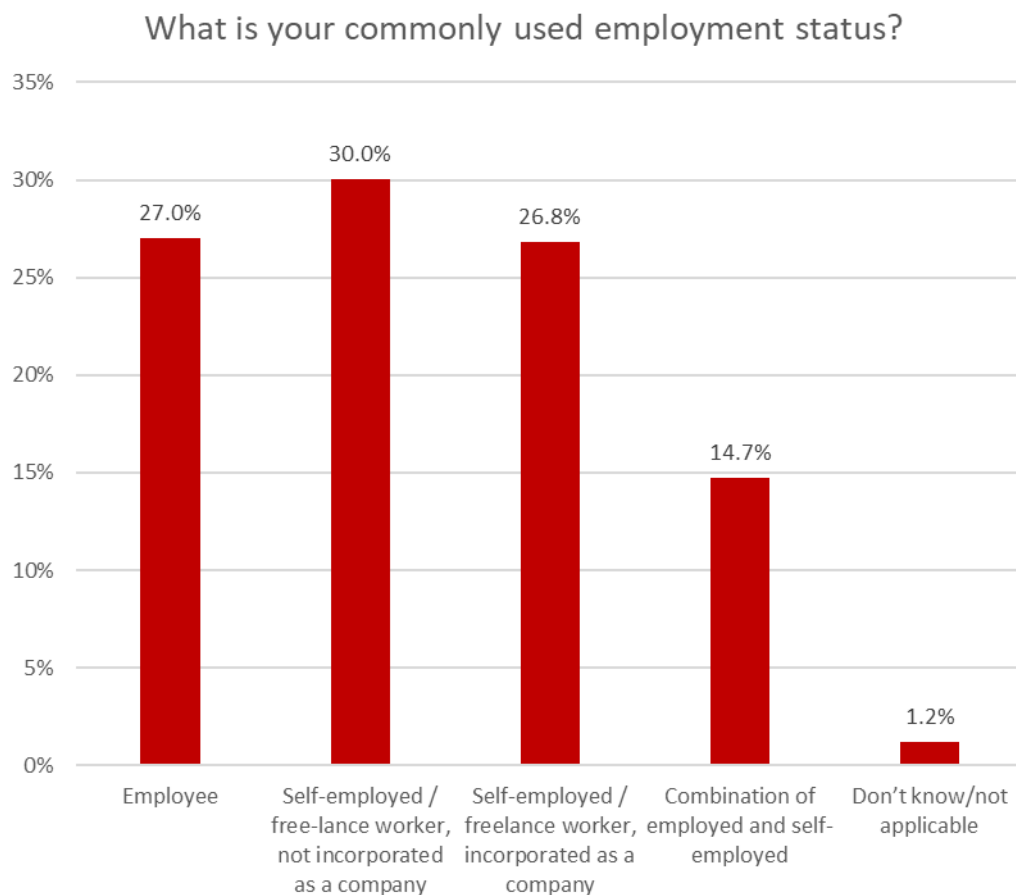
Figure 9 Contract signed before starting to work



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 468

Around half of the respondents have been working for one to three production companies during the last year, 30.2% for four to six and the rest for 7 or more production companies. More than half of the surveyed cinematographers are working as self-employed or are freelance workers. 30% are working as self-employed not incorporated as a company and 26.8% are self-employed incorporated as a company. 27% of the respondents are employees and 14.7% work in a hybrid form by combining self-employment and dependent employment. 54.5% of the participants stated that the employment status was decided by themselves based on their own wishes. By contrast, for 35.8% of the respondents this was decided upon by the producer and for 9.7% by someone else.

Figure 10 Employment status



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 465

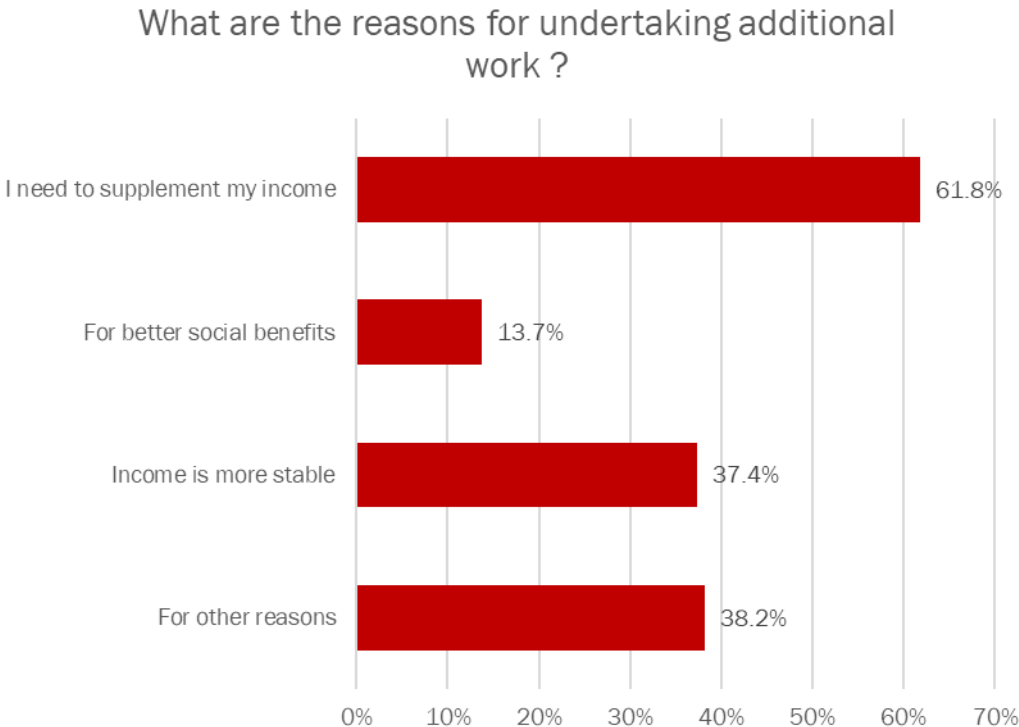
A vast majority of the surveyed cinematographers (64.6%) have gone with more than three months without paid work as a cinematographer in the last five years and just 8.7% with up to one month. 26.5% of the respondents also frequently undertake paid work other than their work as cinematographers. The main reason for undertaking additional work is supplementing the income, which was indicated by 61.8% of the participants. Stability of the income partially stemming from non-cinematography work was mentioned by 37.4% and 13.7% of the respondents need the additional income for better social benefits.

Figure 11 Periods without paid work as cinematographer



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 483

Figure 12 Reasons for undertaking additional work



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 131 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

9. Pay, Working Time and the Economics of Cinematography

Pay structures and working time arrangements reveal the extent of economic pressure faced by cinematographers across Europe. Most respondents rely on individually negotiated fees, with limited access to collective agreements or standardised rates. All-inclusive contracts are widespread, often producer-driven and typically exclude overtime compensation. Long hours and extended work weeks are the norm, while unpaid work — especially during pre- and post-production — remains routine.

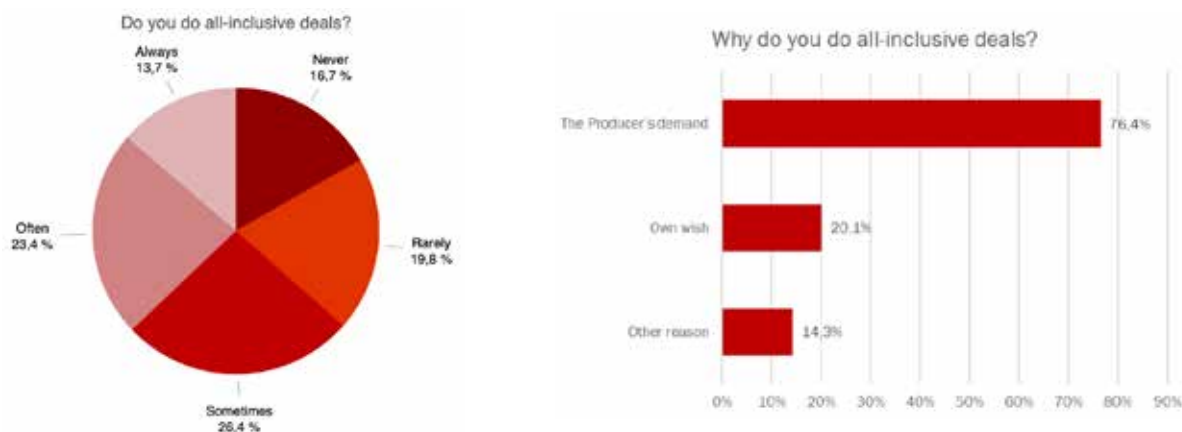
The ongoing financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to reduce paid working days for many, adding to the profession's structural precarity. These conditions reflect broader challenges in securing fair, sustainable and transparent economic frameworks for cinematographers in the European audiovisual sector.

23

For 66.7% of the cinematographers surveyed, their wages are based on own negotiations. For 19.2% they are based on collective agreements and for 14.1% the rate, fee or level of income is unilaterally laid down by the employer or producer.

All-inclusive deals are rather widespread among the cinematographers surveyed. More than one-third often or always do all-inclusive deals and 26.4% sometimes. For the vast majority all-inclusive deals are due to the producer's demand. Just 20.1% state own wish as reason.

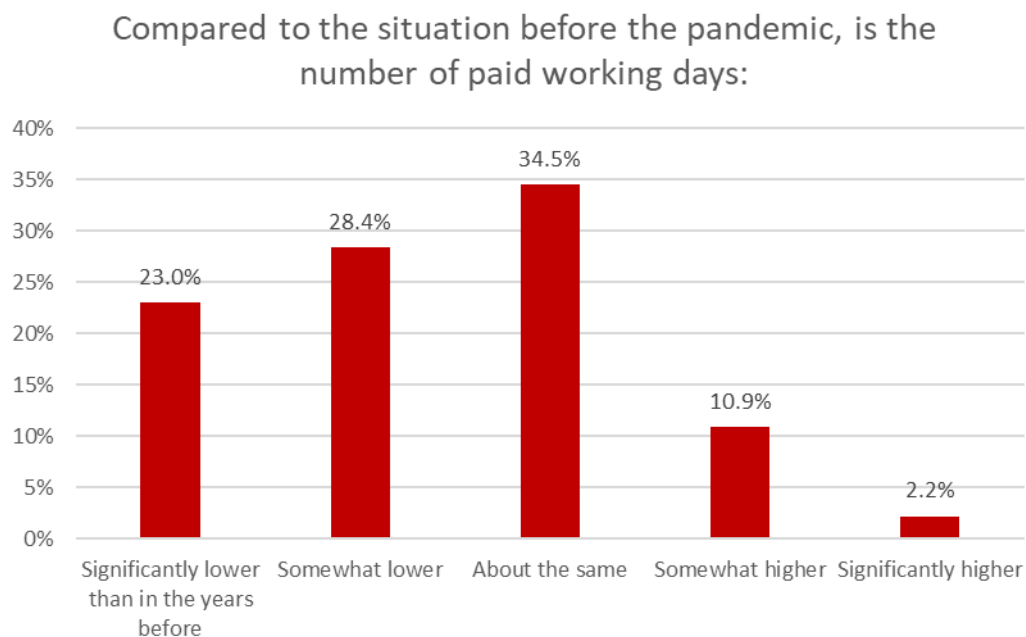
Figure 13 All-inclusive deals



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. Do you do all-inclusive deals?: n = 496; Why do you do all-inclusive deals?: n = 407 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

In the perception and experience of the cinematographers surveyed, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a lasting negative impact on their professional and financial situation. For more than half of the respondents, the number of paid working days is significantly or at least somewhat lower compared to the situation before the pandemic. For 34.5% it stayed the same and for a minority it somewhat or significantly increased.

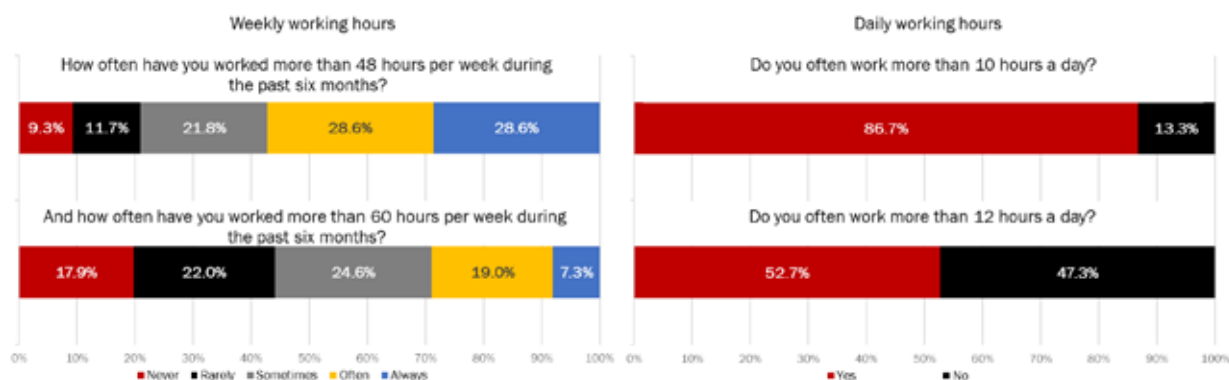
Figure 14 Paid working days in comparison to pre-pandemic



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 491

The day-to-day work of the cinematographers surveyed is characterized by long working hours often dramatically exceeding the 'normal' working day and week. 28.6% of the respondents stated of always having worked for more than 48 hours per week during the last six months. The same percentage of respondents (28.6%) indicated that this has often been the case. For some of the survey participants the working week even extends to over 60 hours, for 7.3% always and for 19% often. 86.6% of the participants also stated to often work more than 10 hours a day and 52.7% often work more than 12 hours a day.

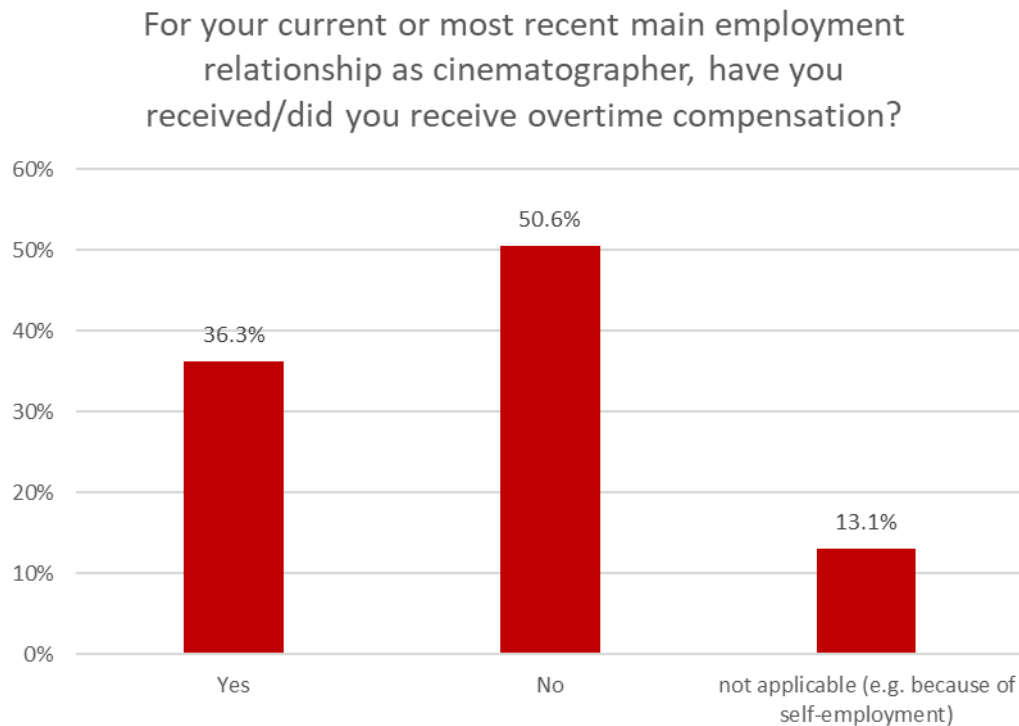
Figure 15 Weekly and daily working hours



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. Weekly working hours – First row: n = 496; Second row: n = 450. Daily working hours: First row: n = 495, Second row: n = 496

Despite the long working hours, only a minority of 36.3% receive overtime compensation. Half of the cinematographers surveyed explicitly stated to not receive overtime compensation.

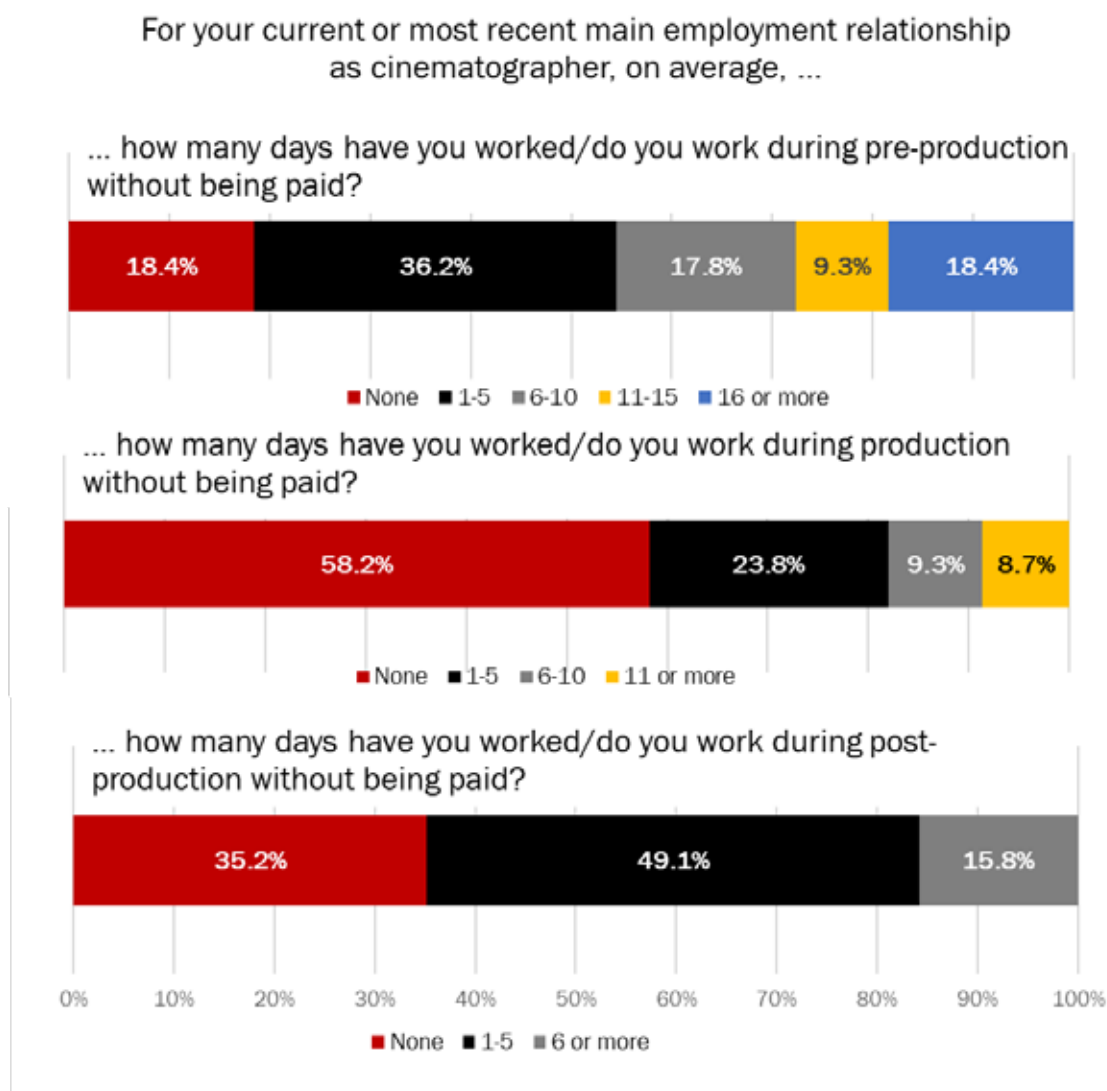
Figure 16 Overtime compensation



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 466

Doing additional work without being paid is common practice during pre- and post-production according to the cinematographers surveyed. Just 18.4% stated that they did no unpaid work during pre-production and 35.2% stated that they did no unpaid work during post-production. Nearly half of the respondents work one to five days unpaid during post-production and 15.8% more than six days. During pre-production, 36.2% work one to five, 17.8% six to ten, 9.3% eleven to fifteen and 18.4% sixteen days or more without getting paid. This is different during production. 58.2% stated that on average there are no unpaid working days in this phase of the employment relationship as cinematographer. 23.8% nevertheless work one to five, 9.3% six to ten and 8.7% eleven or more days unpaid during production.

Figure 17 Unpaid work during pre- and post- and during production



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 495

10. Mobility, Travel and Representation

The demands of working away from home and how interests are (or aren't) protected.

Mobility is a defining aspect of cinematographic work, with travel and cross-border assignments forming a routine part of professional life. The survey shows that while most cinematographers have their travel expenses at least partially reimbursed, a notable share still face unpaid or underpaid travel. Working abroad presents additional challenges — particularly regarding taxation, visas and access to social security — highlighting the complexity of transnational employment in the sector.

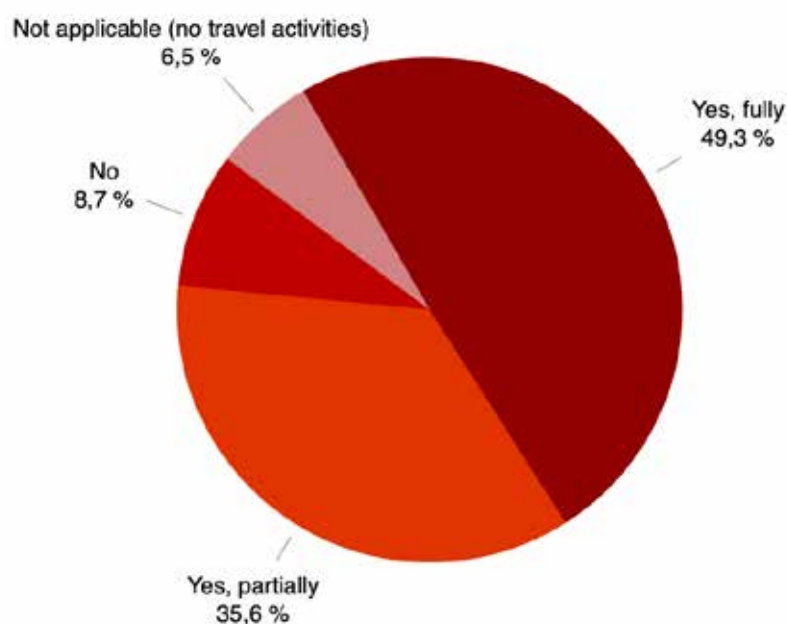
Alongside mobility, the chapter also addresses how cinematographers' interests are represented. While many are affiliated with associations or unions, few of these bodies have the capacity to negotiate directly with producers or institutions. Satisfaction with union activity is limited and a strong desire for more on-set presence and support is clearly expressed by the respondents.

27

Traveling is common practice for cinematographers. This is also reflected within the survey data. Asked whether the last business trips made on behalf of the producer were paid or not, just 6.5% stated that this question is not applicable to their situation because of no travel activities. Half of the respondents stated that the travel expenses have been fully refunded. For 35.6% the costs were partially paid and for 8.7% they were not paid at all.

Figure 18 Travel expenses

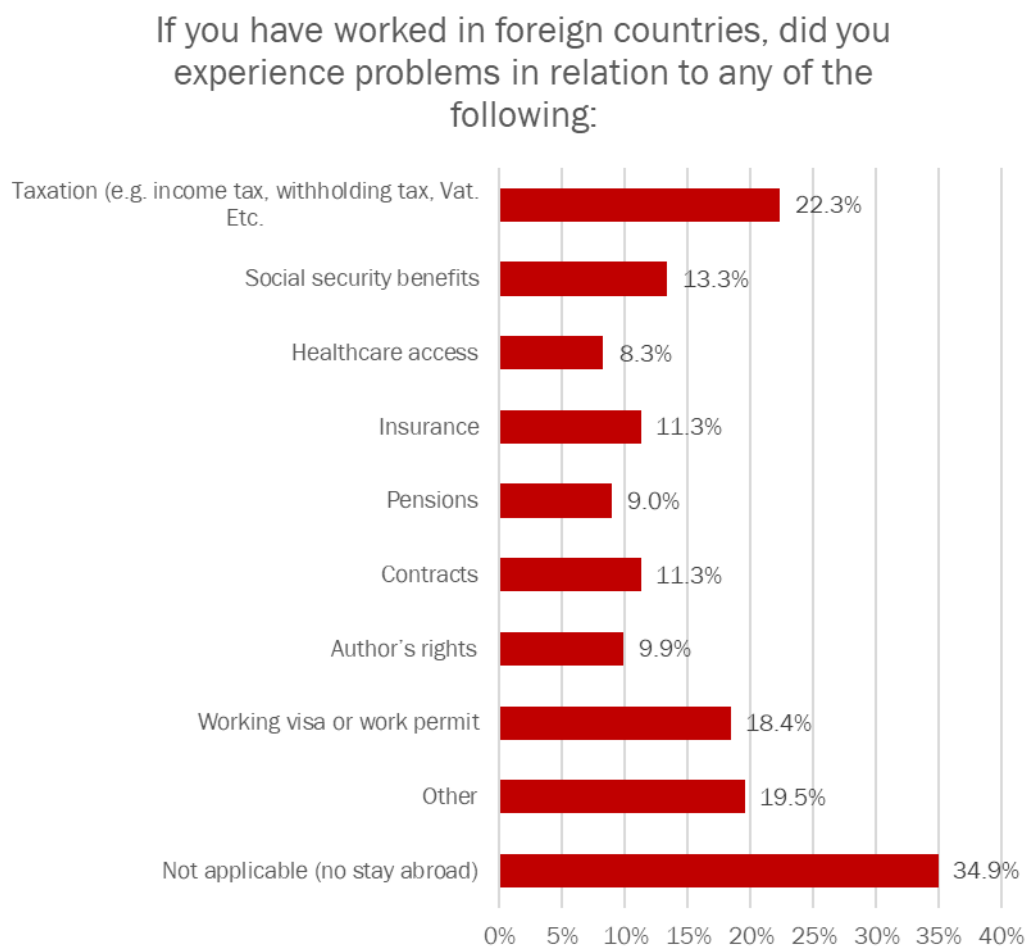
In relation to the last business trips you made on behalf of the producer, were these trips paid?



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 495

Also working abroad is common among cinematographers. Asked about experiencing problems while working in a foreign country, just over one-third of the respondents stated that they have not stayed abroad. Of the possible problems they experienced while working abroad, taxation has been mentioned the most (22.3%), followed by issues related to working visa or work permit (18.4%). 13.3% of the respondents also marked issues related to social security benefits and each 11.3% those related to insurance on the one hand and contracts on the other. Problems with healthcare access, pensions and author's rights are each mentioned by fewer than ten percent of the respondents. However, 19.5% of the participants also stated to experience other problems not mentioned in the survey.

Figure 19 Experience of problems while working abroad



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 453 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

37.7% of the cinematographers surveyed are members of a trade union (also) representing film workers. 65.3% indicated that their interests were represented by a society or association standing for their rights apart from trade unions or agents. However, according to 69.1% of the cinematographers surveyed, the society or association is not able to negotiate working conditions with productions or legal institutions.

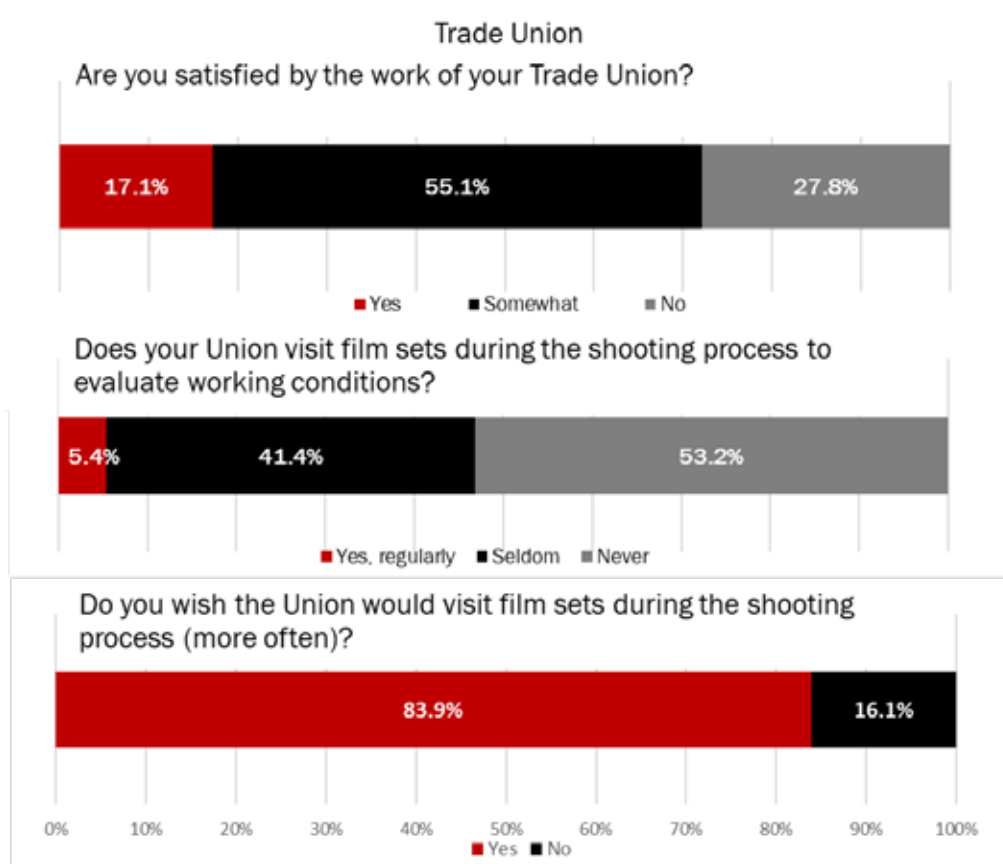
Figure 20 Representation of interest



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. First and second row: n = 496. Third row: n = 324

Of the cinematographers being members of trade unions, 17.1% are satisfied with the work of the trade union, 55.1% are somewhat and 27.8% are not satisfied. 5.4% mentioned that the union regularly visits film sets during the shooting process to evaluate the working conditions, while 41.4% and 53.2%, respectively, of the respondents indicate that the union visits seldomly and never the film sets. However, 83.9% expressed their wish that the union would visit film sets (more often).

Figure 21 Satisfaction with Trade Union work



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. First and second row: n = 187. Third row: n=174

11. Social Security and the Precarity Problem

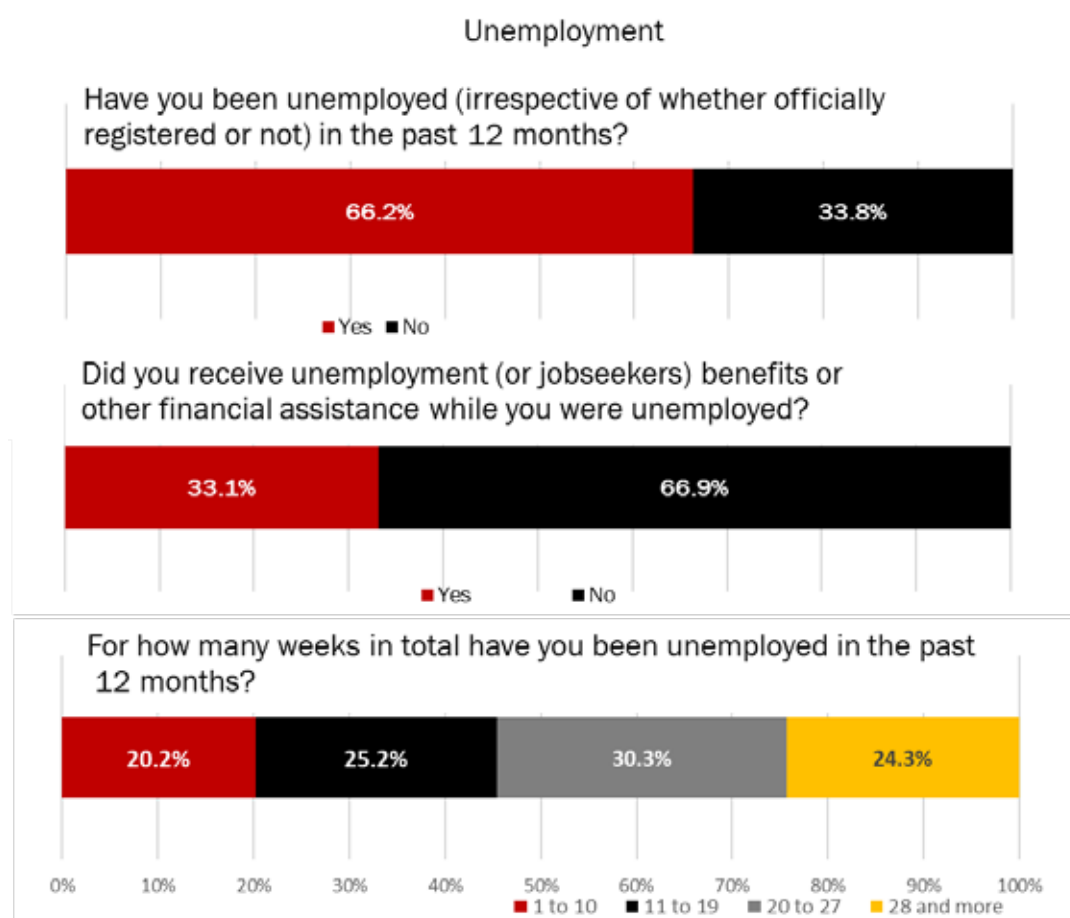
What happens when the job ends — or life intervenes?

The survey reveals significant gaps in social protection for cinematographers across Europe. Irregular employment patterns, limited access to unemployment benefits and fragmented pension entitlements contribute to widespread financial insecurity. Concerns about old-age security are particularly pronounced, with a majority of respondents expressing uncertainty or expecting difficulties. These findings highlight the structural vulnerability of freelance audiovisual professionals within existing welfare systems.

Two-thirds of the cinematographers surveyed have experienced unemployment in the past 12 months. Of these, one-third has received unemployment or jobseekers' benefits or any other financial assistance while being unemployed. 20.2% have been unemployed between one and ten weeks, 25.2% between eleven and nineteen weeks, 30.3% between twenty and twenty-seven weeks and 24.3% twenty-eight or more weeks.

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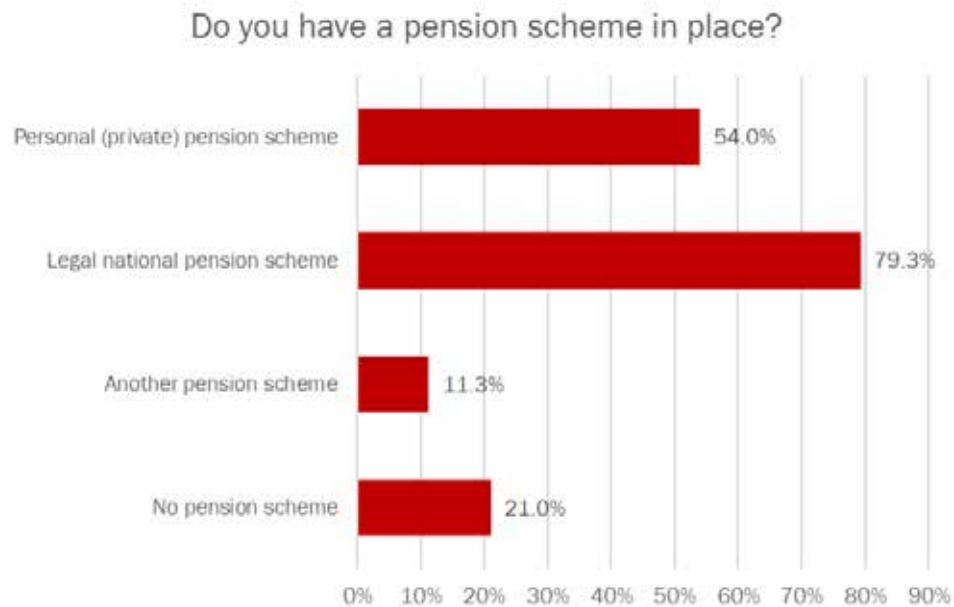
Figure 22 Unemployment, length and benefits



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. First row: n = 494. Second row: n=326. Third row: n = 317

Regarding pension provision, 79.3% of the cinematographers surveyed pay into a statutory public/national pension scheme and more than half of the cinematographers (54%) pay into a private pension scheme, either additionally or exclusively. 21% of the respondents, however, stated that they have no pension scheme, neither private, public or other.

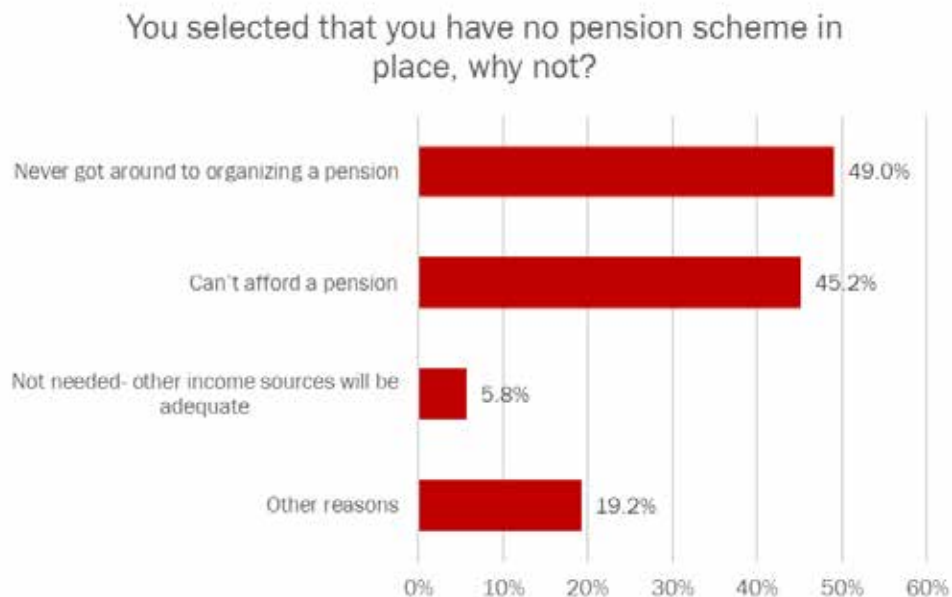
Figure 23 Pension scheme



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 495 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

Nearly half of the respondents without a pension scheme stated as reason that they never got around to organizing it. 45.2% of them stated that they can't afford a pension and 5.8% stated that it is not needed or that other income sources are adequate. Asked explicitly whether they have any other arrangements in place to provide them with financial security in old age (e.g. investment income, etc.), 26% said yes, 59.6% said no and 14.4% didn't know.

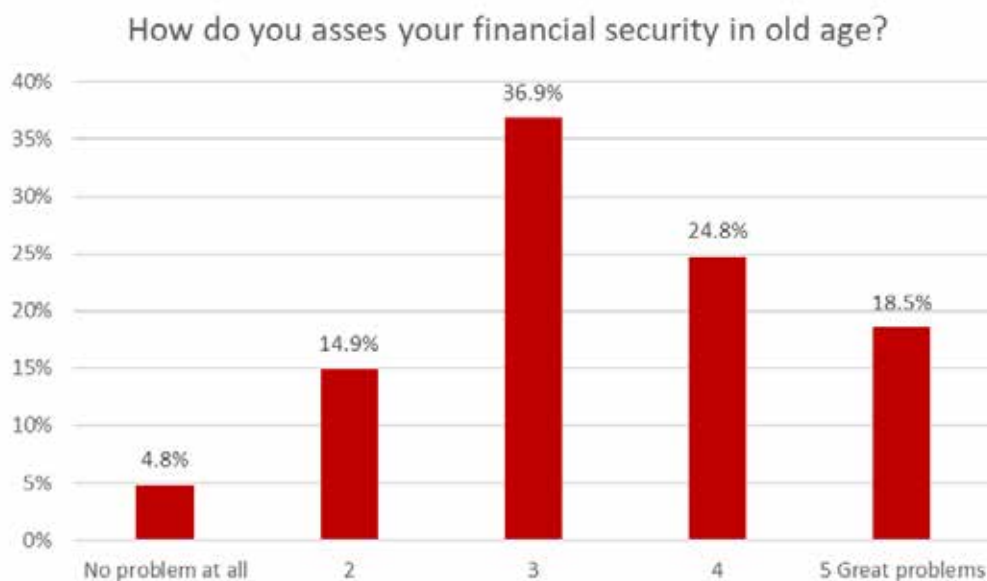
Figure 24 Reason for no pension scheme



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 107 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

For 4.8% of the cinematographers surveyed, financial security in old age is not seen as a problem at all. By contrast, 18.5% of them assess their financial situation in old age as a great problem. 24.8% are somewhat pessimistic about their financial situation in old age and 36.9% of the respondents show a neutral position in this regard.

Figure 25 Financial security in old age



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 469

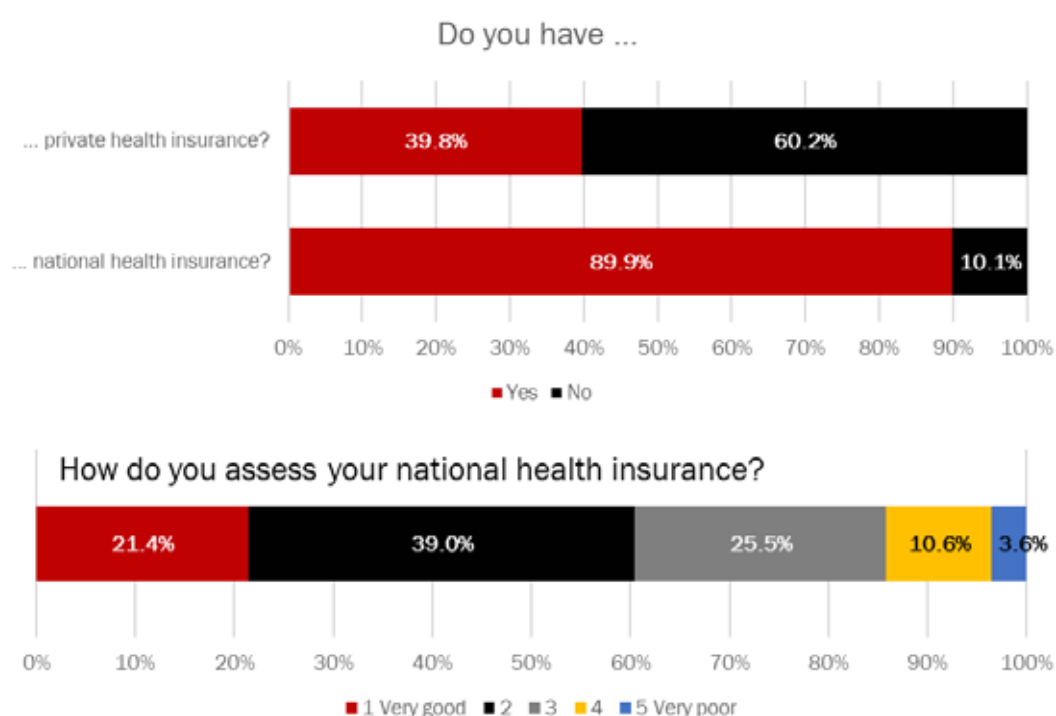
12. Health issue and work pressure

High levels of work-related stress and health strain are evident across the cinematography profession. While most respondents have access to public health insurance, many still report working while clearly unwell — a strong indicator of pressure and lack of support. Burn-out symptoms are widespread, both personally experienced and observed among colleagues. A majority perceive a rise in work pressure over the past five years, with many linking it directly to negative impacts on their personal health and well-being.

89.9% of the respondents are insured through a state or public health insurance fund. Of these, 21.4% assess national health insurance as very good and 39.0% as good. 39.8% of the participants pay into a private health insurance, though for the vast majority in addition to public health insurance. Just 5.1% are solely privately insured and again 5,1% have neither public nor private health insurance.

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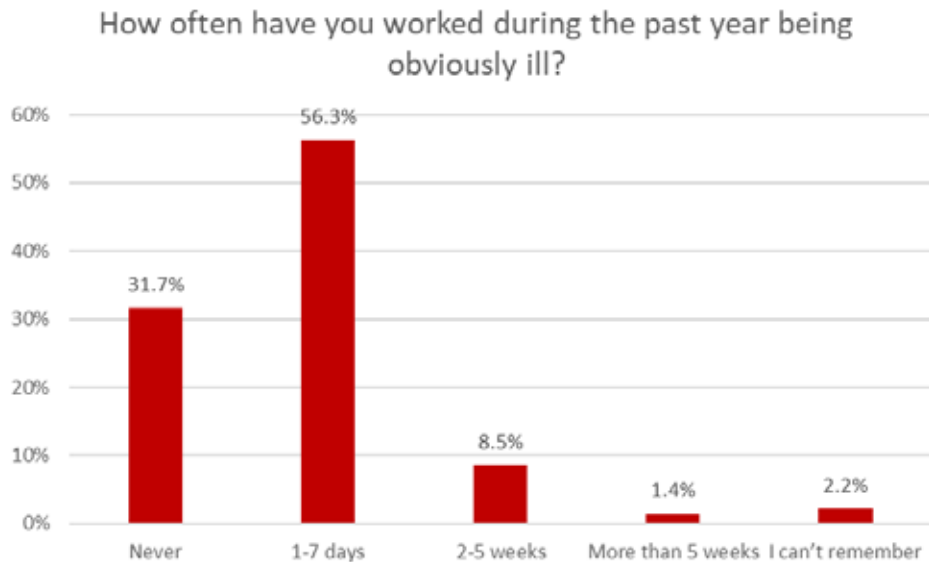
Figure 26 Health insurance



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. First and second row: n = 495. Third row: n = 444

The number of days having to work while being obviously ill is an indicator of high work pressure. Around one-third of the respondents could clearly state that this has not been the case for them during the past year and 2.2% can't remember. 56.3% noted that they worked one to seven days obviously ill, 8.5% two to five weeks and 1.4% more than five weeks.

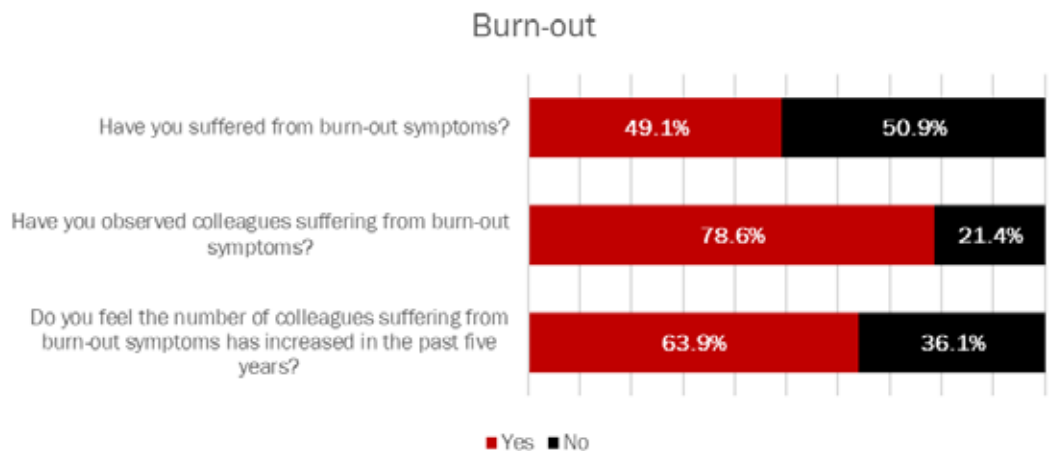
Figure 27 Working while obviously ill



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 469

A possible consequence of high work pressure is burn-out. Nearly half of the cinematographers surveyed stated that they had already suffered from burn-out symptoms. Even more, 78.6%, observed colleagues suffering from burn-out symptoms. And 63.9% feel that the number of colleagues suffering from burn-out symptoms has increased in the past five years.

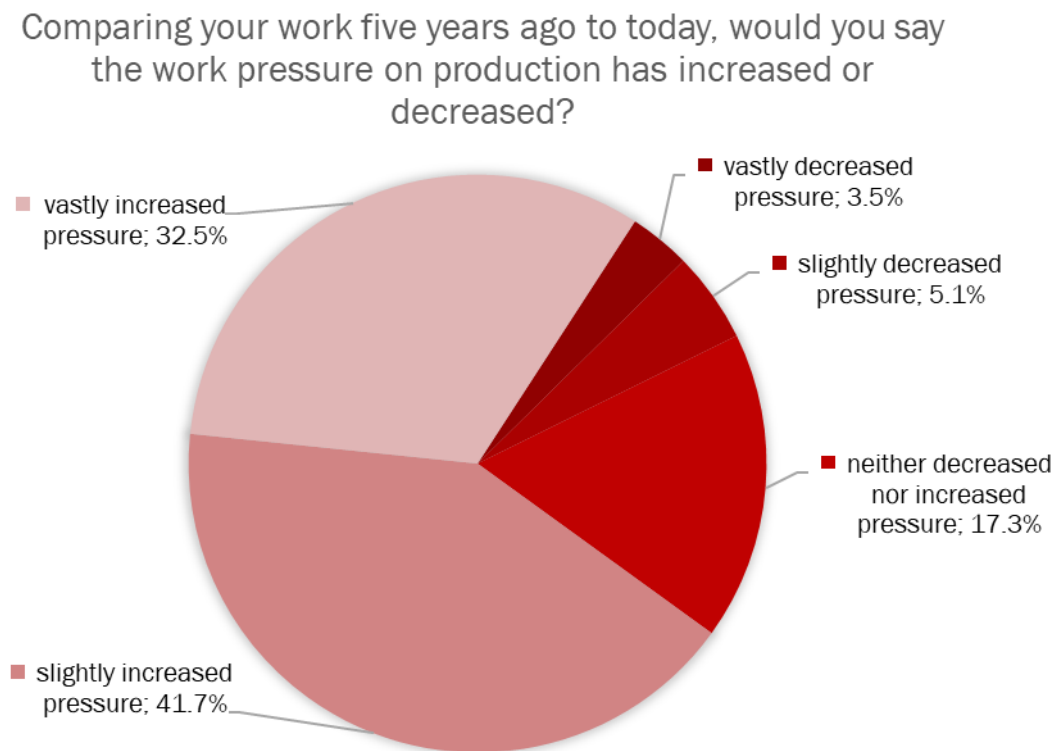
Figure 28 Burn-out



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. First and second row: n = 495. Third row: n = 488

The impression of most of the cinematographers surveyed that the number of colleagues suffering from burn-out has increased is accompanied and buttressed by the assessment that the work pressure in general has increased over the past five years. 32.5% of the cinematographers surveyed stated that the work pressure had vastly increased compared to five years ago and 41.7% indicated that it had slightly increased.

Figure 29 Increase or decrease of work pressure



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 469

17.3% of the respondents observed no change. 70% of them also agreed that the overall working conditions impacted their personal life in an unhealthy way, while 16.5% disagreed and 13.5% did not know.

13. Job Satisfaction, Insecurity and Professional Concerns

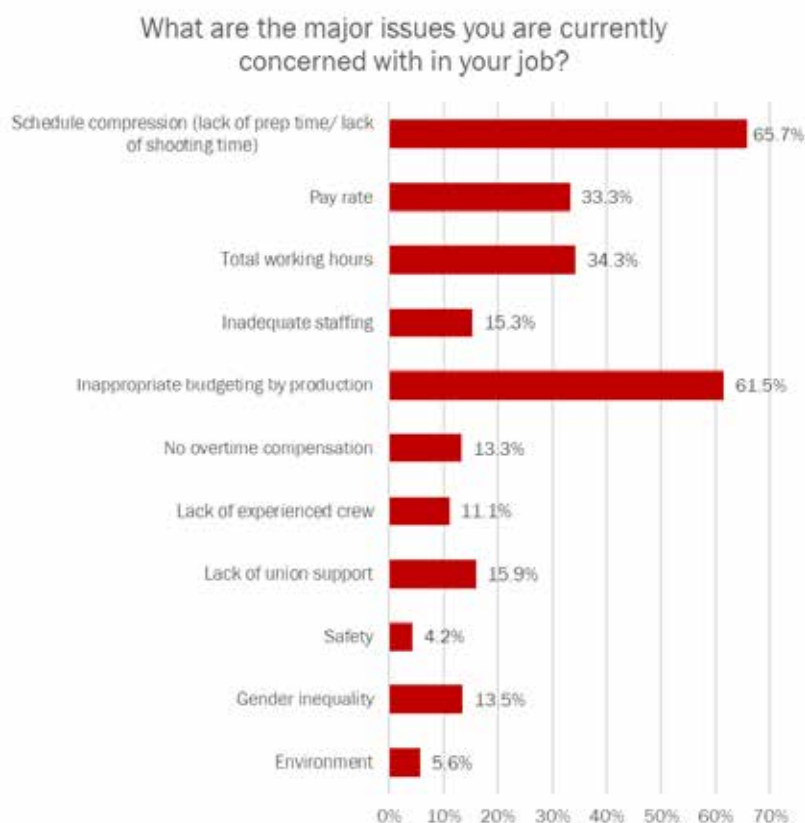
Despite a heavy workload and persistent structural challenges, a majority of cinematographers report being satisfied with the path their careers have taken. Yet beneath this overall sense of fulfillment lies a clear set of concerns — from compressed schedules and unrealistic budgets to pay disparities and gender inequality — that continue to affect the profession deeply.

Despite the high workload, 64.6% of the cinematographers surveyed expressed satisfaction with how their career has progressed so far. Nearly the same amount would choose to work in their profession again, if they were starting over again.

Asked about the major issues they are currently concerned with in their job, two answers stand out: Schedule compression (lack of preparatory time/ lack of shooting time) and inappropriate budgeting by production. Almost two-thirds of the cinematographers surveyed selected these answers. Pay rate and working hours are each mentioned by one-third of the respondents. Gender inequality is seen as a major issue by 13.5% of the respondents, however with a large gender bias. Just 4% of the male survey participants see gender inequality as main issue, but 42.6% of the female participants so do.

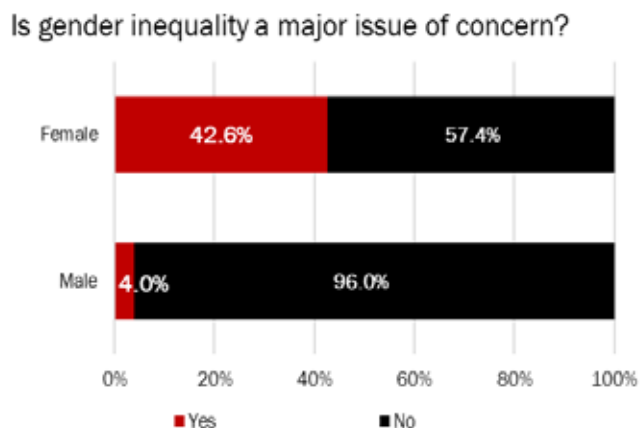
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Figure 30 Major issues of concern



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 496 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

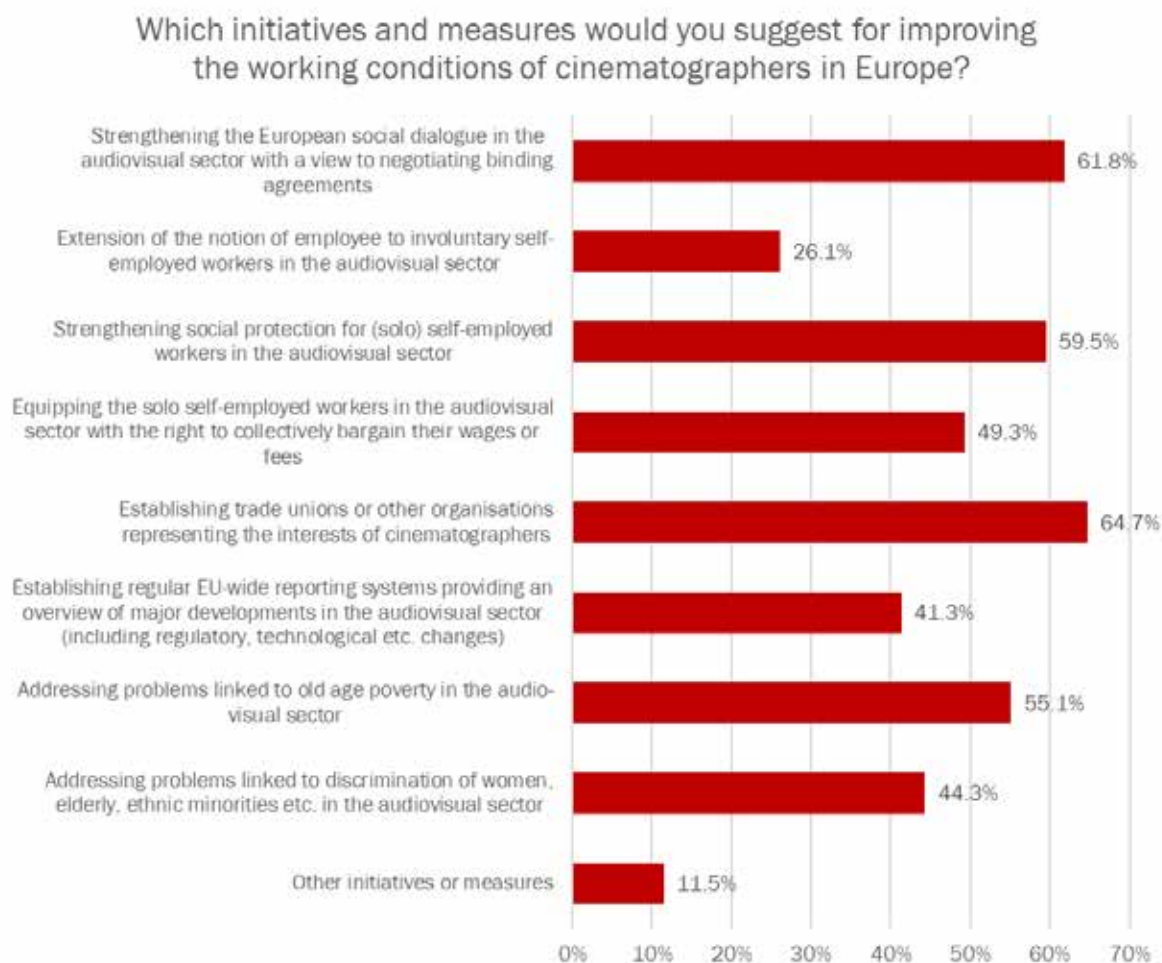
Figure 31 Gender inequality as major issue of concern by gender



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 493. Female: n = 122. Male: n = 371

As measures and initiatives to improve the working conditions of cinematographers in Europe, strengthening bargaining power by establishing trade unions or other organisations representing the interests of cinematographers was suggested by 64.7%. Almost 50% of the cinematographers surveyed also stated that solo self-employed workers in the audiovisual sector should be equipped with the right to collectively bargain their wages or fees. The general wish to strengthen the European social dialogue in the audiovisual sector with a view to negotiating binding agreements was also shared by a majority of 61.8%; and 59.5% suggest strengthening social protection for (solo) self-employed workers in the audiovisual sector. Addressing problems linked to old age poverty in the audio-visual sector was marked by clearly more than half of the cinematographers surveyed; and about 45% also stated that problems linked to the discrimination of women, elderly, ethnic minorities etc. in the audiovisual sector should be addressed. 41.3% also suggest establishing regular EU-wide reporting systems providing an overview of major developments in the audiovisual sector (including regulatory, technological etc. changes).

Figure 32 Initiatives and measures to improve the working conditions of cinematographers in Europe



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 497 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

14. Harassment, Mistreatment and Discrimination

Addressing the darker aspects of workplace culture.

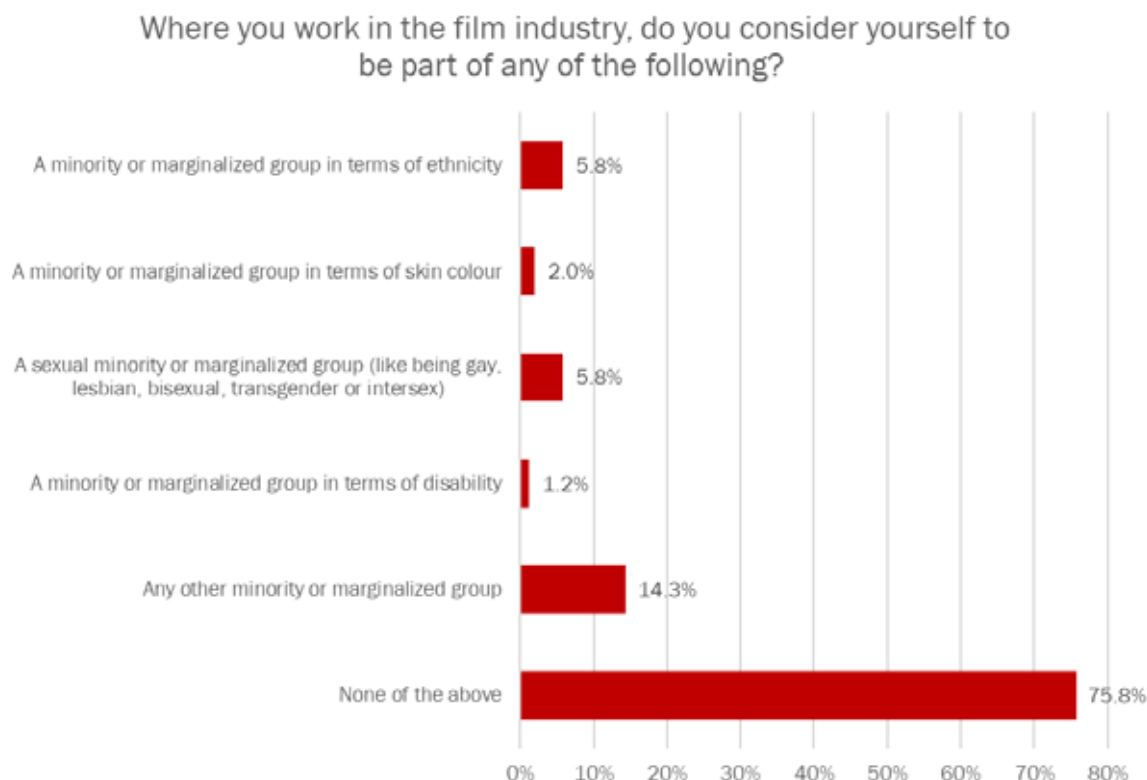
Mistreatment and discrimination continue to affect a significant number of cinematographers across Europe. While most respondents do not identify as belonging to marginalized groups, gender, age and sexual orientation emerge as key factors in experiences of exclusion and harassment. Notably, gender-based discrimination is reported far more frequently by women than men.

Concerns about the potential negative impact of reporting such incidents remain widespread, particularly among those who have experienced discrimination firsthand. Opinions on the effectiveness of current industry measures to combat discrimination vary, with many perceiving limited progress. These findings highlight ongoing challenges in ensuring equitable and respectful working conditions within the audiovisual sector.

39

75.8% of the cinematographers surveyed do not consider themselves as part of a minority or marginalized group at the place where they work in the film industry. 5.8% are of a minority or marginalized group in terms of ethnicity and the same share of a sexual minority or marginalized group (e.g. gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex). 2% stated to be part of a minority or marginalized group in terms of skin colour and 1.2% in terms of disability. 14.3%, however, stated to be part of any other minority or marginalized group. This was followed by an open question for further specification. Two-thirds of the formulated open answers point out that being female in the film industry still makes them part of a minoritized and marginalized group; a female respondent formulated: “woman in very much a man’s world” – an observation this survey strongly supports. The other answers include old age, religion, education, having an extreme conservative or right-wing ideology; however, such answers are given only scarcely.

Figure 33 Respondents part of a minority or marginalized group

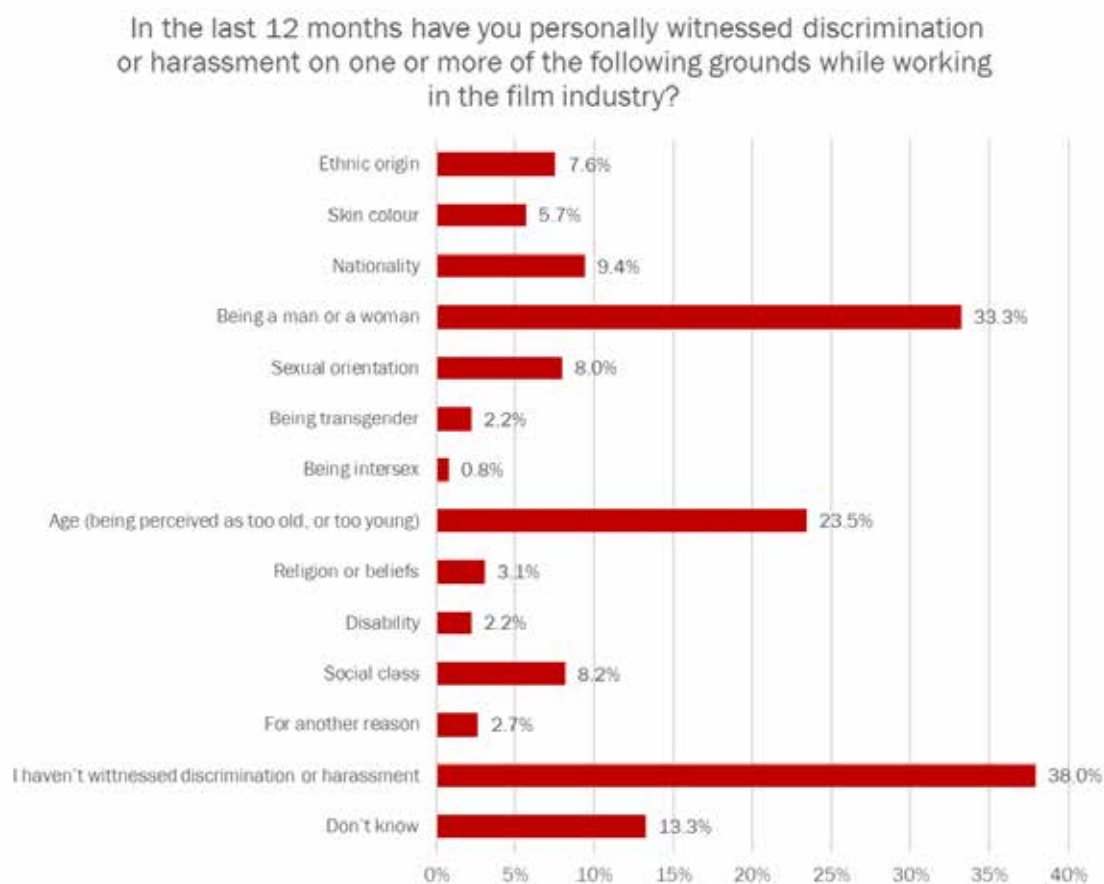


Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 496 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

Slightly less than half of the cinematographers surveyed have not personally felt discriminated against or experienced harassment in the last 12 months and 7.6% could not say if this has been the case. 28.3% have experienced discrimination or harassment because of being a man or a woman. However, there is a strong difference in this regard whether the respondents identified as male or female. 69.4% of the female cinematographers surveyed have felt discriminated against or experienced harassment on the grounds of their gender. On the other hand, just 14.4% of the respondents identified as male have felt discriminated against or harassed because of their gender.

Age was mentioned by 25.4% as a reason for feeling discriminated against or harassed while working in the film industry, with a significant difference by age of the respondents. Younger and older respondents mentioned age as a reason for discrimination more often than cinematographers in the middle age segment. 37% of the cinematographers up to 34 years of age and 36.7% of them with more than 55 years marked age as reason for discrimination experienced. In contrast, 14.6% of cinematographers aged between 35 and 44 years and 21.6% of them aged between 45 and 54 years stated to feel discriminated against on the grounds of their age.

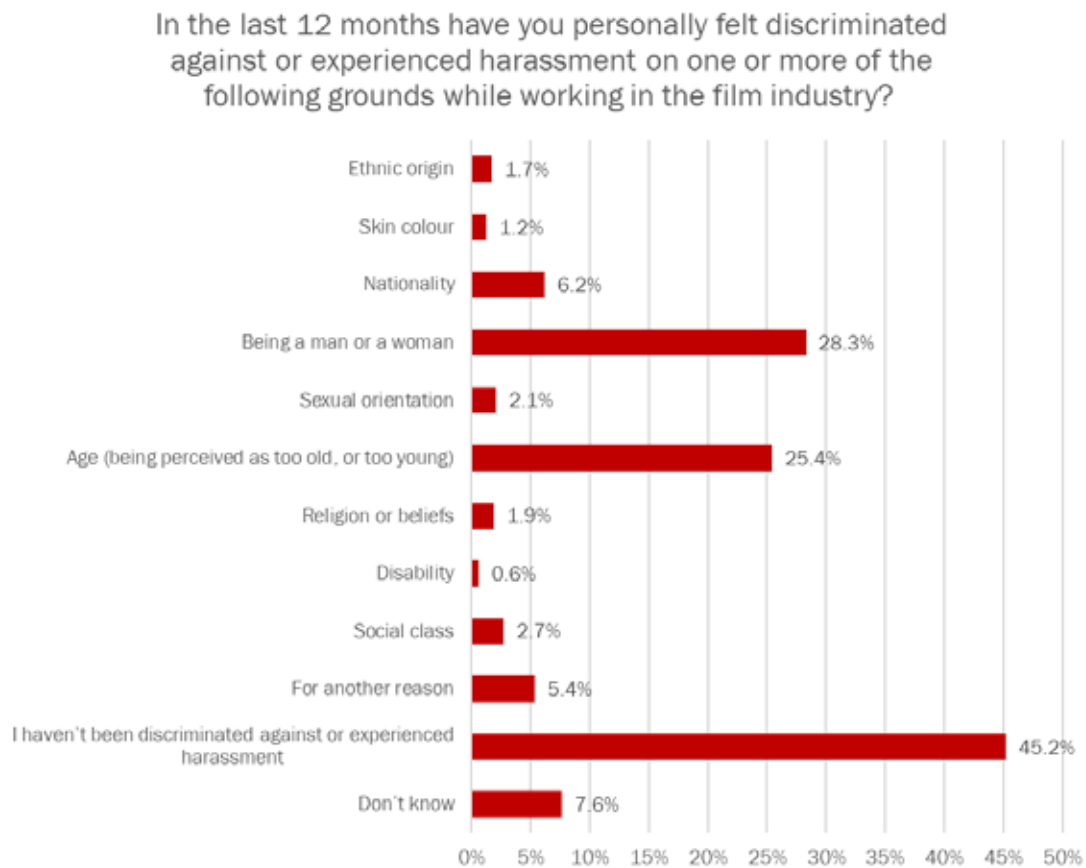
Figure 34 Experienced discrimination or harassment



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 484 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

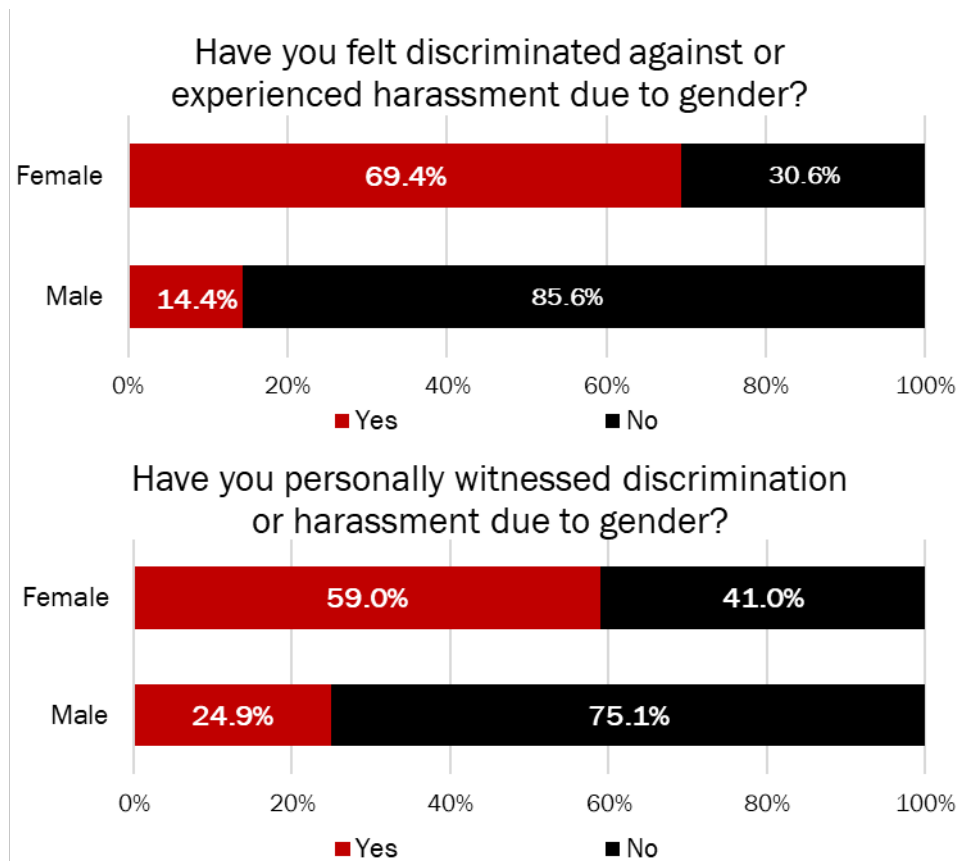
Asked whether the cinematographers surveyed have witnessed discrimination or harassment while working in the film industry in the last 12 months, 38% denied and 13.3% did not know. 33.3% witnessed discrimination or harassment on the grounds of gender. In this regard, again more female cinematographers (59%) witnessed gender discrimination compared to their male counterparts (24.9%). 23.5% witnessed age discrimination.

Figure 35 Discrimination and harassment witnessed



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n = 490 – Multiple response set – Displayed: Percentage of cases

Figure 36 Sexism experienced or witnessed by gender



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. Experienced discrimination: n = 482. Witnessed discrimination: n = 487

18.5% are worried and 27.4% are rather worried that reporting instances of workplace harassment and/or discrimination has a negative impact on their career. There is, however, a significant difference according to gender. 31.1% of female respondents are worried and 36.9% are rather worried reporting discrimination and harassment. By contrast, 14.4% of the male cinematographers are worried and 23.4% of them are rather worried to report discrimination. This bias is even more pronounced when differentiating between respondents who have and those who have not experienced discrimination. Each 32.6% of the cinematographers who experienced discrimination and/or harassment are worried and rather worried to report it. On the other hand, 6.7% of respondents who have not experienced discrimination or harassment are worried and 21.7% of those are rather worried to report discrimination and harassment.

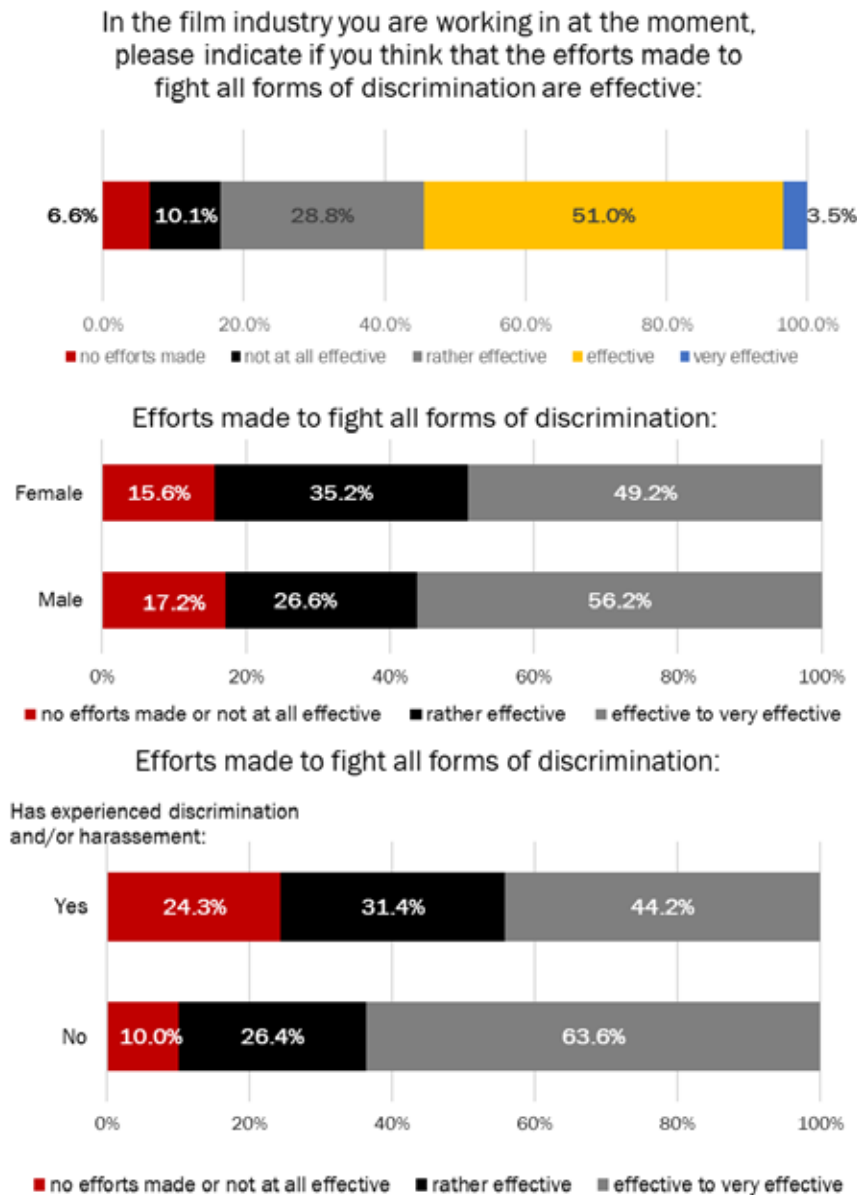
Figure 37 Concerns about reporting discrimination and/or harassment by gender and experience of discrimination and harassment



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. By gender: n = 490. Experienced discrimination: n = 481

Asked about the efforts made to fight all forms of discrimination, 6.6% stated that no efforts were made. 10.1% see that efforts are made but that they were not very effective and 28.8% deem them rather effective. Around half of the cinematographers surveyed are of the opinion that the efforts made are effective and 3.5% see them as very effective. To address whether this assessment differs by gender and experienced discrimination the answers with fewer responses had to be summarised. Though fewer female cinematographers see the measures as effective to very effective than male respondents, the difference in assessing the effectiveness of the measures to fight discrimination by gender is not large enough to be statistically significant. However, cinematographers who experienced discrimination rate the effectiveness significantly lower than respondents who do not feel discriminated against. 24.3% of respondents who experienced discrimination saw no measures in place to fight discrimination or stated that they show no effect at all. This is only the case for 10% of the respondents who have not experienced discrimination. On the other hand, 44.2% of cinematographers with experience in discrimination see the measures as effective or very effective in contrast to 63.6% of respondents without experience in discrimination or harassment.

Figure 38 Efforts made within the film industry to fight all forms of discrimination by gender and experience of discrimination and harassment

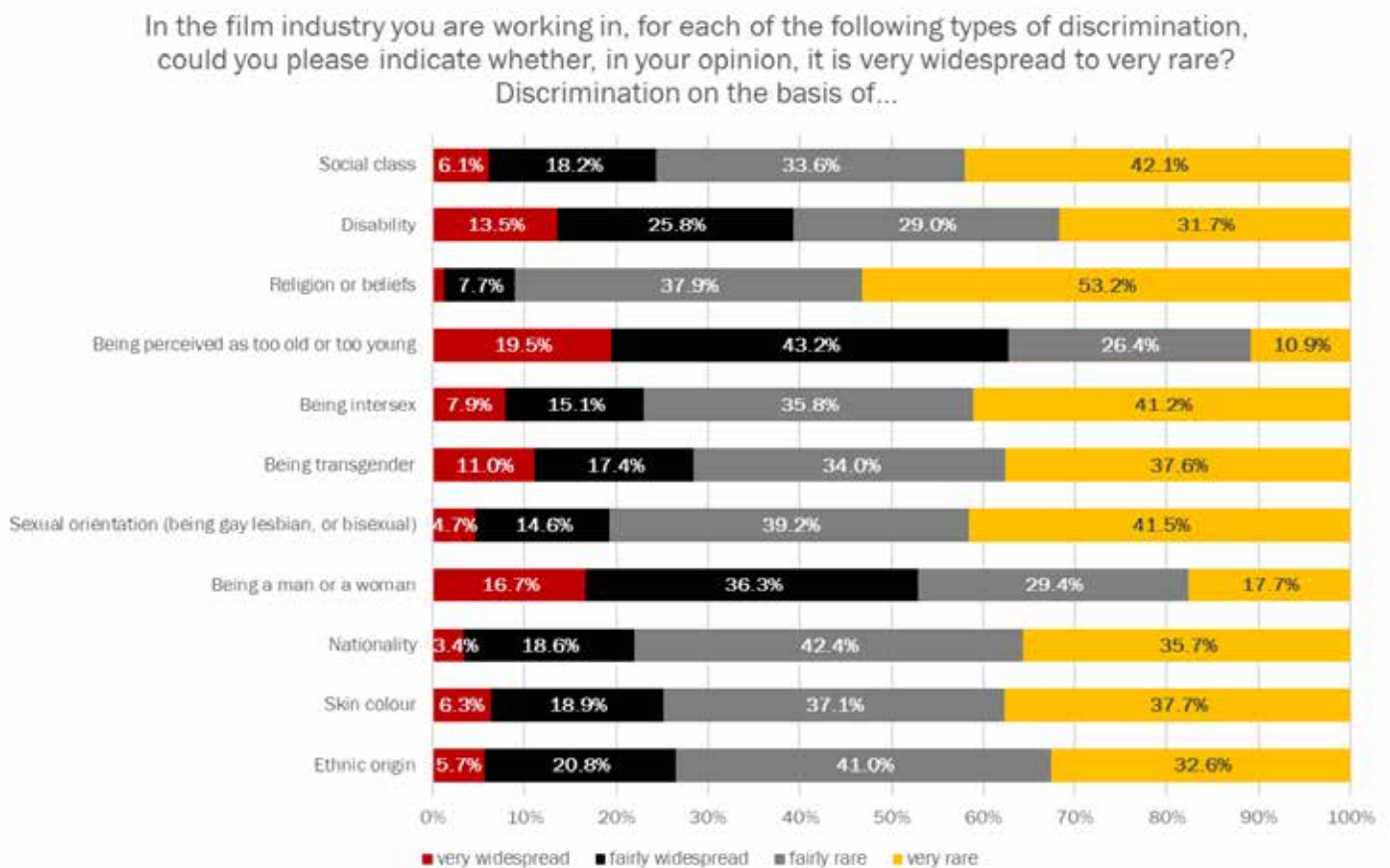


Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025. By gender: n = 483. Experienced discrimination: n = 476

In line with the outcomes so far, discrimination on the basis of age and gender are considered most widespread by the cinematographers surveyed. 19.5% stated that discrimination due to being perceived as too old or young is very widespread in the film industry they are currently working in. 43.2% see age discrimination as fairly widespread. Discrimination on the basis of being a man or woman is seen by 16.7% of the respondents as very and by 36.3% of them as fairly widespread within the film industry, though also with a significant gender bias. 38.1% of the female cinematographers see discrimination based on being a man or woman as very and 49.2% of them as fairly widespread. In contrast, just 9.7% and 32.0% of the male respondents, respectively, stated that

gender discrimination is very and fairly widespread. Ableism, that is discrimination aimed at people perceived as disabled, is mentioned by 13.5% of the respondents as very and by 25.8% of them as fairly widespread. Racist discrimination, either based on skin colour, ethnic origin or nationality is seen as widespread within the film industry by around 25% (very and fairly added up). Moreover, around 25% of the cinematographers surveyed perceive intersex and transgender discrimination as widespread. Discrimination based on sexual orientation is seen by 19.3% as widespread, whereas discrimination based on religion or belief is only scarcely seen as widespread.

Figure 39 Assessment of the spread of discrimination in the film industry



Source: FORBA/IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2024/2025, n ≈ 478

Looking forward

15. Conclusion – What Needs to Change

Key takeaways and policy implications for a fairer, more sustainable profession.

The IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2025 paints a clear picture of the challenges faced by cinematographers across Europe. Despite being highly skilled and dedicated professionals, they navigate an unstable and often exploitative work environment marked by long hours, inadequate pay, limited social protections and widespread insecurity.

Key issues include a high prevalence of precarious employment, with many working without formal contracts or under self-employed status often imposed rather than chosen. This precariousness, coupled with compressed schedules and insufficient compensation—particularly for overtime and preparatory work—contributes to excessive work pressure and financial vulnerability. Discrimination based on gender and age remains widespread and concerns about reporting such incidents persist. Union membership is low and many workers feel underrepresented by existing organizations.

While the survey did not include specific questions about artificial intelligence or related technologies, several respondents raised concerns about their growing influence on the profession. Tools such as AI-assisted editing, virtual production environments and automated visual processing are beginning to reshape workflows and job roles. These developments may reduce crew sizes, shift creative responsibilities, or intensify existing pressures, particularly if introduced without safeguards or professional input. Proactive monitoring and inclusive dialogue between cinematographers, employees and unions will be essential to ensure that technological changes support—rather than undermine—fair and sustainable working conditions.

These findings underscore the urgent need for strengthened collective representation, inclusive of self-employed and economically dependent workers, alongside legislative and sector-specific measures to safeguard fair working conditions and social protections in the audiovisual industry.

The IMAGO Working Conditions Survey 2025 reveals that cinematographers across Europe face difficult working and living conditions. Whilst they are highly qualified professionals, with more than three-fourths having completed tertiary education and often intrinsically tied with their profession, they work in an unstable, insecure and exploitative environment. Working conditions in the audiovi-

sual industry are regularly characterised by long working hours, unpaid labour, discriminatory practices and limited representation. The results expose working conditions that conflict with the values and protections enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU Working Time Directive, the European Commission's 2022 Guidelines on Collective Bargaining for the Self-Employed and other European regulations.

In terms of contract of employment or contract for work, about 45% of the cinematographers surveyed have a contract never or rarely signed before beginning their projects/work. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and legal uncertainty. Moreover, four-fifths of the respondents indicate that their wages or rates are set by own individual negotiations or unilaterally laid down by the employer/producer. Only one-fifth of the cinematographers are covered by collective wage agreements.

This is interrelated with the fact that clearly more than half of the respondents are self-employed, whether incorporated as a company or not, often without any leverage to negotiate fair fees and working conditions. Only slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents exclusively work as employees. For almost half of all cinematographers surveyed, their employment status is not self-chosen but determined by the employer, the principal or someone else. This suggests that the status of many self-employed audiovisual workers was not adopted voluntarily.

Corresponding to the high degree of heteronomy in the sector, a vast majority of cinematographers are compelled to regularly or frequently work more than 48 hours per week, often as a result of compressed production schedules and cost-cutting. Moreover and in line with this, more than half of the respondents frequently work more than 12 hours a day. Despite excessively long working hours, only slightly more than one-third of the respondents receive overtime compensation – often a result of the fact that the status of self-employment excludes them from adequate labour law provisions.

Apart from that, a substantial proportion of respondents report not or only partially being paid for preparatory or follow-up work. More than 80% and almost two-thirds of the cinematographers surveyed, respectively, indicate not being paid for at least one day during pre-production and during post-production.

With regard to business travels, only half of the respondents receive full travel reimbursement, thus many of them often lose money on the job.

Two-thirds of the respondents have experienced unemployment in the past 12 months, irrespective of whether officially registered or not. Of this group, only one-third have received unemployment or jobseekers' benefits or any other form of financial assistance while being unemployed. This points to the mismatch between established unemployment insurance schemes on the one hand and the working life reality and social needs of so many, in particular of the self-employed, on the other hand.

More than one-fourth of the cinematographers surveyed have experienced gender-based discrimination – among women, this share amounts to almost 70%. One-fourth of the respondents have faced age discrimination. Nearly half of the cinematographers surveyed fear reporting such incidents due to career repercussions.

Around two-thirds of the respondents report of having to work while being obviously ill, which is

an unambiguous indication of high work pressure. Half of the cinematographers surveyed report experiencing burnout, often a consequence of high work pressure.

Despite difficult working conditions, almost two-thirds of the respondents lack union membership. More than one-fourth of union members are not satisfied with the unions' representation and many of them perceive trade unions as ineffective and absent on set.

Against this background, trade unions across Europe are required to include self-employed people in their membership domain, given that these workers are dependent on one main or only few clients and that their working conditions resemble those of standard employees. Moreover, trade unions need to develop sector-specific strategies for establishing collective bargaining or at least minimum pay rates (including tariffs, fees and other forms of pay) for specific jobs and professions within sectors with a high proportion of vulnerable and concealed self-employed persons – as is the case with many cinematographers in the audiovisual sector.

On the other hand, the EU Member States need to establish extensive representation and collective bargaining rights also for the (solo) self-employed and the economically dependent self-employed persons, as stipulated in the European Commission's 2022 Guidelines on Collective Bargaining for the Self-Employed. This would enable the trade unions to pursue a credible and effective policy of interest representation on behalf of those self-employed who need a strong collective voice for accomplishing their goals.

Key Recommendations

1. Expand Collective Representation

- Trade unions and professional organizations should actively include self-employed and economically dependent cinematographers within their membership.
- Develop sector-specific collective bargaining agreements that establish minimum pay rates, working conditions and protections for all workers, regardless of employment status.

2. Strengthen Legal Protections for Self-Employed Workers

- EU Member States must implement and enforce legal frameworks recognizing the rights of solo self-employed and economically dependent workers to collective bargaining and social protection, consistent with the European Commission's 2022 Guidelines.
- Clarify and standardize employment status criteria to prevent misclassification and ensure fair access to labor rights and benefits.

3. Ensure Fair Contracts and Transparent Negotiations

- Promote the use of clear, written contracts prior to the commencement of work, guaranteeing agreed pay, working hours and conditions.
- Encourage transparent and fair fee-setting practices, reducing unilateral employer impositions.

4. Address Excessive Working Hours and Compensation

- Enforce compliance with the EU Working Time Directive, ensuring cinematographers do not routinely exceed safe working hour limits.
- Guarantee overtime compensation and remuneration for preparatory, follow-up and travel time.

5. Combat Discrimination and Promote Inclusion

- Implement targeted initiatives to address gender, age and other forms of discrimination within the audiovisual sector.
- Develop clear, accessible reporting mechanisms with protections against retaliation, fostering a safe working environment.

6. Enhance Social Protection and Support Systems

- Adapt social security and unemployment insurance schemes to better fit the realities of freelance, self-employed and economically dependent audiovisual workers.
- Provide accessible healthcare, mental health support and resources to prevent burnout and work-related illnesses.

7. Promote Regular Monitoring and Transparency

- Establish EU-wide reporting systems to track working conditions, wage developments, discrimination and other sector trends.
- Use data-driven approaches to inform policy decisions and industry practices.
- Monitor the professional impact of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and automation, as raised by survey respondents, to ensure that their adoption does not compromise job quality, safety, or creative autonomy.

16. Annex

Table 1 Survey participants by country

	Frequen- cy	Percent
Austria	37	7.5%
Belgium	9	1.8%
Bulgaria	1	0.2%
Croatia	3	0.6%
Czechia	9	1.8%
Denmark	11	2.2%
Estonia	2	0.4%
Finland	6	1.2%
France	50	10.1%
Germany	94	19.0%
Greece	19	3.8%
Hungary	5	1.0%
Iceland	11	2.2%
Ireland	20	4.0%
Italy	20	4.0%
Latvia	1	0.2%
Netherlands	3	0.6%
Norway	28	5.6%
Poland	19	3.8%
Portugal	4	0.8%
Romania	3	0.6%
Slovakia	1	0.2%
Slovenia	5	1.0%
Spain	42	8.5%
Sweden	26	5.2%
Switzerland	7	1.4%
United Kingdom	60	12.1%
Total	496	100,0%
Other Country	108	17.9%
Total	604	100.0%

17. Table of figures

Figure 1 Map: Share of survey participants (EU27, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland)	15
Figure 2 Age and Gender of respondents	16
Figure 3 Primary/main caregiver by gender	17
Figure 4 Main family income by gender	17
Figure 5 Specific training undertaken.....	18
Figure 6 Function in the camera team.....	19
Figure 7 Years worked as cinematographer.....	19
Figure 8 Category of cinematography.....	20
Figure 9 Contract signed before starting to work	21
Figure 10 Employment status.....	22
Figure 11 Periods without paid work as cinematographer.....	23
Figure 12 Reasons for undertaking additional work.....	23
Figure 13 All-inclusive deals.....	25
Figure 14 Paid working days in comparison to pre-pandemic	26
Figure 15 Weekly and daily working hours.....	27
Figure 16 Overtime compensation	27
Figure 17 Unpaid work during pre- and post- and during production	28
Figure 18 Travel expenses.....	29
Figure 19 Experience of problems while working abroad	30
Figure 20 Representation of interest	31
Figure 21 Satisfaction with Trade Union work.....	32
Figure 22 Unemployment, length and benefits	33
Figure 23 Pension scheme	34
Figure 24 Reason for no pension scheme.....	35
Figure 25 Financial security in old age	35
Figure 26 Health insurance.....	36
Figure 27 Working while obviously ill.....	37
Figure 28 Burn-out	37
Figure 29 Increase or decrease of work pressure	38
Figure 30 Major issues of concern	39
Figure 31 Gender inequality as major issue of concern by gender.....	40
Figure 32 Initiatives and measures to improve the working conditions of cinematographers in Europe.....	41

Figure 33 Respondents part of a minority or marginalized group	42
Figure 34 Experienced discrimination or harassment	43
Figure 35 Discrimination and harassment witnessed.....	44
Figure 36 Sexism experienced or witnessed by gender	45
Figure 37 Concerns about reporting discrimination and/or harassment by gender and experience of discrimination and harassment	46
Figure 38 Efforts made within the film industry to fight all forms of discrimination by gender and experience of dis- crimination and harassment	47
Figure 39 Assessment of the spread of discrimination in the film industry.....	49

18. Table index

Table 1 Survey participants by country52