

Joint Statement to the Commission on the Status of Women 64 on the crucial role of media in achieving gender equality

submitted by

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Our recommendations to the Commission on the Status of Women:

- To recognize the crucial role of media in achieving gender equality in all domains by creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking gender stereotypes.
- Media should lead the way towards gender equality through gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content. For this we need coherent policies, rules, and mechanisms on all levels, starting with national media policies and media industry self-regulation.
- Safety of female media workers needs to be a key priority for Member States and the media industry. A culture of safety needs to be created and effective mechanisms for complaints and redress need to be put in place.

The role of media in achieving gender equality

Media today, from traditional legacy media to online media, still hugely influence our perceptions and ideas about the role of girls and women in society. What we have unfortunately seen until now is that media tend to perpetuate gender inequality. Research shows that from a young age, children are influenced by the gendered stereotypes that media present to them¹. Research has found that exposure to stereotypical gender portrayals and clear gender segregation correlates “(a) with preferences for ‘gender appropriate’ media content, toys, games and activities; (b) to traditional perceptions of gender roles, occupations and personality traits; as well as (c) to attitudes towards expectations and aspirations for future trajectories of life”².

We are concerned that the latest Secretary General report³ proposing priority areas to the Commission on the Status of Women does not mention the crucial role of media in achieving gender equality. This is a huge opportunity that is lost.

The data we have show that women only make up 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news. Even worse: 46% of news stories reinforce gender stereotypes while only 4% of stories clearly challenge gender stereotypes.⁴ One in five experts interviewed by media are women. Women are frequently portrayed in stereotypical and hyper-

1 [Beyond the Stereotypes? Images of Boys and Girls, and their Consequences](#). Introduction, Dafna Lemish & Maya Götz. Nordicom, 2017.

2 Idem, page 12.

3 Report of the Secretary-General ‘Proposals on the Commission’s priority and review themes for 2021 and beyond’, UN doc E/CN.6/2020/4, 18 December 2019.

4 Global Media Monitoring Project 2015, 5th edition, World Association for Christian Communication.

sexualised roles in advertising and the film industry, which has long-term social consequences.⁵ And 73% of the management jobs are occupied by men compared to 27% occupied by women.⁶

We strongly believe in the transformative role media can play in achieving gender equality in societies. By creating gender-sensitive and gender-transformative content and breaking gender stereotypes. By challenging traditional social and cultural norms and attitudes regarding gender perceptions both in content and in the media houses. By showing women in leadership roles and as experts on a diversity of topics on a daily basis, not as an exception.

In many countries around the world women's opinions are dismissed and they are not taught to ask questions and be part of public debate. Without information women don't know about and can't exert their rights to education, to property, pensions, etc. and they cannot challenge existing norms and stereotypes. This makes it impossible to achieve inclusive societies as we aim to achieve through the Global Development agenda. Access to information empowers women to claim their rights and make better decisions.

The media industry needs to be encouraged to produce gender-transformative content and to develop self-regulatory equality policies, including access to decision-making positions. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be set up to assess the progress within the sector. Thereby creating gender equality in content, workplace and management.

Violence against female media workers

The safety of female media workers has in recent years developed into a serious concern, as it creates another obstacle to gender equality within the media. The majority of female media workers experience gender specific harassment both inside their organisations, outside of them, and more increasingly online.

Gender-based violence (GBV), both digital and physical, pose a threat to freedom of expression and access to information. Silencing female journalists constitutes an attack on democracy itself as it leads to self-censorship: women retreating from the public sphere because of the harassment. Almost a third of female journalists consider leaving the profession because of the threats, intimidation or attacks they endure. More than a third of female journalists avoided reporting certain stories for the same reason. Almost half of female journalists experience online abuse. Many of them indicate the abuse has led them to become less active or even inactive on social media, while it's a crucial part of the job.⁷ Threats are often of a sexual and racist nature, targeted at the person instead of the content, making the workplace an unsafe environment for women.⁸ This leaves the male-dominated field of media with even fewer female voices.

We believe that the media sector has the responsibility to provide a safe working environment for all staff and to develop policies that prevent GBV. It is imperative media organisations have mechanisms in place that ensure necessary support for those who have experienced GBV at the workplace, while performing their work outside and/or via digital means.

5 'Beijing +25 –The 5th Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States', European Institute for Gender Equality, 22 November 2019, page 111.

6 International Women's Media Foundation report, 2011, Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media.

7 Data derived from 'Attacks and Harassment The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting', International Women's Media Foundation and Trollbusters, 2018. Similar findings in a global survey on online harassment of women journalists by the International Federation of Journalists in 2018 and a Dutch survey into the safety of female journalists in the Netherlands in 2019 "An Unsafe Climate".

8 'Beijing +25 –The 5th Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States', European Institute for Gender Equality, 22 November 2019, page 111.