

YOUROPE @ SoAlive

Seminar on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion



**Future-Fit Festivals at
SoAlive Music Conference**

3F Training event E 3.1 | October 15 & 16, 2025

Sofia, Bulgaria

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YOUROPE
THE EUROPEAN FESTIVAL ASSOCIATION

3F FUTURE-FIT
FESTIVALS



Co-funded by
the European Union

2nd Seminar on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

National Palace of Culture, Bulgaria Boulevard, 1463 Sofia, Bulgaria

Wednesday & Thursday, October 15 & 16, 2025

Report written by Katharina Weber, YOUROPE project manager

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Introduction: What's in this Report?

With political leaders and conservative forces globally trying to fight what they label “the woke agenda”, concepts like diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have been in the crossfire of a culture war. The supposed enemy is everyone that goes against the norm: women, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, people of color, and everybody else from a marginalized community.

However, we at YOUROPE still believe that DEI and the rights of all these people are worth supporting and vital for creating a more just world that is safe and welcoming to all of us, despite our differences. Since festivals are a mirror of the societies they take place in, it is our declared goal to foster knowledge sharing on DEI at festivals, so they can become a safer and more inclusive place for everyone.

Our seminars on DEI & festivals help us foster this knowledge exchange. After the premiere at MaMA Music & Convention in Paris last year, in 2025 we cooperated with **SoAlive Music Conference** to host our second seminar in Sofia, Bulgaria.



SoAlive Music Conference is the location and partner of YOUROPE's 2nd DEI seminar. Photo: SAMC

Over two days, we welcomed 30 participants from 13 countries to our sessions. Some represented festivals, others organizations working with festivals, yet others organizations from the wider cultural sector that wanted to broaden their horizons.

This report contains the key takeaways from each session, so live event makers everywhere can benefit from the seminar. Feel free to read through this and implement anything suitable you find at your own event/in your own organization. In this report, you will learn:

- about YOUROPE's **Diversity & Inclusion Toolset**
- how much artists from the **Balkans are underrepresented** in Europe's music ecosystem
- how Roskilde Festival creates a positive **impact beyond the festival days**
- how crowd safety rules can **limit inclusion**
- what **psychological safety** is and why it matters for your teams and organizations
- what **pinkwashing** is and how to avoid it
- about Colours of Ostrava's "Colours without Barriers" **accessibility program**
- how you can identify different types of **barriers to accessibility**
- about good practices in **keeping events affordable**
- about the **GENiE database** for more gender equality
- about the **challenges of women** in the (Eastern) European live music industry
- about the **mentorship program** "Women in Music" from Romania
- how to deal with **stress** and prevent **burnout**
- how EXIT festival supports the **mental health of its teams** and visitors



YOUROPE's board member Marta Pallarès during the opening of the seminar. Photo: Ivana Barova

Opening: A Toolset and a Game

Much of the work that YOUROPE does to foster an exchange of knowledge and experiences between festivals and other stakeholders is supported by its working groups. The YOUROPE Event Safety (YES) Group works on all topics related to health, event safety and security, and Green Operations Europe or GO Group is the equivalent for green production and sustainability. For DEI, mental health, and HR topics, YOUROPE has recently founded a third group, which is still looking for a suitable name.

Marta Pallarès (group member, YOUROPE board member, and Head of international PR at Primavera Sound) welcomed the participants in Sofia, telling them that the unnamed group had curated the program for YOUROPE's second DEI seminar.

Earlier, the group had developed YOUROPE's Diversity & Inclusion Toolset, which was published in 2024. The Toolset is a collection of resources that can assist live event organizers in building more inclusive and diverse live events – for their audience, artists, and teams. The tools include guides, tests, checklists, interviews, databases, other toolkits, roadmaps, reports, games, and action plans – all assessed and summarized by the project team – as well as inspirational good-practice stories from festivals.

The Toolset is available as an online version and a PDF divided into chapters dedicated to accessibility, anti-racism work, gender equality, consciousness / awareness, and allyship. It also contains a [glossary](#) on 'DEI lingo'. On top, the project team has written a '[Diversity Mission Statement](#)' that organizations are free to copy and adapt for their own purposes.

Creating DEI can seem overwhelming, but as Marta said: "It's a process." It's not a sprint race – it's a continuous journey involving constant learning, making mistakes and improving on them. "It

sometimes feels like you're not doing enough, but you're doing a lot," she said to the participants. After the two-day seminar, she was sure they would be more prepared to face the challenges of our sector.



→ Access YOUROPE's [Diversity & Inclusion Toolset](#)

To get to know each other and to try out a resource from the D&I Toolset, the participants played "[Go / No Go](#)", led by **Mika Christoffersen, Roskilde Festival's Head of Participation and Diversity**. The game was developed by Roskilde Festival and is an excellent way to help teams talk about diversity and the differences in their lives and experiences – conversations which are often difficult to start and tough to have.

What happens when two people talk and try to understand each other? This game makes you aware that you will step on each other's toes. "The reason that we do that is because we're different – and that's okay," Mika said. Difference means friction, and the more friction, the more tension is caused. It's important to be able to talk about this tension to resolve it.

During the game, the room is divided into a scale, with "Go" at one end and "No Go" at the other. Mika read out statements and participants had to choose a place in the room, depending on whether they considered the statement appropriate (Go) or inappropriate (No Go).



One of the statements the participants should rate as 'go' or 'no go.'
Photo: Ivana Barova

Some takeaways:

- **Everyone has different boundaries**, and **everyone has different values**. The game opens up the conversation between colleagues to help them better understand the people they will be working with.
- **Context is key!** Some statements can be appropriate when said by friends but highly inappropriate when said by higher ups.
- Do you want to comment on someone's **appearance**? Ask yourself first: Is this something they can change in five seconds (e.g., spinach in their teeth)? If not, consider not saying anything.
- The reactions to statements might be **gender-split** ('You look cute when you're angry'), **age-split** ('Are there any strong guys to help us carry the table?') or **ethnicity-split** ('Can I touch your hair?'). → Before playing, select the questions based on the composition of your team.

Geographical Gatekeeping: The Underrepresentation of the Balkans

Ruth Koleva, the founder of SoAlive Music Conference, took the time out of her busy schedule to speak in the DEI seminar about a topic close to her heart: the underrepresentation of the Balkans in the European music ecosystem. Ruth herself had performed as an artist for years before switching to the production side during the COVID-19 pandemic. By doing research, she was able to finally put into numbers the feeling she had that artists from the Balkans are not treated equally in Europe.

For the past 2 ½ years, her team has researched the representation of Eastern European artists in the broader European music ecosystem, resulting in the paper "[Geographical Equality in the Music Industry in the EU](#)." "Although diversity, equity, and inclusion are very important in the EU's values and programs, people don't talk much about geographical representation," she said. Their research started out by examining the situation of artists and has transformed to also include people working in the industry more broadly, Ruth explained.

While there is some debate about which states exactly belong to "the Balkans" and where to draw the geographical line, Ruth and her team take a broad approach by including all European countries south of Austria, Hungary and Ukraine. This includes Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Bulgaria, Albania, and Greece.



Founder of SoAlive Music Conference and former artist Ruth Koleva. Photo: SAMC

"The Balkan peninsula is home to 55 million people and one of the biggest markets in Europe, but we don't really hear about music happening in this place," Ruth criticized. In their study, they set out to find out why the Balkans are almost invisible on the European music map.



A possible definition of the Balkans. Source: Wikimedia, OpenStreetMap.

They analyzed the representation of artists from this region by looking at the **line-ups of major showcase festivals**. In 2025, Linecheck, Reeperbahn Festival and The Great Escape all featured zero artists from South-Eastern Europe (SEE), WOMEX had two, Tallinn Music Week had three. JazzAhead hasn't featured a single SEE artist in years, despite multiple applications, according to Ruth.

ESNS, Europe's biggest event for emerging music artists, featured six artists from SEE in 2025. However, out of the 222 artists this

year, 12 came from Ireland and three from Iceland, despite the countries having a much smaller population than the Balkans. "Systematically, all these countries have been very underrepresented in many of the lineups that we see. SEE artists made up only 0.6% of acts at major European showcase festivals in 2025," Ruth concluded.

Another problem are barriers that arise from the selection process of the **European Broadcasting Union (EBU)**. According to Ruth, there are frequent changes in policies about when and how you can apply to be featured, and the jury is made up of program managers of the individual radio stations whose median age is 65-70.

Examining **LiveEurope**, which offers touring support, revealed that out of 3200 supported events none took place in Albania, and only one each in Montenegro and Kosovo. "While Serbia (83) and Croatia (77) are better represented, a significant proportion of these bookings took place within the region rather than in Western or Central Europe, thereby undermining the core goal of transnational exposure," Ruth said.

The investigation also showed that the entire Balkan region with 11 countries and 56 million inhabitants is grossly underrepresented when compared to, e.g., to Benelux and Scandinavia. In these five countries with roughly 57 million people, acts from the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, France, Austria, Germany and Sweden consistently dominate programming schedules. "This is gatekeeping with a very westernized priority," Ruth criticized.

She said the reason for this "geographical gatekeeping" are **negative stereotype towards the Balkans** that are deeply rooted in countries outside the region. For instance, the so-called Bulgarian scam, where a Bulgarian playlist allegedly swindled \$1 million in royalties out of Spotify,



Ruth Koleva. Photo: SAMC

happened almost ten years ago, but it's the only thing many people have heard about the Bulgarian music industry, Ruth said.

"It's so commonly accepted that you can categorize people from SEE as mafia, prostitutes and so on. This is the portrayal in the media. There is no portrayal of people living their everyday lives. Everyone you see on the media is connected to nighttime labor," Ruth said. British newspaper *The Guardian* recently published an opinion piece in which Slovenian author Ana Schnabl

stated that movie villains used to be Russian and Chinese – now there are from the Balkans, showing an underlying western prejudice.

SEE artists are also **underrepresented in digital platforms**, Ruth and her team found. "Spotify doesn't have any regional curators in the Balkans," she said. Without them, there is no way for artists who release music in their local languages to make it into playlists. "It really damages the cultural identity."

Artists in small markets like Montenegro were also hit by Spotify's decision to **demonetize songs below 1000 streams**. The decision was supposed to target low quality AI music but also hurts established artists with a legitimate userbase that just isn't big enough.

However, the digital market also brings chances. In Bulgaria, the Spotify userbase grew by 25% in 2023. According to Ruth, people in the country have more money to spend, there are more festivals and stadium shows. "There is potential to develop this," she said.

She also urged the EU to take action against this geographical bias because of a **growing Euroscepticism in Eastern Europe**, also among artists. "People follow role models, and if you don't have visible success stories of artists circulating their music and growing, people tend to get skeptical. And this opens the door widely for nationalist, pro-Russian propaganda," Ruth said. Recently, "a hardcore nationalist performer" from Croatia drew 500,000 people to a show – the biggest concert ever performed in Zagreb. According to Ruth, not enough positive examples exist for people to feel like they belong to the EU.

She has also experienced negative sentiments towards the Balkans in person. When she met with someone from an export office in Western Europe, the person said, "you look way more European than in your pictures." "In every other scenario it would be such a racist thing to say, but Balkan people hear it all the time," Ruth criticized.

She further underlined that genre wise, the Balkans have much to offer. "In reality, the richness and diversity in the Balkans is so much more than Balkan Sound." However, gatekeeping in genres

"In reality, the richness and diversity in the Balkans is so much more than Balkan Sound."

Ruth Koleva

like Jazz is strong, as, e.g., shown by zero SEE artists being invited to JazzAhead. This keeps Balkan artists confined to folkloric music, further limiting their opportunities.

This is especially surprising if you consider the vast number of artists in the SEE region. Counting registered artists on GigMit and in country-specific associations like the Bulgarian Music Association and performers' rights collecting societies, has revealed more than 35,000 artists in the region, "highlighting a vibrant and extensive community of musicians across various genres," Ruth said.

At SoAlive Music Conference (SAMC), they actively fight against this trend. In 2025, they featured 55 bands from the region in their line-up. "There is so much talent here, but you won't see them anywhere else," the SAMC founder said. Additionally, her team is encouraging artists to apply for other showcases, which led to four times more applications to ESNS this year. When they ask artists why they don't apply for showcase festivals, they often answer: because they won't get accepted anyway.

What can we as music professionals do to improve the situation for Balkan artists? Ruth recommended to

"There is a lot of space to grow, but if the East and the West want to live together, some work needs to be done."

Ruth Koleva

- advocate for the establishment of regional curators on major streaming platforms and music festivals.
- strengthen music export offices in SEE countries.
- increase access to funding for SEE artists to enable them to cross borders.
- establish collaborative networks to connect Balkan and international artists.
- promote cross-cultural exchange programs that encourage artistic collaboration across borders.
- support artist development and training programs for SEE artists.
- work with policy makers for truly inclusive policies that address systemic biases and stereotypes.

In the end, this would be a "win-win situation," Ruth said. The European market is oversaturated and there are a lot of opportunities in the Balkans, from tax incentives to festivals to talent. "There is a lot of space to grow, but if the East and the West want to live together, some work needs to be done," Ruth concluded.



→ Get more info from Ruth's presentation [here](#).

→ Read the full [study "Geographical Equity in the Music Industry in the EU"](#).

Is it DEI versus Safety? The Limits of Participation

Is universal accessibility an illusion? When you are trying to make your festival more accessible and inclusive, you'll find that measures sometimes clash with the safety of festival participants, i.e. with the concept of crowd safety. In these cases, it's often the safety team's unpopular job to say: "no, we can't do it." In the panel "**Is it DEI versus safety? The limits of participation**", crowd



*Isabel Roudsarabi interviews Roxana Luca and Morten Therkildsen from YOUROPE's Event Safety (YES) Group.
Photo: Katharina Weber*

safety experts from YOUROPE's Event Safety (YES) Group discussed where at festivals the needs of the individual come into conflict with the needs of the many – and what you can do to resolve this conflict.

At Roskilde Festival, accessibility is a huge focus for the teams. "For me, it's very much about good hosting. The whole idea is being a good host and honestly wanting to create a good environment for your guests," **Morten Therkildsen, (Director of Safety at Roskilde Festival Group / YES Group)**, said. Their entire staff gets this message.

Host **Isabel Roudsarabi (Co-founder and Managing Director at Høme – For Festivals)** asked whether it's sometimes 'safety versus DEI', even though safety teams don't like to be viewed as the ones excluding certain people from certain areas. For example: people crowdsurfing in wheelchairs. What looks like the epitome of inclusion is actually a safety hazard at the same time – the crowdsurfers might fall out of their wheelchairs, possibly injuring themselves and others around them.

Morten admitted that Roskilde Festival (RF) is not good at handling this topic, i.e. bringing people in wheelchairs into high-density areas. "It's dangerous for them, but it's also dangerous for everybody else," he said. RF hosts about 180 concerts per edition. Each is rated as green, yellow, or red. The color is determined based on a risk assessment, which, e.g., includes the expected behavior of the crowd. Green means visitors are just hanging out and watching, yellow means some jumping is expected, while red means high energy with dancing and moshing.

In theory, it should be possible for people in wheelchairs to go to high-density areas at green concerts, Morten said. But the challenge is communicating the difference. They work with very lowly trained staff – what if they didn't read about the color system in their briefing? What if they don't understand the difference? Then they would create a danger for everyone.

RF is particularly attentive to crowd safety because in 2000, nine people died at a concert at the festival. "One person in a wheelchair in a high-density crowd could kill someone. In a low energy crowd, not so much – unless they really try," Morten said. But all it takes is one person arguing with the staff if they are not well prepared. "The safety of the crowd comes before the experience of one person," Morten summarized their approach, although he also admitted that they could work on being better.

"Why not simply train the staff more?" Isabel asked. Morten's answer: because there is so much staff and they have so many tasks that they can't train them in every detail. Roskilde Festival works with 3000 volunteers alone and has around 135,000 visitors each year.

As **Mika Christoffersen, RF's Head of Participation and Diversity**, added, they don't count the number of people using wheelchairs but only ask about mobility issues in general. Right now, they have space for about 50 people on each of their accessibility platforms – and the more accessible they make the festival, the more people with disabilities come, they found. These accessibility platforms are their current answer to not allowing wheelchair users in high-density areas at any concert. "I think we are doing well but there is still a long way to go. We could open the green concerts, but that would mean a lot of work in training and preparation," Morten said.

At ARTmania Festival in Romania, they also don't allow people in wheelchairs in the high-density areas, **Roxana Luca (ARTmania / Emagic / Pozitif Live / YES Group)** said, because it would slow down the pace at which all visitors would be able to evacuate in case of emergency. Instead, they

"One person in a wheelchair in a high-density crowd could kill someone. In a low energy crowd, not so much – unless they really try."

Morten Therkildsen



Morten Therkildsen is Director of Safety at Roskilde Festival. Photo: Katharina Weber

also opt for special platforms. These are at eye level of the visitors standing around them. ARTmania also offers break areas, where people with disabilities can relax and get away from the noise.

The festival has started supporting visitors with hearing impairments by creating a fenced-off area in the middle of the high-density area for them. The spot was chosen because there, you have the best view of the sign language interpreters on stage. Since it is one of the best places to watch the concerts, it took about three years for visitors without hearing impairment and access to the zone to accept it, Roxana reported.

“How much are you working with people with disabilities to address these issues?” Isabel asked. Morten: “A lot. “It’s all about listening and good hosting. We are all different and that’s the challenge.” However, there are also limits. He told the story of a small woman who loved Metal and wrote them a letter, suggesting changes to make it easier for small people in high-density areas. But RF couldn’t implement them.



Roxana Luca works as a safety expert for ARTmania.

Photo: Katharina Weber

Morten explained that he is a crowd safety manager first and foremost, meaning he generalizes – how many people can stand in a specific area, what is the speed that they walk with, what is the energy at the concert? Etc. They have 135,000 people at the festival, and about 70,000 fit in front of the main stage. Thinking about crowds within crowds – they are not good at doing that, he admitted, but you also need to know where to stop. If there are too many details, the system won’t work anymore. “The balance is very difficult for us,” Morten said.

Roxana talked about when ARTmania wanted to create viewing platforms for people with mobility issues, they didn’t know where to start. What is the correct height? Which degree is too steep for the ramp leading up to it? So, they reached out to small,

local agencies working with people with disabilities. These agencies gave them a good idea of the needs of the target group, so the festival could check what they could afford and offer.

“What is your approach to communicating with the audience?” Isabel asked. “I think we communicate a lot,” Morten said. The challenge is to adapt the communication methods to the situation because there is only so little that the audience can take in. For example, the only way they reveal the color scheme to the audience is before high energy concerts by showing a lightning symbol on the screens. It comes with a message: ‘If you’re not robust (physically or mentally), start out at the side and see if you dare to go into the middle.’

Similarly, at ARTmania, “we try not to spam,” Roxana said. They use local channels, associations, and ambassadors to spread certain information. This method can help a lot, particularly when the festival forgets to communicate something or needs to fix something on short notice. They are also raising awareness by communicating about their visitors with disabilities and the services they offer for them, so other visitors behave when there are people with disabilities in the audience.

Sometimes, Roxana told the participants, visitors without disabilities try to use the relaxation zones for people with disabilities, e.g. exhausted elderly people. How the festival team handles it depends on the capacity of the zone, Roxana added. If there is space, they let them in. If there isn’t, they direct them to other areas, and if it’s almost at capacity, the team explains that they might need to make room when a visitor with a disability arrives. “It works if you communicate nicely,” she said.

Implementing accessibility platforms rather than pure wheelchair platforms also requires good communication at RF, Morten said. Who is allowed up there is now more fluid, e.g. people who can’t stand for too long and need a

**“It works if you
communicate
nicely.”**

Roxana Luca
about people with and
without disabilities
sharing zones for
people with disabilities

place to sit. The audience doesn't understand why some are allowed up there and others are not. They might take photos and complain publicly. "If you train your staff really well, they will be able to explain the reasons to guests," Morten said.

In his opinion, we, as a society, still have a long way to go in talking about the fact that people are different and how to best deal with that. At RF, they have already come a long way since they had the first social workers at the event in 2006. They have been trying to move from 'security staff' to 'safety staff', because 'security' implies that they are looking for someone who has the intention to do harm, and that doesn't fit into their concept of good hosting. "We have worked with that for so many years, but we are still far behind." He dreams of a day when good hosting is the way to manage most of their challenges. "For me, that means we need more money to train safety staff."

But they also have a responsibility to teach their very young audience whenever they can. They can't expect them to know how to behave in all situations. We need to explain to them, e.g., it's okay to leave high density areas, but don't push people because they enter your personal space there. "It's like this: when they are in my home, I will make sure they have a good time, but they also have the responsibility to behave," Morten concluded.

Case Study: How Roskilde Festival Creates an Impact beyond their Event

Trying to have an impact beyond their festival is one of Roskilde Festival's core goals. They want their visitors to have something that they can take home and that changes the way they interact with the world. In Sofia, **Mika Christoffersen, Head of Participation and Diversity at Roskilde Festival (RF)**, presented some of the many projects that are intended to make visitors feel safe, welcome, and inspired.

The three guiding questions in her work are:

- Who can attend?
- Will they thrive and feel safe?
- How do we treat each other and the venue?



*Mika Christoffersen, Roskilde Festival's Head of Participation and Diversity.
Photo: Ivana Barova*

Simple questions, but according to her, they make concepts like diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) more approachable.

Roskilde Festival lasts for eight days, has seven stages and about 130,000 participants. Each year, it becomes the fourth largest city in Denmark. Roskilde Festival relies on 2500 year-round volunteers who help plan the festival and 28,000 volunteers who work on site during the festival. RF donates all profits to charitable (youth) projects. They use art as method of change. Besides the monetary bottom line, they also consider their artistic, social and environmental bottom line.

To explain why the festival works so hard to create a social impact on their visitors, Mika quoted US author Ursula K. Le Guin, who once said: "We live in capitalism. Its power seems

“If you expect good of people, they are more likely to perform at that level.”

Mika Christoffersen

inescapable. So did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art, the art of words.” Mika: “We believe that art is a tool for change, a direct way to tap into people’s empathy.”

RF was started in 1971 on the local animal showcasing grounds by three friends who felt inspired by Woodstock. People sat in front of the stages, tents were pitched near the stage, and everything had a completely different vibe.

Today, RF has a core audience of 15–25-year-olds, lots of them first-time festival goers. When asked why they come, their top answers were: festivals as freedom, catching a break from routine, imagining a different future, hope and potential. “It’s really hard to imagine a radically different future. Gen Z are the first generation that imagine a future that is worse. It used to be flying cars, now it’s the apocalypse and climate catastrophe. We were told that the festival makes them feel hopeful,” Mika said.

Four core values influencing the whole festival

One of RF’s core values is to **believe in people**. For **design and expectations**, this means they design their festival in a way that favors trust in people over total control of a situation. They pay attention that their **actions match their values** and adhere to **access intimacy** (more on that below). Since 2018, they measure and report, e.g., how many people have accessibility needs, get catcalled, get groped and much more. Mika was happy to report that all numbers had developed in the right direction this year.

“‘**We believe in people**’ sounds kind of corny – and it really is,” Mika said. RF takes risks because they believe that people won’t misuse their offers and hold each other accountable. “If you expect good of people, they are more likely to perform at that level.” There will always be some jerks, but not the majority. “Planning for this principle can be hard sometimes,” Mika said.

What does that mean for **design and expectations**? How you design your festival leads to certain behaviors. For example, the whole infield used to be fenced. It implied that the festival doesn’t trust its visitors and had to keep them out. “People rebelled and pushed against the fence – so we took it away. It was very risky, and we didn’t do it all at once,” Mika said. Nowadays, only some barrier tape is put up around the infield.

Young service staff is stationed there, asking the visitors, who are often their peers age wise, not to enter because the site is not ready for them yet – and it works. People know when the site will open, so they don’t have to queue. It’s a huge monetary saving and



Mika Christoffersen on accessibility at Roskilde Festival. Photo: Katharina Weber

a huge behavioral change. "It all came down to trusting that people would actually play by the rules," Mika said. The only time it failed was when the staff tested the bullhorn signaling the opening of the infield, and visitors mistook it for the actual opening.

As a general rule, Mika recommended: "Tell people what you want to see, not what you don't want to see. It's like raising kids. If you always tell them no, they wonder what they are actually allowed to do." RF has developed the "Orange Together" **code of conduct**, which spans the entire event and uses positive reinforcement: treat each other with respect, look after each other, be considerate in crowds, leave your campsite clean, take a break.

Actions match Roskilde Festival's values

This is a selection of projects that RF implements to support their values with real-life action:

- **Responsible refund:** Some people, often Black and Brown from weak economic backgrounds, buy a ticket specifically to collect deposit bottles, Mika reported. The festival tries to make sure they can do their work by offering an area with interpreters that speak their languages, by having a volunteer group to keep in touch with them, by offering a place where they can put their collected bottles. In the end, it's also a plus for the festival, if deposit bottles are collected and not left behind as trash.
- **Equal access:** Period products are available for free at several stations at the festival. They come with a 45-second time lock, so people don't squander the products. RF also offers different squat urinals, labelling them "for women and those who need to squat to pee" to not gender them.
- **Accessibility map:** RF created an accessibility version of their site map, showing, e.g., paths with a firm layer that will always be easy to travel on, accessible podiums, accessible bathrooms – "all the things you might need if you are a person who might need more accessibility," Mika said.



Roskilde Festival's accessibility map. Source: Roskilde Festival

- **Facilitating rest:** When attendees need a break from sound, alcohol, or conversations – they can access lounge areas to sit and relax without receiving any input. New this year

was an on-site garden. The festival cooperates with volunteers from local schools, who take care of the garden year-round. During the festival days, visitors could join in the gardening fun and community dinners, which were supplemented by food grown there. It was so successful that the festival plans to expand the garden to three times its size next year, Mika said.

- **Soft Spots:** Even if nothing is wrong, festivals can demand a lot from people. At these special places, you can show your soft side, hang out, and talk. The spots are staffed by trained personnel from partner organizations. In the second year, about 2/3 of the users were men, and they wanted primarily to talk about consent, after a new consent law had been passed in Denmark. "This is a place where you can talk about things that are hard to talk about like consent, sexual boundaries, gender." This year, the spots offered a device that imitate period cramps – quite a few men were brought there by their girlfriends, Mika reported.
- **Equal access:** To make the hills in the middle of the campsite accessible, RF hired an artist to create an installation called "The long way round", which was a huge, winding ramp leading up to a platform on the hills. Some of the legs intentionally look like they are about to break or point in funny directions – nevertheless they are sturdy. This installation will be part of RF for at least five years, according to Mika.
- **Access intimacy:** Access intimacy means looking at a space, a webpage etc. and decoding if you're welcome – is this festival for me? Are my needs considered here? Will I be safe and comfortable? All those things that don't directly exclude people but make them hesitate to come. This can relate to disability, age, language, ethnicity and more.
- **Accessibility:** RF works with four types of accessibility: physical, psychological, organizational, and social (more on that in the [chapter on barriers to equal access](#)). All should be considered to create access intimacy. For example, RF's accessibility platforms have a poster explaining that this platform is for everyone, but certain types of needs have priority here. It has seats at the back, and it is lower than usual so that people without disabilities can stand next to it to party with their friends on the platform.

Diversity Awareness Training: Psychological Safety & Pinkwashing

One of the goals of diversity awareness training is for the participants to learn how to handle challenges that might arise from working in an environment with people from different backgrounds. Each training course is a little different, focusing on other aspects of diversity. For his training session in the seminar, **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Researcher and Professional Jannick Friis Christensen** chose two main topics: 1) psychological safety and 2) social responsibility communication, a.k.a. how not to pinkwash.

What is DEI?

After a short introductory game and establishing some guardrails for the session, Jannick started out by talking about what 'DEI' actually means. '**Diversity**' is context-related, he emphasized. The concept travelled to Europe in the early 2000s from diversity management in the USA – but many European countries already had a history of working with similar issues, such as equality that, however, was predominantly understood as sameness, whereas diversity emphasizes differences, Jannick said.

At first, it was mostly about integrating migrant workers; later it evolved to also incorporate women, then the LGBTQIA+ community; and now the newest trend is neurodiversity. Sometimes, it's a numbers game, i.e. the group that is in the majority is often also the dominant force, but not always (e.g. black people in South Africa). 'Diversity' can relate to culture, skin color, age, gender, and much more. The most important aspect: "It's a group concept," Jannick said. A person on their own cannot be diverse – it's about differences in a group. That means that a group of only women might be just as non-diverse as a group of only men. The group of women is not automatically more diverse just because women belong to a non-dominant force.



DEI and Belonging researcher and professional Jannick Friis Christensen. Photo: Ivana Barova

'**Inclusion**' can be defined by considering two aspects: the uniqueness of people and a sense of belonging. When people have a high sense of uniqueness, that is, they can express themselves even if falling outside the norm-group, *and* they retain a high sense of belonging, you have achieved inclusion. The opposite is 'exclusion,' a low degree of uniqueness and sense of belonging.

In between you can find 'assimilation,' when people have low expression uniqueness but a high sense of belonging. In a work scenario, that could mean, e.g., that people downplay their sexual

orientation at work if they are gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In other words, they get to belong but at the expense of vital aspects of who they are to fit in. 'Differentiation' or 'segregation' happens when people have high uniqueness, but a low sense of belonging, e.g. workers eating lunch in groups according to their native language.

Lastly, access, opportunity and fairness can be achieved through **equity**, more specifically through equitable organization. While showing pictures of different stairs Jannick asked the participants to think about who is included in these scenarios and who is not. The first picture of a person walking up a flight of stairs also showed a person in a wheelchair sitting at the bottom, with no means of getting to the top. "At a structural level, wheelchair users are completely invisible in this picture," he said. According to him, 'equity' is working with people and seeing them before the need arises. "This is an ongoing process, so don't let 'perfect' get in the way of progress," he said.

Psychological Safety: What it is and why your team needs it

As Jannick explained, Amy Edmondson and Timothy Clark are "the gurus of psychological safety." Edmondson defined 'psychological safety' as "a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking." She studied failure and found out that teams that feel psychologically safe report more mistakes, which enabled them to learn from them and improve, making them high performing teams.

"Psychological safety is about performance in teams," Jannick underlined. Psychologically safe teams are able to distinguish between intelligent and unacceptable mistakes. An unacceptable mistake would be to not follow the rules, causing the roof to catch fire, for which people justly should be sanctioned. Intelligent mistakes, on the other hand, are caused by people experimenting, innovating, taking risks by exploring new grounds. "People should be rewarded for that," Jannick added.

If you want to find out about the level of psychological safety in your teams, you can ask your team to answer a simple seven-question survey suggested by Edmonson (see image). The survey contains statements like: "Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues," and respondents must state how much they agree or disagree with it. A company must determine the level that they think represents psychologically safe teams which they want to achieve.

Evaluating psychological safety in your team

Rate each statement on a scale as "STRONGLY DISAGREE", "DISAGREE", "NEUTRAL", "AGREE", or "STRONGLY AGREE"

1. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you. (R)
2. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues.
3. People on this team sometimes reject others for being different. (R)
4. It is safe to take a risk on this team.
5. It is difficult to ask other members of this team for help. (R)
6. No one on this team would deliberately act in a way that undermines my efforts.
7. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilised.

**You can also use your eyes and ears to gauge levels of psychological safety: For example, do you experience 'deafening silence' at meetings? And who speaks more – leaders and senior members?*

Edmondson (2019), p. 215 with "R" indicating a reverse relationship for negatively expressed questions, such that disagreement is consistent with higher psychological safety.

You can use this test to get a good idea of what your level of psychological safety is in your team. Image: Jannick Friis Christensen

Other things to consider that Jannick suggested: how often have you not said something in a meeting because you were afraid your colleagues would laugh at you, because you were afraid it might sound stupid, or because your idea might not make sense?

A few examples:

- One of the participants told the story about how she thought she had become confident because she felt confident in her team, but then she **started working with another team**. She remained silent about topics to which she could have contributed and eventually stopped talking about her core values altogether.
- A lack of psychological safety might also be caused by **bad leadership** creating a fearful work culture.
- Psychological safety can be particularly important for **introverts**. A fair share of them prefer to think things through before they speak, and sometimes they don't get to the point of sharing. Often, managers say, "well, but they can simply speak up." What they might forget is that the introverts sometimes don't feel safe enough. Managers are creating a certain ideal for the way meetings should go that is great for extroverted people but suboptimal for introverts.



Jannick Friis Christensen. Photo: Ivana Barova

What is the problem with a lack of psychological safety? These examples show that, if psychological safety is absent, employees don't criticize the status quo, they don't offer new ideas, they might appear as weak when admitting a mistake, and they don't ask questions. They don't because they fear being seen as negative, intrusive, incompetent or ignorant.

Psychological safety could be the answer to these problems. It is not about being nice or being free from conflict. It's not a permission to slack off and not do your work, or a guarantee that all of your work will be applauded. Instead, it is about "a workplace where people are not hindered by interpersonal fear in work groups," Jannick explained.

"[Psychological safety is about] a workplace where people are not hindered by interpersonal fear in work groups."

Jannick Friis Christensen

Having a high level of psychological safety shows if the quiet person speaks up with relevant ideas, questions and concerns, because team members trust each other. Team members believe there won't be any repercussions and that they won't lose their responsibility.

Why is a lack of psychological safety a problem?

Jannick explained that the experience of physical pain and the anticipation of social exclusion show up similarly in brain scans. In socially contemplating people, it activates higher attention-related brain activity like rumination and spiraling, possibly leading to exhaustion. Similarly, the brain can't differentiate between having a

real discussion with someone and having an imagined discussion with someone in your head, someone from the audience added. Lastly, we might miss out on getting less commonly known

knowledge, because somebody who has unique experiences doesn't dare to speak up.

"Psychological safety is important to activate the diversity in the teams."

Jannick Friis Christensen

A study involving Amy Edmonson showed **the benefits of having a high level of psychological safety**, by proving that teams with high diversity and high psychological safety perform better than teams with high psychological safety. "Psychological safety is important to activate the diversity in the teams," Jannick said.

Another study found that diversity is important when you want to innovate and go new ways, while homogenous teams can be better at doing routine work

due to shared understandings. A third study, conducted by Google, found that five aspects are important to predict team effectiveness: psychological safety, dependability, structure and clarity, meaning, and impact – with psychological safety being the most important aspect.

How does psychological safety work? You cannot just declare that there is now psychological safety in a team. Rather, "it is something that is experienced," Jannick said. It's a matter of how a facilitator, leader or team member reacts when you do something courageous. What counts as 'courageous' is individual and contextual. It can mean speaking up without having evidence (esp. in academia), questioning the work dynamic with a more senior colleague, owning mistakes, expressing your opinion, delivering bad news, and much more. The common denominator is that a courageous act, at the same time, is to show vulnerability.

To increase psychological safety, it can help to destigmatize failure. When somebody admits a mistake, focus on offering help instead of assigning blame, Jannick recommended. Mika from Roskilde Festival shared that, when they try something new at her festival, they don't ask the question "did we succeed?" Instead, their approach is always 'build, test, learn.'

Social responsibility communication: How not to pinkwash

In short, pinkwashing is the social equivalent of greenwashing, Jannick explained. It happens, for example, when companies use Pride colors but don't do anything to support the LGBTQIA+ community; when CEOs publicly show solidarity with women in the #metoo debate but have their own sexual harassment case surface later; or when companies speak out for the Black Lives Matter movement but employ Black people only at the lowest positions.

While today Pride parades in Western countries may seem like a big party sprinkled with some politics, LGBTQIA+ individuals still don't have the same rights as heterosexual, cis-gender people everywhere, not even in all EU countries, Jannick said. He explained that Pride has its root in the protests of the LGBTQIA+ community against serious police violence in 1969, particularly a raid of the Stonewall Inn in Lower Manhattan's Christopher Street. During this series of protests, called the Stonewall uprising, the community demanded a stop of the persecution of sexual minorities.

In the following year, people came together in several American cities to peacefully commemorate the uprising in New York's Christopher Street, starting a long tradition. This is why

Pride Parades were initially called (and in some places like Germany are still called) 'Christopher Street Day.'

Today, you can also be a 'proud company' or a 'proud parent', if you are not queer yourself, to show your support. "They socially sanction that it's O.K. to be LGBT+," Jannick said. They give a stamp of approval, which is great – but mixing fighting for human rights with commercial interest is also where the problems begin.



Trainer Jannick Friis Christensen and some of the participants of his session. Photo: Ivana Barova

As Jannick explained, pinkwashing was historically used in two contexts: donation campaigns for breast cancer awareness that misused the collected donations, committing **charity fraud**, and so-called **homonationalism**, i.e. using your alleged queer-friendliness as a smokescreen to mask that you are in fact discriminating against other minorities.

Nowadays, pinkwashing is used to describe **the phenomenon when companies are profiting from marginalized people's struggles**, e.g. by selling merch or branding in a specific way, but without giving something back to these communities. They only offer symbolic support but, e.g., don't have policies in place to support minorized individuals or still do business with countries that have outlawed homosexuality. "All talk, no action," Jannick said, summarizing their approach.

He shared empirical examples that pinkwashing used to be about movements criticizing companies – now companies use it to criticize the competition. According to these businesses, just creating visibility and awareness is not enough anymore, even donating can be seen as "buying indulgences." So, how do you participate in Pride in the correct way?

To **minimize the risk of pinkwashing** and **maximize the potential and mutually beneficial impact**, Jannick advised to:

- form strategic partnerships with people from the community you want to support.
- minimize the gap between what you promise and what you can deliver. Communicate that you are not perfect.
- keep stakeholders in the loop. It's not enough to communicate your efforts internally, e.g. when you installed a new LGBTQIA+-friendly policy. You also need to let the public know, e.g. activists. Be careful not to brag!
- support your employee networks and their identity groups.

- engage in advocacy. A whitepaper revealed that advocacy matters when it comes to workplace inclusion. It's particularly important for companies to engage in advocacy that deal with countries where being queer is illegal.

Case Study: Colours of Ostrava's Accessibility Program

Colours of Ostrava is a 50,000-capacity festival founded in 2002 taking place at the former industrial site Dolní Vítkovice in Ostrava, Czech Republic. When they found more and more people with mobility issues were interested in their event, they started the program 'Colours without Barriers' in 2011. Meanwhile, it has expanded to offer services for people with different kinds of disabilities and needs. In Sofia, **Colours of Ostrava's** **booker and former social worker Pavla Slivova** gave more insight into the program.

The idea for the program was sparked by a vendor, who brought a bar with a lower counter to the festival, so people in wheelchairs could use it, too, Pavla said. Since then, it has been snowballing to address more and more types of disabilities. "What we are trying to do with our accessibility program is having a festival without barriers and having a venue that is fully adapted. Everyone is welcome and can be part of it. How do we do it? We listen to people," Pavla said.



Colours of Ostrava's Pavla Slivova on their services for people on the autism spectrum. Photo: Ivana Barova

They have channels where people can express how they feel at the festival, and they publish a survey to ask what they could improve. They have team members with visual and hearing impairments, and they have people in wheelchairs test the routes at the festival before opening to check for barriers. "And of course, we learn from our mistakes," Pavla added.

"We work with local communities because they are super important to us. We are not the experts here." The team meets with them a few times a year. Sometimes they point out obvious things the team didn't realize, sometimes they come up with things the festival can't implement. Here are some of Colours of Ostrava's measures:

General accessibility

- Reduced admission fee for people with a certificate of disability. €60 instead of €140 (early bird). Free admission for their caretaker. It can be a different caretaker each day.
- 'Colours without Barriers' information desk and helpline specifically for people with disabilities.
- The option to ask for a trained assistant. A team of about 50 volunteers are available to support people with different kinds of disabilities during their entire stay.

Reduced mobility

- Fully equipped, barrier-free campsite with showers and facilities. It used to be right next to the festival grounds, but the festival lost the right to use the land and moved the accessible campsite into the general camping area. Although camping is about a 20-minute walk away from the infield, having accessible camping integrated in the general camping is actually more inclusive, Pavla said. A shuttle for people with disabilities runs every 30 minutes.
- Wheelchair-accessible platforms at the stages for people who cannot stand up or be in a crowd.
- Wheelchair-accessible taxi for a symbolic price of €4 brings those with reduced mobility to the festival gates.
- Relaxation zone for wheelchair users where they can sit on soft cushions and get repair support for wheelchairs when a battery runs out or a tire goes flat.

“Everyone is welcome and can be part of [the festival]. How do we do it? We listen to people.”

Hearing impairment

Pavla Slivova

- Website with informational videos interpreted in Czech sign language.
- Interpretation of lectures and debates of the 'Meltingpot discussion forum' into Czech Sign Language. The festival asks the local community which topics they are most interested in to choose which sessions to sign.
- AI translation of 'Meltingpot' sessions into English text.
- Interpreting select concerts of Czech, English and Spanish artists into artistic sign language. "It's a performance in itself," Pavla said. If the headliners don't allow the interpreters to be on the stage with them, they work from a small platform next to the stage. "If it rains, they get a tent; if it's sunny, they get a fan," Pavla said.
- Backpacks that transmit sounds as vibrations.
- A designated area in front of the main stage for deaf people for the best view of the sign language interpreter. Although the festival got feedback that this is a bit excluding, they have not found a better alternative yet that allows a good view of the stage.

Visual impairment

- A guide in Braille about 'Colours without Barriers'.
- Tactile map of the site with markings for all festival stages.
- 3D model of the [Gong Multipurpose Hall](#) – a lightweight and portable model that allows blind people to better imagine the space where lectures, concerts, and theatrical performances take place.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

- Fully equipped relaxation zone (safer space) where visitors with ASD can escape the hubbub of the festival.
- Inflatable tent with [Snoezelen therapy](#) – a pleasant and specially-designed multisensory environment.
- Childcare for children with ASD, "so their parents can have some free time at the festival, which is often impossible for parents of children with autism," Pavla said.
- Awareness raising for ASD: Visitors can get an idea of what it is like to have autism by wearing a special helmet that limits their vision, hearing etc.



Pavla Slivova. Photo: Ivana Barova

The idea of offering services for people with ASD came from the local community, Pavla told the audience. They were approached by a group working with people on the autism spectrum who wanted to build a living center where people with ASD could live independently without their parents' help. The group asked whether they could tap into the VIPs coming to Colours of Ostrava to find sponsors – and with the support of the VIPs, the apartments were eventually built.

Next plans: The festival wants to communicate more to all visitors what they are doing for "Colours without Barriers" and why they are making the festival more accessible. "Our visitors do know very little about it about the moment," Pavla said. There are plans to use the main stage performance of a specific band next year as a frame for PR on the project.



➔ Find Pavla's presentation [here](#).

Identifying Barriers to Equal Access

Leading up to a discussion round on barriers to equal access, Roskilde Festival's **Head of Participation and Diversity, Mika Christoffersen**, described how the festival deals with barriers. The team considers two things: 1) what could prevent people from coming to the festival? 2) What is the feeling visitors will likely have when they are at the festival? Instead of thinking about individual needs and removing single barriers, they think more holistically and look at generalized populations and which barriers they would face at the event.

Roskilde Festival (RF) considers four dimensions of accessibility: physical, psychological, organizational, and social.

- **Physical accessibility** is all about ramps and traveling: Am I able to physically enter this place? Can I travel to the venue? Can I read the homepage, so I know when the venue opens? Almost every law on accessibility relates only to this area, according to Mika. But it's about more than just spatial planning. If you have kids, are you allowed to bring them? Is there someone who can watch them, is there a family zone? There is a gender gap in this area because it's still often women who take care of the kids, Mika added.
- **Psychological accessibility** relates to the question of whether people will feel comfortable in a space. Will I know anyone? Can I even find the place? "A lot of people will try to stop themselves from participating because of psychological barriers," Mika said.
- **Organizational accessibility** relates to how we plan things in an organization and its structure. Is there a person responsible for identifying barriers? Is there someone people can call? Is there a way for people with special needs to work at your organization or volunteer at your festival?
- Lastly, **social accessibility** purely relates to people. After you have successfully found accessibility information and reached the venue, how are you greeted? Are you treated as an annoyance? Can you hang out with your friends who don't face barriers? If the elevator is on the other side of the building and the stairs are directly at the entrance, do you split up, or do your friends come with you to the elevator? "This problem doesn't seem like it's a big thing – but it is," Mika said. "The physical space will impact all of the others."

After Mika's introduction, the participants had the chance to talk about barriers at their events and in their organizations. For example, somebody mentioned their office building, which had only recently been renovated. Unfortunately, it seems that nobody had thought about people with mobility issues because all office spaces can only be accessed by stairs. Other barriers the participants talked about included limitations of their websites and a lack of online accessibility information, as well as unsuitable pathways on their festival sites.

Mika recommended **identifying cheap methods to increase accessibility first**, e.g. pointing out which roads have tarmac and which not. "The physical dimension costs money, but the other three rarely do,"

"The physical dimension costs money, but the other three rarely do."

Mika Christoffersen
about the four types of
accessibility Roskilde Festival
considers in their work

she said. One of the participants had a great example from their own festival – they uploaded pictures of the different stages to their website, accompanied by explanations on what the ground looks like – is there grass? Is there tarmac? Are there height differences? Etc.

Some people want to know exactly what they can expect, particularly if they come to a festival for the first time, so it's good to give them pictures and descriptions, Mika said. "There are so many things you can worry about. This is why we don't look at individual needs. It's called '**universal design**', a universal solution that is the best for most people," she added. Even if people don't have a disability, they will benefit from being able to prepare well.

"Most people have so many decisions to make every day," Mika said. She explained that our brain works in two systems, a conscious and an automatic system. Only about 20% of the decisions we make are made consciously – the rest happens automatically. Our brains do that to preserve energy and not overwhelm us. Conscious decision making requires energy and is needed especially in unfamiliar situations. "So, if we can automate, we give people back energy."



Roskilde Festival's Head of Diversity and Participation Mika Christoffersen. Photo: Ivana Barova

According to studies, **about 20% of the population in Europe have self-reported having a disability**. "That's a lot of people with invisible things that they are carrying around," Mika said. Once we get older, anybody might join this population. And it's not just about visitors, it's about artists, too. Can artists with disabilities play at your event? "If you design for accessibility, you can get a lot more people to your event or into your organization," Mika said.

A good-practice example from Roskilde Festival: At an ice cream stand staffed by people who were deaf, visitors could only order in sign language. The signs for the different

flavors were explained on large signs at the booth. You could order by signing or simply by pointing to your preferred flavors. "It wasn't trouble for anybody," Mika said. The advantages: you got to talk to people you never would have talked to, people with disabilities could have a whole new community, they could work at and be a part of the festival and interact with hearing people who wouldn't have interacted with them otherwise.

Mika asked the participants to think of a few things they can implement immediately at their events. Her advice: work with organizations of people with disabilities and ask them what you can improve to make the event better for them. There is a saying in the disabled community: **"Nothing about us without us."**

But don't work with just anybody, Mika recommended. If you work with general disability interest groups, you will get information that is too unspecific, and if you work with many individuals with disabilities, you will get information that is way too specific. In her opinion it's best to work with interest groups for people that have a specific disability because they know exactly how to improve the festival for people who share their disability.

"Nothing about us without us."

Motto of people with disabilities

Lastly, Mika said: "Don't strive for perfection." For example, what do you do if there is a person who needs a seeing-eye dog and another person that is allergic to dogs? "You can't include everyone – and that's okay." She summarized RF's approach in a quote by author Toni Morrison: **"Freedom is choosing your responsibility. It's not having no responsibilities; it's choosing the ones you want."** You can't fix everything – but you can choose something and make a difference in this area.

How to keep your Event Affordable

Festival tickets aren't the only thing that is becoming more expensive every year. Since the pandemic, a global cost of living crisis has made everyday goods more expensive for people in many countries. It can't be taken for granted anymore that young people are able to afford a festival ticket that costs hundreds of Euros plus all the extra costs like food and camping equipment on top. But what happens when entire demographic groups can't afford to come to our festivals anymore?

In a workshop, **Isabel Roudsarabi (Co-founder and managing director at HÖME – For Festivals)** explored some ideas to keep events affordable together with the participants. She started out with a recent quote by Michael Rapino, CEO of Live Nation, who said:

"Music has been underappreciated. In sports, I joke it's like a badge of honor to spend 70 grand for a Knicks courtside [seat]. They beat me up if we charge \$800 for Beyoncé. **We have a lot of runway left.** So when you read about ticket prices going up, the average concert price is still \$72. Try going to a Laker game for that, and there's 80 of them. **The concert is underpriced and has been for a long time.**"

First of all, Rapino argues with false numbers, Isabel pointed out. As Pollstar reported, the average price of a concert ticket in the US was already \$135 in 2024. Furthermore, the participants agreed that this quote showed how out of touch almost-billionaire Rapino is with the average Joe. Of course, \$800 doesn't seem much for someone who belongs to the 1%, but for the average population it's a lot of money. Charging ticket prices like that would mean excluding average people and fans and turning live events into luxury items.

According to Isabel, the problem is that most visitors aren't aware of how much a festival nowadays costs. They don't know how much promoters spend on toilets, artist bookings, etc. They just see tickets getting more expensive. "Try to take on the perspective of someone who just thinks: 'I can't see my favorite artist anymore.'" When visitors think of a festival ticket in terms of the price for one headliner, of course they think it's too expensive. "We need to communicate that there is more at a festival than just the headline concert," Isabel said.



*HÖME's co-founder and managing director
Isabel Roudsarabi. Photo: Ivana Barova*

Last year, YOUROPE and Høme teamed up to conduct the first pan-European survey among festival goers. The results showed that, still, almost a quarter of the respondents calculate €200-299 for festival tickets per year. Almost half of them, however, also think that ticket prices are too high. The biggest group of respondents additionally calculated spending between €80 and €100 on site for food and drinks, proving that in this debate, it's not enough to just talk about ticket prices. Keeping events affordable means more than that.

While 42% of the respondents thought that festivals should offer solidarity tickets, only 15% were willing to pay more to finance them. Mika Christoffersen from Roskilde Festival chimed in to say they found people are more willing to donate if they know to which specific cause their money will go.

Good practice examples

Some events have already found ways to make their events more affordable. Isabel presented some examples:

Boom Festival's social ticketing system: Boom Festival, an eight-day festival in Idanha-a-Nova, Portugal, has an incredible international audience and thus must pay attention to keep prices affordable for people from low-income countries. They have been using a social ticketing system since the early 2000s. 90% of their tickets are sold for the regular price (€270 in 2023), and 10% are sold at a so-called friendly price (€200 in 2023).

“[Offering balanced tickets] takes away the shame of not being able to afford a ticket.”

Isabel Roudsarabi

The festival decides which countries qualify for the friendly price by looking at economic data like the GDP. In addition, they choose a guest country for each edition and provide 500 tickets for free to its residents. A network of ambassadors who live in the respective countries decides who will receive the tickets.

Balanced tickets: Multiple German agencies and ticket providers got together to offer balanced tickets. The idea is to offer three layers of tickets: a regular-priced ticket, a cheaper one, and a more expensive one. Cheaper ones are intended for, e.g., students or people with disabilities. “It takes away the shame of not being able to afford a ticket,” Isabel said.

There are two options: unlock a cheaper ticket only if a more expensive ticket has been bought by someone, or don't restrict cheaper tickets and make them first come, first served, without asking for proof of being in need. The last method of trusting people has worked for some festivals, according to Isabel. “It's a lot about building trust and looking what kind of system works for your target group.”

Cheaper food: Offering a supermarket or food sharing on your festival site is another way to make visiting a festival more affordable. You could have a supermarket on site, collaborate with a supermarket that's close by, or simply offer a stall with items like cheap noodles to cook at the campsite.

This isn't just realistic for major festivals. Isabel told of a German 3000-capacity festival that collaborated with a local supermarket which built an on-site tent to offer food stuff, and a 5000-capacity festival which bought food and drinks to resell them in a supermarket on site. Hosting

“People are buying tickets later and later because they don’t want to or can’t plan that far ahead.”

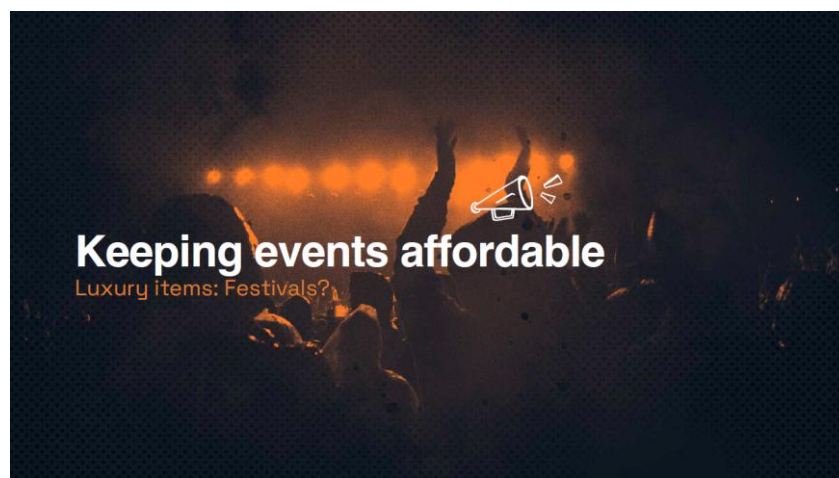
Isabel Roudsarabi

community breakfasts or food sharing stations, where visitors can bring leftover food to share with others, is another great idea.

Refundable tickets: For many, buying tickets for an event that is still a year or a half away has become an unpopular commitment. “People are buying tickets later and later because they don’t want to or can’t plan that far ahead,” Isabel explained. Höme, who among other things offers a ticketing system, found a solution by including a refund option. They launched the refundable ticket option last year in cooperation with the Danish insurance company Tryg, and most of Höme’s ticket clients (almost 200 festivals) have adopted it by now.

In the three-year trial phase, neither the ticket buyers nor the festivals must pay for the refundable ticket option. The tickets are insured, and Höme has designed a whole catalogue of reasons that qualify you for returning your ticket. For example, you broke up with your partner, you were invited to a wedding on the same day as the event, you must take care of family members, your cat got sick, your rent went up.

People simply have to get in touch and state the reason, without needing to deliver any proof (unless they do it very often). Buyers get 100% of the money back, including fees. Isabel: “People actually used it and were very happy to be able to do it.”



➔ Find Isabel’s presentation [here](#).

Gender Balance in Eastern Europe & beyond

How is gender balance lived (or not lived) in the European music industry, particularly in Eastern Europe? In this panel, three women working in live music talked about their personal experiences and academic findings. Host **Isabel Roudsarabi (Co-founder and managing director at Höme – For Festivals)** wanted to know: What is the situation – and how can we improve it?

GENiE – Gender Equality Networks in Europe

Grace Goodwin, a researcher from the University of Liverpool who is in the middle of doing her PhD on gender equality in the UK music industry, opened the floor with some research results, such as (for the sources, please refer to [Grace's presentation](#)):

- Almost 97% of chart-topping songs are produced by men
- 82% of music publishing CEOs are men
- 92% of European festival headliners are men

To address gender inequalities in the music industry, she developed and launched the database [GENiE](#), Gender Equality Networks in Europe. The goal of the database is to collect and connect networks that all share the common goal to create more gender equality in the music industry. She got the idea when she met two women from different networks working on the same cause who had never met or heard of each other – although they were both from the same country and could have benefitted greatly from combining their voices.



University of Liverpool's Grace Goodwin. Photo: Katharina Weber

So, Grace started researching gender equality projects. When GENiE launched on April 2nd, 2024, it already included 300 projects. As of today, the database contains 575 initiatives from 27 countries. Users can filter projects by country and project type based on 29 different tags. "GENiE is built on community and knowledge sharing," Grace said. People can upload their projects by using the submission form on the website.

The main things she has learned so far:

- **Gender equality networks are normally run by FLINTA*** (females, lesbians, intersex, trans, and agender people), rarely cis-gender men (being 'cis-gender' means you identify with the sex that was assigned to you at birth). "Although gender equality is also a man's issue because we live in a patriarchy, men rarely come to my talks," Grace said.
- There is not enough link-up between projects. "There is **no cross-border collaboration**, but I think that is really needed at the moment." According to Grace, a lot of funding is available for cross-border collaboration, but people aren't aware of it.
- The biggest problem: the people running the projects are brilliant, but they have **no time and no money**. Most of them give up their time for free, but cis-gender men rarely do that in the same way as people from marginalized communities.
- **Projects often don't get funding** because they serve niche communities, so they are funded by the activists themselves. The average lifespan of these projects is three to four years, Grace said. Then people get burned out and stop, although they have produced something brilliant. And if projects are funded, sponsors often do it to look good and offer only a one-time investment. "There needs to be sustainable funding models," Grace said. If companies really want to show their commitment, they should fund a project for around five years for it to have a proper impact.

These projects help FLINTA* to learn new skills, find community and enter the industry, Grace concluded. However, there are gaps: while the UK and Germany have the most projects, Eastern European countries like Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania show a lack thereof.



From left to right: Grace Goodwin, Gergana Milovska, Roxana Luca, and Isabel Roudsarabi. Photo: Ivana Barova

She noted that although men need to be at the table when we talk about creating more gender equality, 100% of the audience of the panel was female. "If you want men to show up to these talks, don't label them 'gender balance' or 'DEI,'" she said. In her research, she is also trying to find out more about men's beliefs on the topic. Questions like "have you ever thought about the fact that you're a man?" or "Did you realize that there is no such thing as 'men's music?'" have led to some confused reactions. Unlike 'women's music,' 'men's music' is just music, Grace said. "A lot of them don't really get the difference."

Speaking from her own experience in live event production, particularly in event safety, **Roxana Luca (ARTmania / Emagic / Pozitif Live / YES Group)** from Romania said that in her field you must deliver, no matter what gender you are. The priorities are different – it's all about delivering results. "You have to make sure everything is on time. It's a stressful environment. There are fewer women but not because there are restrictions but because it's a very demanding field," she said.

Grace added that it's difficult to have a common European perspective on gender equality. "We do a one-size-fits-all-approach, but the culture influences it a lot." Sometimes, not even the same terms are used in different countries.



➔ Find Grace's presentation [here](#).

Rising up in the Bulgarian music industry as a woman

“For a woman to get into a leadership position, she has to believe that she can do it first and then prove that she can do it. That’s double trouble.”

Gergana Milovska

Gergana Milovska (Sofia Live Festival / SoAlive Music Conference) from Bulgaria agreed with her colleague Roxana on that you need to deliver results in production. In her country, growing up, the kids have been taught from generation to generation that the woman is the caregiver and the man is the provider. “So, for a woman to get into a leadership position, she has to believe that she can do it first and then prove that she can do it. That’s double trouble. But that struggle builds resilience and strength,” Gergana said.

As a woman in leadership in Bulgaria, you can be a role model, but it’s really hard to get there. For things to change on a societal level, more women need to share their personal experiences with others, share how they struggle, she said.

Gergana had started as the assistant of a man, worked in music and clubs a lot, and finally became a production manager and club owner. “I was always introduced as the assistant. I had to do a lot of work so that people would accept me as their equal.” She has been working for SoAlive Music Conference for three years now, doing the “dirty work” for the showcase program.

What helped her go from an assistant’s role to where she is today was “realizing that I’m able to do the same things all the men around me can do. Then you become more confident. Start making decisions, and if your decisions are better or on the level of your crew you realize that there is no reason to be afraid to be out there.”

Good practice: Mentorship program “Women in Music”

Starting a career in the music industry can be hard. “When we started in the industry, there was nobody to teach us. We had to find out how things work ourselves,” said **Roxana Luca (ARTmania / Emagic / Pozitif Live / YES Group)**. That’s why she and other women support the mentoring program “Women in Music” in their home country Romania. Women with working experience can sign up voluntarily to support younger women who are just starting their careers. “It feels like giving back to the new generation,” Roxana said about her motivation.

Each edition of the project runs for six months. Each mentor is assigned one mentee. They have individual meetings and an individual agenda. From time to time, all participants come together at special events. Some of the mentees want to become music producers, others production



Gergana Milovska (left; SoAlive Music Conference) and Roxana Luca (ARTmania). Photo: Katharina Weber

workers, yet others don't know which role they want to end up having but want to understand the industry better.

The first step is to build trust, Roxana said. "We see that their voices tremble at the first meeting and it takes a while for them to build the confidence to speak up." Building confidence in yourself is the whole point of the program. At the end of the six months, the mentees have a shared project, for example, organizing a concert for a local artist that just dumped their agent. That meant they had to act as an agent, too, secure the backline, sell tickets, get permissions, pay taxes, do promotion, create social media for the artist, and so on. "It's the real deal," Roxana said.

As a mentor, it's her job not to solve everything for the younger ones, but to guide them to find the solution themselves. For her as a mentor, the program is great because she knows there will be a new, competent generation that she can hand over the reins to someday.

By using partners like Universal Music, which offers their meeting spaces to the program for free, they can save costs and run the program efficiently. "It's really easy to implement. You just need the will to do it, if you want to implement it in your own country," she said to the participants.

A little Q&A

- One of the participants who has been working in the industry for a long time said that she has seen the industry slowly change, with more women coming in and men treating them more respectfully than they used to. What she still found challenging are **women in leadership positions who claim that, just because they made it, every woman could,** and thus don't support measures for more gender balance. She would appreciate if these women would admit that it was difficult to get there and that they had to put in extra work.
- Since the **start of their career can be so slow for women**, they might leave the industry, feeling like they aren't going anywhere, even though they are doing a good job. Supporting them in the beginning of their careers can help them stay on and keep talent in the industry.
- Companies supporting their employees by offering services like **childcare** and **psychological counseling** do exist, but they are still in the minority. Having this as the standard is a great vision for the future that currently often fails because it costs too much. If you are looking for organizations who can help you implement services like that at your company, you should check out GENiE.
- "Because we work in an **industry that is built on networking**, networks are the most important thing when you are from a minority," Grace said. GENiE includes both projects that help FLINTA* **network and training programs** that help them develop key skills – some of them are even free of charge. Isabel recommended, because it can be tough to find your way in, to look for a group or project of like-minded people that are open to talking about these issues, a place where you feel you belong. On that base, the network will grow bigger automatically with time.

"Because we work in an industry that is built on networking, networks are the most important thing when you are from a minority."

Grace Goodwin

- If you are in the position to hire people, **hire women**, Gergana recommended. At Sofia Live Festival, they work with a team that's all women, and the venue owner said he enjoyed working with them specifically for this reason. Invite them into positions with a lot of responsibility, even if they are afraid of it. Believe in the women you work with and trust that they will do their work well without micromanaging them.
- Even if they make mistakes – explain that there is nothing wrong in making mistakes as long as you own them, and talk them through the solution, rather than assigning blame, Gergana said.
- Suffering from **Imposter Syndrome** means you have self-doubts, you question your skills and accomplishments to the point that you wonder whether you are the right person for your role – despite evidence to the contrary. When one of the participants admitted to suffering from it and asked if others in the room felt the same, a lot of hands went up.

Even one of the women with years of experience said she still felt it, despite her many accomplishments. She said she actually appreciated it, because the fear keeps her on her toes, makes her double check everything and deliver great results. She recommended using this fear as a motivator. Another participant, who also feels Imposter Syndrome, advised to remind yourself that it's just that – Imposter Syndrome –, that your fears are irrational and that you are doing good work.



*Lots of food for thought for the seminar participants.
Photo: Ivana Barova*

To close the round, Isabel asked the panelists: **"What are processes that you would like to see in the next years?"** Grace replied that she wishes for more sustainable funding models for gender equality projects because currently many can only rely on short funds. "Big companies should be putting in five-year funding plans because they will also benefit from having the new generation of women."

Gergana had nothing concrete in mind because everything is changing so fast at the moment. "I'm hoping for a better future for everyone," she said, and a music industry where jobs are assigned according to competence and not gender. Roxana hoped for people to dare to break the ice and ask questions to get their careers going. "Even if the question seems stupid, just be brave and ask." And Isabel added: "Treat young people the way you would have wanted to be treated when you were 19."

Case study: Mental Health Support at EXIT Festival

Serbian EXIT Festival is a great example for how festivals can serve as platforms for connection, healing and care. **Tanja Nježić, EXIT's Secretary General**, took the time in Sofia to talk about how mental health support and awareness raising campaigns make EXIT a better place both for its employees and visitors.

Why does mental health matter in the music industry? It's a fast-paced, highly demanding industry with long hours and constant deadlines. "We've all been through it," Tanja said. This environment can lead to stress, exhaustion and burnout. Similarly, festival audiences might bring their own mental health issues to the event. EXIT wants to be a place where both audiences and employees can feel safe and supported.

"We've all been through it."

Tanja Nježić
on experiencing stress
in the music industry

Tanja quoted a 2019 study which found that 73% of independent musicians reported symptoms of mental ill-health like stress, anxiety and/or depression. Among younger artists between 18 and 25, it was even 80%. She added that workers in the creative industries are about three times more likely to experience mental health problems than the general population. In a study from Northern Ireland, 60% even reported having suicidal thoughts.

EXIT grew out of a student movement protesting for peace and freedom. Since then, it has had about five million visitors from 120+ countries, becoming one of Europe's leading festivals. "We're not just a music festival, but a festival with a mission. Since we started as a student movement, this is close to our hearts," Tanja said.

Mental health is at EXIT's core. The organization offers year-round psychological support for staff and on-site therapists during the festival. They also offer on-site counseling for visitors



EXIT Festival's General Secretary Tanja Nježić.
Photo: Isabel Roudsarabi

during the event days, and run awareness raising campaigns. They integrate mental health into every part of their work, demonstrating how **festivals can serve as platforms for healing, connection, and community care.**

"In 2018, we recognized that a traditional HR department alone couldn't provide sufficient support, so we decided to offer independent psychologists and psychotherapists for employees," Tanja said. If staff need further support, they can get a referral to an external expert. During the festival days, the psych-team is reinforced with three to four more psychotherapists.

For the festival visitors, EXIT partners with an NGO focused on suicide prevention called Scre. The

NGO runs several support zones spread out across the entire festival site, to which visitors can turn. At the campsite, they are open from 2-7 p.m. and at the infield from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m.

On top, each year, the TIM research center from Novi Sad, EXIT's hometown, conducts research on various topics. In 2022, they surveyed 1400 visitors and discovered that 81% of them think EXIT has a positive impact on their mental health. "It shows that festivals can be places where visitors feel supported in their mental health," Tanja said.

Some numbers from EXIT's 2025 edition:

- The support teams led **543 conversations**; 326 were informative and 217 supportive.

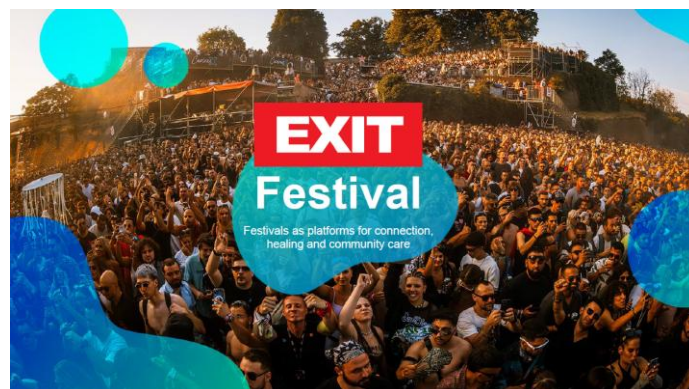
- **63%** of the people who came to talk were **men** and 37% women. “We were surprised to see that more men approached us for support,” Tanja said.
- The largest group was between **15-25 years** old (51%).
- The most prominent talked about problems: **loneliness, relationship issues, and problems at work or school**. Other common topics were family problems, mental disorders, and existential problems.

Tanja was happy to report that some people, who had sought assistance in 2024, had returned in 2025 merely to express their gratitude and share how much the conversation had meant to them.

To raise awareness of how digital addiction can harm the mental health of young people, EXIT started a partnership with UNICEF in 2023. It resulted in the campaign “Life is Live” that won the Take A Stand Award at the European Festival Awards 2024. Because we are more connected but at the same time lonelier than ever, the campaign’s message is “A true story lasts a lifetime,” encouraging young people to go out and have real-life interactions.

Key takeaways for the industry from Tanja’s talk:

- Festivals can heal people!
- Mental health care should be a part of your identity, not an afterthought.
- Take care of both audience and staff.
- Partner with NGOs and health organizations to help you.
- Make wellbeing visible and measurable, e.g. by involving researchers.



➔ Find Tanja’s presentation [here](#).

Mental Health in the Music Industry: Stress & Relationships

With all the stress we experience while working in the music industry, it’s important to know that there are people out there to help us take care of our mental health. For the seminar, YOUROPE had managed to win a true expert: Rosana Corbacho.

The clinical and humanistic psychologist specialized on the music industry and has more than 15 years of experience. She has worked with companies like Spotify, Believe, Live Nation, and Berklee, spoken at major conferences across the continent, and also provides mental health care during big tours. In her presentation, she focused on how stress affects us and our relationships.

The upside of working the music industry is that it involves a lot of passion and great moments, she said. The downside, however, is that it comes with a lot of stress. She quoted the same study that Tanja had cited in her EXIT presentation, which found that 73% of musicians experience occupational stress. "We work with people that are very stressed. And it's not just artists," she said. Unfortunately, only 7 out of 24 reports on mental health in the music industry include music professionals beside artists, although they are exposed to stress, too.



Psychologist Rosana Corbacho. Photo: Ivana Barova

She described the music industry as a high-risk, competitive environment with a high workload but low job security and poor work-life-balance. Often, our own identity is strongly linked to our job, so "if I feel rejected in my work, my whole identity shakes," Rosana said. Stress isn't just caused by a high workload, but because our self-esteem is linked to our jobs. "That is like having a table with just one leg," Rosana said.

The problem is: many don't notice a burnout before it's too late. She asked the participants to describe **early signs of stress** in their bodies. This is what they came up with:

- queasy feeling in in the stomach
- jaw clenching
- feeling nervous
- feeling as if something is off and you're not yourself
- craving fancy stuff like a pumpkin spice latte
- migraines
- lack of sleep
- shoulder and neck pain
- not being able to breathe properly
- heart racing
- nausea
- blurry vision
- tingling in the hands
- unable to concentrate
- feeling numb
- snapping / short temper

Rosana also asked the participants for **consequences of not listening to these early warning signs** they have experienced. They reported feeling less energetic, getting sick, fighting with people, feeling self-hatred because you didn't listen to the stress signs, which leads to getting angrier and being even more stressed. How do the

participants **notice stress in others**, if they don't express it verbally? People isolate themselves, don't engage as much anymore; you can see it in their body language and facial expressions, they talk aggressively, complain, or eat more chocolate.

Rosana's last question was whether **anything has happened in their team because of stress overload**. Participants talked about colleagues quitting or going to the hospital, creating drama out of nowhere, making mistakes, and putting people in danger.

What is stress?

After this reflection exercise, Rosana explained what stress actually is. "It's the physiological or psychological response to external stressors," she said. It influences nearly every system in our body, and thus how we behave and feel. "When we're talking about stress, we're also talking about mental health. Stress is not bad per se. A little bit of tension makes me awake. A lot of tension over a long time tends to affect me," Rosana said.

Some stressors can even be amazing life events, like becoming a mother, moving, or getting a pay raise. However, it's important to remember that there is no such thing as 'I have stress at work, but I am good at home' – stress is accumulated in the body, Rosana explained. "When we are exposed to something – a trigger, an activity, a job – the brain is going to classify: is this a threat or is this a challenge?" Rosana said. This doesn't mean we should regard everything as a positive challenge, but it's important to be able to recognize the difference.

"Stress is not bad per se. A little bit of tension makes me awake. A lot of tension over a long time tends to affect me."

Rosana Corbacho

What is burnout?

Only five years ago the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized burnout as a sickness. They define it as a "syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed." According to Rosana, **symptoms** can include

- exhaustion
- having little motivation for your job
- being irritable and anxious
- a decrease in work performance
- physical symptoms
- trouble sleeping

How to deal with stress and prevent burnout

So-called coping mechanisms are things we do to deal with stress and to make us feel better, Rosana explained. However, you must decide between unhealthy coping mechanisms that might make us feel better for a short moment and healthy coping mechanisms that have a positive effect on us in the long run. **Unhealthy coping mechanisms** that the participants knew from own experience:

- drinking alcohol
- eating junk food
- doom scrolling
- bingeing series
- shopping

- hibernating / isolating
- working more – “which is often what we do the most, Rosana said.

As **healthy coping mechanisms** they listed

- exercising
- sleeping / resting
- eating healthy food
- talking to friends

To deal with **acute stress**, Rosana suggested tools like breathwork, grounding, taking breaks, and structuring activities differently. However, when **stress gets chronic**, often only professional help, restructuring your work, seeking purpose and forming meaningful relationships can help.

According to her, it also helps to **express boundaries** to others. “When we don’t express boundaries, stress gets accumulated,” she said. It helps to use assertive communication. Tell others respectfully how you feel and what you need (from them). Of course, in order to express what we want, we need to find out what we want first.

We can use **mindfulness** to protect ourselves, Rosana continued. She quoted a study that found while being mindful doesn’t reduce the stress of touring, it does decrease the likelihood of that stress turning into depression and a risk of suicide.

If you look at teams, you will find they have needs, limits and potentialities, according to Rosana. **Needs** include things like being seen, being recognized for hard work, feeling safe and respected, having an income – feeling you belong without losing your autonomy.

Limits are about the limits in our teams – the people that we care about, train and mentor. Limiting factors can be aspects like time, tiredness, the life outside work, or learning style. “We

“When we don’t express boundaries, stress gets accumulated.”

Rosana Corbacho

live in a neurodiverse industry,” Rosana emphasized. People can get hyper-focused for a week but need a month of rest afterwards. “Instead of making everyone fit into a style, it is the beauty of our industry that it is so colorful.”

Lastly, **potentialities** represent the space for growth in our teams. It relates to core values rather than just emotions, including things like creativity, love for music, and purpose. “When we know which ones are our core values, it also helps us make decisions,” Rosana said.

She summarized that we stay in an environment when we feel we can fulfill our needs, grow in our potentialities, and our limits are respected. “The quality of your life is defined by the quality of your relationships,” she emphasized.

To prevent burning out, it helps to stay connected with your mind, emotions and being. The challenge is to find purpose and meaning and remind yourself of it. Rosana: “When we set a goal,



Rosana Corbacho. Photo: Katharina Weber

“The quality of your life is defined by the quality of your relationships.”

Rosana Corbacho

we feel we have a purpose, but when we are very stressed, we can feel disconnected from it. We wonder, why am I doing this? Why am I always putting out fires? Where am I going?”

Consider what brought you to this stressful industry. **Purpose** could be to build artist careers or organize festivals. **Meaning** comes when that work resonates with your values, emotions, or relationships. Sustainable well-being often needs both,” Rosana said.

A little Q&A

Where is the difference between being stressed out and burned out? Rosana responded that anxiety, which can be confused with stress, also plays into this. Stress is when you feel that with everything you have available, you don’t feel you can do the task at hand – you’re overwhelmed. With anxiety, the emotion at the baseline is fear – the body is prepared to run away. When we have burnout, we cannot function, we cannot do basic tasks. It affects your eating habits, your sleep, and resting is not effective anymore.

Bad leadership can ruin a whole company. How do we approach these difficult conversations about mental health with leaders who won’t listen and understand? Rosana recommended using the same language they speak: money and resources. It’s a matter of unity between colleagues, and you need statistics: how many people quit because of burnout? How much can they save by treating their employees better? Etc. Your argument should be: “We want to feel better, but this will also be better for your company.”

Closing: Key Takeaways from the Seminar

While the seminar made it obvious that we as festival promoters and human beings still face many challenges when trying to make our events and companies more inclusive, **YOUROPE’s board member Marta Pallarès** also had some motivating words for our participants.

“Talking about DEI is also talking about health and safety and how it can affect all the aspects of this crazy industry that we’re in,” she said. The workshop might have only reached 30 people in person, “but all these people will bring the learnings home and have a real impact at the festivals that they are working at,” she added. “We are doing this for all the people that are coming to our festivals year after year. They feel safer and more included.”

Before she sent everyone home, Marta asked each participant to share one key learning that they found important. Here is what they said:

“Talking about DEI is also talking about health and safety and how it can affect all the aspects of this crazy industry that we’re in.”

Marta Pallarès

- **Implementing DEI policies / activities / facilities is a process!** There is not a beginning and an end – there is always room for improvement. Everything is changing all the time, be at ease with that. And if you can make it easier for someone, they will very much appreciate it on an individual level.
- **Analyze things that are already working** in your company in DEI and build on them.
- Roskilde Festival's approach to **"build, test, learn"** instead of not taking risks and doing only what will likely turn out to be successful. Maybe in the end an idea doesn't work out, but that's a learning in itself.
- **DEI can be applied to any aspect of our business.** While it can be about productivity and making the lives of minoritized communities better, it can also be measured in terms of financial benefits. And if that is the angle we need to sell it to our bosses, so be it.
- **Keep having conversations about DEI**, even if the global political climate discourages you from doing it.
- A quote by Roskilde Festival's Mika Christoffersen resonated with a participant: **"Tell people what you want to see and not what you don't want to see."**
- **Be a good host** – like Roskilde Festival.
- Considering all **four types of accessibility suggested by Roskilde Festival** and trying to create access intimacy is a useful way of approaching accessibility. Particularly because implementing measures in three of four aspects usually doesn't cost anything.
- It is important to give people grace. You need to **be open-hearted and -minded** as well.
- It has been difficult to create support systems in the music industry but **never has anyone walked to the top alone.**
- It is essential to **build a community with like-minded people** from different backgrounds, giving you different perspectives. We need them!
- **Imposter syndrome among women is a thing.** If you suffer from it, be aware of it and use it to your advantage!
- So much about creating more DEI and a feeling of safety hinges on the quality of leadership. **We need to educate our leaders** about these topics and get them on board.
- Being a part of the mental health session showed that we as event organizers are part of a team and **we all go through the same challenges regarding stress and burnout.** Just being aware of this fact can help you deal with it.



*YOUROPE board member Marta Pallarès.
Photo: Ivana Barova*

- Ask yourself: how can I do this job in a way that I will be able to do it for a long time? **Working sustainably** is a must if you want to stick around until retirement. Also ask yourself: Is our company making it possible?
- **Mindfulness** is always useful, not just when you're under a lot of stress.
- When you are under a lot of stress, you often don't have time to be human. "We have to remember that we're all human and that we are here for **the love we have for the music industry**," one participant said.

Fun Stuff: A Walking Tour and a Bulgarian Dinner



Tour guide Kris (blue jacket) is taking the seminar participants on a tour through Sofia, starting at the National Palace of Culture (left), passing the Holy Sunday Square (right) and many more places of interest. Photos: Katharina Weber

A YOUROPE event wouldn't be complete without some dedicated time to get to know your fellow participants. On the night of the first seminar day, the festival association invited all registered seminar participants to exchange ideas while enjoying authentic Bulgarian cuisine at Manastirska Magernista. The restaurant guided the participants through Bulgaria's kitchen in several courses with dishes ranging from dips, salads and cold cuts served with traditional Bulgarian bread, to oven-baked cheese with honey and walnuts and a dish of beans and prunes, to grilled meats and vegetables.

Before the dinner, the participants had the chance to get to know their host city Sofia in a walking tour organized just for them. Their tour guide Kris had over ten years of experience in showing people around the city, so he had many interesting stories to tell. For example, the National Palace of Culture, which is SoAlive Music Conference's venue, was built in such a hurry that citizens from Sofia helped out for free during the construction. The project's initiator was later found dead in her bathtub, but according to Kris, no investigation into her death was opened.

He also knew that the first records of Sofia date back to 29 AD, when the Romans were settled in the area. Later, the region was taken over by the Bulgars, and a long process finally resulted in Bulgaria, making it one of the oldest countries in Europe.



*Delicious Bulgarian food at Manastirska
Magernista. Photo: Katharina Weber*

In nearly two hours, Kris led the participants from the National Palace of Culture to monuments, buildings and places like the Holy Sunday Square, where Tsar Boris III survived an assassination attempt because he was late, a controversial statue of a woman called Sofia built for the new millennium, the very old Church St. Petka of the Saddle Makers, which was financed by the local saddle maker community, the Square of Tolerance with buildings of all religions represented in Sofia, the public bath and hot spring, and the Presidency, which is the office of the Bulgarian President and always guarded by two soldiers in front of it. His advice: "Don't hug the guards!" or you might find yourself in jail.