

Chapter 2

Women and Media: What Public Service Media Can Do to Ensure Gender Equality

Zeljka Lekic-Subasic

Office of Eurovision News Exchange for Southeast Europe (ERNO), Bosnia and Herzegovina

ABSTRACT

Difficulties that women face in the media professions and discrimination against women's access to decision-making posts within the media is a problem that transcends national borders. Becoming a greater part of this particular workforce would help to expand both the amount and quality of visibility for women – in news, television, and public sphere in general. Public service media (PSM), as broadcasting, made, financed, and controlled by the public and for the public, with the output designed to reach everyone and reflect all voices, should treat gender equality with the utmost importance. The existing data indicate however that, although some progress have been made, there is a lot to be done: while women among European PSMs represent 44% of the workforce, the number falls to less than 25% at the higher and executive positions. This chapter analyses the efforts made by the European Broadcasting Union's members and the measures they recommend.

WOMAN AND MEDIA

Women's relationship to media has always been understood as central to wider spectrum of equality issues and also an indicator of a fundamental problem of gender inequality. In many ways, mass-media systems share a reflection of a global distribution of power and control. In a world where women's access to political and economic power is in most cases severely limited, their status and roles are defined within political, economic and cultural systems which tend to exclude them from active participation (Lago et al., 2018). As Gallagher (1981) pointed out in one of the first international reseraches on gender and media, "the mass media's role is primarily to reinforce definitions and identities set in a framework constructed for and by men".

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-6686-2.ch002

Women and Media

Over the past 60 years, the international community has made many agreements to promote and defend women's rights, contributing to the creation of national laws and influencing the social norms. These agreements are not in themselves a guarantee of positive change, with many political pressures that threaten to roll back progress, but they provide a framework for action to realise the rights of all women and girls. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 1979, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. It entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981, after the twentieth country had ratified it, and it forbids all forms of discrimination against women and calls on states parties to identify and eliminate any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex. In relation to women's role in the field of media, the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women is very important because it formally recognized the relationship between women and media as being one of the major challenges to achieving equal opportunities for women in contemporary societies, but also predicted the media's potential to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action identified the stereotypical portrayal of women in the media and women's limited access to creating media products and decision-making in media and culture industries, as two core areas where action by States and media industries was globally needed. Since then, numerous opinions, formal documents and strategies have been adopted to combat gender stereotyping and misrepresentation as well as women's marginalization and professional discrimination in media structures, including more recently the digital media environment.

Many of the challenges identified so far in numerous agreements and conventions are still relevant today. In February 2020, members of the European Parliament adopted the resolution calling on the European Council to ensure a unified EU position and act to counter the backlash against gender equality and all measures undermining women's rights (European Parliament, 2020). MEPs have called for measures boosting women's economic and political empowerment including greater inclusion of women in the labour market, more support for female entrepreneurship, promotion of the education for girls and encouraging greater participation in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) careers, and promotion of gender-balanced representation at all levels of decision-making. One of the priorities is closing of the gender pay gap, estimated to 16%, and pension gap, which is 37%. According to the European Parliament's report, a high pay gap could indicate that women were more concentrated in lower-paid sectors or that a significant proportion of them worked part-time. As an example there were more male than female scientists and engineers – 59% compared to 41%, on average in the EU in 2018, and women also held only a third of managerial positions (Young, 2020).

Discrimination against women's access to decision-making posts within the media is hardly a problem in countries where only a handful of women enter the media professions in the first place, but aspects of the mass media's relationship to women—in terms of both portrayal and employment—transcend cultural and class boundaries (Jamil, 2020, 2019, 2016). The same “limited set of dominant characterizations of women, the same impoverished patterns of female participation in the media can be found—well-rooted—in established media structures and ‘emergent’ in younger systems., (Gallagher, 1981, p.28).

On a different front, women's organizations were seeking to increase visibility in the news for women's political campaigns to achieve equality through legislative reforms related to rape and domestic violence, equal pay, job discrimination, and other civil rights (Barker- Plummer, 2010). Those engaged in women's rights movements since the nineteenth century had recognized that their political success required getting into the mainstream news of the day if they were to succeed (Kielbowicz and Scherer, 1986). As Barker- Plummer (2010, p. 145) has observed, “The news has historically played a critical role in the

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/women-and-media/267625

Related Content

Offensive Artificial Intelligence in Cybersecurity: Techniques, Challenges, and Ethical Considerations

Calvin Nobles (2023). *Real-World Solutions for Diversity, Strategic Change, and Organizational Development: Perspectives in Healthcare, Education, Business, and Technology* (pp. 348-363).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/offensive-artificial-intelligence-in-cybersecurity/330304

Exploring the Nexus of Women's Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Efficacy, and Passion in Tourism Development: A Concept Proposition

Ruth Sabina Francis, Sumitha Anantharajah, Sarthak Sen Gupta and Amrik Singh (2025). *Examining Barriers and Building Resiliency for Rural Women Entrepreneurs* (pp. 277-296).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/exploring-the-nexus-of-womens-entrepreneurship-entrepreneurial-efficacy-and-passion-in-tourism-development/365642

Visual Representation of Whiteness in Beginning Level German Textbooks

Silja Weber (2017). *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education* (pp. 1-12).

www.irma-international.org/article/visual-representation-of-whiteness-in-beginning-level-german-textbooks/182849

Incarcerated Students, the Technological Divide and the Challenges in Tertiary Education Delivery

Lorna Barrow, Trudy Ambler, Matthew Bailey and Andrew McKinnon (2019). *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education* (pp. 17-34).

www.irma-international.org/article/incarcerated-students-the-technological-divide-and-the-challenges-in-tertiary-education-delivery/216371

A Heteroglossic Lens on Washington State's Growing Dual Language for Multilingual Learners

Chioma Ezeh (2024). *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/article/a-heteroglossic-lens-on-washington-states-growing-dual-language-for-multilingual-learners/339883