

Urska Umek
Secretariat of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI)

The Information Society Department of the Council of Europe, Media and Internet Division, acts as the Secretariat of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI), the committee entrusted with standard setting in the area of media and Internet law.

Two expert committees have been set up in the framework of the CDMSI dealing with specific issues related to the media and Internet landscape. One of these expert committees, MSI-MED, is vested with producing two feasibility studies on different aspects of media coverage of elections, with a view to answering the question of whether the Council of Europe should adopt a standard-setting instrument on these issues.

One of these studies explores media coverage of elections with a specific focus on gender equality.

The study seeks to identify ways in which female candidates are represented in the media, but also to explore a wider context of participation of women journalists, editors, media experts, analysts, commentators, etc. in the electoral process.

The introductory part will present diffuse interests of women, as a historically marginalised group, and political realities in which women candidates go public in election campaigns. Also, there will be a short overview of the essentials of existing Council of Europe recommendations relating to the topic:

- CM/Rec(2007)15 on measures concerning media coverage of election campaigns;
- CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media;
- CM/Rec(2011)7 on a new notion of media

The second part will explore current issues related to gender equality in relation with the media coverage of elections, focusing on the following questions:

- Definition/discussion on what constitutes fair and balanced media coverage of election campaigns from the perspective of gender equality;
- What elements/factors to be included in the examination and possible standard-setting regarding media coverage of elections:

Presentation of female candidates in the media;

Participation of female journalists, news presenters, presenters of political programmes, editors, etc. in the election-related topics;

Participation of female panellists, media and political experts, analysts, commentators, etc. in media coverage within the electoral period.

Presentation of women voters' needs, interests, challenges. Could we explore what kind of voice, if any, is given to the female voters by the media?

The third part is supposed to explore possible existing analyses of the gender representation in media coverage of elections or at least media coverage of political issues that might provide insight into the current situation within the member states of the Council of Europe. Also, it will endeavour to analyse any good practices and/or experiences from the member States.

Having regard to the considerations analysed in previous parts, the last part will seek to answer the following questions:

- Are there gender issues (related to media coverage of elections) that are not addressed by existing recommendations?
- Are existing recommendations effective in addressing part or all of the issue?
- Are there new problems arising from social media, online media, content-sharing platforms and how to address them?
- Could the means be achieved through rigorous implementation of already existing standards?

As the expert committee is composed of media experts, and the topic of gender equality in the media coverage of elections is of transversal nature, we are kindly asking for the help of the members of the Gender Equality Commission with any studies concerning the topic of gender equality related to media coverage of elections, as well as analyses of national legislation or practices.