



ELIA Resists Threats to Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity across Higher Arts Education

ELIA Position Paper, 23 July 2025

ELIA is alarmed by the mounting backlash and extensive restriction of Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) initiatives in education. This is severely affecting the higher arts education community and has global ripple effects on the cultural and creative sectors and industries.

Across many regions and countries, vital EDI efforts (as defined in the [ELIA Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity \(EDI\) Policy](#)) are being defunded, discredited, obstructed, silenced, co-opted, and in some cases, criminalised. Anti-EDI rhetoric, often driven by populist agendas, seeks to polarise society and dismantle long-standing work aimed at addressing systemic inequalities. These are not abstract shifts – they threaten marginalised communities, academic freedom and the very conditions for inclusive artistic practice.

Shocking developments are coming from the United States, where under the current administration's orders the Department of Education has been actively eliminating EDI initiatives. However, the backlash we are witnessing goes far beyond the United States. While much of Europe takes a stand against this shift, it is not immune. For instance, laws passed by the Hungarian government are severely undermining EDI efforts – gender studies programmes were banned in Hungary already in 2018. And, we are witnessing a general climate of scrutiny, combined with financial challenges, which is putting pressure on EDI initiatives and higher education institutions in countries such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

In today's challenging political landscape, ELIA unequivocally expresses its support for students, faculty and leadership who raise their voices, organise and push for meaningful change. ELIA rejects divisive and dehumanising rhetoric that aims to divide, diminish, or silence these efforts. Instead, we are committed to amplifying them, nurturing dialogue across diverse perspectives, and building alliances with those resisting regressive populist agendas. ELIA stands with all who are working—each in their own way, within their own context—towards more inclusive, equitable, and just futures.

For ELIA, dismantling power structures to give rise to Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity is never an add-on—it is foundational to a just and forward-looking higher arts education sector. The consequences of failing to embrace these principles are evident: homogeneous student populations, risk-averse hiring practices, a lack of diverse

leadership, and the persistence of glass ceilings across institutions.

ELIA rejects racism and all forms of systemic discrimination. This includes exclusion based on racial or ethnic background, gender and gender roles, sexual orientation, religion or belief, class, age, or variations of physical and neurological factors – and the list continues.

We recognise that these forms of inequality shape our societies, our institutions, and the way arts education and research is taught and practiced. We firmly oppose all forms of structural injustice and reaffirm our dedication to building inclusive and equitable environments within the arts and higher education.

ELIA is committed to uplifting and amplifying the work of artists from a diverse range of backgrounds and perspectives. As a community, we celebrate and actively seek connections that embrace a multitude of cultures, generations, and practices. We stand for open dialogue, critical reflection, and solidarity. We recognise inclusive representation and freedom of artistic expression as essential to strengthening the social fabric, challenging narrow narratives, and opening space for new ways of seeing and being together.

ELIA envisions a field grounded in empathy, respect, complexity, and care and refuses to accept the status quo that sustains exclusion and marginalisation. ELIA calls on the higher arts education sector—and the broader cultural and political spheres—to stand with those confronting systemic inequality and resisting regressive, anti-EDI agendas.

To explore further, read our [Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity \(EDI\) Policy](#) and discover more about the [EDI Working Group](#). If you would like to get involved, please reach out to ELIA Community Manager, Amalia Smyrnioti at amalia.smyrnioti@elia-arstschools.org.

