AEC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Policy 2030

1. Introduction

This document has been developed by Alfonso Guerra, AEC Network and Finance Manager, together with the members of the AEC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Panel of Experts, and the AEC DEI Allies network[1], as part of the AEC work plan for the 2025–2028 term. It outlines clear procedures and measurable targets for embedding DEI principles into the AEC's overall management and operations.

The AEC DEI Policy 2030 focuses on promoting inclusive recruitment, representative participation, and equitable practices across all AEC structures, including the AEC Council, the Office Team, and all Working Groups, Task Forces, and Stakeholder Networks. **Its overall aim is to ensure that DEI principles are consistently and visibly integrated into the organisation's daily work, long-term development, and decision-making processes.**

1.1 Vision and mission

The AEC DEI Policy is rooted in the broader vision and mission of the AEC. As an international non-profit organisation of nearly 320 Higher Music Education (HME) institutions across Europe and beyond[2], the AEC is dedicated to advancing music and arts education as central contributors to human life and democratic societies. This document contributes to that vision by ensuring that every individual has equitable opportunities to participate in and influence the AEC, the community it represents, and the wider field of HME.

A meaningful DEI Policy is the result of careful research, critical reflection, and alignment with the organisation's values and strategic frameworks. As such, the language and structure of this document have been deliberately aligned with the AEC's culture to support deeper integration and sustainable implementation.

Over the past years, DEI has been given increasing importance in AEC's work. In the former AEC revised Strategic Plan 2016-2023, it was addressed through a dedicated pillar (*Pillar 3: Promoting participation, inclusiveness and diversity*). In the current AEC Strategy 2030[3], these principles are embedded across all operations and daily work, reflecting the AEC's recognition that DEI is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic one. This integrated approach strengthens the AEC's capacity to anticipate trends, advocate for its members, and cultivate resilient partnerships.

Moreover, the DEI Policy aligns closely with the objectives of the Creative Europe Programme for European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations[4], under which the AEC has secured funding for the period 2025–2028. The programme explicitly supports diversity, equality, inclusion, and participation, with a particular focus on engaging underrepresented groups (including people with disabilities, and individuals from minority or marginalised groups) as creators, leaders, and audiences.

By addressing these goals, the DEI Policy reinforces the AEC's role as a trusted, forward-looking network for innovation, while supporting its ongoing development as an inclusive organisation. To translate this vision into action, the following section sets out the conceptual foundations on which the Policy is built, anchoring it in a shared understanding of values and intentions.

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[1] The DEI Allies network includes representatives from previous AEC DEI-focused Working Groups, active participants from previous DEI workshops, and representatives from AEC Associate members outside Europe.
[2] AEC membership database. Consulted in April 2025.
[3] AEC Strategy 2030. Approved at the AEC General Assembly in November 2024.
[4] CREA-CULT-2024-NET Call for proposals, version 1.0. Published in October 2023.

1.2 DEI foundations

Throughout this document, the acronym DEI is used to refer to *Diversity*, *Equity* and *Inclusion*. We acknowledge that different organisations may adopt different acronyms, such as D&I (Diversity and Inclusion), EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion), DIGE (Diversity, Inclusion and Gender Equality), or IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility), depending on factors such as workforce demographics, geographical location, organisational size, DEI maturity, and strategic aims.

> In the context of the AEC, DEI is used as an overarching term. However, this DEI Policy also addresses *accessibility* and *power relations*, as these concepts are inextricably linked to the principles of DEI. While they fall under the broader DEI umbrella, they require particular attention to ensure that systemic barriers are identified and addressed effectively.
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> We will also take into account the role of *resistance*, which often emerges when change is perceived as unfamiliar or threatening. In the context of HME, and within organisations more broadly, resistance may be subtle, manifesting as hesitation or silence rather than open opposition, but understanding it is essential to supporting meaningful and lasting transformation.[5]

To support a shared understanding, we will briefly define each element as it relates to the context of HME and the AEC's operations. In doing so, we aim to strengthen the conceptual foundation upon which this DEI Policy is built, and to promote consistent interpretation and implementation. These definitions will inform the procedures and practices outlined in this document, providing clarity and clear direction as we work to embed DEI principles meaningfully across the organisation.

1.2.1 Diversity

Diversity refers to the recognition, appreciation, and active inclusion of differences and commonalities[6] among individuals and groups. These differences may be based on gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, and other characteristics that shape individual identity and experience.

Diversity is not solely about representation; it is also about creating conditions in which varied perspectives, cultural expressions, and lived experiences are genuinely valued. More concretely, within HME institutions, embracing diversity means critically examining traditional academic structures and asking whether they reflect the needs and realities of contemporary musical life.

Diversity also involves institutional self-awareness and action. This may include revising internal policies, fostering interdisciplinary work, and broadening musical genre representation. Such practices help ensure that all community members feel recognised, respected, and empowered to contribute.

In summary, diversity in the AEC is about actively engaging with difference, culturally, artistically, and structurally, and ensuring that all voices have space and value within the collective work of HME.

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[5] For an in-depth exploration of resistance, see: European Association of Conservatoires (2023). *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Music Education: An Invitation for Action*. Published in June 2023. Brussels: AEC.

[6] Benedikt, A. (2018). *Diversity & Diversity Management*, keynote presented at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Austria. Translated from German by Stefan Heckel.

1.2.2 Equity

Equity refers to the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals, while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups[7]. **Equity involves acknowledging that individuals have different circumstances and allocating the specific resources and opportunities needed to achieve equal outcomes.**

In practice, equity in HME may involve implementing policies and practices that address systemic barriers and biases, such as those related to socio-economic status, race, gender, disability, or other factors. This could include offering targeted support programmes, revising admission criteria to be more inclusive, or ensuring diverse representation in faculty and leadership positions.

By embracing equity, the AEC commits to creating an environment where all members have the support they need to thrive, recognising that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient for achieving true diversity and inclusion.

Understanding the difference: *Equity* vs *Equality*

While *equality* aims to promote fairness by providing the same resources to all, *equity* recognises that this approach may not be sufficient to achieve fairness. Instead, equity focuses on providing individuals with resources and opportunities tailored to their specific needs[8], thereby ensuring that everyone has the chance to succeed.

- Equality means providing the same resources or opportunities to all individuals, regardless of their unique circumstances. It operates under the assumption that everyone starts from the same place and needs the same support;
- Equity, on the other hand, involves recognising that individuals have different needs and circumstances. It focuses on distributing resources and opportunities in a way that accounts for these differences, aiming to achieve equal outcomes for all.

In the context of HME, applying equity might involve, for example, offering additional support to students from underrepresented backgrounds to ensure they have the same opportunities for success as their peers. This approach acknowledges the systemic challenges some individuals face and seeks to address them proactively.

1.2.3 Inclusion

Inclusion refers to the intentional and continuous process of ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences are not only present within an institution but are also actively engaged, respected, and valued[9].

In the context of HME, inclusion means creating institutional cultures and learning environments where every student, teacher, and staff member feels a genuine sense of belonging and is empowered to contribute meaningfully to both educational and artistic development. This involves not only recognising and valuing difference but also ensuring that diverse voices are integrated into decision-making, teaching practices, and artistic planning.

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[7] Based on the definition of equity by the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (CAPD).

[8] This conceptual distinction between equity and equality is supported in various DEI frameworks, including those by UNESCO, the OECD, and public equity offices (e.g., the University of Melbourne).

[9] European University Association (2019). *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in European Higher Education Institutions. Results from the INVITED project*. Published in November 2019. Brussels: EUA.

Inclusion requires more than diversity in numbers[10]; it entails recognising the presence of structural barriers and actively working to remove them, whether they are social, economic, cultural, or curricular. It also means re-examining long-standing traditions in music education that may have excluded certain communities, genres, or modes of expression.

Institutional policy development also plays a key role. For the AEC, establishing clear anti-discrimination frameworks and codes of conduct ensures that **all individuals, regardless of background, are protected and able to participate fully in institutional life. Inclusion is, therefore, not a passive state but a continuous and deliberate institutional commitment**.

Distinguishing between *Inclusion*, *Inclusivity*, and *Inclusiveness*

While these terms are often used interchangeably, subtle differences exist that can clarify institutional strategies. *Inclusion* refers to the active process of integrating individuals from diverse backgrounds into all aspects of institutional life, ensuring equal access and participation.

Inclusivity describes the quality or characteristic of an environment or practice that promotes and sustains inclusion. It reflects how deeply embedded inclusive principles are within the institutional culture. *Inclusiveness* has a similar meaning to inclusivity but tends to emphasise structural and systemic aspects, how policies, curricula, and governance frameworks are designed to enable participation by all, particularly historically marginalised groups.

Understanding these distinctions helps institutions like the AEC not only to implement inclusive practices but also to cultivate an overarching culture that embodies inclusivity and inclusiveness across all facets of their operations.

1.2.4 Accessibility

Accessibility refers to the removal of barriers and the creation of equitable opportunities that enable all individuals, regardless of their physical, cognitive, socio-economic, or cultural circumstances, to fully participate in educational and institutional life[11]. Within HME, accessibility is fundamental to fostering and promoting DEI, ensuring that staff and students can engage with the institution's physical and digital spaces, and educational content without obstruction.

At its core, accessibility encompasses multiple dimensions. Physically, it involves ensuring that buildings and facilities are navigable for individuals with disabilities, such as those with visual, auditory, or mobility impairments. Cognitively, accessibility requires that information and learning materials are presented in ways that are understandable and usable by all, including the use of clear language, captioned media, and alternative text for screen readers[12].

Beyond physical and digital considerations, accessibility in HME also relates to broader social and economic factors. This includes providing financial support mechanisms such as scholarships, bursaries, or fee waivers to ensure that talented individuals from underrepresented or economically disadvantaged backgrounds can access educational opportunities.

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[10] *AEC – Strengthening Music in Society* (2022). *Spotlight on Inclusiveness*. Consulted in May 2025.

[11] *AEC – Strengthening Music in Society* (2022). *Spotlight on Accessibility*. Consulted in May 2025.

[12] David, S. and Fernandez, M. (2019). *Using the USA2 Framework to Make Informed Instructional Technology Decisions*. Published in *The Teaching Professor*. Consulted in June 2025.

Ultimately, accessibility in the context of the AEC means that the organisation is genuinely open to all, with transparent, inclusive application procedures and communication in accessible formats and multiple languages where possible.

HME institutions committed to accessibility publish clear policies that enshrine the rights and responsibilities of all community members, ensuring that discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, or sexuality is actively addressed and prevented.

1.2.5 Power relations

Power relations refer to the dynamics of influence, control, and authority within institutions and social structures. Understanding power relations is crucial for recognising systemic inequalities embedded in traditional academic and artistic hierarchies, which can reinforce exclusion based on class, race, gender, or other identities[13].

Addressing power relations requires more than surface-level diversity initiatives; it calls for structural change. This includes reassessing admission criteria to challenge privilege and bias, democratising decision-making processes to include diverse voices, and revising assessment practices to value multiple forms of musical excellence.

In the context of HME, power relations affect who gets to decide curricula, who is heard, who is silenced, and how access to opportunities is distributed. Addressing power relations is therefore fundamental to any meaningful DEI work. **By confronting how power operates, HME institutions can move towards genuinely inclusive environments that empower all members to participate.**

PRIhME - Stakeholder Assembly on Power Relations in Higher Music Education

The PRIhME project (Stakeholder Assembly on Power Relations in Higher Music Education, 2020-2023)[14], co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Commission, provided the first structured platform through which the AEC explicitly engaged with power relations in the HME sector. It created a space for critical reflection on how influence, authority, and decision-making processes shape experiences in HME, often reinforcing systemic inequalities.

A central innovation of PRIhME was the creation of *Stakeholder Assemblies*: collaborative forums designed to challenge traditional hierarchies and encourage open, inclusive dialogue among students, teachers, administrators, and other institutional actors. These assemblies did more than just include diverse voices; they actively reimagined the power dynamics within the conversations themselves.

Through this approach, the AEC began to address not only what is discussed in institutional reform, but also how those discussions are structured. **Power relations are thus treated as a lived reality to be acknowledged and addressed, rather than an unspoken backdrop.**

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[13] European Association of Conservatoires (2023). *PRIhME Recommendations* (collection from the four Stakeholder Assemblies). Published in August 2023. Brussels: AEC.
[14] *PRIhME (2020-2023) Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership*. Consulted in August 2025.

2. Embedding DEI into the AEC context

The true impact of DEI work lies in the extent to which these principles are embedded into organisational culture, policy, and daily operations. This section bridges the gap between principle and practice by providing recommendations for embedding DEI across the AEC's structures, procedures, and working culture. **These recommendations establish a foundation for inclusive practice, encompassing DEI in governance, participation, and decision-making.**

While this section focuses on strategic guidance, concrete operational measures, including specific action areas, timelines, and measurable outcomes, are presented in section 4. Together, these sections ensure that DEI is consistently and meaningfully integrated across all levels of the AEC.

2.1 Ensuring diversity and representation

The AEC's commitment to diversity goes beyond the recognition of difference. It involves actively working to ensure that the organisation reflects the range of identities, experiences, and cultural backgrounds that shape the HME sector. This includes not only demographic diversity (e.g. ethnicity, gender, age) but also diversity of musical traditions, educational pathways, and regional contexts.

Recommended external recruitment practices:

- ☐ Language in open calls for Council and Working Group[15] members is reviewed to ensure inclusivity, clarity, and accessibility. Jargon is minimised to enhance understanding, and calls explicitly encourage applications from underrepresented candidates.

- ☐ Recruitment campaigns are disseminated widely across the full geographical spread of the membership, with targeted outreach to marginalised communities and HME institutions beyond Western Europe to attract a broader and more diverse pool of applicants.

  For the Office Team members, including interns, additional steps are taken:

- ☐ Vacancies are advertised through platforms likely to engage underrepresented groups. Job descriptions are reviewed to ensure inclusive, accessible language, and to avoid unnecessary requirements that may create barriers. Selection processes ensure fairness and transparency, with diverse perspectives involved in review and decision-making.

Recommended internal monitoring practices:

- ☐ Participation in AEC governance and working structures is monitored annually. Demographic data across roles is collected confidentially and in compliance with data protection regulations. This data is used to inform recruitment strategies and outreach efforts[16]. Progress towards representative participation is tracked through annual reports and feedback mechanisms, supporting continuous reflection and improvement

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[15] In this document, the term *Working Group* refers collectively to members of Working Groups, Task Forces, and Stakeholder Networks within the AEC's 2025–2028 work plan.
[16] For one example of how organisations operationalise data-driven DEI monitoring, see: Inclusalytics (n.d.). *How Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leaders Use Data to Drive Their Work*. Inclusalytics. Consulted in August 2025.

2.2 Addressing structural barriers to participation

Equity involves identifying and dismantling structural barriers that limit full participation in the AEC's structures, activities, and leadership. It acknowledges that members experience differing levels of access due to factors such as socio-economic status, geographic location, institutional profile, different speeds of development, and language proficiency, among others.

Recommended external recruitment practices:

☐ Application criteria for leadership roles within the Council or Office Team are reviewed and broadened to recognise a wider range of qualifications and career paths, including non-academic, community-based, and professional experience, and ensuring that candidates from less traditional backgrounds are not excluded by narrow requirements.

Recommended internal monitoring practices:

☐ The AEC reimburses travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs, or provides additional funds, for Council and Working Group members from low-resource institutions. This facilitates their participation in Council meetings, Working Group meetings, workshops, platforms, and events, grounded in the principle of equity rather than equality.

☐ Orientation and mentorship support are integrated into the selection and on-boarding process for new Council and Working Group members, as well as Office Team members, including interns. This builds on the existing "buddy system" currently implemented in the *Welcome to Newcomers* session at AEC events.

2.3 Creating a culture of community and belonging

Inclusion means more than just representation. It involves ensuring that individuals feel welcome, respected, and empowered to contribute meaningfully. For the AEC, this means cultivating working practices that acknowledge different communication styles, cultural norms, and lived experiences, creating environments where all voices are heard, contributions are valued, and input translates into tangible outcomes.

Recommended inclusive meeting practices:

☐ In-person Council and Working Group meetings, as well as Office team-building activities, begin with check-ins or warm-up activities inspired by the PRIhME Stakeholder Assemblies[17], strengthening connections and fostering a sense of shared purpose.

☐ Inclusive facilitation is actively encouraged across all AEC structures. Agendas for Council, Working Group, and Office Team meetings are co-created and shared in advance to enable broad input and thorough preparation. Key materials are distributed ahead of time to support informed participation. During meetings, facilitation practices such as rotating facilitators and actively inviting contributions from all attendees are considered.

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[17] European Association of Conservatoires (2023). *PRIhME Exercises* (collection from the four Stakeholder Assemblies). Published in August 2023. Brussels: AEC.

2.4 Distributing voice, influence and engagement

Understanding and addressing power relations means recognising how influence is structured within AEC governance, activities, and events. This involves asking who holds decision-making power, whose voices are prioritised, and how participation is facilitated across the AEC's work. Accessibility in this context is not only physical or digital, but also institutional and cultural, requiring ongoing reflection and active redistribution of voice and agency across all levels of the organisation.

Recommended internal monitoring practices:

☐ Council, Working Group, and Office Team members are encouraged to engage in critical reflection on their own positions of privilege and influence. This is supported through facilitated workshops and peer-led training delivered by DEI and PRIhME facilitators, aimed at deepening awareness of unconscious bias and uneven participation dynamics.

☐ Student voice is permanently and meaningfully represented within Council and Working Group structures, ensuring that the needs, experiences, and perspectives of emerging professionals actively shape the AEC's decision-making and policy development.

For the Office Team members, including interns, additional steps are taken:

☐ Student voice is embedded through rotating internship opportunities, providing students with access to leadership spaces and insight into sector operations.

Recommended inclusive meeting practices:

☐ Council, Working Group, and Office Team meetings (as well as AEC platforms and events) are increasingly held in venues that meet recognised physical accessibility standards. To reduce geographic and financial barriers to participation, support is offered through bursaries and rotation of meeting locations. Online meetings, when used, are recorded, captioned, and made accessible afterwards to support broader access and engagement.

2.4.1 Further considerations: AEC events

The *Recommendations for planning, organising and hosting AEC events with a DEI perspective*[18], developed by the AEC Gender Equality and Non-discrimination Mainstreaming Task Force within the ARTEMIS project, serves as a complementary document that specifically addresses inclusion, equity, and accessibility in the planning and delivery of AEC events. While the AEC DEI Policy 2030 outlines strategic priorities for embedding DEI across the organisation, this document translates those principles into concrete standards and guidelines for AEC events.

This document serves as a practical toolkit designed to ensure that every event organised by the AEC is planned and executed in a manner that guarantees a safe, welcoming, and accessible environment for all participants. It emphasises key areas such as venue accessibility, diverse and balanced speaker representation, travel bursary opportunities, respectful communication, and more.

By adopting these recommendations, AEC events are able to more effectively embody the values outlined in this DEI Policy and foster meaningful engagement from all members of the community.

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[18] European Association of Conservatoires (2025). *Recommendations for planning, organising and hosting AEC events with a DEI perspective*. Published in October 2025. Brussels: AEC.

2.4.2 Further considerations: AEC communication

The *AEC Communication Strategy 2025–2030*[19] complements the AEC DEI Policy 2030 by ensuring that the organisation's internal and external communications consistently reflect the DEI principles outlined in this document. While the DEI Policy defines overarching values and commitments, the Communication Strategy translates these into practical approaches for how AEC speaks, listens, and engages with its members, partners, and audiences.

The Strategy positions communication as an expression of AEC's core values, grounded in European principles of democracy and human rights. It recognises that language, tone, and visibility all play a decisive role in shaping belonging and representation within the AEC community. It establishes inclusive language and accessibility as non-negotiable standards, promotes ethical and human-centred digital practices, and ensures that all messages amplify the diversity of voices across the network.

By embedding DEI considerations in every aspect of communication, from strategic messaging and advocacy to event promotion, digital content, and member engagement, the Communication Strategy strengthens AEC's credibility as a living, learning, and inclusive network, ensuring that how we communicate is as inclusive as what we communicate.

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[19] European Association of Conservatoires (2025). *AEC Communication Strategy 2030.* Published in October 2025. Brussels: AEC.

3. Inclusive recruitment and selection processes

Inclusive participation begins at the point of selection. Ensuring that the AEC's recruitment processes are equitable, transparent, and welcoming to a broad diversity of individuals is essential to embedding DEI principles across its governance, working structures, and operations.

This section offers a practical checklist and set of guiding principles for inclusive recruitment and selection across three core areas of the AEC structure: Council, Working Groups, and the Office Team. It builds directly on the DEI values outlined in previous sections, translating these values into concrete actions. **The aim is to proactively seek diverse perspectives, remove access barriers, and create processes where all applicants can engage equitably.**

3.1 For AEC Working Groups

The AEC is committed to ensuring that participation in its Working Groups is open, inclusive, and reflective of the rich diversity across its network of member institutions. This involves actively addressing structural barriers and creating equitable opportunities for teaching staff, administrative staff, students, alumni, and others, particularly those from underrepresented and minority groups.

Recognising the importance of student perspectives, most Working Groups should reserve positions for student and alumni representatives. Student voice is invaluable in shaping discussions and outcomes, and students are encouraged to share their ideas and perspectives while gaining experience collaborating with representatives from AEC member institutions.

In the selection processes, the AEC applies an inclusive and holistic approach to recruitment and group composition, guided by the values endorsed in this DEI Policy 2030. The process promotes transparency, fairness, accessibility, and diversity across a broad range of dimensions[20], including:

- Personal and socio-cultural background
- Gender identity and sexual orientation
- Disability, race, and ethnicity
- Socio-economic and linguistic background
- Geographic region and local context
- Artistic and institutional background
- Career stage and level of seniority
- Migration background and status

It is important to note that each Working Group, Task Force, and Stakeholder Network has its own subject focus, objectives, deliverables, and required expertise, which may influence which of the above-mentioned dimensions are most pertinent for participation. For example, considerations such as career stage, artistic background, or lived experience with accessibility may carry more weight in some groups than others.

Identifying the most relevant diversity dimensions for each Working Group ensures that recruitment is both inclusive and contextually appropriate, allowing the AEC to assemble groups that reflect both the values of the DEI Policy and the practical needs of their specific remit.

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[20] Adapted from frameworks for inclusive participation in arts and Higher Education, drawing on intersectional approaches to equity and access (e.g., UK Office for Students guidance on equality and diversity, Arts Council England 2020, and other sector-specific guidelines).

Internal checklist for the recruitment of Working Group members

Outreach and communication:

- Has the call been shared through diverse, multilingual, and student-centred networks?
- Have plain-language summaries or FAQs been used to explain the opportunity accessibly?
- Are materials available in multiple formats (e.g., subtitled videos, visuals, other languages)?

Recruitment and selection:

- Are application materials clear, jargon-free, inclusive and accessible?
- Does the process include space for lived experience, motivations, and identity?
- Have students, alumni, and underrepresented groups been explicitly encouraged to apply?
- Is there an opt-in for support, such as financial assistance or accessibility accommodations?

Follow-up and communication

A six-month follow-up survey[21] (e.g., via Google Forms) may be conducted to track representation and participation after selection. Guiding questions may include:

- How included and welcomed do you feel within the Working Group?
- Do you feel your identity and experience are recognised and valued?
- Have you encountered any barriers to participation, or experienced power imbalances?

In addition, Working Group members may be invited to contribute to additional periodic monitoring and feedback efforts, in line with the internal DEI practices outlined in the previous section, to support continuous learning and improvement.

3.2 For AEC Council

The Council follows the same commitment to DEI as other AEC structures, with adaptations to reflect its governance role and membership structure. Student representation is facilitated through the European Performing Arts Students' Association (EPASA), ensuring that student perspectives are consistently embedded in the Council's strategic decision-making processes.

Council recruitment ensures diversity across a range of intersectional dimensions, while also recognising the importance of leadership and governance experience. The selection process is informed by the principles and strategic guidance set out in this document, with additional emphasis on strategic vision, institutional representation, and geographical balance.

Council members are responsible for overseeing DEI implementation and ensuring accountability. They are expected to address power dynamics, promote equitable participation across AEC structures, and model inclusive practices that reinforce the organisation's commitment to DEI.

Internal checklist for the recruitment of Council members

Recruitment and selection:

- Are candidates drawn from across different institutional types, countries, and regions?
- Are DEI dimensions such as gender, race, disability, and career stage reflected in shortlists?

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[21] People Insight (2021). *15 survey questions to measure and improve Diversity and Inclusion*. Published in December 2021. London: People Insight.

- Is strategic leadership experience balanced with fresh, diverse perspectives?

On-boarding process:

- Is a structured orientation process in place for new Council members?
- Are mentorship or peer-support systems offered to help integrate newcomers?
- Is there space for continuous feedback on inclusion and participation in decision-making?

3.3 For AEC Office Team

Recruitment for the Office Team aligns with the organisation's broader DEI commitments, fostering inclusive practices in staff hiring and internship opportunities. The process actively seeks candidates from a wide range of educational, socio-cultural, and geographic backgrounds, including students and recent graduates. Outreach is broadened through diverse communication channels, with targeted efforts to reach marginalised and culturally diverse communities beyond Western Europe.

Internal checklist for the recruitment of Office Team members

Outreach and communication:

- Has the call been shared through diverse, multilingual, and student-centred networks?
- Have plain-language summaries or FAQs been used to explain the opportunity accessibly?

Recruitment and selection:

- Are application materials clear, jargon-free, inclusive and accessible?
- Does the process include space for lived experience, motivations, and identity?
- Are DEI dimensions such as gender, race, disability, and career stage reflected in shortlists?

On-boarding process:

- Are mentorship or peer-support systems offered to help integrate newcomers?
- Are periodic check-ins conducted to assess staff experience, belonging, and access?

3.3.1 Inclusion of a positionality statements

To further support inclusive participation, all applicants across Working Groups, Council, and Office Team roles are encouraged to submit a short positionality statement within their application. This statement outlines how the applicant's lived experience, background, or personal values might contribute to inclusive, creative, and socially engaged work within the AEC.

Such statements may address, but are not limited to, reflections and experiences related to race, ethnicity, migration, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic background, or other aspects of identity.

This approach draws inspiration from *academic positionality statements*[22], which acknowledges that all individuals view the world through their unique social and cultural lenses. By inviting applicants to share their positionality, the AEC recognises that no perspective is entirely objective, and that diverse identities enrich understanding and creativity in collective work.

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[22] Duvall, S., Epting, K., & Isaac, M. (2021). *Assignment 5: Writing a Positionality Statement*. Developed for the Elon University Center for Writing Excellence. Published in August 2021. Elon, NC: Elon University.

Including these statements encourages greater self-awareness and fosters a culture of openness, respect, and inclusivity, reinforcing the values embedded in this DEI Policy.

3.3.2 Appointment of a DEI Officer

To strengthen the implementation and long-term sustainability of DEI initiatives, the AEC could consider designating a DEI reference person within its Office Team. This role would act as a central point of oversight and coordination for DEI measures, bridging the gap between policy commitments, practical implementation, and continuous improvement across the organisation.

Having a dedicated reference point ensures DEI considerations are consistently monitored and integrated across all AEC structures. It fosters accountability by clarifying who tracks progress and identifies barriers, strengthens the feedback loop with members, leadership, and provides a visible resource for guidance, supporting a culture of inclusion and shared responsibility.

Key responsibilities of the DEI Officer could include:

- Monitoring the implementation of inclusive recruitment practices and onboarding procedures
- Collecting and reviewing demographic and participation data to inform DEI strategies
- Reporting regularly to the AEC members and governance bodies on progress and challenges
- Facilitating communication between the DEI Panel, DEI Allies, and internal structures
- Supporting the integration of feedback from applicants, members, and stakeholders into ongoing DEI efforts.

While the exact scope and structure of this role would need to be defined according to operational feasibility, its presence could significantly enhance the organisation's capacity to translate DEI policies into tangible, measurable outcomes. **By consolidating oversight and providing a clear point of reference, the AEC would strengthen continuity, support equitable participation, and ensure that DEI efforts are actively nurtured and sustained across the organisation.**

3.3.3 Off-boarding

Inclusive participation extends beyond recruitment and on-boarding. Just as equitable selection and on-boarding embed DEI principles, thoughtful off-boarding ensures that departing members feel acknowledged and that their experiences contribute to organisational learning.

The AEC conducts off-boarding in a transparent, respectful, and equitable manner. Departing members are invited to provide feedback on their participation, including any barriers encountered or suggestions for improving inclusion and accessibility. Contributions are recognised appropriately, and opportunities to maintain connections are offered where relevant.

Insights gathered through exit reflections inform future recruitment, on-boarding, and organisational practices, helping to strengthen participation and reduce systemic barriers.

4. Next steps and action areas

Building on the strategic goals and principles outlined in this DEI Policy so far, this section lays the foundation for translating DEI principles into concrete, actionable steps across the AEC's structures and operations. The Action Areas (AAs) defined below provide a structured framework to embed diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and critical reflection on power relations into the organisation's daily work, governance, and medium-long-term planning.

Each action area is accompanied by specific, measurable actions, clear targets, and timelines to ensure accountability, monitor progress, and support continuous improvement. By linking operational practices to the foundational DEI principles, the AEC seeks to create a culture to which all members feel valued, represented, and empowered to contribute meaningfully.

The seven action areas cover:

- AA1. Ensuring inclusive recruitment and representation
- AA2. Embedding equity and inclusion in project delivery
- AA3. Reflecting DEI in communications and culture
- AA4. Providing training and capacity-building beyond bias awareness
- AA5. Data collection, periodic reporting, and transparency
- AA6. Community engagement and partnerships with external organisations
- AA7. Fostering critical reflection on power and privilege

Together, these action areas establish a roadmap for medium and long-term impact, ensuring that DEI principles are consistently integrated across all levels of the organisation. Continued collaboration with the AEC DEI Panel of Experts, the AEC DEI Allies network, member institutions, and external partners will be essential to deepen capacity, broaden engagement, and cultivate an inclusive, forward-looking culture within the AEC.

4.1 Proposed actions, references, and timeline

This phase represents the evolution of the AEC DEI Policy 2030, from foundational commitments to dynamic, data-informed interventions that will sustain DEI across all aspects of the organisation. The proposed actions, organised by action area, provide clear benchmarks, responsibilities, and timelines, enabling consistent monitoring and evaluation. Periodic reporting and public transparency will reinforce accountability, foster trust, and support shared ownership of DEI goals among the AEC community and stakeholders.

Action Area (AA)	Concrete action	Target	Link to	Timeline / Frequency	Expected outputs / Key metrics
AA1. Ensuring inclusive recruitment and representation	Before initiating recruitment, define candidate profiles that specify required competencies, relevant experiences, and targeted diversity dimensions.	Council Office Team	Chapter 2.1 Chapter 2.2	From 2026	100% of recruitment calls use pre-defined profiles
	Ensure all open calls, job descriptions, and application materials are written in accessible, inclusive language and available in multiple formats to reduce barriers for underrepresented candidates.	Office Team		From 2026	All recruitment materials meet accessibility standards; applicants feedback is collected
	Require positionality statements from all applicants and include them in selection deliberations, valuing lived experience alongside formal qualifications.	ALL		From 2025 (ongoing)	Positionality statements reflected in selection decisions
AA2. Embedding equity and inclusion in project delivery	Integrate a mandatory DEI checklist into all project planning, initiation, and review stages, covering diversity, accessibility, and equitable participation.	Council Office Team	Chapter 2.2 Chapter 2.3	From 2026	All projects include checklist; compliance monitored in reports
	Allow all Council, Working Group, and Office Team members to submit input to meeting agendas in advance to include diverse perspectives and voices.	ALL		From 2025 (ongoing)	Agendas reflect pre-submitted contributions
	Review and adjust internal policies and subsidies allocated to travel and participation support to remove structural barriers for low-resource participants.	Council Office Team		From 2029: *new work plan*	More financial support is provided through travel bursaries / waived fees
	Provide structured on-boarding and support for new Council and Working Group members, especially those unfamiliar with AEC structures, to enable equitable participation.	ALL		From 2026	Mentorship completion rates; survey feedback on on-boarding effectiveness
AA3. Reflecting DEI in communications and culture	Align all internal and external communications with accessibility standards and inclusive language, ensuring diverse perspectives are represented.	Office Team	Chapter 2.3 Chapter 2.4	By 2030	All communications reviewed; bi-annual audit confirms inclusivity
	Brief speakers on inclusive practices to ensure discussions at AEC events respect all voices. Include DEI-focused questions in feedback questionnaires for improvement.	Working Groups Office Team		From 2025 (ongoing)	100% events briefed; participant survey feedback on DEII

	Apply formal guidelines for accessible and inclusive event planning, hosting, and organisation, including physical access, captioning, and multilingual materials.	ALL		From 2026	All events meet these guidelines; participant satisfaction measured
AA4. Providing training and capacity-building beyond bias awareness	Deliver DEI-focused workshops for Council, Working Groups, and Office Team, addressing equity, unconscious bias, and inclusive leadership.	ALL	Chapter 2.3 Chapter 2.4	From 2027, annually	% of members trained; post-training evaluation scores collected
	Facilitate peer-led and expert-led sessions on equitable participation and inclusive decision-making, tailored to AEC governance contexts.	Council		From 2026, AEC Congress	Attendance rates; participant feedback on relevance / effectiveness
	Launch a mentorship programme pairing Office Team and Working Group members with senior leaders from the Council to promote advocacy and connection.	Working Groups Office Team		From 2027, annually	% of members completing the programme; feedback on impact
AA5. Data collection, periodic reporting, and transparency	Implement confidential demographic and participation surveys across all AEC structures to monitor identity, inclusion, and engagement.	ALL	Chapter 2.1 Chapter 2.4	From 2026, annually	Survey response rate; diversity metrics collected
	Monitor and report representation across intersectional dimensions (gender, geography, career stage, etc.) annually, using data to refine recruitment practices and underprivileged participation.	Council Office Team		From 2026, annually	DEI report published in the AEC Annual Report; tracking and improvement of key metrics
AA6. Community engagement and partnerships with external organisations	Strengthen collaborations with underrepresented institutions, students, and stakeholders to promote DEI knowledge and practice.	ALL	Chapter 2.3 Chapter 2.4	By 2030	Number of partnerships established; outcomes of joint activities
	Ensure DEI considerations are included in partnership agreements and project collaborations. Exchange experience and knowledge with partner organisations.	Council Working Groups		By 2028	Agreements reference DEI; partner feedback; collaborative outputs
	Share best practices, guidance, and tools on DEI across the HME community through workshops, seminars, and events, promoted by the AEC DEI Panel of Experts.	Working Groups		From 2025 (ongoing)	Number of workshops and events; participant attendance and feedback
AA7. Fostering critical reflection on power and privilege	Deliver regular workshops on unconscious bias, privilege, and institutional power structures, tailored to AEC governance and operational contexts.	Council Office Team	Chapter 2.3 Chapter 2.4	From 2028, annually	% of members trained; self-reflection survey results collected

	Conduct internal reviews of participation and influence patterns at Council, Working Group, and Office Team meetings. Collect feedback from underrepresented voices.	ALL		From 2028, annually	Data-informed improvements in engagement; improved representation metrics

This table presents a cohesive roadmap, translating the DEI principles and recommendations outlined in section 2 into actionable strategies across each action area. With defined timelines, measurable targets, and ongoing monitoring, it ensures that all actions are grounded in the organisation's operational practices and values. **Together, these measures provide a structured, accountable, and transparent approach to embedding DEI principles throughout the AEC, supporting sustained progress and meaningful impact up to 2030 and beyond.**

4.2 Development of a code of conduct

Building on the commitments to inclusive recruitment and representation, the AEC recognises the importance of establishing a clear and shared framework to guide respectful and equitable participation within its internal structures, specifically the Council, Working Groups, and Office Team. To this end, the development of a code of conduct will set out common principles and expectations that support a culture of respect, inclusion, and accountability, complementing the DEI action areas outlined in this section.

This code will:

- Define clear principles of inclusive and respectful engagement
- Address power dynamics, discrimination, and exclusion within group settings
- Set expectations for communication, accountability, and mutual support
- Provide a foundation for constructive management of conflicts, ensuring transparency and fairness

The code of conduct will be developed in close consultation with the DEI Panel of Experts and representatives across AEC structures, including students and alumni. It will be integrated into on-boarding processes, recruitment communications, and periodic DEI monitoring efforts, linking directly to AA1 (inclusive recruitment), AA3 (communications and culture), and AA7 (power and privilege). By establishing these shared standards, the code reinforces the organisation's commitment to trust, accountability, and continuous learning, ensuring that all members can participate fully and safely.

5. Conclusion

The AEC DEI Policy 2030 represents a foundational step toward embedding DEI principles across all levels of the organisation. Beyond guiding inclusive recruitment, selection, and participation, it provides practical tools and operational guidance that embed equity and inclusion into the AEC's daily work and strategic decisions.

DEI is not treated as an isolated concern but as a cross-cutting principle, informing project planning, group formation, communications, and stakeholder engagement. Power, access, and inclusion are actively interrogated in all organisational processes, supported by the DEI Panel of Experts through advisory, training, and strategic reflection.

The DEI Policy establishes measurable pathways for equitable participation, including recruitment adaptations, mentorship, orientation, and formal inclusion of student voices. Its impact will be reflected not only in the diversity of contributors and accessibility of spaces but also in transparent monitoring, reporting, and continuous improvement across all action areas.

Ultimately, DEI is a dynamic, ongoing process that requires commitment, institutional courage, and resilience. Its success will depend on the sustained engagement of all AEC members, ensuring that the organisation remains inclusive, accountable, and responsive to evolving needs and challenges.

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Annex I. AEC's involvement in projects

This annex provides a practical checklist to guide the design, on-boarding, and implementation of projects involving the AEC in line with the DEI principles described throughout this document. These considerations apply primarily to EU-funded cooperation partnerships, including Erasmus+, Creative Europe, and Horizon Europe, but are also relevant to other programmes, whether funded, co-funded, or without financial contribution by the EU.

The objectives are:

A) To ensure that DEI principles guide the AEC's decision to participate in a project;

B) To guarantee that DEI principles are reflected before, during, and after the project across all dimensions of work, including administration, reporting, evaluation, organisation and participation in meetings and events, and communication and dissemination of results.

Checklist and guiding examples

- **Does the project align with AEC's DEI values and principles? Is DEI explicitly addressed in the project proposal?** Projects should demonstrate a shared commitment to DEI, not as an isolated concern but as a guiding principle throughout the project.

Example: The project acknowledges systematic inequalities in HME. Access, representation, or inclusion-related objectives are reflected in Work Packages, deliverables, evaluation criteria, or dissemination strategies. DEI considerations are explicitly mentioned in project tasks and objectives, ensuring integration from design to implementation.

- **Are partner roles and decision-making structures inclusive, transparent, and equitable? Does the consortium reflect diversity?** Partnership composition should reflect the diversity of the European HME sector, with equitable voice and responsibility.

Example: Decision-making processes are clearly defined and participatory. Partners are drawn from underrepresented regions, various institutional models (e.g., conservatoires, universities, independent organisations), and a balance of academic and artistic expertise. Roles and responsibilities are assigned transparently, allowing all partners to contribute meaningfully.

- **Are communication and dissemination materials accessible and inclusive in language and format?** Project communication should reflect AEC's commitment to accessibility, clarity, and representation, guided by the principles of the AEC Communication Strategy 2030.

Example: Use of plain, inclusive language, accessible digital formats, visual materials that represent diversity, and multilingual communication where possible. Communications highlight diverse voices and perspectives, ensuring materials are approachable for all participants.

- **Are project meetings, workshops, and events designed to be accessible (e.g., formats, travel, timing)?** Practical and logistical aspects should support broad and equitable participation, guided by the principles of the *Recommendations for planning, organising and hosting AEC events with a DEI perspective*.

Example: Hybrid participation options or travel support are provided when possible. Venues and digital platforms comply with accessibility standards, and workshops and events content are designed to be inclusive of different learning styles and abilities. Scheduling considers multiple time zones.

- **Does AEC's own contribution actively promote inclusion and representation within its remit?** AEC should model its DEI commitments through its specific project tasks and outputs, serving as an example for partners and its community and stakeholders.

Example: AEC integrates DEI reflection in workshops and training sessions, highlights inclusive recruitment practices, and ensures diverse representation in project events and outputs. AEC has a voice in strategic meetings and coordinates with partners to promote fair participation, inclusive leadership, and equitable sharing of tasks and resources.

- **Are monitoring and reporting processes attentive to DEI dimensions relevant to AEC's role?** Evaluation should include reflection on how DEI has been integrated and experienced throughout the project, and liaise with any DEI data collection conducted by the AEC.

Example: Internal evaluations include questions on participation diversity, accessibility, and equity of engagement. Project reports incorporate DEI observations and recommendations. Lessons learned are documented and used to improve future project participation and implementation in line with AEC DEI principles.

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This annex draws on the AEC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Policy 2030 and relevant frameworks for equity, diversity, and inclusion in EU-funded programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe, and Horizon Europe. It is intended as a guiding tool for decision-making, implementation, and reflection on DEI in all AEC project activities.