

MEDIA AND GENDER

Towards a balanced gender representation and participation in the media in Bosnia and Herzegovina



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Table of Content

I. Introduction _____	3
II. Media and Gender: basic terminology and concepts _____	4
III. Women in the media: a historical and contextual analysis _____	6
IV. Gender participation and representation in media: explainers and resources _____	10
4.1. Participation _____	11
4.1.1. Access, media use and the digital divide _____	12
4.1.1.1 Policy compass _____	13
4.1.2. Safety and GBV _____	14
4.1.2.1. Policy compass _____	15
4.2. Representation _____	16
4.2.1. Imagery, bias and intersectionality _____	17
4.2.1.1. Policy compass _____	19
4.2.2. Cross-cutting issues _____	21
V. Conclusion _____	22
References _____	23

Abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CM/Rec	Committee of Ministers Recommendation
CoE	Council of Europe
CRA	Communication Regulatory Authority
CRVENA	Association for Culture and Art
EBU	The European Broadcasting Union
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
GBV	Gender-based violence
GCs	Gender Centres
GEA	Gender Equality Agency
GMMP	The Global Media Monitoring Project
IWMF	International Women's Media Foundation
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual.
MIL	Media and Information Literacy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WACC	World Association of Christian Communication
WEM	Women Executives in Media

I. Introduction

The Study on Media and Gender provides the context and specificities of gender as a normative framework within Media and Information Literacy (MIL). It also sheds light onto the local needs and obstacles for balanced gender representation and participation in the region, specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Study offers a solid basis for the development of MIL interventions which primarily aim at encouraging and nurturing critical thinking about gender, and addressing gender as a cross-cutting element and cornerstone of holistic MIL, with indispensable implications for sustainable media and an informed public (Haider 2020, p. 43; CM/Rec(2013)1).

The overall objective of this Study is to surface contextual applications for and representations of gender and media, and in media in the country. Specifically, *how media reflects, reproduces and can shape representation and participation in public life*. Making use of an intersectional human rights approach, the Study will examine international and Council of Europe (CoE) policy instruments, academic literature and international reports¹ that address gender and media, including gender-based violence (GBV). To this end, the Study focuses on two conceptual pillars: 1) Participation and 2) Representation. Each pillar addresses key components for gender equality, identified in the Beijing Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace, adopted by the UN in 1995. The Platform refers specifically to participation and representation as methods by which “the media has a great potential to promote the advancement of women and the equality of women and men, by portraying women and men in a non-stereotypical, diverse and balanced manner, and by respecting the dignity and worth of the human person” (UN 1995, para. 33).

Desk-research and analysis have been utilised along with data gleaned during interviews with key stakeholders² to allow for a nuanced understanding of those processes that reinforce and perpetuate gender norms, as well as hinder or enable women’s full participation and representation in public and political life.

The Study will specifically address:

- 1) the policy-specific context including regional dynamics and norms, and the role of gender equality-focused activism, and community-building (see Policy Compass sections on gender media monitoring mechanisms); and
- 2) gender-sensitive MIL-related outputs for potential scaling and application to the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including a mapping of critical-skills toolkits and other resources (see Useful Resources and p. 23 for a full Reference list).

¹ The reports of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE); the Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media by the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF); and the Global Media Monitoring Project by the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC) will be paid special attention, as well as to UN Woman with regards to the Beijing Platform for Action objectives.

² Interview with Communication Regulatory Authority (CRA), 29 November 2021; and Saša Leskovic of the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 21 December 2021.

The conceptual framework utilised for this Study, including the selected resources, do not address gender and media in their entirety, but rather focus on salient aspects related to policy and MIL. Additionally, when it comes to MIL analysis of gender and media specifically, the research process pointed to the need for greater focus on gender representation than participation (Van der Spuy & Aavriti 2018, p. 34). On the one hand, the issue of representation can be better analysed as a tool for community empowerment and emancipation. On the other hand, participation and its limiting and enabling factors, are more closely tied to policy and processes, although, in any case, representation and participation are inextricably tied: a balanced representation of women clearly has significant implications for positive trends in women's participation and safety, and vice versa.

The Study is structured as following: the first Chapter presents key concepts and shared gender and media vocabulary; the second Chapter offers a brief overview of the legislative and institutional frameworks in Bosnia and Herzegovina providing with context for existing gender and media norms and trends; the third Chapter combines these analysis and suggests resources for development of MIL interventions to improve the status of women's participation and representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

II. Media and Gender: basic terminology and concepts

The following sections briefly introduce key concepts necessary for a gendered analysis of media in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, gender (as a normative lens or framework) is a dynamic concept – continually evolving, and with specific indicators based on cultural norms and local environment. Thus, these definitions should not be taken as fully prescriptive, but rather as guides for a shared understanding of language to analyse gender and media notions in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Having said that, women's access to public spaces, especially when it comes to participation in media and politics, is from a normative perspective improved with the provision of gender-specific policies that meaningfully enable accessibility and participation. Holistic MIL framework is one such policy that has the potential to enable and promote equality when it comes to gendered social and other transformative initiatives (CM/Rec(2017)9).

In this Study, the concept of *gender identity*, beyond the core notions and feelings associated with self-identification, should also be understood to encompass “the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men” (Istanbul Convention, Article 3). Gender equality should be understood as “equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of both women and men in all spheres of public life, including the media” (CM/Rec(2017)9, Preamble). The concept of gender goes beyond the binary of male and female, to include a range of genders, gender expressions and identities that are not fixed, but rather can shift and change over the course of a lifetime. This Study will therefore apply an inclusive lens, to look into the traditional notions of gender, while ascribing to a framework that includes the full provision of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for people of all genders, and other intersectional identifiers. Finally, it assumes that, when it comes to the media sector, gender equality is intrinsically rooted in a variety of

fundamental human rights, notably the right to freedom of expression and others (freedom of thought, conscience and religion, privacy, assembly, etc.).

As a lens for analysis, concerning media, gender not only has broad applicability when it comes to legal, political, societal, economic and cultural processes, but must be employed in all sectors and processes for the effective removal of obstacles for women’s full participation in public life. In addition, compounding the necessity for a gender-sensitive approach to media, the country-specific media ecosystem ‘simultaneously reflects and reshapes the social world’ in which women live (Djerf-Pierre & Edström 2020, p. 14). Using this framework, two salient aspects of gender and media are explored in this Study:

i. *Participation* should be understood as increased opportunities for involvement and access to public forums and decision-making processes, via media, including new technologies of communication (UN 1995, Strategic objective J.1; see also: CM/Rec(2017)9). The Study will evaluate participation based on the obstacles to and opportunities for access to public forums, political processes and media (news-creation and infrastructure), but also opportunities for capacity-building to increase women’s participation in full compliance with and respect for the enjoyment of human rights. Using this framework, a holistic concept of safety – personal, physical, emotional and digital – emerges as a necessary prerequisite for meaningful participation.

ii. *Representation*³ refers, in this Study, to the variety of ways in which the media produces, reproduces and perpetuates perceptions and representations of gender (Rozgonyi (forthcoming), p. 8) and specifically of women and members of other marginalised communities. “In intersectional constructs, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, and other aspects of identity are discussed as mutually constitutive. Intersectionality is understood as people experiencing multiple aspects of their identity simultaneously” (ibid.).

PARTICIPATION	REPRESENTATION
Access, use and digital divide	Imagery, bias and intersectionality
Safety and GBV	Cross-cutting issues (e.g., intersection with disinformation and other relevant informational trends)
<i>Gender-sensitive (media) regulatory frameworks: International (Council of Europe) and Bosnia and Herzegovina perspectives</i>	
Gender gap(s) and inequality	

³ Djerf-Pierre, M. and Edström, M. (2020). p. 21. The authors identified three levels of representation: i. Symbolic recognition refers to the public’s opportunities to see, list and read about women in prominent roles; ii. Representation as social justice means to provide a space where women are heard and have to say on issues that are important to them; iii. Representations as diversity refers to broadening of the news topic and content that emanate from women’s life and experience and inclusion of women’s sources and expertise.

Table 1: Conceptual framework for the Study on Gender and Media

In line with this conceptual framework and Council of Europe standard setting documents, certain MIL interventions, given their citizen-centric and dynamic nature, emerge as indispensable instruments for achieving gender equality. Indeed, CM/Rec 2017(9) on gender equality in the audiovisual sector, promotes gender-sensitive MIL as a tool for enabling young people to responsibly approach and critically assess representations of women and sexist narratives in the media, and as a means of “broad human rights education and active involvement in the democratic processes” (CM/Rec 2017(9), Section IV, para. 2).

These interventions must also meaningfully include other society stakeholders including adults, teachers and parents, as part of holistic education for “active citizenship” as well as audiovisual professionals and students, given their “crucial role in a democratic society” (CM/Rec 2017(9), Section IV, para. 3 and 4). Looking at Council of Europe recommendations,⁴ there is an intrinsic link between MIL and gender equality that positions MIL as a key mechanism for advancing gender equality, contributing to greater public and democratic participation. However, stand-alone MIL interventions will not result in meaningful steps towards gender equality. State and non-state actors are also responsible for collaborative efforts to translate these concepts and interventions into MIL practices as well as the broader policy framework, for the creation of gender-sensitive provisions.⁵ This process – “the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, to ensure that a gender equality perspective is incorporated at all levels and stages of all policies by those normally involved in policy making” (CM/Rec(2007)13, Appendix) – is referred to as gender mainstreaming.

The Study and the proposed conceptual framework are rooted in a theoretical and practical framework of feminist media theory, that calls for (a) pro-active countering of gendered political, economic and social inequalities in society; (b) enabling opportunities for both men and women to develop their human interest, wishes and talents; and (c) opposing structures that create gender-based inequality (Rozgonyi, (forthcoming), p. 1).

III. Women in the media: a historical and contextual analysis

By way of introduction to the historical context of gender and media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one must preface with a reminder of the power of media when it comes to the armed conflict of the nineties. Media played a central role in promoting and perpetuating inflammatory narratives and was thus inextricably linked to the conflict. Media, then and now, has the power to create and reproduce certain *realities* that shape collective and individual biases and perspectives. Despite an increasing number of women entering the media and political spheres (GMMP 2020; Haider 2020, p. 5, 22), women’s meaningful participation in public and political life seems to be declining, and gender equality eroding (ibid., p. 20). Given this situation, and in the context of this Study, the logical questions arise

⁴ See also: CM/Rec(2013)1, xiv-xvi: that similarly references MIL to gender education ‘the values of justice and participation necessary for the effective and active exercise of democratic citizenship’.

⁵ For in-depth guidelines on gender-sensitive indicators for development of educational curricula for a range of groups in the society, see: Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on Gender Mainstreaming in Education.

– how are existing *realities* about women, and members of marginalised communities produced in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and by whom?

In previous moments in the country's history, women's participation and activism were and were seen to be, crucial building blocks for a functional and active society (Popov-Momčinović 2013, p. 76). This understanding of and reliance on women's contribution also extended women's enjoyment of a range of human rights: *reproductive rights* (in 1951 women were granted access to abortion in Serbia with certain restrictions. In 1977, these restrictions were lifted, to increase women's reproductive agency throughout Yugoslavia. see: Zaharijević 2012, p. 536, 541)⁶; *political rights* (in 1945 women throughout Yugoslavia already had voting rights, *ibid.*); and *social and labour rights* (guaranteed in the 1946 Constitution and related legislation, *ibid.*).

These movements furthered women's efforts for full emancipation and inclusion, bolstered simultaneously by the media (in the second World War, more than 30 print news editions were dedicated specifically to the topic of women and gender equality (Popov-Momčinović 2013, p. 77). By 1959, there were more than 1000 women's organisations active in Yugoslavia, 248 of which were in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Zaharejjević 2012, p. 573). The feminist agenda (regionally termed "women question" – žensko pitanje, see: Popov-Momčinović, 2013, p. 84) had different meanings, applications and outcomes for women in the region, but resulted in the shared understanding that women "had a special status as a specific category [...] in the political beat of previous system and their emancipation and inclusion in the system remained on the top of political agenda [...]" (*ibid.*, p. 100; see also: Bamburać et al. 2006, p. 46). The conceptualised notion of "sisterhood" and women's movements were an indispensable part of, and contribution to the anti-war movements and peace building processes, initiated as of 1991 (Zaharejjević 2012, p. 547), and continue to shape community networks today.⁷ Women and women's voices have been the essential and primary mechanism for the promotion of gender equality in the past half century. The erosion of gender equality and backsliding of women's agency of current day, are in seeming contradiction to the gains made by regional feminism of past years. The current situation can be traced to the neo-liberalism of post-war society (Haider 2020, p. 24, 26) as well as an expanding media ecosystem that provides ample space for rhetoric that colours gender discourse and influences (dis)empowerment. Women's voices and visibility are required more than ever, as proven tools for equality and necessary change, but are minimised, made invisible and distorted in many (digital) public spaces, with immediate effect on the general public whose perspectives and awareness suffer given the unbalanced and incomplete informational landscape.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in much of the Western Balkans, decision-making and editorial positions are held primarily by men (Haider 2020, p. 22). In Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁶ For a more in-depth discussion about feminism in this region, see: Zaharijević, A. (2012). *Neko je rekao feminizam*. BiH edition, Žene u crnom. Belgrade.

⁷ See: work of the feminist collective Association for Culture and Art – CRVENA and their collaboration with women movements across the region, available at: <https://crvena.ba/suradnje/>.

only 30% of managerial positions within the media sector are held by women (Popov Momčilović 2019, p. 1). Most of the country's population access news and public information via broadcast media – a shift from previous years, likely caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which online portals and social media were the main access points for news⁸ (CoE 2021, p. 23; Sokol 2020, p. 6). The same study also noted a slight gender differentiation in relation to sources of information of public importance (“events in the country and the world”): women visit less news portals than man (42% vs. 48%), use less the open internet (35% vs. 41%) and in fact tend to access internet from one device, and are less likely to use video-sharing platforms (45% vs. 52%) (CoE 2021, p. 24-25). In the context of use of social media for public discussion, women are also less likely to engage compared to men (27% vs. 35%) (ibid., p. 47). On the top, given male-dominance in decision-making and ownership of the media (GMMP 2020, p. 11; Popov-Momčinović 2019, p. 1), men have increased agency to shape public debate as well as women’s experiences and opportunities. As a result, “the post-socialist landscape is one in which women are largely absent from the public sphere. These changes, developments and continuities are reflected in the media.” (Haider 2020, p. 8).

Despite the fact that women represent 50.09% of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s total population (Bosnia and Herzegovina Agency for Statistics 2020), women’s experience and contribution are minimised and relegated to “soft-topics” like entertainment and lifestyle (USAID 2016, p. 41; Barišić 2020, p. 10). In 2020 the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) analysed 287 news stories published by 20 (traditional and digital) media outlets, for the “Who makes the news” report, which concluded: “when we compare the 2020 statistics on news subject’s function with those from the previous monitoring conducted in 2015, we can conclude that women have become even more invisible in comparison to men” (GMMP 2020, p. 48). In addition, during the report monitoring period, GMMP did not identify any news on gender equality/inequality (ibid., p. 34). Following the analysis of news-content related to LGBTQIA+ contribution, findings showed a similar “invisibility” of these communities (Haider 2020, p. 3).

In 2017, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the Action Plan for Human Rights Education for Journalists and Media Professionals for the period 2016-2019.⁹ The Plan outlines concrete steps to improve access for and representation of marginalised and minority groups, including guidelines on gender-sensitive reporting (CoE – Gender Equality Commission 2019, p. 34). However positive these initial efforts, as of yet, there has not been a measurable improvement for women or members of marginalised groups, especially when it comes to prevalence of harmful stereotypes, and their objectification in the media. Because the media is such an important sector for dissemination of information, the media and audiovisual sector are “well placed to shape and influence perceptions, ideas, attitudes and behaviour prevalent in society” (CM/Rec(2017)9; CM/Rec(2013)1, Preamble). Yet, for many reasons, existing legal and policy initiatives have been unable to remedy gender inequality in representation and participation, and generally, according to the UN

⁸ Primary sources of information are TV (78.3%), followed by social networks (52.1) and online news portals (45%) (CoE 2021, p.23).

⁹*The Law on prohibition of discrimination* (Official Gazette No.66/16). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3OGyN1U> .

CEDAW 2019 report, “progress over the past decades on women’s rights has been slow” (UN CEDAW 2019, para. 17/a). The report further calls for state authorities to “strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations, in particular women’s organisations” to ensure their meaningful inclusion in political and legislative decision-making processes (ibid.).

In regard to legislation and policy, analysis of existing measures indicates a legislative lacuna when it comes to specific provisions to identify and combat obstacles for women’s meaningful inclusion. For example, the 2016 Law on the prohibition of discrimination,¹⁰ which includes a definition of harassment and sexual harassment fails to encompass all forms of discrimination against women (ibid., para. 11), including intersecting forms of unequal treatment in public and private space (ibid., para. 14). The Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Official Gazette 32/10), prescribes equal access to media regardless of sex, prohibits derogatory or humiliating portrayal of people based on their sex, and requires media to promote gender equality (Article 21; see also: CoE – Gender Equality Commission 2019, p. 25). It does not, however, offer specific protection or recognise the gendered nature of abuse and disinformation that plagues women journalists and politicians (Barišić 2020, p. 22). The corresponding Gender Action Plan 2018-2022¹¹ refers to gender equality only in the context of employment, by introducing monitoring requirements for the private and public media sectors (ibid., p. 23).

In terms of institutional mechanisms of support, there is a state-wide Gender Equality Agency (GEA), two entity Gender Centres (GCs), state and entity-level parliamentary commissions for gender equality and equal opportunity, as well as a number of advisors, committees, and boards distributed throughout multiple cantons (Barišić 2020, p. 6). The Communication Regulatory Authority (CRA) has an important role in enforcing, through sanctions (USAID 2016, p. 41; CoE 2019, p. 43), the provisions¹² that have been established to protect members of the community from problematic speech and images, including violence or discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation. Another important layer of protection against GBV in and by the media is the judiciary. Regrettably, the judiciary also often fails to adequately sanction, or effectively address instances of GBV given that “personal biases inevitably influence the procedure and the seemingly gender-neutral legal norms”, therefore, “justice is blind, the law is neutral” (Barišić 2020, p. 14, 19). Media self-regulatory mechanisms do include gender-sensitive provisions but they prove to be poorly implemented by media professionals and newsrooms (ibid., p. 24).

These semi-effective processes, and unmet standards have created an environment of impunity, in which women have very few options for redress or remedy against GBV and gender discrimination, especially in a country where GBV is prevalent and remains a real concern vis-à-vis both digital and physical safety (UN CEDAW 2019, para. 25). Women’s

¹⁰Law on prohibition of discrimination (Official Gazette No.66/16). Available at: <https://bit.ly/3Omtx43>.

¹¹ Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees and Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018-2022* (October 2018).

¹² Code on Audiovisual Media Services and Radio Services from 2015 (Art.3, para. 3-5), Code on commercial communication, including the Law on Communication (Official Gazette 31/03, 75/06, 32/10, 98/12).

safety risks are compounded, when looking at the current decline of trust in and value of the media by the broader community (a study conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung showed that one in four individuals surveyed finds that assaults on journalists, including women, are justified, see: Popov-Momčinović 2019, p. 12). By the same token, a study conducted by Journalistic Association in 2018, found that women journalists face “assaults, insults and discrimination from colleagues within the editorial staff, from interlocutors, and from the public, with the perception in society that a woman is easier to humiliate in public space” (Popov-Momčinović 2019; see also: Haider 2020, p. 23).

When it comes to media coverage of GBV, misogyny and gender-based assault and threat, are sensationalised as stories of love, power and dominance, downplaying the harm to and lack of agency of women, all to drive engagement, and, ultimately, profit. These narratives overpopulate the media space and negate the significance of GBV as a serious structural and societal problem. Journalists often lack training on ethical coverage of GBV, or face pressure to publish sensationalised narratives given the over-saturated and financially untenable media space. And “while responsible media coverage cannot resolve the issue of violence against women, it can be instrumental in recognition of GBV as a social phenomenon and give greater attention to prevention activities” (Haider 2020, p. 4; see also: Barišić 2020, p. 11). Similarly, violence and discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community is absent from public discourse or presented in a way that “creates the detrimental public impression that such minorities do not actually suffer from discrimination, exclusion, violence and hate speech” (Haider 2020, p. 4).

Representing an ever-increasing portion of the country’s media workforce, women have a vested interest in, and inherent right to full participation and representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, at all levels and in all areas of governance, especially as an essential resource for new perspectives, and challenging existing power imbalances. Effectively addressing the many obstacles to participation goes beyond an awareness of discrimination, to an analysis of how levels of discrimination and marginalization may intersect or overlap each other, reinforcing barriers to opportunity. Women have also proven to be powerful agents of change – opening up paths for meaningful contribution for other women and historically absent communities. However, in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the so-termed ‘symbolic annihilation’ (Gerbner & Gross 1976, p. 182) or depiction and under-representation of women in a narrow range of social roles that omits, trivialises and condemns them by the mass media (Tuchman 1979), renders their historical-social and political achievements meaningless. when it comes to democratic progress and reduces their agency in terms of participatory governance.

IV. Gender participation and representation in media: explainers and resources

The following section briefly unpacks key terms and concepts, by positioning the previously introduced theoretical framework within the local-specific gender and media context, using a proposed conceptual matrix (see Table 1), Council of Europe gender equality and media standards, literature review and interview data. This section is not an in-depth analysis, but rather a context-relevant review of these concepts for practical implementation. It is also an

overview, by way of introduction to additional material and resources, to gender-sensitive MIL programmes, and content in line with the Council of Europe commitments and standards, especially the 2017 CoE Committee of Ministers Recommendations on gender equality in the audiovisual sector (CM/Rec(2017)9).

Across the globe, the media sphere generally, but especially digital platforms, have become indispensable spaces for and instruments of public debate and participation. Media stakeholders, therefore, have an essential role in this space, as watchdogs of those in power, but also as enablers (or oppressors) of community dialogue and engagement. For truly democratic processes, all factions of society, especially those that have been historically marginalised, must be given equal space and fully enabled to contribute. This is not to say that gender equality is the sole responsibility of media, but rather that media must be meaningfully included as an intrinsic part of any initiative – MIL or otherwise – to effectively address and counter gender discrimination and GBV. Simply put, media is a crucial part of any system that enables “partnership and the equal sharing of rights and responsibilities between women and men, cater for their respective needs, ensure balanced participation in all areas of life and full citizenship rights to every woman and man” (CM/Rec(2007)13, Preamble).

4.1. Participation

In the context of gender and media, participation essentially refers to the opportunity for engagement with public spaces, community dialogue and decision-making processes, in and through the media, including (and sometimes especially) online. Despite the fact that women and men similarly access and make use of technology in the country (CoE 2021, p. 15, 17), the repercussions of genuine unequal participation of women for society fall along gender lines, and further exacerbate existing inequality. Though communication technology (mobile phones, social media platforms, etc.) is a neutral commodity in a vacuum – in practice, and because technology of all types is largely designed and programmed by the companies managed by men, it has multiple and clear links to patriarchal and structural inequality (Van der Spuy & Aavriti 2018, p. 42). In addition to digital technologies, media, as an entire sector, but particularly news-creation and dissemination, has similar links and implications for gender equality.

When it comes to the media, women’s role as journalists or as other types of media workers, functionally shape, as a bottleneck for but also as an indicator of safe (or unsafe) engagement, women's opportunities for participation in public media spaces and dialogue. Women’s access to and use of media technology are key enablers of participation, and are therefore, intrinsically connected to the question of gender equality in the media sector. Women’s editorial independence, economic vulnerability, working environment and safety, are all key factors that shape women’s access to upward mobility and editorial and professional independence, and, ultimately, type and level of participation. In the Western Balkans, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina, women make up a greater proportion of the media population than men, however these numbers alone are not (yet) an indicator of increased access or agency when it comes to decision making and ownership, editorial positions, or improved representation. Increasing

numbers of women, however, has resulted in an increase in opportunities for engagement, and access to peer, and other forms of support – crucial restorative places of empowerment and protection following instances of abuse. Examples of this type of opportunity include: Women Executives in Media (WEM) initiative launched by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) that provides coaching to female executives; and Prenons la Une, a French network of women journalists that counter sexism in the media (CoE 2015, p. 23). In Serbia, a recently founded peer network of women journalists – Women journalists against violence¹³ – offers holistic support for other women, supported and guided by local anti-GBV organisations. This network regularly monitors and publishes reports and recommendations regarding media coverage of GBV. There are also plans to establish the first pan-Western Balkan women journalists’ network.

4.1.1. Access, media use and the digital divide

Accessibility of media and digital/ICT technologies refers to a set of societal, political and regulatory conditions that enable women and girls, as well as members of other minority and under-represented groups, to make free use of technology-driven tools, resources and spaces. Access to and use of digital technologies is a pre-condition for the full enjoyment of human rights, and a necessary tool for the promotion of gender equality. The phenomenon known as the gender digital divide, refers to the exclusion of women and minority communities from the process of technology development, public debate, and the proliferation of informational and diversity gaps (Vartanova & Glatkova 2019, p. 195; see also: Čausević & Sengupta 2021). It has unleashed new and reinforced old trends, perpetuating structural inequality. The digital divide is not a static concept, but rather a dynamic spectrum of intersectional incarnations of oppression and exclusion, that narrow the access points to public and political participation (Vartanova & Glatkova 2019, p. 195-204). The question of access and use clearly highlights the complexities and manifestations of gender inequality when it comes to digital technologies, but also the importance of certain skills and capacity building as a means to begin addressing the gender digital divide. In the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the gender digital divide manifests as unequal access for women to the digital sector and related professions (Haider 2020, p. 33). Therefore, initiatives that aim to improve women’s access to and position in this sector, must go hand in hand with capacity building initiatives, especially educational initiatives that seek to interrupt the process of encoding gender bias in technology (Wajcman et al. 2020, p. 6).

As previously mentioned, access in the context of gender equality, also encompasses “equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation” in the media as a precondition for achieving social justice (CM/Rec(2013)1; CM/Rec(2007)17, Preamble). Gender equality and media freedom are, therefore, mutually reinforcing, and, indeed, studies suggest that countries with higher levels of media freedom also enjoy greater gender equality in the media (Padovani 2020, p. 114). In practice, gender equality in the media means women are able to pursue journalism on their own terms (independence), have access to and opportunities for

¹³ See here: <https://www.facebook.com/novinarkeprotivnasilja>.

professional growth and upward mobility, experience full enjoyment of labour law guarantees (e.g., free and equal treatment in relation to payment, working hours and entitlements, including maternity and sick leave), and a safe and secure working environment.

4.1.1.1 Policy compass

There are several policy implications when it comes to gender inequality in media participation. The many hurdles for women and girls' meaningful access to and agency within the digital sector include "affordability, lack of education, as well as inherent biases and socio-cultural norms curtailing women and girls' ability to benefit from the opportunities offered by the digital transformation" (OECD 2018, p. 13). These hurdles exacerbate and are aggravated by gendered stereotypes and norms that limit sector (and all jobs/courses within the sector – engineering, manufacturing, etc.) participation (only 10 percent of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina are educated in mechanical and electrical engineering, see: UN Women 2021b, p. 54). Policy recommendations include (UN Women 2021b; OECD 2018):

- design and implement national digital strategies with the specific objective of closing the gender digital divide;¹⁴
- improve access to digital technologies, by subsidising capacity building and tech-tools for women in rural areas more vulnerable to poverty;
- raise awareness about education opportunities for women and girls, and removing obstacles to adult education;
- facilitate and expand women's economic participation and innovation by investing in capacity building initiatives, career-networks, especially within those sectors where women's participation is significantly lower than that of men.

Equal opportunity in the media sector, especially when it comes to journalists and media workers, would require the effective implementation of certain policies by media organisations – such as adoption of gender equality policies, including policies against sexual harassment and abuse, and ensuring entitlements for maternal and paternal leave, as well as codes of conduct and other support mechanisms (Padovani 2020; EIGE 2013). In line with Council of Europe standards, media organisations should: adopt policies ensuring "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" (CM/Rec (2013)1).

¹⁴ In 2017, the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted the "Policy for the Development of the Information Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2017 – 2021", that mentions women in the context of the need to increase their access to digital jobs but fail to provide more structural guidelines and measures to address gender digital divide (Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2017).

USEFUL RESOURCES	
1.	<u>Girls who code</u> and <u>Women who code</u> ;
2.	<u>Feminist Internet resources</u> ;
3.	<u>Gender and women’s online participation</u> ;
4.	Gender mainstreaming courses and resources: <u>UNESCO</u> , Gender, Media, ICTs and <u>Council of Europe</u> Gender mainstreaming in education practices;
5.	<u>Building inclusive newsrooms and digital spaces</u> , a toolkit and materials.

4.1.2. Safety and GBV

Holistic safety – encompassing physical, emotional, financial and digital safety – has emerged as a crucial enabler for women and girl’s full public and political participation. This holistic conceptualisation of safety means to be free from (physical, psychological and digital) threat and harm, but also includes accessibility of effective and fair reporting, redress and healing mechanisms when breaches to safety do occur.

According to the UN CEDAW 2019 report, Bosnia and Herzegovina has a relatively high incidence rate when it comes to GBV. The report notes that underreporting, lack of judiciary and law enforcement sensitivity, as well as low rates of prosecution and conviction have significantly contributed to country-wide GBV (UN CEDAW 2019, para. 25). The studies have found that current reporting on GBV “focus on masculinity and the systematic portrayal of women as victims” (Haider 2020, p. 17), which effectively creates a serious problem of representation. “If audiences constantly see women primarily portrayed as victims of violence (often depicted graphically), they are more likely to consider women as inferior, as the ‘fragile sex’, with little power to change their situation” (ibid., p. 18).

The proliferation of GBV and other safety threats has serious implications when it comes to both women’s ability to contribute to society, but also for freedom of expression more generally. According to a study produced in 2020 as a part of the Council of Europe JUFREX report on gender equality and freedom of expression in Bosnia and Herzegovina, “the greatest threat to freedom of expression is the difficult economic situation within the country’s media industry, which exposes journalists to the risk of political blackmail and increases their likelihood of dependence on political support” (Barišić 2020, p. 6). This situation creates a chilling effect on freedom of expression and media freedom, and when compounded by insecure working conditions (media workers are largely overworked and underpaid in the country (Džihana 2021), “verbal attacks, including derogatory and offensive language, threats and intimidation online and offline, from readers and news subjects” (Barišić 2020, p. 10; see also: Ombuds-person Report 2017, p. 49) seriously undermine journalists’ ability to carry out their work of holding those in power to account. The Safejournalist.net regional platform –

advocating for media freedom and safety of journalists – documented 44 attacks against women journalists from 2015-2021, although data on sexual and gender-based harassment on the job is missing almost entirely (Safetyjournalists.net 2022).

The most common forms of assault against women journalists are:

1) Political pressure and related abuse: political actors are, unfortunately, some of the prime instigators and magnifiers of online GBV. This sets the tone for public discourse and “generates an atmosphere where such behaviour is allowed, and even politically profitable” (Popovic-Momčilović 2018, p. 4; see also: case of politician referring to women journalists as prostitutes, Haider 2020, p. 27). In a survey of local media workers, almost two thirds (75%) of respondents claimed to have felt pressure from political actors, with most coming from the ruling political party, and then from opposition political actors and advertisers (Džihana 2021, p. 3);

2) While physical attacks are not frequent, attacks, both verbal and physical, against groups of journalists (while covering public events, for example), that also include women are present (Popov-Momčinović 2018, p. 14-16);

3) Online abuse is the most prevalent and manifests in a number of ways: one-to-one abuse, many-to-one or many-to-many (often in the form of forum coordinated disinformation and abuse). Online assaults are especially difficult, logistically, to investigate and adjudicate. There are a number of reasons for this, but prime among them is lack of engagement from or refusal to take accountability by social media and video streaming platforms generally. Without platform cooperation, abusive content – even when judged illegal – remains available online, causing further trauma and duplicating the offline culture of impunity in the digital space. In addition, political actors use Facebook profiles to attack media actors. Assaults on women journalists often are, more or less, sexist and misogynistic with the aim of gaining cheap political victories and attracting public attention (Popov-Momčinović 2018, p. 17; see also: Džihana 2021, p. 34). Against this backdrop, it is clear that women’s contribution to knowledge and information, as a powerful resource and driver of plurality, must be uplifted and protected, given the very obvious threats it faces from widespread misogyny, online and offline (Haider 2020, p. 27).

4.1.2.1. Policy compass

The damaging cycle of GBV and harassment, which first manifests as harmful stereotypes and objectification that can end in death threats and physical violence, must be interrupted at multiple points along its trajectory, and by a number of key stakeholders. State leadership, social media platforms, civil society and the media all have a role to play in minimising the impact of GBV and harassment and ensuring justice for targets of GBV and harassment. To identify the specific origins of abuse, and method of spread, consistent monitoring and collection of data, as well as data analysis should be a top priority. This data could have significant implications for the development of targeted resources and best practices when it comes to countering not just GBV, but also gender-based hate and discrimination more broadly.

Mechanisms promoting media accountability and civic responsibility, such as public dialogue fora online and offline, opening up of channels for cooperation, and potential innovation between different stakeholder groups proved to be successful mechanisms. Collaborative workspaces for women, can also generate innovation and networks of support and information sharing. Appointment of an individual or organisation administrator, and establishment of transparent rules for engagement aid towards ensuring sustainability of collaborative groups and networks. A monitoring platform, with a reporting function, for misogynistic content and online GBV, could be an effective resource, not only for data collection, but also for targets of abuse seeking information in pursuit of redress (CoE 2015, p. 28, 29).

USEFUL RESOURCES	
1.	Reporting on GBV: <u>UK</u> and Novinarke protiv nasilja nad ženama, <u>Serbia</u> ;
2.	Building <u>digital communities</u> of and for women;
3.	Resources on online safety: <u>Onlinesos.org</u> , <u>Tactical Tech</u> , <u>Safer online communication</u> .

4.2. Representation

The question of representation is a question of power – namely the power to decide “the ways in which the media portrays people, specific groups, communities, experiences, ideas, or topics from a particular perspective” (Rozgonyi (forthcoming), p. 11). In Bosnia and Herzegovina those who have this power have, historically and currently, ignored or stereotyped women, and minority groups, and minimised their individual and collective contributions to society. The absence of women in the media has been reported on widely. A 2020 GMMP report found that women were present in only 14% of politics and government news programming, 24% of economy news, 8% of crime-related news, and 18% in celebrity/arts/entertainment/sports programming (GMMP 2020, p. 11). Women are also underrepresented in radio and television, including in digital media, where men outnumber women in all categories of news programming (ibid.).¹⁵ Women are even less represented as subjects or information sources in traditional media, at only 11% (ibid., p. 10). During the monitoring period for the GMMP report, not a single story or segment of programming addressed the issue of gender equality. This dearth of women’s representation and inclusion makes invisible women’s experiences and perspectives, while at the same time it reproduces a reality that excludes women’s and minority

¹⁵ Women were present in only 29% of print, 21% of radio and 13% of TV news. The presence of women in digital news is similar to that in the traditional media, i.e., ranging from 13% in Twitter to 31% in internet news, whereas men were present in 87%- 69% news in all media (GMMP 2020, p. 11).

voices, magnifies gender-bias and codifies the ‘male gaze’ within our individual and collective worldview.

Representation is also a manifestation of power in that it perpetuates unrealistic expectations and normalises the objectification of women. From minimising women down to the shape of their bodies to narrowing women’s path for engagement to stereotypical access points (topics like lifestyle, design, beauty, fashion, motherhood, etc., see: GMMP 2020, p. 35-36), media most certainly shapes public opinion, but equally places constraints on women themselves.¹⁶ The term stereotype refers to an “oversimplified generalisation that dictates what is acceptable or expected for women and girls, and for men and boys” (Commission on Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood 2020, p. 1). Research on this topic indicates “a strong link between the status of women in and through media and the way society treats women. How the mass media represent women greatly influences opinion making processes about gender roles in everyday life” (Haider 2020, p. 8). The proof of this power to establish and perpetuate existing gender norms lies in the harm that comes to those who challenge these norms. Those who speak out against norms and gender bias almost always face backlash. Women, especially, who fail to live up to societal and media-perpetuated standards, are often attacked with the moniker of their rebellion: “unattractive, undesirable, and unfeminine” or shamed for “gaining independence and social-economic mobility through the use of their ‘physical assets’” (Haider, 2020, p. 15; see also: Popov-Momčinović, 2018, p. 17).

As previously discussed, political influence has a significant impact on editorial policies in the country. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, this impact often manifests as a decline in the quality and diversity of representation in audiovisual, print and digital media. Put simply, a lack of media independence has led to a situation where the quest for profit runs contrary to ensuring a plurality of media (CoE 2015, p. 9). To maintain ethical standards and create content that is actually representative of the community of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole, media must be vigilant in upholding journalistic community standards, including ensuring balanced coverage, adoption of guidelines on gender-sensitive language, avoiding sensationalism at the expense of individual or community well-being, and correcting and addressing any of these violations, when they do occur (CoE 2013, p. 21).

4.2.1. Imagery, bias and intersectionality

Language is a powerful instrument that conveys meaning in a mediated way. Language, like technology, cannot be assigned as an inherent good or bad resource, but utilised without care for or recognition of harmful stereotypes and tropes, it can create and maintain discriminatory and sexist patterns (Rozgonyi (forthcoming), p. 12). The CoE CM/Rec (90)4 on the elimination of sexism from language encourages the inclusion of feminine forms of language, when it exists, or use of gender-neutral formulations to minimise and, eventually, eliminate discriminatory and objectification language, as well as the connection between harmful gender

¹⁶ ‘The media “annihilated” women through omission, trivialization, and condemnation.’ See: Steiner, L. (2014). *Feminist Media Theory*. In Fortner, R. S., & Fackler, P. M. (Eds.). (2014). *The handbook of media and mass communication theory*. John Wiley & Sons. p. 4.

roles and assigned sex. The use of gender-sensitive language could also be bolstered through adoption of internal media policies and codes of conduct to combat sexism, stereotypes and derogatory representations of women (ibid., p. 14).

Language and images (representation) also play a critical role in codifying “socially constructed beliefs about men and women, often but not necessarily, sexist and negative, which ignore complexity and serve to rule out exceptions and choices” (UNESCO 2012, p. 54). In essence, stereotypes confirm and reproduce sexist “[s]upposition, belief or assertion that one sex is superior to the other, often expressed in the context of traditional stereotyping of social roles on the basis of sex, with resultant discrimination practised against members of the supposedly inferior sex” (CoE 2016, p. 3). A 2019 UN CEDAW report noted with concern the pervasiveness of stereotypical representations of men’s and women’s roles and responsibilities, as well as the persistent sexist portrayal of women in the media (UN CEDAW 2019, para. 23).

These problematic representations of women, unfortunately, also feature prominently when it comes to commercial communication. Advertisers have capitalised on the objectification, and particularly the sexualisation of women. The idea that “sex sells” has resulted in an overly sexualised perception of women that turns them into objects for consumption, but also limits their ability to safely and sustainably live and express themselves outside of the accompanying norms and expectations. The Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe Resolution 1557(2007) on the image of women in advertising notes that “it is nearly always women who are reduced to the role of mere consumer commodities or sex objects” (Resolution 1557(2007), para. 3), and that these stereotypes “do women a disservice in their fight for equality” (ibid., para. 5). Here again, we see how a free market, embedded in a framework of structural patriarchy, will prioritise perceived economic gain (engagement and consumption based on sexualised and stereotypical representations of women), over proven harm to the entirety of the female population.

Indeed, degrading and sexist representations are particularly harmful and can have even more profound consequences on women from minority and/or marginalised communities (in Bosnia and Herzegovina this has been particularly the case for Roma women), and oppressed groups, such as LGBTQIA+ people, causing further stigmatisation and discrimination (UN CEDAW 2019, para. 29 and 43). Another study conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina indicates a need to increase the capacity of citizens and media (including community-run media) to recognise and contribute to balanced and gender-sensitive reporting (Haider 2020, p. 33). In the UK, research-based evidence points to the fact that gender stereotypes result in girls avoiding subjects they view as requiring “brain power”, which leads to fewer girls studying and picking careers in areas like natural and computer sciences. Stereotypes also negatively affect boys (Commission on Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood 2020). The same research showed that some boys fail to develop basic reading skills, given the expectations associated with classic tropes of men. When children are constantly exposed to these harmful stereotypes, their self-image usually suffers. These images can result in body dysmorphia that manifests as disordered eating, social anxieties, and depression. These gender stereotypes naturally intersect with other socially constructed norms and stereotypes that tie identity (e.g., race, sexual

orientation, economic status) to other problematic power constructs (Commission on Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood 2020, p. 7; see also: Gnams 2021).

4.2.1.1. Policy compass

In the last decade, civil society and state actors in Bosnia and Herzegovina have conducted significant research, both in terms of amount and scope of, on the issue of discriminatory portrayals of women by the media. This research (also previously referred in this Study: Popov-Momčinović, GMPP, and others) should serve to guide development of a state-wide permanent monitoring effort to ensure research relevance for local contexts and consistency of data and methodology. The Committee of Ministers guidelines on media and gender equality, and ethical reporting and inclusion of minority groups (CM/Rec(2013)1), could establish the foundations for awareness raising campaigns as well as monitoring mechanisms. Many of the illustrations presented in the Council of Europe study on Gender and Media (CoE – Gender Equality Commission 2019) offer concrete examples of legislative and policy initiatives that codify gender-sensitive monitoring practices. One such example, the Irish Media Act¹⁷ requires media organisations to submit an annual media review including data on the representations of gender in the media. Regulatory Authorities (RAs) play a crucial governance role when it comes to regulation of gender portrayal and representation in and by the media. In Malta, the regulator published Guidelines on Gender Equality and Gender Portrayal in Broadcast Media aimed at “sensitising producers to use gender inclusive vocabulary and images”. The Guidelines also set the standard for broadcasters to “ensure that the portrayal, reporting and representation of women and men respect their dignity” (Broadcast Media Authority Malta 2007, p. 83-84.).

There are also well-established good practices when it comes to gender sensitive reporting by the media. In Slovenia, guidelines were introduced in 2017 to “support the media in their efforts to depict the world in a more gender sensitive and gender responsive manner, thus contributing to more inclusive and equal societies”. The guidelines are divided into four sections: 1) Selection of sources and stories in order to achieve a balanced portrayal of women and men in media, reflecting the composition of society and human experiences; 2) Fair portrayal of women and men through the elimination of stereotypes; 3) Use of gender-balanced language; and 4) Gender equality within media organisations (Ramšak 2017).

There is general agreement that monitoring of gender (in)equality indicators is the key to meaningful policy and consequent regulatory intervention. The Council of Europe has set relevant standards on the role and responsibilities of RAs with regard to monitoring and corresponding regulatory interventions. The starting point, as a general approach, assumes, that “media regulators [should] respect gender equality principles in their decision making and practice”, and that “media regulators [should be mandated] to include an assessment of the implementation of gender equality policy in the media in their annual reports” (CM/Rec(2013)1). About monitoring methods, RAs are to “contribute to the collection of data,

¹⁷ Article 23 of the Irish Media Act No. 38/2011 requires all media organisations to submit annual reports to the Media Commission; annual reports are required to contain various information, including as regards the representation of both sexes in those interviewed or the share of women and men among their staff.

commit to the publication of such data and adopt measures to achieve gender equality and visibility for women based on the findings” (CM/Rec(2017)9).

To fulfil these tasks, regulators must be given both the legal mandate and authority. Across Europe, “some regulators are conducting monitoring exercises and producing annual reports to track the gender ratios in television programmes, and hold broadcasters to account” (EPRA 2018, p. 27). Monitoring mechanisms that have been established for collecting gender-disaggregated data in countries like Sweden, Switzerland and Belgium “have done remarkable work in producing annual reports analysing the presence of women and men, as well as diversity” (CoE – Gender Equality Commission 2019, p. 46). Performance indicators pertinent to broadcasting regulatory authorities include on- and off-screen indicators to capture and assess gender disparities in the sector in a more holistic manner (EPRA 2018). Some RAs, like the Portuguese regulator, have adopted internal monitoring practices for television content, and provide recommendations and guidelines for the audiovisual sector (ibid.).¹⁸ In addition, media organisations can help regulators in their efforts to bolster gender equality by utilising complaint mechanisms (and dissemination of information and policies related to RA/Press Councils complaints/reporting procedures) for media content that violates or limits women’s rights (CoE 2015, p. 19).

USEFUL RESOURCES
1. Council of Europe <u>Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1</u> includes an overview of good practices and mechanisms to counter sexism and other forms of mis/mal representation;
2. Advancing gender equality in media industry: <u>A Resource bank of good practices</u> (Guidelines on Gender Equality and Gender Portrayal in <u>the Broadcasting Media</u> , and <u>No hate speech movement</u> , Council of Europe led program);
3. <u>The European Advertising Standards Alliance</u> : guidelines to encourage its members to apply best practice in the area of <u>advertising self-regulation</u> ;
4. <u>Media smart</u> , a UK non-profit organisation for smart and equal advertising;
5. <u>PreventIPV</u> , materials and resources that promote body positivity and address the impact of unrealistic media portrayals of beauty and gender stereotypes on young people;
6. <u>European Institute for Gender Equality</u> - a gender equality quiz;
7. <u>Miss Representation</u> , a documentary film, by Jennifer Siebel;
8. Gender mainstreaming courses and resources: <u>UNESCO</u> , Gender, Media, ICTs;

¹⁸ For more information about the opportunities of the public service broadcaster to increase their gender equality efforts, see CoE 2015, p.16-18.

9. EPRA, [Evaluating MIL](#) in Europe of students aged 14-18 (see also: [EdumediaTest](#) for identifying disinformation and stereotypes).

4.2.2. Cross-cutting issues

Gendered disinformation has been defined as “the spread of deceptive or inaccurate information and images against women political leaders, journalists and female public figures” employing misogyny and societal stereotypes, “framing them as untrustworthy, unintelligent, emotional/angry/crazy, or sexual” (Di Meco 2020, p. 4). Gendered disinformation goes further to “alter public understanding of female politicians’ track records for immediate political gain, as well as to discourage women seeking political careers or leadership roles” (ibid., p. 5). While patriarchal structures and general misogyny on- and offline are clearly the driving forces behind gendered disinformation, these influences are nothing new, and so further analysis is needed to understand how disinformation about women’s public participation has become so pervasive. The digital ecosystem certainly enables new and harmful tactics and provides the reach to magnify these harms to the point of interruption of democratic processes and participation. Moreover, online disinformation campaigns to deter women’s access and participation may also have a legitimising effect when it comes to violence and other strategies for excluding women offline. As of 2021, only 26 per cent of all national parliamentarians are women (IPU Parline 2021), and at the current rate of progress, UN Women predicts that gender parity in national legislative bodies will not be achieved before 2063 (UN Women 2021c). However, given the increase in gendered disinformation and magnification of GBV online, true parity may be even further off.

As technology itself is a neutral resource – neither intrinsically good or bad, it can be utilised for both positive and negative effect, or in other words, technology is a “socially shaped crystallisation of society” (Wajcman et al. 2020, p. 3). The negative effects for women and girls are often the effect of bias built into technology without proper analysis as to the potential effects on and usefulness for men and women. Technologies’ direct harm to women and girls has been touched upon in the safety explainer above and refers to any and all forms of online GBV, and can extend to physical harm and offline violence when assisted by the use of technology. Data security bias occurs for many reasons, including a lack of representation of women in the technology sector (programming and building of tech is mostly done by men), and in data training sets. Without women’s meaningful inclusion, including throughout the processes of technology design and implementation, and especially the design and use of Artificial Intelligence, their needs and experiences will continue to be made invisible, and technology will continue to fail to (be programmed to) learn from the potential and specific harms posed to women in the digital ecosystem. When social media and video streaming platforms allow bias to harm users, this can have a disproportionate effect on women and other marginalised communities, especially in countries where they are already denied space and agency, and where women’s empowerment runs counter to political interest.

Gender bias in technology goes beyond failure to safeguard women online, to also play an increasingly significant role in the perpetuation and amplification of gender discrimination. For

example, the current language model used by Google to program its eponymous search engine, has been shown to reproduce harmful stereotypes about women and girls (Metz 2019). There are many such examples, and mountains of experiential data that indicate a need for gender-sensitive technology and the meaningful inclusion of women at all levels of technological development and use (Feminist Tech, Feminist Internet).

USEFUL RESOURCES
1. UNESCO, Closing gender divided in the digital skills through education, <u>I'd blush if I could;</u>
2. Equals Skills Coalition, <u>A resource page</u>
3. CIVICUS, <u>The gender and social inclusion toolkit</u> with training material per session
4. UN Women, <u>The Digital revolution</u> and implications for gender equality
5. Global Alliance on Media and Gender, <u>Setting the Gender Agenda for Communication Policy</u>

V. Conclusion

A 2020 study on gender and media in the Western Balkans, commissioned by the UK Government, concluded that in post-war, post-socialistic and transitional societies, where media freedom is shrinking and women rights are slow to see any progress, gender equality in the media has become a system “based on the ability to capitalise on one’s own sexualised ethno-self-exoticisation” (Haider 2020, p. 16). Despite the transformative significance of unbalanced gender representation and misogyny in the media, political actors largely ignore resulting structural and societal problems, or worse, perpetuate rhetoric, pressure and violence against women journalists.

The burden of filling this gender gap is being somewhat shouldered by civil society organisations and independent bodies: another indicator that “women inside civil society have fought and succeeded to build their own space and that they are the engines of development” (Popov-Momčinović 2013, p. 117). However, this community receives little support within the political landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina (USAID 2016, p.37), and, for this reason, “networking is vital as a means of stepping up exchanges of good practices” (CoE 2015, p. 23).¹⁹ MIL interventions and education, that seek to fill information gaps, empower underrepresented communities – including women – and educate the public on the importance of diversity, are crucial resources for providing citizens with the tools to better evaluate media – both the content they receive, and the methods of engagement. UNESCO’s Gender, media &

¹⁹ For example, this CoE study mentions activities that could be undertaken by this network such as establishment of a European prize for gender equality in media content, a collection of good and replicable practices to strengthen equality and portrayal of women, etc. (ibid.).

ICTs: new approaches for research, education & training,²⁰ developed by renowned universities and academics, provides a comprehensive approach to the concepts presented in this Study, and should be used as a primer for curriculum development in this field. Taken together with the overview of the media landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina presented in this study, a more complete picture of the needs and obstacles faced by women in the country surfaces as a path for development of effective and sustainable MIL and other sorely needed programmatic interventions to better position and prioritise gender in the media.

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²⁰ Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000368963>.

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The Study on Gender and Media provides the context and specificities of gender as a normative framework within Media and Information Literacy (MIL). It also sheds light onto the local needs and obstacles for balanced gender representation and participation in the region, specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Study offers a solid basis for the development of MIL interventions which are primarily aimed at encouraging and nurturing critical thinking about gender, and addressing gender as a cross-cutting element and cornerstone of holistic MIL, with indispensable implications for sustainable media and an informed public.

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