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CATALYSTS FOR CHANGE: BREAKING DOWN GENDER STEREOTYPES IN MEDIA AND ADVERTISING

A side event to the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), organised by the Council of Europe within the framework of the [Liechtenstein Presidency of the Committee of Ministers](#).

Co-organised with the [Permanent Mission of Liechtenstein to the United Nations](#)

11 March 2024, 4:45 PM – 6:00 PM

Venue: ECOSOC Chamber - General Assembly Building, United Nations, New York

The media and advertising wield immense potential for social change. They are more than mirrors of society or neutral communication environments – they actively shape opinions, attitudes, perceptions and ideas. As technology advances, media play an even bigger role in people’s everyday lives. They can reinforce existing gender inequalities by perpetuating gender stereotypes and attitudes and can even exacerbate gender-based violence. But they can also play a part in hastening structural change towards gender equality.

Men have a major role to play for this change to happen as the vast majority of media and advertising companies, globally, are still led by men. Despite a substantial increase in the number of women in the media professions, notwithstanding new legislative and regulatory frameworks, gender inequalities and stereotyped portrayals of women and men in media content remain widespread.

The event will look at promising practices, initiatives and concrete measures in the public and private sectors, highlighting their benefits for all, in line with the Council of Europe 2023 Guidelines on men and boys in gender equality policies. Bringing together political leaders, international partners, private sector and civil society representatives, including male role models, the side-event will foster an **understanding of concrete actions to ensure that media play a transformative role in breaking down gender stereotypes and in promoting gender equality.**

Background

Media, including advertising, are part of our everyday life. With the rapid development of new technologies and the extensive use of communication tools and social media, new forms of media are increasingly present in the daily lives of children and young persons.

The media are the reflection of society but they also influence the way gender norms, societal roles, attitudes and behaviour are shaped. They can reinforce gender stereotypes – what it means to be a woman or a man in a given society in a certain point in time. This can contribute to an environment that tolerates and trivialises “everyday” sexism. There are many ways in which media and advertising do this: by promoting images of women and men in stereotypical roles within the family and community; depicting men as dominant, powerful alpha males; rarely portraying women in diverse professional roles (such as experts); or through sexual, sexualised and racialised depictions and objectification, primarily of women and girls. Gender stereotypes and sexism present a serious obstacle to the achievement of gender equality and feed into gender discrimination. Certain roles or stereotypes reproduce harmful practices and contribute towards the idea that violence against women is simply a fact of life.

Various international frameworks and standards have underlined this dimension and called for action. Almost 30 years after the Beijing Platform for Action - and 10 years after the Council of Europe Recommendation on gender equality and media - the objectives are far from being achieved. Despite a marked increase in the number of women in the media professions, and new legislative, policy or regulatory frameworks and initiatives to promote more diverse, gender-equal and inclusive media, many studies highlight the persistence of stereotyped portrayals of women and men in media content, both online and offline.

No single intervention can effectively eliminate sexism or gender inequality in the media. Governments, industry, trade unions and civil society more broadly, each play different but critically important roles in promoting change towards gender equality by displaying non-stereotyped images of women and men, avoiding sexist content and promoting zero tolerance of violence against women and girls. In this regard, men have a particular role to play as agents of change, in a sector where they have been traditionally, and they remain, in leading positions.

Council of Europe framework

As Europe’s foremost human rights Organisation, bringing together 46 member States, the Council of Europe has been actively promoting gender equality, combating violence against women and girls, preventing and combating sexism, including in the field of media – key instruments include the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ([Istanbul Convention](#)) (in particular its Article 17 - Participation of the private sector and the media), Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2013\)1](#) on gender equality and media and Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2019\)1](#) on preventing and combating sexism.

The Council of Europe pays particular attention to the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women, as highlighted in the new [Guidelines](#) adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2023. These Guidelines present a range of relevant measures available to States, including several pertaining to men and boys as agents of change fighting resistance to gender equality.