

# MEDIA AND THE IMAGE OF WOMEN



**Report of the 1st Conference  
of the Council of Europe Network  
of National Focal Points  
on Gender Equality**

Amsterdam,  
4 and 5 July 2013

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*Les médias et l'image de la femme*

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## Summary

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**M**edia has a significant impact on how social and cultural norms relating to women and to gender form and evolve. At the same time, women's image and the role that women play in the media are heavily influenced by existing social and cultural norms. The Council of Europe Conference on Media and the Image of Women examined the relationship of the media to the female images they project, including issues related to stereotyping and sexism; freedom of expression and gender equality; female leadership positions in the media; and the new media as a tool for positive change.

The Conference brought together key actors throughout Europe to draw attention to existing standards; facilitate debate, good practice exchange and networking; take stock of progress; and make recommendations for further action. Representatives from public and private media industries, civil society, academia, international organisations, and public authorities contributed to the findings and recommendations.

The Conference concluded that media's treatment of women and their reproduction of female stereotypes are linked to violence against women in everyday life. Stereotypes and sexist representation affect women as citizens and violate their human rights. But it also concluded that women's professional presence in media industries has given rise to improved and equitable representations of women and girls. Women's status within the industry has progressed, but changes have been slow and uneven across countries, and are now being threatened by prevailing conditions of austerity and media concentration.

Participants stressed the paramount importance of developing collaboration among media organisations, states, professional organisations and civil society. Alliances, networks and collaborative ways of tackling inequity and stereotyping can complement each other and mutually strengthen work in the area. They also highlighted the need for a proactive commitment of both public authorities and media industries to combat the multifaceted and complex factors that

contribute to and reinforce gender inequality in the media. Policies should be put in place to help tackle sexist content, but without hindering freedom of the press or citizens' right to freedom of expression. Media and government collaboration should also entail setting up a gender equality agenda, which would include measures dealing with content, employment, the lack of women in decision-making positions, technological design, and both specialised and general media literacy skills.

Last, the Conference called for gender equality awareness-raising, studies of the impact of social injustice on people's lives and life-chances and a sophisticated programme of media literacy to be integrated into compulsory education across Europe.

” *In the Netherlands, roughly 70% of all the current affairs programme anchors is male; 30% is female. But maybe more important is the stereotypical choice of guests in these programmes and their portrayal. Unless a topic is blatantly female, all experts are male. These numbers and the ways of portrayal matter because television has a great impact on society.*

Shula Rijxman,  
Member of Dutch Public Broadcasting Board  
The Netherlands

## Key findings

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**N**ever before in history have media played such a major role in the socialisation of human beings and become such an integral and constant part of people's everyday lives. The media have the power to transmit messages and images of the world. They are not simply mirrors of the world; they are active shapers of perceptions and ideas. Over the past 20 years, the media have become powerful and central actors in constructing and making sense of local and global social affairs. As institutions, they shape cultural and social attitudes, impact on politics and public policy, and even influence journalism.

Media's most important role has always been linked to that of a watchdog and informing the citizenry, so that participation in public affairs and decisions can be realised through democratic deliberation. The underlying conditions of democratic, mediated public deliberation are equitable access to and exercise of citizenship rights, namely social, economic,

cultural and political rights. This means that public deliberation, at whose centre the media are firmly anchored, can be democratic only when speakers, viewpoints and experiences are accorded equal respect and space, and where equality of dialogue partners is guaranteed.

**”** *Sexism, as openly expressed as in those days, is not accepted any more. There are many more female politicians and journalists as thirty years ago, I count my blessings. There are many more “roles” for women available now, as strong, powerful persons in every phase of our lives. Yet, is this reflected enough in the media? That is an important question for you.*

**Andrée van Es, Deputy Mayor of Amsterdam**

Furthermore, democratic speech is one which is free from fear of retaliation and persecution, and is conditional on all sides having access to the most comprehensive information possible on the debate topic. These conditions must be accompanied by attention to context and pre-existing inequalities, such as cultural inequality or a lack of resources that can render “speaking subjects” voiceless. Democratisation of the public domain in this form is a crucial precondition for gender democracy. The media construct meanings and narratives of human experience through content and production processes, spaces of deliberation across borders and different socio-economic groups. In other words, the media generate cultural meanings about not only what is considered to be issues of common concern in a society, but also about who is considered legitimate – even worthy – to speak about them.

The media continue to be regarded as the Fourth Estate, despite profound changes in media landscapes and the immense role the market plays in their everyday management and content production. And despite the dominance of “consumer-oriented” discourse within and about today’s media – discourse which characterises communication as business – it is the fundamental principle of serving democratic values and democratic deliberation that guides European public policy expectations and is in accordance with international standards and instruments of human and civil rights.

The role that media play in gender democracy has been of long-lasting concern, when considering the process of moving towards gender equality. As things stand today, this role can be largely identified through two interrelated fronts. By representing and narrating gender and gender roles through content programming, design and production, media shape and reinforce stereotypes and prejudices about women and men. These are also reinforced on a second front by the current *structural* organisation of mass media and communications. The fact that women are still in a minority in media professions disadvantages them not only as producers of meaning, but also as technologists and decision makers.

” *If we want fundamental changes in any sector, we need to make deliberate changes. I became a media leader, because my employer made a programme promoting women like me. In my opinion the big last and maybe the biggest battle is still the quota discussion of having more women as board members. Why is it so controversial to have a deliberate strategy on this? Norway has succeeded. And I do not buy the argument of “we recruit by qualifications” since when was it ever a question of qualified men?*

Suzanne Moll, Media Specialist, Denmark

This persisting inequality has been the object of intensive and detailed studies for over four decades. Time and again, studies have shown that the numbers and proportion of women involved in the making of news, content and the decision-making processes of media organisations are significantly lower than those of their male counterparts. This situation cuts across most professional positions, forms of media, news content, organisation management and so forth, with the exception of women's magazines. Studies have documented the existence of male dominance in media corporations, as well as a masculine organisational culture that has resisted change towards more equitable gender roles.

From early pioneering work, such as Rush and Oukrup's 2004 study on the status of women in media and communications in the United States in the 1970s and its update over three decades, to Gallagher's *Unfinished story* (1995), the Global Media Monitoring Project (the most recent is 2010) and the latest study of the European Institute for Gender Equality (2013), the overall findings are similar, despite individual country and industry differences.

” *I started the Everyday Sexism Project as a simple website where I asked women to add their experiences of sexism and gender imbalance, from the minor, niggling, normalised catcalls and wolf whistles, to workplace discrimination, sexist media portrayals of women, sexual assault and rape. I had no funding whatsoever and no way to publicise the website. I thought that perhaps 50 or 60 women would add their stories.*

*I could never have anticipated what happened next.*

*Powered by the simple strength of social media, women's voices were amplified and echoed as they began to tell their stories. One turned into ten, ten into a hundred, and in the course of just a single year, a hundred into thirty thousand stories from women around the world - women of all ages, races and sexual orientations, disabled and non-disabled, religious and not religious, employed and unemployed.*

[Laura Bates, Founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, United Kingdom](#)

The media can be defined as “different technological processes that facilitate communication between the sender of a message and the receiver of that message” (Croteau and Hoynes 2000). This definition allows us to speak not only about established media, such as television and the press, and their virtual forms on the Internet, but also about a variety of new media forms, such as social media. Some of these are twitter, facebook, platforms such as youtube, instagram and so on. Today’s media landscape in Europe is a mixture of public and community ownership, as well private ownership. The media are converging in more ways than one and more than ever before, in particular with regard to technology, formats and the way they are used: radio and television, the Internet, social media and the print press can be produced and consumed in very similar ways, despite their differences.

The significance of digital technologies in shaping citizens’ relation to media and communicative spaces can be understood in terms of digital rights and policies. Digital media are governed by laws and policies, and these in turn determine the extent to which existing rights are maintained or modified, such as the right to privacy. It is difficult to ignore the negative impact that the concentration of media ownership across Europe and the immense near-monopolistic role that social media companies play have had on gender equality. For example, media ownership concentration and the deregulation of the media in general have intensified the circulation of sexist images of women and the sexualisation of women and girls.

This is partly due to the market logic of constructing market-niches that “push” media to rely on and cultivate a specific kind of gender roles. It is within this context that we find most violent content. This is particularly the case when it comes to the female body. The sexualisation of pop culture artists is a “standard” marketing strategy. Critics argue that elements of “pornification” have entered mainstream culture with the result that advertisement, music and even fashion promotion are increasingly taking visual and verbal cues from pornographic content (Levy 2005).

” *The internet provides an open public forum for the debate and dissection of traditional media presentations of women, and online blogs such as Vagenda magazine have taken full advantage of this to satirically lampoon the outdated stereotypes of women’s magazines. A seventeen year old girl told me how she’d managed to leave behind an eating disorder after discovering body positive websites and feminist Tumblrs. And for the first time in history, women around the world are able to join together and create networks, campaigns and movements for change using the power of social media.*

Laura Bates, Founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, United Kingdom

Technologies facilitate quick and easier access to content that otherwise would have been difficult to circulate. In these conditions, “the female body remains a sexualised, fragmented and mutilated body in the world of global advertising not only in the West but around the world” (Sarikakis and Shade 2010).

New media technologies are heralded for offering users the means to transcend gender restrictions and connect with one another on a gender-free basis, yet often their technological design and architecture do not allow gender-free usage and creativity. This is particularly important for young people, who use social media intensively and who are involved in cross-media storytelling. Technological design often forces young users to perpetuate hyper-gendered identities, restricting and channelling their sense of worth, their sense of self and expression, as well as how they see others, in particular girls. Technical design of applications and social media sites “channels” users’ ways of expression into specific ways, for example, by “directing” where or how to express emotions, gender (often no choices to choose gender free representations when registering), thoughts and habits. Moreover, technologically induced problems such as these are fortified by social practices based on social relations and mainstream culture. Bullying, hyper-sexualisation and sexism are on the rise in universities and schools and have spread rapidly through new media and social media. User-generated content, such as amateur videos, photographs and other material, as well

as elements of pop culture, such as music videos, emulate each other in a whirlwind of hyper-emphasised physical and gender-based behaviours and expectations.

” *Most editorial staff considered themselves open minded, and had gender equality high on their agenda. The only thing: they couldn’t always find relevant women. This, of course, could not be right. So we started facilitating them. Delivering relevant women. I know plenty! Together with a network organisation called ‘Women Inc.’ we selected women in key positions in any industry. Who are ambitious and eager to show their talents on national television? We shortlist them. Like matchmakers, we visit editorial floors and arrange speed dates with 12 candidates and editors of the show. Candidates learn what it takes to be on a television or radio show - be it in a screen test, a panel discussion or interviewed – and editors connect with new people they can use as ‘experts’, ‘panel’ or ‘opinion makers’ instead of speed dialling one of their regular ‘talking heads.’*

Shula Rijxman,  
Member of Dutch Public Broadcasting Board, The  
Netherlands

The architecture of technology and its design impact on the ways people use these media and express themselves. Technology empowers or disallows users to determine the extent to which their privacy will be protected. It is central to upholding and protecting individual privacy and digital rights, such as the right to access to digital content and the Internet, to develop skills to use further new technologies and to use them without fear. Privacy is a particularly important aspect of new media and social media usage, and young people should be made aware of this and empowered to safeguard their privacy. Gender specific effects on women due to violation of their privacy include physical and verbal assault and intimidation. Stereotypes ample in popular youth culture normalise violence against women in the digital world.

At the same time, the multiple demands made on journalists' time, along with the increased precariousness of journalism and other media professions, have had a negative impact on the production of non-fictional, informative content. The consequences of these new work conditions for women are twofold: the quality of the coverage of public affairs and women's news stories is worrisome, as women's representation does not seem to be improving overall. Second, women's own positions and career prospects, including reaching leadership positions, in the media have been undermined. Today's media jobs pay less and are less

rewarding personally. These conditions have created new challenges for women with regard to career progression, their image in the media and ultimately their meaningful participation in public life.

The structural problem of resources and their distribution can be partly attributed to the consequences of the economic crisis in Europe. Economic downturn has reduced the provision of public services and the social net upon which women's lives often depend and which allow them to participate more dynamically in the public domain of politics and economy, including the media (European Women's Lobby 2012). Service provisions include childcare, care for the elderly and social care in general, safety, social benefits and health provision, legal support and support through membership in unions.

It is true that not all media are the same. National contexts and media landscapes can be rather diverse or dissimilar in their specific treatment of women and in their general organisation. Responsible journalism, forms of management ethics in public media and media with a minimum degree of public remit pave the way to a more equitable cultural production of meanings overall, and provide a wider range of opportunities for the free expression that enhances freedom and democracy.

Morover, women's own initiatives in the production of media has brought change and offered positive role models for society. It is through networking and collective action that change can be brought to the media, as recent cases of reporting rape, sexist attitudes and "artistic freedom" attest to. Again, it seems that the Internet and the new media provide the spaces lacking in established media for women to connect and to protest, but also to produce and create new forms and formats of content. The role of women professionals in the media, especially in the boardroom, is also crucial, as their networks and alliances can support pressure for change in hard-to-move corporations.

For example, going after sexist and hate language targeting women is one of the objectives of The Everyday Sexism Project (<http://everydaysexism.com/>). It campaigned to pressure Facebook into filtering and banning groups and images that depict and promote violence against women. The campaign was successful because of the immense interest it attracted from women around Europe and the world, including female users of Facebook.

However, gender stereotypes persist, but perhaps not the same as in the past: some have evolved, while others are being revived or remain unchanged. For example, there is a whole sector of the media whose business model is based on sexism: violence against women is glamorised and monetised and a new form of aggression against women

and girls is emerging. In these cases, it is not the right to free speech of the media owners or editors that is at stake: the issue is the silencing of women. Women are less likely to be consulted as "experts" than men; they are a minority in politics and in media representations; and the news, even if about women, speaks with a male voice. The ratio of women in positions of media leaders, decision makers and content deciders does not appear to have risen significantly in the past decade and has stalled between 25% and 30%. This echoes earlier work on the status of women in journalism and the media professions that predicted the "recurrent and reinforced residuum" of one-quarter to one-third of women to men.

#### ” Knowledge is a Man's World

*In TV and radio shows, 4 out of 5 experts are men.*

*On any given topic, the presenter is surrounded on average by 20% of women experts and 80% men.*

*Some very serious weekly TV shows only have 2% of women experts per year.*

**Natacha Henry, Writer, lecturer and broadcaster, France**

Major media industries do not perform well in gender representation across the world, with only a few exceptions. The 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project survey reported that “the world we see in the news is a world in which women are virtually invisible” (Gallagher 2005). According to the report, women are dramatically under-represented in the news, with only about one-fifth of news subjects being female (the topic of the news stories or interviewees). There was no single news topic in which women outnumbered men as newsmakers: only 14% of political stories were on women and 20% of business news focused on women. However, women are dominant in the media as celebrities (42%), royalty (33%) or “ordinary” people. In 2010, the survey reported that only 13% of all stories focus specifically on women; 46% of all stories reinforce gender stereotypes; politics featured 19% women and figures for business stories remained unchanged in 2010.

It is important to bear in mind that women are not a homogenous group with the exact same experiences, but they do experience what we call intersectionality: multiple and varying degrees of disadvantage and marginalisation that may change from context to context, and from woman to woman. Yet these experiences are organised around the demographic markers of gender, age, class, sexual orientation, and physical and other disabilities. This element of intersectionality makes it difficult to talk about “women” in

general, but it forces us to grasp the complexity of the challenges women face. It is also important to acknowledge that the aim for social change cannot focus on the “individual”. It is not about improving the position of women in the media on an individual or even on a specific group basis, but about improving their position as a social group. Hence, although women are not just “one category”, neither are they individuals devoid of social context.

” *What difference would it make, if there were more leading women in the media? From my own experience as an executive editor I know that more diversity in a team brings greater variety of input, and more interesting and genuine results. Women are often closer to everyday life and are more sensitive to female clichés and sexism. But to be the only woman in a discussion about gender questions can be very strenuous and tiring.*

Helen Issler, Freelance Journalist/Presenter,  
Switzerland

Certainly some progress has been made since the early studies on women and media policy. These positive points were discussed at the Conference, including some of the effects of having more women in media professions:

- ▶ The production of more diverse images of women in media content go hand in hand with the rise of women in positions of authority in the new media environments.
- ▶ There is more awareness among media professionals about the importance and need for gender sensitive approaches to content production and for a higher presence of women in media corporations.
- ▶ Women at the helm of media organisations are no longer considered as anomalies.
- ▶ Role models are important as an educational and inspirational method for young people and women whose circumstances have been challenging, such as women who have not followed a typical educational life path, professional women with children and/or dependents and so on.
- ▶ More women in the media provide not only better representation of women, but also better media governance.
- ▶ The new media are used by women to draw attention to neglected aspects of women's lives, to connect women and to help form global alliances. They can give a voice to women in a way that mainstream media have failed to do.

Yet at the same time, systemic, structural and cultural obstacles persist and hinder progress in the representation of women and their positions in the media generally, in particular:

- ▶ The hyper-sexualisation of images and use of social media for the objectification of women constitute a new context within which women and especially young people construct and express their identities.
- ▶ The liberalisation of markets and media deregulation have gone hand in hand with the phenomenon of hyper-sexualisation of women, in particular female artists and pop culture entertainers.
- ▶ Images of the sexualised females provide limited role models for young women and create a false picture of women's roles in society.
- ▶ Images of female objectification normalise everyday sexism.
- ▶ Economic crises, changing labour conditions and the under-representation of women in leading positions in the media have affected not only individual careers and life chances, but have also contributed to the production of limited content and undermined women's full participation in public life.

## International standards and principles

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**A**ny debate concerning the role of the media in society inherently involves the fundamental principles of freedom of the press and freedom of expression. Without these, media cannot fulfil its functions and societies cannot bring about change and social justice effectively. Freedom of expression is not an absolute right, but is linked to other human rights, which it may not cancel and endanger, such as the right to life, dignity, safety or privacy (Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights). Through its case law, the European Court of Human Rights has tested and passed judgement on various cases concerning the violation of Article 10 in Europe, from press freedom to individuals' freedom to seek and impart information, as well as in cases where permissible limitations, especially in broadcast and audiovisual media, were deemed necessary for the protection of other rights. At an international level, Article 19 of

the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights clearly expresses the need for responsibility in the exercise of the right to expression.

” *As long as there is seen to be merit in gender difference as such, as natural, authentic or meant-to-be, the letter of the law will not become material reality. Not the principles of gender equality and freedom of the press are at stake here but the most basic of human rights: not to be discriminated against on the grounds of gender, race or sexuality.*

Joke Hermes, Lecturer, InHolland University,  
The Netherlands

Freedom of expression is often invoked when society targets media organisations over the representation of women and girls in their content. Debates stifle when the media, journalists and artists' right to freedom of expression is used to counter demands for change towards equitable treatment of women in cultural and media products. The phenomenon of "symbolic annihilation" of women (Tuchman 1978) involves omission of women, the trivialisation of women's skills, speech, experiences, and the condemnation of women who do not comply with expected norms of sexuality, marriage, image, aspirations and so on. Due to this long-standing practice of omission and misrepresentation, critics argue, freedom of expression of women as a social group has been violated. Stereotyping and violence against women are intrinsically connected: studies, reports and witness testimonies have documented this connection

across a range of geographical areas and socio-economic contexts. International efforts to combat violence against women and girls recognise this connection. Stereotyping of human beings effectively silences and "annihilates" them by depriving them of the opportunity to express diverse ideas, have different lifestyles, and demonstrate and apply skills and knowledge. It also "colours" their social and private lives with unjust and harming expectations. Stereotyping trivialises experience.

The need for balance in the ways in which the media portray women, the recognition of women's roles as integral productive and influential forces in the media, and the role that media can play in combating, but also in reinforcing stereotypes, has been recognised in international and European policy for gender mainstreaming and media content and employment.

” Every single day the media expose us to images, situations and words which convey stereotyped descriptions of what is "feminine" and what is "masculine"; arbitrarily assigning to women and men roles determined by their gender.

*Stereotypes are the product of a "typical" human behavioural process: by creating categories, we simplify decision-making. Given that the vast majority of information received by us is stored in our subconscious without first being consciously "filtered" or analysed, it is inevitable that our judgment, attitudes and behaviour are very often influenced by stereotypes and prejudices of which we are unaware.*

Philippe Boillat, Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe

The United Nations initiative, known as the Beijing Platform and its subsequent Beijing +5 and Beijing +10 conferences, drew attention to the changes needed and set targets dealing with women's representation and leadership positions in the media, their access to and use of media technologies and women's literacy.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) stresses the need to abolish discriminatory laws and practices that hinder gender equality and that media have a crucial role to play in combating violence against women. Article 1 of the Convention defines discrimination against women as

” ... any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

According to Article 5, States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:

” (a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

The Council of Europe has developed norms which guarantee the non-discrimination of women's civil and political rights (the European Convention on Human Rights), as well as their social, cultural and economic rights. The revised European Social Charter guarantees non-discrimination of men and women, and equal treatment and equal opportunities in all areas, together with the right to non-discrimination for any social group on the basis of their “race”, sex, age, disability, association with ethnic minorities, family responsibilities or social background. The Social Charter also guarantees the right to protection from sexual and psychological harassment in employment and from any form of exploitation. The Charter is the cornerstone of social equality rights legislation in Europe and underpins the work of nation states and entities involved in European governance, such as NGOs, regulatory bodies, women's organisations, professional organisations - such as journalists.

Specific problematic areas that hinder achieving full gender equality are centred on physical and psychological violence against women and its perpetuation and normalisation through cultural systems. The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) – the first European treaty aimed at protecting victims of trafficking and their rights – derives from an exhaustive report on the use of the Internet for trafficking in adults. The report (Hughes 2003) analysed how pornography, images of

sexually exploited adults circulating online without their consent and online communication forums were used to exchange information about prostitution and buying people.

In 2007, a second report, “The misuse of Internet for the recruitment of victims of trafficking in human beings” followed the Convention, and detailed the strategies used for trafficking recruitment through new technologies.

In 2011, with the opening for signature of its Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), the Council of Europe provided a comprehensive policy package for member states. Article 17 refers to the importance of the participation of the private sector, the media and communication technologies in the elaboration and implementation of policies. Moreover, citizens’ literacy, educational guidance and change in the media are central to addressing degrading content and sexualised violence.

” Terminology in reporting crime against women and children is an area where change is occurring.

*It is particularly important not to mix up what is legal with what is not and give a stamp of respectability:*

- ▶ *Not “images of child pornography” but “images of child abuse”;*
- ▶ *Not “elopement with a teacher” but “abduction”;*
- ▶ *Not “child prostitution / child prostitute” but “child abuse and abused child”.*

*The media plays an important role in reflecting attitudes in society. Those who work in the media should be conscious of this.*

[John Battle, Head of Compliance, ITN, United Kingdom](#)

Alarmed by the persistence of violent content and stereotypes against women in the media and the rapidly changing media technology landscape, the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media. The Recommendation provides an update of related Committee of Ministers recommendations, of Parliamentary Assembly resolutions, and a new policy direction that will address inequality and violence against women within New Media environments:

- ” 4. Media organisations should be encouraged to adopt self-regulatory measures, internal codes of conduct/ethics and internal supervision, and develop standards in media coverage that promotes gender equality, in order to promote a consistent internal policy and working conditions aimed at:
- equal access to, and representation in, media work for women and men, including in the areas where women are underrepresented;
  - a balanced participation of women and men in management posts, in bodies with an advisory, regulatory or internal supervisory role, and generally in the decision-making process;
  - a non-stereotyped image, role and visibility of women and men, avoidance of sexist advertising, language and content which could lead to discrimination on grounds of sex, incitement to hatred and gender-based violence.

” *Terminology is also an area where real care is needed on use of broad terms like “mums say” rather than “parents say” or referring to the individual. The word can again homogenise and wrongly assume the individual is speaking for all and assuming all have the same views.*

John Battle, Head of Compliance, ITN,  
United Kingdom

Importantly, the Recommendation also recognises and calls for gender sensitive media literacy and citizenship education as integral areas in fighting discrimination against women in the production of media and cultural contents.

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 identifies combating gender stereotypes and sexism as a strategic objective and puts forward concrete measures and action to promote gender equality awareness, combat sexism as a form of hate speech, and promote a positive and non-stereotyped image of women and men in the media, among others.

At the European Union level, the European Commission developed the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015. The strategy aims to tackle persistent inequalities in the proportion of women in decision-making positions in employment; to pursue dignity, integrity, and end gender-based violence; promote equal pay; and promote gender equality beyond the EU. The strategy is an inherent part of the provisions laid down in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, whereby the principle of gender mainstreaming, meaning the systematic consideration of gender in policy design, evaluation of its implementation and possible impact, must accompany every area of EU activity.

In 2013, the European Institute for Gender Equality designed the "European Gender Equality Index" for the European Union, deriving from this strategy the first such comparative

instrument in Europe which can monitor and measure progress in gender equality in the EU's major related policy areas of health, education, employment and governance. The findings show an average of 54% achieved gender equality across member states. The differences among countries are significant. The domains where gender inequality is the most glaring are those of power, such as decision making. There are also glaring inequalities in the time spent on performing unpaid care labour. These markers indicate the persistence of norms and attitudes about gender roles and the need for further policy action.

These are agreements and international instruments to which member states have committed themselves to combat violence against women and safeguard human rights.

## Recommendations

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**B**ased on international legal frameworks and taking into account evidence on the current status of women in media and communications and its relation to women's rights, the conference concluded with the following recommendations.

### To states and public authorities

#### Media content, stereotypes, sexism

- ▶ Provide clear policy frameworks and legal remedial avenues for women to use in cases of sexist and harmful content. User-friendly systems of complaint and redress should be in place that will enable citizens to stand up against sexist media content by filing a complaint.
- ▶ Strengthen and establish independent media regulatory bodies, which should represent a wide range of public interests, and in particular ensure that women are meaningfully involved.
- ▶ Promote and safeguard media pluralism. Pluralistic media are important for democracy and gender-balanced content.

### Education, skills, literacy

- ▶ Include compulsory media and gender literacy education in all school grades.
- ▶ Ensure that a robust system of education on social rights and ways to claim and defend these rights is communicated to young people as part of their citizenship education.
- ▶ Raise awareness among children and young people early on about the restrictive nature of stereotypes, stereotypical and biased content, and sexist behaviour, including the level of injustice which affects groups and which society endures as a result.
- ▶ Provide young people and children with the tools and knowledge to resist and counteract stereotypical and biased content and practices. Good academic and practical knowledge of press complaint systems, for example, should be part of their education.

## To media organisations

### Media content and freedom of expression

- ▶ Combat the proliferation of stereotyping through careful reporting, appropriate programming in general and everyday practice in the daily business of media organisations.
- ▶ Provide guidance in the use of appropriate terminology in describing and reporting violations of the law and human rights, such as child abuse, rape, sexual harassment and other forms of violence.
- ▶ Avoid beautifying, glamorising, obscuring and relativising terms to describe such abuses. This goes hand in hand with a conscious and systematic effort to strengthen “good”, that is, appropriate language, which should be as accurate and sensitive to gender-specific violence as possible.
- ▶ Establish a unified code of terms for journalists and media across Europe to support this effort, and which journalists’ unions, together with media organisations, can strengthen.
- ▶ Ensure that a balanced group of media workers provide coverage of diverse topics, witnesses, experts, thereby producing better gender representation.
- ▶ Proactively address the effects of stereotyping by educating and raising awareness in society by covering issues such as gendered violence against women.

### **Policy and decision-making mechanisms**

- ▶ Strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms and codes of conduct to condemn and combat sexist imagery, language and practices by setting clear standards and consequences for the industry, and provide progress monitoring.
- ▶ Ensure that internal codes of ethics and conduct, including procedures for complaint, are widely known to the public and easy to access. A practical way to disseminate this information would be to include guidance about such procedures on the websites of all major media in Europe, in addition to their self-regulatory bodies.

### **Employment of women in the media**

- ▶ Support the return to work of women professionals after parental leave, and encourage work practices that correspond to people's natural life cycles, such as caring for young children.
- ▶ Provide training with adequate remuneration and social benefits, and provide other forms of support through mentoring systems. Childcare support can alleviate significantly the burden placed on individuals and help them overcome structural hurdles and progress in their careers.
- ▶ Provide resources and programmes for the strengthening of women's media literacy in designing, accessing and managing information and content in media technologies.
- ▶ Encourage studies of the managerial and decision-making aspects of media organisations to become an integral part of higher education curricula and journalism training programmes.
- ▶ Protect journalists from job precariousness and instability and create safe working environments for women.
- ▶ The policy of quotas for women in the media remains for some a controversial issue. This is not because opinions are not united in the urgent need to raise the proportion of women in media and content, but because there is disagreement as to whether such measures would be effective and appropriate. The debate oscillates between a focus on women as individuals and women as a social group. Women as a social group can benefit from quotas. Disagreement focuses largely on women as individuals.

### Conference discussions highlighted two interconnecting elements:

- ▶ as a strategy and a goal, quotas can motivate political action, and
- ▶ as historical experience has demonstrated, without quotas, vulnerable, yet crucial content would not have been protected, such as children's programmes or European content in audio-visual material. From this point of view, quotas are a course of action that enables various professional organisations to apply pressure for corrective action in the media.

## To international organisations

### International organisations should encourage their member states to:

- ▶ comply with international standards, provide resources to combat sexism in culture, monitor progress and provide corrective measures in a timely fashion.
- ▶ ensure that Internet users are given more control over their privacy and representation, and should have the option to retract content they produced in social media.
- ▶ promote women in science and technology, so that gender sensitive applications and considerations can be embedded within the "code" of the Internet and within the technological design of the tools of communication.
- ▶ hold the media accountable in their role to address gender imbalances. This is a useful practice that civil society and professional organisations can further pursue. This could take the form of regular monitoring and submitting requests for information. Transparency in everyday business and management of major corporations is important for the successful application of corporate responsibility.

## To states, public authorities and media organisations

- ▶ Commit to long-term collaborative training in gender awareness.
- ▶ Publicly recognise and give credit to organisations for excellence and leadership in promoting balanced gender representation. Women's leadership in the media will help support and reinforce good practice.

” There are no “one-size-fits-all” solutions that could be used for drawing up recommendations in order to improve the situation in the member states of the Council of Europe. It is true for both the existing legislation in the countries and the state of women representation in the decision-making in the media. In this sense, we have to be cautious not to step onto the path of overregulation.

*It would be advisable for the media organisations in respective countries to look into the issue vis-a-vis its own code of ethics and/or conduct and suggest avenues for its improvement. Sharing of best practices among the member states of the Council of Europe could serve as the basis for any guidelines that might be put forward to tackle the issue.*

H.E. Dziunik Aghjanian, Ambassador of Armenia to the Netherlands,  
Representing the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

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” Gender equality is an integral part of human rights. Freedom of expression, as a fundamental right, goes hand-in-hand with gender equality.

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