# J / WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

Strategic objectives

•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.

'**If media are a mirror of society as they should be, they certainly need to reflect better the fact that gender equality is a fundamental human right.**'
International Federation of Journalists, *Gender Equality in Journalism*, 2009, p. 1

In 2005, the EWL's Beijing+10 Report concluded that 'Women and the media is one of the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action that is the most neglected by the EU'. Unfortunately, little has changed in this respect over the last five years. The diversity of the globalised 21st Century media does not make combating stereotypical and degrading portrayals of women an easy task. This difficulty is compounded by the necessity of balancing the fundamental values of protection against discrimination with freedom of expression and of the press. Nevertheless, the rapidly increasing spread and impact of the media, especially in digital form, make ensuring the protection of human dignity in media content all the more essential. For this, consideration must also be given to the participation and access of women to the media, both in terms of expression and decision-making.
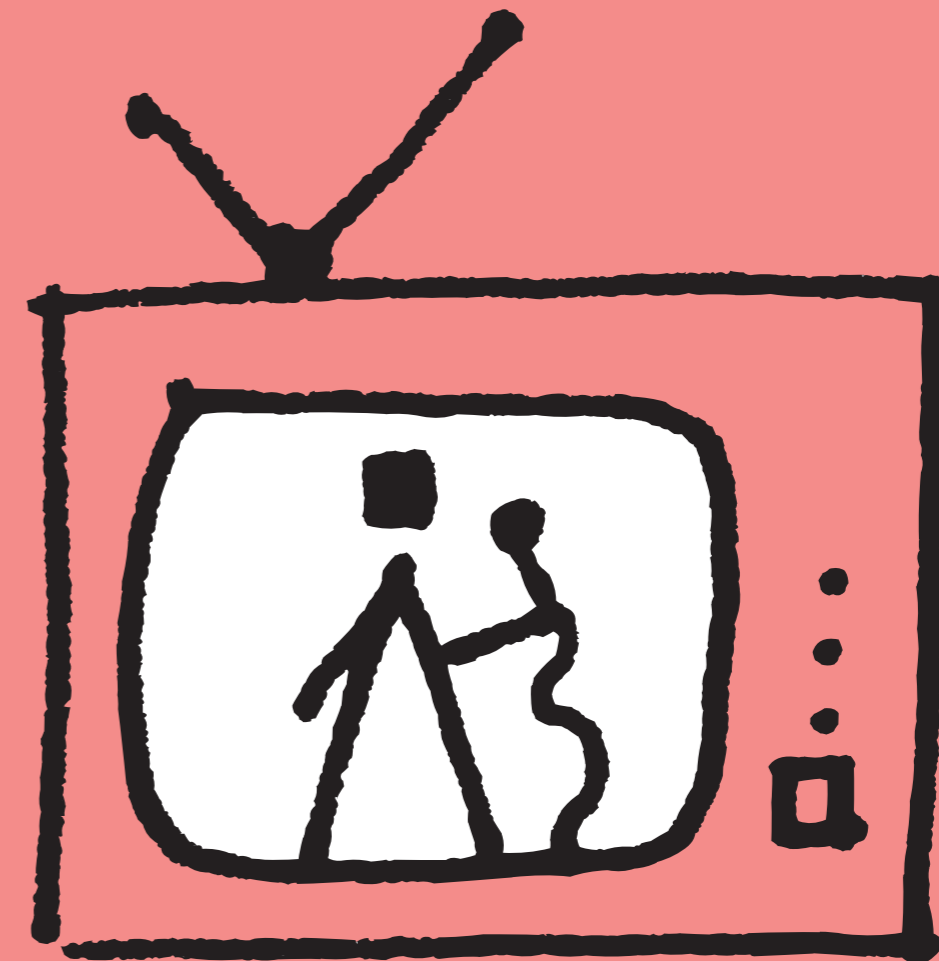
EWL FOCUS

Gender stereotyping in the media is of great concern to the EWL. In 2006, the EWL worked extensively on the revision of the *European Television without Frontiers Directive*, focusing on aspects relating to the protection of fundamental rights and women's rights, anti-discrimination and violence against women in advertising and television content. The EWL monitors European policies on women and the media, engages in journalist training and is compiling European-level data on gender stereotyping, sexism and violence in the media.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THE EU REGARDING WOMEN AND MEDIA

● **Women's participation and access to expression through the media**

In Europe, there are four men for every woman who gets news coverage. The Global Media Monitoring Project 2005 highlighted a slight rise in the number of female subjects in the news since 2000 (from 18% to 21%), but the fact remains that the European Union does not score well in relation to women's voices in the media. For example, in Europe women are central to a news story only 10% of the time, a figure that has not changed since 2000 and is half the US rate. This low representation of women goes beyond the news: only 32% of main TV characters are female;[1] and women athletes only secure between 2-9% of television airtime devoted to sports.[2] Certain groups of women receive even less attention than the average (migrant women, elderly women, disabled women, lesbian women, etc.).[3]
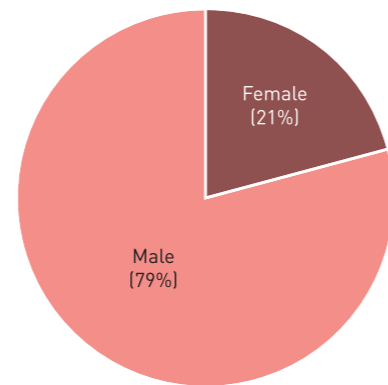
WOMEN AND MEN IN THE NEWS
Source: *Global Media Monitoring Project 2005, Who makes the news?*, 2005
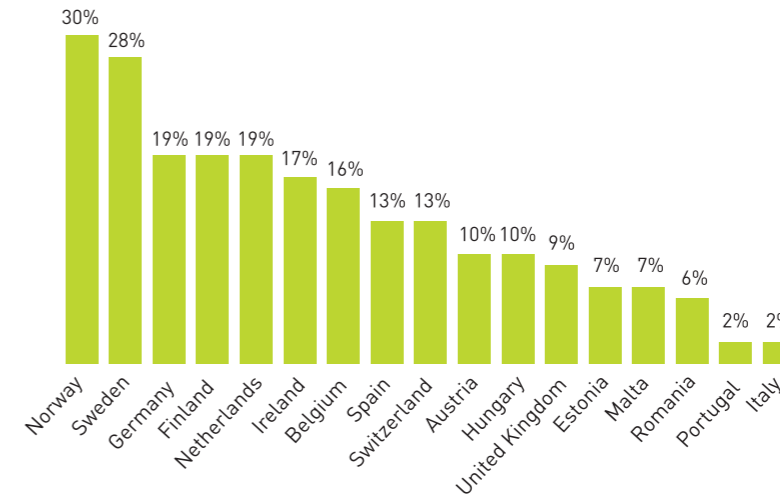
POLITICIANS IN THE NEWS- THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN
Source: *Global Media Monitoring Project 2005, Who makes the news?*, 2005

More worrying than the low coverage of women in mainstream media is that women most qualified for and in need of access are denied it. Women make up only 16% of experts and 14% of spokespersons. Only 10% of European politicians in the news are female – this is actually below the global average of 12%! In Italy and Portugal, women represent only 2% of politicians in the news. This is not simply because men tend to be in higher positions: a 2003 study of politicians heading their party lists in parliamentary elections in the Netherlands found that the men received twice the coverage of the women.[4]

●● **The portrayal of women in the media**

The lack of women portrayed in positions of power or expertise reflects a wider issue of the stereotypical image the media promotes of women and men and gender relations. When women appear in the news, they do so most of the time in a more personal or 'human' capacity than men. Women are most likely to be eyewitnesses (30%), to give personal views (31%), or to represent popular opinion (34%).

They are twice as likely to appear as news subjects in stories on social issues than in stories on politics or government. Women are more than twice as likely as men to be portrayed as victims.[5] This bias is even more prominent with regard to women with disabilities or Muslim women.

In European news, women are three times as likely as men to be identified in terms of their family status. This association with the 'traditionally female' domains of the home and the family is strong across all media: women only represent 27% of the employees or professionals shown in adverts, but some 60% of those portrayed doing housework or looking after children. Adverts showing boys place them outside of the house 85% of the time. Adverts featuring girls place them more than half of the time in the home. The effect of such portrayals on young girls in societies where the average child watches two hours of television per day cannot be underestimated.[6]

Homemakers and victims, women in the media are also beauty and sex objects. In the news,

[1]Götz, M., *Girls and Boys and Television: A few reminders for more gender sensitivity in children's TV*, 2008, available at: http://www.br-online.de/jugend/izi/deutsch/forschung/IZI_Guidelines_WEB.pdf [2]Media Awareness Network, *Media Portrayals of Girls and Women: Media Coverage of Women and Women's Issues*, 2005, available at: www.media-awareness.ca [3] Global Media Monitoring Project 2005, *Who makes the news?*, 2005, available at: http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp_reports/2005/gmmp-report-en-2005.pdf

[4]Wierstra, R., *Breasts, Butts, Balkenende*, Hilversum, Bureau Beeldvorming en Diversiteit, 2003.[5]Global Media Monitoring Project 2005. [6]Media Awareness Network, Media and Girls. [7]Van Hellemont & Van Den Bulk, L'image des femmes et des hommes dans la publicité en Belgique, 2009, p. 16. [8]Media Awareness Network, *Media and Girls*.

women are more likely than men to be covered in pictures. They dominate the fashion and entertainment sections. In advertisements, women are more than twice as likely to be portrayed in (semi-) nudity as men.[7] The fashion industry is eroticising increasingly younger models, and adopting the visual images of vulnerability common in pornographic media.[8] Children Now reports that 38% of the female characters in video games are scantily clad, 23% baring breasts or cleavage, 31% exposing thighs, another 31% exposing stomachs or midriffs and 15% baring their behinds.[9] The link with violence against women is also strong: the top-selling video game *Grand Theft Auto*, for example, allows players to beat prostitutes to death after having sex with them.[10] This kind of message is as strong in music and music videos: rap artist Eminem's song *Kim*, for instance, depicts him murdering his wife, while *Kill You* describes how he plans to rape and murder his mother.[11]

••• Women media professionals

The decision-making in the industry that produces this media is heavily male-dominated. In 2000, there were 9.3% women in top management positions in the telecommunications industry in the EU and European Economic Area and only 3% of women journalists are in decision-making positions.[12] The obstacles women face in the media are similar to those they encounter in the labour-market more generally: discrimination at the stage of recruitment, a pay gap averaging 17.4% in the EU, more precarious conditions of employment and the existence of a glass ceiling.

Among media professionals, women often suffer similar discrimination faced by their sex in the content the media produces. For example, they are valued for their looks, being far more likely to be presenters than reporters, but only while young; whereas up to the age of 34 women represent 79% of presenters, in the 50-64 age-bracket their presence drops to just 7%. Under-represented as reporters, especially in newspapers, they are more often

assigned to local news as well as to social issues, health and education.[13]

The presence of women at all levels in the media industry is essential to reverse these trends in stereotyping of women in the media. The 2005 Global Media Monitoring Project showed how women reporters give women more coverage. Female journalists are also more likely than their male counterparts to produce news articles that highlight gender inequalities, as well as pieces that clearly challenge gender stereotypes.

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EU LEGISLATION, POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES SINCE 2004 REGARDING WOMEN AND MEDIA
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Despite multiple internal and external calls for the EU to intensify its efforts in this area, the Union has made slow – and mixed – progress in ensuring that the principle of gender equality, which was enshrined in its founding Treaties, applies and is implemented with regard to the media industry.

• New EU legislative acts affecting women and the media since 2004

A December 2004 Council Directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services specifically excluded its application to the 'content of media or advertising'.[14]

There do nevertheless exist some general texts regulating media services in the EU which mention discrimination based on sex, some of which have been updated since 2004. One is a Recommendation which carries political weight but is not binding on Member States:

• In 2006 the Council and Parliament amended the 1998 *Recommendation on the protection of minors and human dignity in audio-visual and information services in the framework of*

the Community programme for a safer internet 2005-2008 with mixed results for gender equality.[15] While the Recommendation calls on the European Commission to 'act with greater determination in this area with the aim of adopting measures to protect consumers from incitement to discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation and of combating any such discrimination' (Para. 5), the other changes in the text weaken the protection that the Recommendation affords: two additions in Para. 17 and recommendation I-3(a) insist on the need to consider the protection against discrimination only 'without infringing freedom of expression or of the press'. Also, while a 2004 amendment reinforced the gender aspect of the text by recommending that Member States and the industries concerned 'develop effective measures to avoid discrimination based on sex', the 2006 Recommendation replaced this by a call to simply 'consider' such means.

Another text extended the coverage of the legislation in question but did not include any stronger wording on anti-discrimination. As a Directive, it is legally binding but leaves the means of implementation up to individual Members States, which makes monitoring compliance more difficult:

• In December 2007 the *Television Without Frontiers Directive* was amended to become the *Audiovisual Media Services Directive*.[16] The aim was to enlarge the scope of the legislation, which serves as the legal basis for the free movement of European broadcasting services, to cover on-demand audiovisual media services such as video-on-demand whatever platform is being used, including internet and mobile TV. The text applies to the content of broadcasting and advertising and calls on Member States to 'ensure by appropriate means that audiovisual media services provided by media service providers under their jurisdiction do not contain any incitement to hatred based on race, sex, religion or nationality' and that 'audiovisual commercial communications provided by media service

providers under their jurisdiction' do not 'include or promote any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'.

•• Other initiatives of the EU concerning women and media since 2004

In 2006 the European Commission inaugurated a new *Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010*. In this, the elimination of gender stereotypes, including in the media, is set as a priority. The Commission committed to 'develop[ing] dialogue with media to encourage a non-stereotyped portrayal of women and men'.[17] The annual reports on equality between women and men nevertheless betray the lack of substantial progress in this regard. The 2008 Commission report identified 'the need for the Member States, in collaboration with the social partners and civil society, to strengthen efforts to tackle stereotypes in education, employment and the media and to advance the role of men in promoting gender equality'. The 2009 report recommended that 'the media, including the advertising industry, should be encouraged to transmit non-stereotyped images and content, in particular of women in decision-making positions'.[18] The Commission in 2008 also initiated a 'shadowing programme' with senior managers to encourage more young women to enter the ICT industry.[19]

The Council of the European Union has also given this issue political backing. In May 2007 the Trio Presidency of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia issued a Declaration making the elimination of gender stereotypes in society a priority theme, but no specific action was taken by the Commission in this field.[20] In January 2008 the Slovenian Presidency held a Conference on *Gender Equality: Elimination of Gender Stereotypes - Mission (Im)Possible?* but the conference and subsequent report did not directly address the issue of stereotyping in the media.[21] The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs June 2008 Council Conclusions recognised that:

[9] Children Now, *From Sidekick to Superwoman: TV's Feminine Mystique*, Report on the 1995 conference on Children and the Media, 1995, available at: http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/articles/gender_portrayal/sidekick.cfm [10] Media Awareness Network, Violence in Media Entertainment. [11] ibid. [12] Media Awareness Network; International Federation of Journalists, *Getting the balance right: gender equality in journalism*, 2009; International Federation of Journalists, *Equality and Quality: Setting Standards for Women in Journalism*, 2001. [13] Global Media Monitoring Project 2005, p. 63. [14] Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services, available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:373:0037:0043:EN:PDF

[15] Recommendation 2006/952/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the protection of minors and human dignity and on the right of reply in relation to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and on-line information services industry, available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:378:0072:0077:EN:PDF [16] Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities.[17] European Commission, *A roadmap for equality between women and men*, 2006-2010, p. 8. [18] European Commission, *Equality between women and men*, 2009, p. 9. [19] European Commission, *Women wanted in Europe's ICT industry!*, press release of 6 March 2008, available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/392 [20] The Trio Presidency Declaration, *Towards Gender Equality in the European Union on Gender Stereotypes*, stated that 'all forms of discrimination on the grounds of sex are based on gender stereotypes. Gender-based stereotyping can be found in all areas of society as a determinant factor and smallest common denominator for gender inequalities and unbalanced participation.' [21] See: http://www.uem.gov.si/fileadmin/uem.gov.si/pageuploads/Gender-Stereotypes_conference_report.pdf [22] European Parliament Resolution of 3 September 2008 on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men (2008/2038(INI)).

'The media, including the advertising industry, contributes to the reproduction of culturally transmitted stereotypes and images of women and men', but moreover that 'the media as a whole can also play a crucial role in combating gender stereotypes and in promoting the non-discriminatory and realistic portrayal of girls/women and boys/men in society'. The Council called on Member States: 'To promote, through appropriate institutions, awareness-raising campaigns and the exchange of good practices on combating gender stereotypes and the advancement of the realistic and non-discriminatory portrayal of girls/women and boys/men in the media.'

Although its Resolutions are non-binding, the voice of the European Parliament can carry important weight. In September 2008, the EP passed a strong Resolution on how marketing and advertising affect equality between women and men. The Resolution argues for 'the need to eliminate from textbooks, toys, video and computer games, the internet and new information and communications technologies (ICTs), and from advertising through different types of media, messages which are contrary to human dignity and which convey gender stereotypes'. The Parliament called on the Commission to intensify its efforts against discrimination in the media and for further research on this topic.[22]

Gaps and recommendations

In terms of gender equality, the two strategic objectives regarding women and the media identified in Beijing in 1995 play complementary and reinforcing roles: women's equal access to and control over the provision of media services bears a relation to the quality of the portrayal of women in media content. The European Union has the competence to act on both fronts, notably by upgrading its legislation prohibiting sex-based discrimination in this area to match that on racism. The EU also needs to ensure the implementation of the legislation already in force. For this, more EU-wide comparable data is required, and needs to be gathered in a consistent manner from Member States.

The competence for communications and media remains partly in the hands of Member States, they must therefore, as signatories of the BPfA and in consideration of their EU Treaty commitment to gender equality, take action to ensure they individually, and as members of the EU, make efficient progress in meeting the Strategic Objectives regarding women and the media.

Action is also needed on the part of the media industry to ensure a realistic portrayal of women and men, more coverage for women and gender issues and gender equality in the profession, including in decision-making.

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THE EWL CALLS ON THE EU TO:

→ Fill the existing gap in scope between European legislation on racial and on sex-based discrimination and propose new legislation to ensure equality between women and men in education and media.

→ Follow-up concretely on the 1997 European Parliament Resolution calling for the prohibition of all forms of pornography in the media, as well as the advertising of sex tourism.

→ Establish a European Media Monitoring Group with a specific gender equality branch and expertise to receive and consider complaints from the public, grant gender equality awards to media and advertising professionals, study and report on women in the media and carry out regular, systematic monitoring of gender images in media content.

→ Fully mainstream gender into all European policies and programmes related to the media and information society.

→ Develop, fund and encourage training programmes on women's rights, anti-discrimination and gender stereotypes for media professionals.

→ Develop research and comparable data concerning women and the media, including on the portrayal of women from specific groups such as women with disabilities or ethnic minority women.

THE EWL CALLS ON MEMBER STATES AND THE MEDIA SECTOR TO:

→ In the context of the European Presidencies, give political support to combating sexism and the stereotyping of women and men in the media and undertake concrete initiatives to raise awareness on this issue.

→ At national level, implement EU legislation calling for the promotion of a 'diversified and realistic picture of the skills and potential of women and men in society'[23] and monitor implementation.

→ Fully implement new EU legislation prohibiting discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in commercial communications whether linear (broadcast) or non-linear (video-on-demand), and monitor implementation. Progressive interpretation should be made of the requirements not to 'prejudice respect for human dignity' and not to 'encourage behaviour prejudicial to health or safety' (Article 3e), in particular in relation to fighting sexism and images accepting or encouraging violence against women.[24]

→ Develop and enforce a system of effective sanctions penalising the promotion of degrading images of women in all media.

→ Develop safeguards (in the form of ombudspersons or media watch authorities incorporating gender equality experts) to ensure that industrial codes of conduct include a gender equality perspective and are being adhered to, and to ensure that the public can lodge complaints if necessary.

→ Implement positive action measures to ensure more women have access to management positions in the media, including top management positions.

→ Implement legal measures to end all discriminatory employment practices and sexual harassment in the media, including with regard to free-lancers.

→ Develop, fund and encourage training programmes on women's rights, anti-discrimination and gender stereotypes for media professionals, including in journalism schools.

→ Develop initiatives to encourage equal access to new technologies by young women and men, including through educational initiatives

[23] Recommendation 2006/952/EC [24] Directive 2007/65/EC