Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Activities in Database Conferences: A 2024 Report

https://dbdni.github.io

Nelly Barret, Sourav S Bhowmick, Angela Bonifati, Barbara Catania, Stratos Idreos, Ekaterini Ioannou, Madhulika Mohanty, Sana Sellami, Roee Shraga, Utku Sirin, Juno Steegmans, Pınar Tözün, Soror Sahri, Genoveva Vargas-Solar

1. THE DEI@DB INITIATIVE

The database community's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative began in 2020 as the Diversity/Inclusion initiative [1]. This report highlights our activities from 2024. Our goal as a community is to make all DB conference attendees feel included, regardless of their scientific views or personal backgrounds. As a leadership team, the DEI group supports DEI chairs across conferences, preserves institutional memory of DEI efforts, shapes a shared vision, and fosters collaboration to advance inclusion. These efforts are carried out by core members (Figure 1) and liaisons from each conference's executive committee (Figure 2). The initiative was relaunched in January 2024 with a new structure based on five key actions: **COORDINATE**, to support collaboration between core members, liaisons, and DEI chairs; **SCOUT**, to gather best DEI practices from other communities; **ETHICS**, to create and promote ethical guidelines for writing and reviewing; **MEDIA**, to collect and share digital content from DEI@DB events [4]; and **DIVERSIFY**, to analyze data on diversity, accessibility, and the adoption of DEI principles in research and academia. DBCARES[1] is now officially part of the DEI initiative. The mission of DBCARES is to create an inclusive and diverse Database community with zero tolerance for abuse, discrimination, or harassment. As part of this integration, we unified the Code of Ethics and introduced clear guidelines for DB conference organizers. Several conferences—including SIGMOD, VLDB, ICDE, and EDBT—continued using CLOSET [2] to ensure fair and transparent reviewer assignments.

The **SUPPORT**, **INCLUDE**, **INFORM**, **ORGANIZE**, and **REACH OUT** actions have now become standard practice, and since 2024, they are no longer managed by the DEI initiative. To ensure early financial planning for DEI conference activities, **SUPPORT** is now the responsibility of conference organizers. At the same time, **INCLUDE**, **ORGANIZE**, and **REACH OUT** fall under the direct responsibility of DEI chairs at each conference.

What did we achieve this year? The database community's engagement with DEI initiatives in 2024 has been highly encouraging. Shared experiences across DB conferences have enabled the scaling and enrichment of DEI activities throughout the year. As part of this progress,
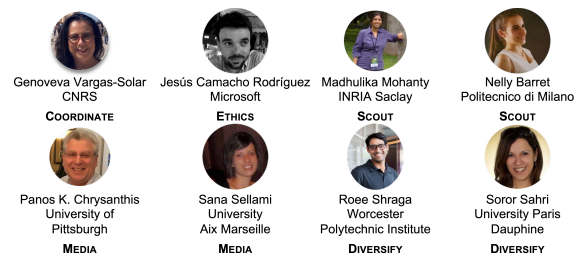

Figure 1: DEI@DB Core Members

Figure 2: DEI@DB Liaisons Members

the **SCOUT** initiative introduced DEI checklists for authors and reviewers to be embedded in submission and review forms, helping assess alignment with DEI principles. The Author Checklist promotes inclusive language and diverse visuals while avoiding stereotypes and oppressive terms. The Reviewer Checklist fosters respectful, detailed, and constructive feedback. Based on VLDB's DEI practices, these checklists will be gradually adopted in line with each conference's timeline. **ADBIS 2025** will pilot the initiative, setting an example for others. We will monitor, refine, and share outcomes to foster a more inclusive research culture. Several conferences launched caregiving and wellness initiatives, including childcare spaces with dedicated programming (e.g., SIGMOD and SIGSPATIAL), and quiet or wellness areas for attendees in need of rest or decompression (e.g., ADBIS). These services were well received, with positive attendee feedback. However, organizers emphasized the need for clearer communication to ensure such resources are known and factored into travel planning. To expand the impact of our efforts, we have also reviewed inclusion programs from other ACM conferences, such as **ACM FAccT**, to explore a broader range of support mechanisms. In 2025, we will assess and adapt
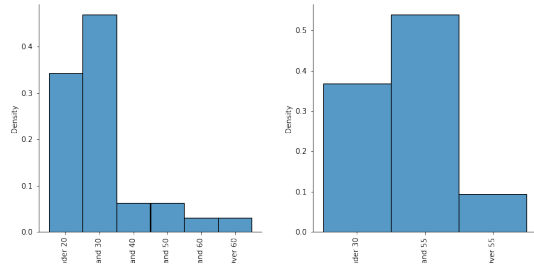
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[1] https://dbdni.github.io/pages/dbcares.html

Figure 3: Age distribution of survey responders.
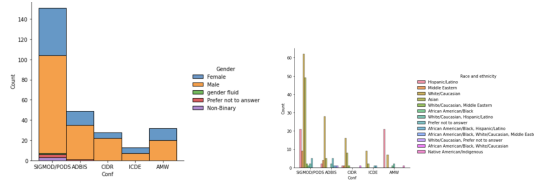
Figure 4: Race, ethnicity and gender distribution.

Figure 5: DEI Chairs of 2024 DB Conferences

promising models to suit the needs and dynamics of the DB community.

2024 DEI statistics. A key goal of DEI@DB is to better understand our community, identify areas for improvement, and evaluate the impact of our initiatives. To support this, we conducted surveys at CIDR, ICDE, AD-BIS, SIGMOD/PODS, and AMW, with 30, 13, 48, 155, and 32 respondents, respectively. Results are aggregated across these conferences. Participants were primarily from academia (26%), industry (12%), or both (33%), with students making up 28%. In contrast to 2022 and 2023 (which included hybrid events), all surveyed conferences in 2024 were in-person. Figure 3 shows participant age distribution: initially, most respondents were between 30–55 years old. Later surveys used a more fine-grained age range and showed a shift toward the 20–30 group—mainly due to the updated question being implemented only at AMW. This refined format is now standard for 2025 surveys, and we plan to revisit the distribution as more data becomes available.

The plot on the right of Figure 4 focuses on race and ethnicity: a clear dominance of participants identifying as White / Caucasian is observed across all conferences, particularly at SIGMOD/PODS and ADBIS. Representation from groups such as Asian, Hispanic / Latino, Middle Eastern, and African American / Black appears significantly lower. However, some multiracial and intersectional identities (e.g., White / Caucasian & Hispanic / Latino) are also captured. Notably, a small but consistent group of respondents selected "Prefer not to answer," suggesting privacy concerns or limitations in identity categories. The plot on the left, examines gender distribution. Roughly 32% of respondents (about 85 individuals) identified as female, and 9.5% as LGBTQ+, consistent with previous years. The plot shows a marked gender imbalance: male participants make up the majority in every conference, with female participation forming the second largest group. Non-
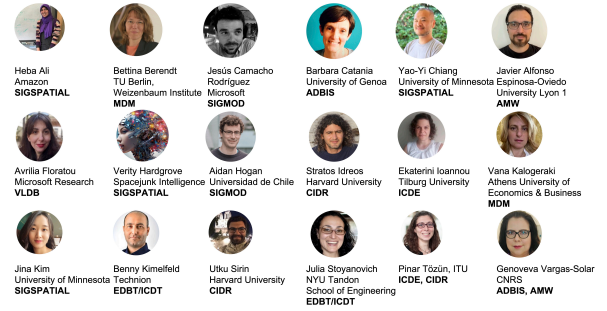
binary and gender-fluid individuals are present in minimal numbers, as are those who prefer not to disclose their gender. SIGMOD/PODS again shows the highest overall participation, but the gender imbalance is consistent across all venues. Together, these plots highlight the ongoing diversity gaps in the database research community, reinforcing the importance of inclusive outreach, equitable access, and active efforts to support underrepresented groups in academic events and conference participation.

Survey results show that the most requested topics for DEI sessions are research-related issues (identifying topics, setting goals, and defining success), followed by work-life balance and mentorship. At SIGMOD, 14% of respondents reported that their research incorporates DEI concerns, which is a promising evolution sign. Suggestions for improvement included maintaining double-anonymous review, increasing diversity in program committees, supporting students and parents with infants, lowering registration fees, expanding mentorship opportunities, and easing visa processes for conference travel. A post-conference survey with 67 responses revealed that 95% of attendees had no visual or auditory difficulties, 86% were satisfied with the food, and 97% found the venue easy to navigate. Notably, 96% of respondents described the SIGMOD/PODS community as supportive.

2. DEI@DB CONFERENCES 2024

Figure 5 reports DEI chairs of individual conferences in 2024. In chronological order, we briefly report on the various activities at past and future database conferences.

DEI@CIDR. Utku Sirin, Stratos Idreos, & Pinar Tözün served as DEI co-chairs. The DEI program featured a mentoring initiative that paired junior and senior attendees for 10 one-on-one sessions, allowing each pair to choose their preferred meeting time and format. Additionally, James Hamilton hosted a group mentoring session with students. To organize these activities, the co-chairs reached out to CIDR participants shortly before the conference to identify mentors and mentees.

DEI@EDBT/ICDT. Julia Stoyanovich & Benny Kimelfeld were the DEI co-chairs. They organized an interactive session titled "Unfinished Comics for Inclusive Commu-

nication about Data Management in Research and Practice", encouraging participants to reflect on diversity and inclusion through personal experiences and explore creative ways to make data management more welcoming and accessible. They also presented an "Interactive Tutorial on Giving Inaccessible, Unclear, and Boring Presentations", designed to raise awareness of presentation quality with a focus on accessibility and diverse audiences.

DEI@ICDE. Ekaterini Ioannou and Pinar Tözün (ITU) served as DEI co-chairs. They organized a session where Prof. Alexander Serebrenik gave a talk on "Diversity, Inclusion, and Software", a lunch hour that brought together some of the senior members of the community with the junior members focusing on mentoring, and financial support to two students and one junior faculty member for their conference attendance.

DEI@MDM. Bettina Berendt and Vana Kalogeraki were the DEI chairs. The program featured a keynote by Pinar Tözün titled "Data Processing at the Edge: From Satellites to Earth". A DEI grant program supported the participation of students and early-career researchers from underrepresented communities at MDM 2024. The grants were possible through funding from IEEE TCDE, the Emeralds Horizon EU project, and the SoBigData++ Horizon 2020 project.

DEI@SIGMOD. Aidan Hogan and Jesús Camacho Rodríguez served as DEI co-chairs. SIGMOD/PODS activities included a "Birds of a Feather" session, to share DEI statistics, feedback, and improvement strategies for the conference and related events. The DEI panel, "Global Voices in Data: Navigating Responsible Management and Processing with Diverse Perspectives"[2], brought together voices from the Global North and South to discuss key factors for fostering responsible and accountable database research. Additional actions included sharing an Anti-Harassment Policy and running a post conference survey to collect attendee feedback on their experience and views on DEI at the event.

DEI@VLDB. Avrilia Floratou served as the DEI chair, promoting awareness and inclusivity throughout the conference. Key initiatives included publishing guidelines on writing and presenting research contributions with DEI considerations and actively communicating the code of conduct to ensure an inclusive and respectful environment.

DEI@ADBIS. Barbara Catania and Genoveva Vargas-Solar served as DEI co-chairs. The DEI program included a hybrid panel titled *"New masculinities: Do we need muscles in the lab?"*[3], and a keynote by Rita Bencivenga of University of Genoa on *"Gender+ and Intersectionality in EU projects."* A coordinated effort between the DEI and Doctoral Consortium led to joint activities. These included a hands-on data science session, *"DEI Perspectives in Data-Driven Experiments,"* led by

Barbara Catania and Martina Brocchi a PhD student, and an in-person mentoring session to foster interaction among PhD students and early-career researchers. A dedicated privacy room in the venue's library provided a quiet and secure space for personal use. The EasyChair review form included a DEI criterion, encouraging reviewers to consider submissions through a DEI lens. To support inclusive participation, DEI co-chairs highlighted location-specific considerations and communicated the code of conduct, DEI guidelines, and announcements to organizers, keynote speakers, and authors—promoting respectful and inclusive engagement. A kakemono [4] summarizing DEI goals and achievements was displayed at the registration desk and included in the welcome materials to increase visibility.

DEI@SIGSPATIAL. Yao-Yi Chiang, Jina Kim, and Verity Hardgrove served as DEI co-chairs for SIGSPATIAL, leading initiatives to promote awareness and inclusivity throughout the conference. Key efforts included publishing guidelines on writing and presenting research with DEI considerations and actively communicating the code of conduct to foster an inclusive and respectful environment. Additionally, the conference provided caregiving facilities for attendees with children and proposed a travel awards program to support participants with travel and conference expenses. The U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), conference sponsors, and ACM SIGSPATIAL funded the grants.

DEI@AMW. Genoveva Vargas-Solar and Javier-Alfonso Espinosa-Oviedo served as DEI co-chairs, shaping the scientific program through an intersectional lens considering gender, career stage, geography, nationality, and institutional background. The actions included offering health-conscious, sugar-free meals made with organic and locally sourced ingredients, and cultural breaks such as visits to biodiversity sites, contemporary art museums, and dance sessions to balance long sedentary activities. To support student participation, a grant program was launched, with 90% of recipients being graduate students from Indigenous and low-income backgrounds studying at public universities in Mexico. Online access was also provided to facilitate participation from students across South America. The grant program was funded by the VLDB Endowment, generous speakers, and contributions from participating institutions.

3. COI MANAGEMENT

As of 2024, the automated detection and management of conflicts of interest (COIs) has become a standard practice across major database conferences, including SIGMOD, VLDB, ICDE, and EDBT. These conferences have collectively adopted CLOSET [2] as a core tool for managing COIs, recognizing its effectiveness in automating this critical aspect of the review process. Notably, VLDB 2024 piloted an enhanced workflow by integrating results of CLOSET into the CMT submission system. In this pilot, the system pre-populated potential COIs for each author based on coauthorship data

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[2] http://vargas-solar.com/
dei-sigmod-pods-panel/
[3] http://vargas-solar.com/adbis-dei/dei-panel/

[4] A kakemono is a vertical hanging scroll—traditionally Japanese art for exhibitions.

and prompted authors to verify and confirm the accuracy of the detected conflicts, thereby streamlining the process and reducing manual input errors. However, it appears that a significant number of authors did not actually review or confirm their listed COIs.

We also observe a noticeable gap between the community's stance on penalties for under-declared COIs, such as desk rejections, and how these policies are actually enforced across major data management conferences. A recent community-wide survey [5] revealed strong support for strict penalties in such cases. However, enforcement remains inconsistent and unclear: while some venues impose certain penalties, others do not apply any at all.

4. GOING FORWARD

Job descriptions. We are working with the ACM to ensure the job descriptions of DEI members and chairs are aligned with the ACM policies. ACM sets global principles and enforcement pathways; our DBDEI initiative delivers domain-specific execution (surveys, templates, DB-conference workflows, and software).

COIs. While major conferences have adopted CLOSET to manage conflicts of interest (COIs), several others, such as CIDR and SIGSPATIAL, still rely on traditional tools that lack the same transparency and precision. More importantly, enforcement of penalties for under-reported or misrepresented COIs remains inconsistent and does not meet the expectations of the research community. This gap calls for stronger action: executive committees should lead efforts to align COI enforcement with community standards. This means adopting reliable tools like CLOSET and defining clear, consistent policies and consequences to ensure COI rules are applied fairly across all conferences.

Checklist for DEI Writing. We introduced a DEI writing checklist at ADBIS 2025 to encourage inclusive and responsible research communication. Our goal is to adopt this checklist across other database conferences and continuously refine it based on community feedback. We also plan to conduct surveys to assess its effectiveness and impact over time.

MEDIA Action. We launched the channel `DEI-DB-MEDIA` on YouTube [5] to centralize and share recordings of DEI related events, talks, panels, briefs, and workshops, organized by conference and year. To support this, we distributed a Google Form in 2024 to collect slides, videos, and links from that year's DEI activities. We also invited 2025 DEI co-chairs to contribute materials after their conferences. The goal is to build a shared archive of DEI programs across the database community, helping promote best practices, inspire new ideas, and provide educational resources. We also plan to enhance the site with summaries of each initiative, highlighting outcomes, common strategies, and lessons learned.

ETHICS action. We are working on establishing and promoting ethics guidelines for publications, similar to other efforts [3]. This involves creating a living document specifying major ethical aspects that authors and

reviewers should consider. To enhance inclusion, we plan to compile a set of guidelines for session chairs, presenters, and participants for handling panels and Q&A. This action will unify the guidelines used by the author, reviewer, and presenter at individual conferences. It will also generalise the "checkbox" to flag institutional representation and SCOUTING action.

DIVERSIFY Action. We developed a diversity survey to assess representation and inclusion across database (DB) conferences. The survey covers leadership diversity, career stage and institutional representation, and accessibility features such as ramps, childcare, and accessible materials. It also evaluates DEI content in the program, available funding, and follow-up efforts after the conference. Responses from DEI chairs showed that gender diversity, varied career stages, and institutional representation were generally well addressed. Ethnic and cultural diversity in leadership also showed improvement. Accessibility measures were partially implemented, and support services like childcare were limited. DEI sessions were held at SIGMOD, ICDE, and ADBIS, with post-conference initiatives already active at SIGMOD.

Looking ahead, we plan to explore new actions based on community interest, including **education**, **sustainability**, **mind the gap** to address gender disparities in database research, and **amplify**, a mentoring initiative to help research groups strengthen their work and aim for top-tier publications and funding.

5. REFERENCES

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[5] https://tinyurl.com/2v4ed98n