

**HUMAN RIGHTS,
DEMOCRACY
AND THE RULE OF LAW**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**DROITS DE L'HOMME,
DÉMOCRATIE
ET ÉTAT DE DROIT**

Gender equality and media

Council of Europe standards and implementation

Urška Umek
urska.umek@coe.int

Head of Media Unit
Information Society Department



Gender equality at the Council of Europe

- Equality between women and men: an **important area** for the CoE for a long time
- **Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023**
- **Institutional** setting



Media at the Council of Europe

- **Freedom of expression and media freedom:** a precondition for a full enjoyment of other rights and freedoms
- **Media standard setting** based on **Article 10** of the ECHR
- **Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media**



Combating gender stereotypes and sexism

- Gender stereotypes are present in **all areas of life** (education, media, arts & culture etc)
- **Obstacle** to the achievement of real gender equality between women and men
- Feed into **gender discrimination**
- Work on **media, education, sexist hate speech**



Gender equality in media – issues

- Media actively **shape opinions**, attitudes and ideas: big influence
- More and more women in the media profession but **under-represented in decision-making**
- **Messages and images** of women and men that **reinforce gender stereotypes**
- **Social media:** a place where sexism and violence is frequent (anonymity online and lack of control)
- Women journalists = particular **targets of sexist hate speech** & violence
- Lack of reporting & sanction of **sexist hate speech**



Two strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action

- Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.
- Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.



In Europe, **24%**
women heard,
read about or
seen in the news
Even less as
experts: 17%



Main relevant Council of Europe standards

- **Binding instruments:**

- **European Convention on Human Rights: right to freedom of expression**
- **Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Article 17**

- **Soft-law instruments:**

- **Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media**
- **Recommendation (2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors**



Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media

Identified problems:

- Women's under-representation in media ownership, in information production and journalism, in newsrooms and management posts, often precarious conditions of employment
- Women's low visibility, both in terms of quality and quantity, in media content
- Rare use of women as experts and the relative absence of women's viewpoints and opinions in the media
- **Persistence of sexist stereotypes and lack of counter-stereotypes in the media coverage of political events and election campaigns**



Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media

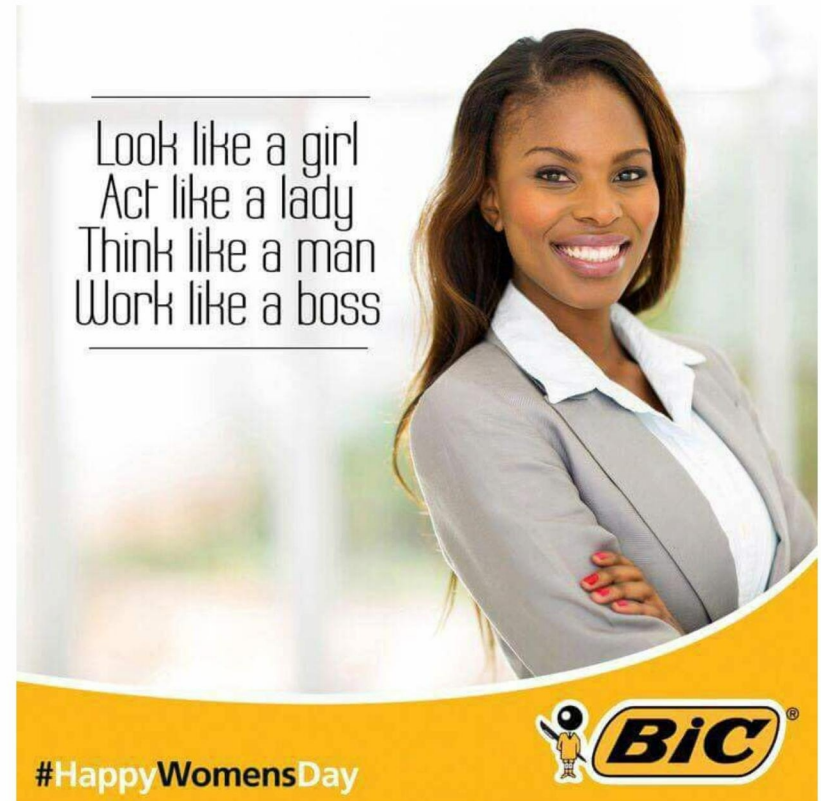
Recommendations:

- **States:** adoption and implementation of an appropriate legal framework to prohibit discrimination
- **Media:** adoption of self-regulatory measures and internal codes of conduct promoting non-stereotyped image of women and men
- **Multi-stakeholder:** adoption of indicators on gender equality in the media and a regular monitoring of the representation of men and women in the media
- **Multi-stakeholder:** media literacy to include gender equality perspective



Sexism in the media

- Sexualised depiction of women in media
- Stereotypical depiction of women and men
- Victim blaming in media reporting on violence against women
- Sexist hate speech



Principles of gender-sensitive reporting

- Identification of violence / reporting on such topics
- Appropriate terminology
- Non-judgmental language
- Respect for privacy and humanity
- Contextualisation and comprehensiveness
- **Prevention of secondary victimisation by the media**



Specific area: women in political/electoral reporting

- Reliance of voters on the news to form their opinion and vote
- Principles of election campaigns:
 - ❖ Fairness (no improper or hidden influence of various groups)
 - ❖ Transparency (in expenditure of political parties)
 - ❖ Equal access of political parties and candidates to media



Study on media coverage of elections with a specific focus on gender equality

Issues addressed:

- Do women and men candidates receive equal media coverage?
- Who reports on elections? (Ratio of male and female journalists)
- What messages are conveyed to the voters?
- What, if any, impact do these messages have on voters' decisions?
- What are the mechanisms in place to ensure equal representation of women and men candidates?
- Is there a need to adopt additional instruments to ensure equal representation of both genders in the pre-electoral media coverage?



Political communication in terms of gender perspective

- More media coverage of male candidates
- Political topics are mostly presented by male reporters and political shows host a majority of male guests
- Women candidates are mostly interviewed on issues considered as „soft topics“ (health, culture, education, etc.), but not on politics, government, economy, etc.
- Gender-biased portrayals (women candidates receive more attention to appearance, age, family, etc.)



Stereotypes framing the media coverage of women politicians

- Style over substance
- Sexualisation
- Family status
- Designation as „wife of ...“



Influence of stereotypical reporting on the voters

U.S. research 1992: voters tend to respond more positively to political candidates that receive the type of coverage usually accorded to male candidates, including the opportunity to voice their views on “hard” issues

U.S. research 2014: sexist coverage reduces votes in favour of women candidates



Mechanisms and practices in the Council of Europe member states

- Statutory requirements on gender equality in media coverage
- Media regulatory authorities' guidelines and strategies
- Media self-regulation
 - Journalist associations and press councils
 - Initiatives/best practices from the media and journalists
- Civil society initiatives
- Tools for improving gender portrayal in the media
- Conclusion: few specific initiatives addressing election coverage from a gender perspective



Recommendations

- Better implementation of existing standards targeting women in the media and sexism
- Explicit inclusion of gender equality requirements in national legislation covering the media
- Encouragement of political parties to include gender equality perspective in their internal policies
- Dialogue with media organisations and self-regulatory bodies on the gender perspective of the coverage of elections
- Inclusion of the gender equality perspective in the coverage of elections by social media
- Assurance of gender equality in the editorial teams covering elections
- Monitoring of media content as regards the respect for gender equality requirements
- Media education and trainings – for journalists and their audiences
- Research and analysis of the impact of biased election coverage on voters' choices



<https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression>

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/freedom-expression/gender-and-media>

<https://www.coe.int/gender-mainstreaming>
www.coe.int/equality

