

A background image showing several stylized human figures in white, holding hands in a circle. The figures are set against a light blue background. In the top right corner, there are several overlapping circles in yellow, blue, and purple. In the top left corner, there is a pattern of small blue dots.

# SAFE SPACE AT AEC EVENTS

Briefing of AEC Artemis Task Force 3:  
Gender Equality and Non-discrimination Mainstreaming

**2022 - 2024**



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# Introduction

The AEC Gender Equality and Non-discrimination Mainstreaming Task Force is responsible for promoting gender equality and non-discrimination mainstreaming within AEC – Empowering Artists as Makers in Society (ARTEMIS) itself, a project co-funded by the European Union, and at the AEC at large, along with shaping and implementing fair, inclusive, diverse and gender-equal frameworks in Higher Music Education (HME) institutions and by empowering them to deal with power relations issues, liaising with PRIhME.

AEC Gender Equality and Non-discrimination Mainstreaming Task Force was composed of:



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# Safe&Brave Space sessions

Since 2023, the Task Force has been facilitating Safe Space sessions (also called Safe&Brave sessions) at the AEC events for in-presence participants. These confidential sessions, shaped as discussion groups, served to encourage participants to give feedback about the events, with particular attention to diversity, inclusion, gender equality and combating discrimination. They were also invited to share their own experiences at their home institutions. The term **safe space** generally means an accessible place or environment in which a person or group of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment or any other risk of emotional (or physical) harm, and is ultimately intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism or potentially threatening actions

The feedback gathered is reviewed by the AEC in order to implement different measures that will ensure a proactive approach for the association to act as an agent of change in these matters.

Moreover, the members who could not join the Safe&Brave Space sessions but would like to share their experience related to diversity, inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination matters were invited to reach out by writing an email to [moderator@aec-music.eu](mailto:moderator@aec-music.eu) for an appointment with the Safe&Brave Space facilitator(s) within the framework of the events.

## + Quiet Rooms

In addition to the Safe&Brave Space sessions, the Task Force has initiated designated spaces at AEC events called Quiet Rooms. These rooms are intended to provide event participants with an opportunity to find calm, concentrate, and take a break from the busy meeting agendas. The Quiet Rooms were organised at all AEC events in 2024.

## + Code of conduct for AEC events

The Task Force has developed a Code of Conduct for AEC events aimed at ensuring that the AEC events offer a safe, welcoming, accessible and inclusive space for learning and sharing, guided by the values of diversity, inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination fostered by the association. All participants registering to attend AEC events are now requested to acknowledge that they have read and agree to adhere to the Code of Conduct and that they commit to comply with all premises as specified in the document.

## + DEIA Guidelines for AEC Events

The Task Force developed a comprehensive set of guidelines to enhance inclusivity, accessibility, and diversity at AEC events, ensuring that they reflect the diversity of the professional field and respect all participants. It sets high standards for venue accessibility, diverse representation among speakers, and participant support, prioritising safe and inclusive spaces for attendees of all backgrounds and capabilities. The guidelines stress responsible behaviour, accessibility in communication, and equal access through accommodations like translation services, dietary considerations, and gender-neutral spaces. By implementing these standards, the AEC team and the hosting AEC members will continue cultivating events that are welcoming and equitable, promoting a supportive and inclusive environment.

## + What else we have worked on:

- Working together with the [Diversity, Inclusion and Gender Equality \(DIGE\)](#) Working Group in developing a resource package and delivering in-presence workshops
- Monitoring the AEC events and activities from the perspective of inclusivity and social safety
- Collecting stories from the field
- Promoting PRIhME recommendations

# Topics Raised at the Safe&Brave Sessions

The topics that have come up in the Safe&Brave Space sessions are highly varied. The input inter alia depended on the place, the people who attended the sessions and their need to speak up. Nevertheless, a pattern emerges in the topics covered in this briefing, illustrated with concise examples **while respecting the confidentiality** of speakers. In almost all these subjects, **Power Relations** have an important role. Conscious or unconsciously the personal standard is often used as the standard for the other without giving the other the rightful recognition.

## ▶ Gender Balance

Over the past decade, the AEC has made strides in increasing female representation at events and within working groups. However, many women continue to face biases rooted in outdated gender expectations. Remarks like, "You're a jazz singer and a staff member? How is that possible for a woman?" exemplify the persistent stereotypes and challenges women encounter in professional settings.

## ▶ Gender Identity

In the discussion about gender identity, there are often sounds of resistance against gender-neutral bathrooms, or the possibility of name tags with the preferred pronouns. Some individuals who show resistance against this can experience gender neutrality as a threat to their own identity.

## ▶ Racism

Especially students with an (assumed) Asian background are often described as 'submissive' or 'problematic in communication'. The painful and racist generalisation of these students seems to be accepted as normal in many institutions.

## ▶ Life Philosophy

Institutions have to deal in different ways with religious convictions. There are examples of students who refuse to follow a certain study programme because the content is against their beliefs. In some cases, HMEIs allow religious requirements or privileges that students could have.

## Neurodiversity ◀

There is an increasing awareness of neurodiversity in HME institutions. However, this is not always translated into concrete actions and steps to make spaces more accessible.

## ▶ Disability

On this topic, too, a growing understanding and knowledge has been achieved. But one of the biggest challenges is our buildings. It is difficult to improve, as mostly they are old, multi-level with stairs, and heavy doors. Often sections of the HMEIs are not accessible for people in a wheelchair or other mobility requirements.

## Social Background ◀

The world of classical music can be elitist. Many musicians were born and raised in an environment where classical music and its belonging practices were self-evident. When one comes into this professional field from another background, this standard of customs can be imposing and excluding.

## ▶ Power Relations

There are big differences in hierarchical cultures; Power Relations do undeniably exist everywhere, but they are expressed in different ways. At AEC events, where teaching/non-teaching staff, students, office employees and services come together not everyone feels acknowledged.

## Diversity ◀

Institutions aim for a more balanced reflection of society but struggle to attract students and teachers from diverse backgrounds.

# Conclusion / Recommendations

Safe&Brave Space sessions during AEC events have demonstrated their necessity. Power Relations play an important role in this professional field and regularly lead to sensitive situations. There are different ways of dealing with the diversity, equity and inclusion matters within the operating area of the AEC. Not every issue is recognised by everyone in the same way, but it can create a sense of discrimination; both on an individual and overarching level.

Therefore, maintaining a culture of discussion is important for listening to each other and learning to understand each other better. The aim is to create an actual sense of belonging in which everyone feels heard and seen, has importance and meaning, and receives trust.

To achieve that goal, the AEC relies on two milestone documents: Artistic Plurality and Inclusive Institutional Culture in HME and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Music Education: An Invitation for Action are excellent resources: tailored to this subject, developed from practice, applicable to all levels of an organisation and peer-reviewed.

