

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) commissioned a study to support progress towards Objective J1 of the Beijing Platform for Action. This objective seeks to foster women's access to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new communication technologies. The study involved the collection of methods, tools and good practices in the field of women and the media. This online discussion is part of the assessment process of this study.

The online discussion took place on 29 and 30 April, 2013. It was facilitated by Niall Crowley and Daniel Morris. Some 18 people participated over the 2 days and contributed over 117 responses to the various debates. This factsheet presents the key points made in the debate.

THE ONLINE DISCUSSION EXPLORED FOUR CONNECTED TOPICS IN FOUR SESSIONS:

- Networking and knowledge transfer among women and media stakeholders
- Promoting gender mainstreaming in the company's organisational culture
- Promoting competence development to ensure professional careers
- Public policies to promote women's access to the production of information and to decision-making in the media

Networking and knowledge transfer among women and media stakeholders

A strong value was placed, in the debate, on the contribution that networking in relation to women in the media could make a great tool for advancement of the position of women in decision-making and in expression in the field. There was a particular emphasis on European-level networking and the contribution to be made at this level. The issue of linking European networking to national action was not, however, addressed.

Agreement was developed through the debate on the need for a broad representation of interests, skills and knowledge within any networking process. Gender expertise and interests, media expertise and interests, policymaking expertise and interests, and academic expertise and interests were the most frequently named issues.

The purpose of networking included supporting information flows, developing guidance materials, promoting change in practice, lobbying for new policy, and acting as mediator. A focus on portrayal of women was also suggested for inclusion under this purpose. This might enable the issue of access to decision-making and expression to be given due regard, as the area of portrayal has been subject to a greater body of work and level of interest.

The measures for successful networking included both the tangible and the intangible. The tangible related to the need for clear and

measurable objectives and for the presence of a diversity of interests and perspectives in the network. The intangible focused on the importance of relationship building within the network.

Promoting gender mainstreaming in the company's organisational culture

Clear differences exist between European countries in the extent to which gender is an integral part of the wider culture. This in turn impacts upon gender mainstreaming in a media company's organisational culture. Where a country began along the path of valuing women's contribution in diverse roles in society one or more decades ago, there are marked examples of good practice, particularly in self-monitoring such as the screening of media content for gender balance/imbalance.

The introduction of legislation to require media organisations to gender mainstream was met with some approval. Some participants pointed out, however, that the mere existence of a law would not be enough. Even with legislation, problems arise that are engrained in either the media organisation's culture, or wider society.

For example, it was highlighted that companies might avoid hiring women when they are afraid that they might have children. This was cited as a case of short-sightedness on behalf of companies, who are incapable of seeing the long-term benefits of the implemented policies. Organisational culture was seen as being clearly influenced by wider society. However, this societal influence does not always extend to the content produced by media organisations.

'And when you, for example, see statistics in Denmark where you can see a female breadwinner in every third family — this is nearly invisible in the media as such where there is a more old fashioned understanding of a nuclear family.'

Anita Frank Goth

Another theme that arose was the idea that it is not only legislation that should push media content to give expression to women's voices. There is a business case to be taken into account. In today's society, women are also consumers of the media. It would therefore be economically convenient for the media to produce more gender-balanced content.

Promoting competence development to ensure professional careers

'In Sweden today the majority of the university students in journalism and more than 50% of active journalists and reporters are women, but women are still under-represented in leading positions in the media. The situation is better in the public service media than in private organisations.'

Simone Lindsten

A wide range of competence issues were debated. Most of the issues identified can be found in other sectors. It was difficult to identify

competence issues that were specific to the media sector. However, the actual media function encompasses issues that are not within the compass of other organisations and sectors. This includes issues of who gets to express their opinions and about what, and issues of portrayal and representation. This does set the media sector apart.

For example, trying to reconcile work and private life in the media industry brings about the risk of women having to work in a 'different' fashion than men: working less hours, at convenient times (for families), not being available when needed. On the other hand, reconciliation should be applied both to women and men.

The focus for competence development in the debate emphasised the need for a cultural competence in terms of gender sensitivity and a technical competence in terms of action to advance gender equality. The dominant focus went beyond the competence development of individual women to prioritise competence development at the level of media organisations. The competence of management was seen as key in improving the situation and experience of women in the media, as this level is often characterised by gender imbalance and would therefore most benefit from the development of both cultural and technical competences with regard to gender equality.

The actions proposed to develop competence within the media sector went well beyond the tradition of training. Training in gender issues for men was highlighted. The focus for action, however, centred around systems within organisations to enhance competence, and drivers from outside of individual organisations with a capacity to promote and secure competence within organisations.

Public policies to promote women's access to the production of information and to decision-making in the media

Public policy can influence media organisations through a wide range of legislation. Examples were given of labour law, laws specifically in relation to the media, equality legislation and education legislation. Some participants saw legislation as an important driver for change.

'In Ireland the government has committed to introducing a positive duty on public sector organisations to give due regard to equality and human rights. This could be a big breakthrough in relation to women in the media in the public broadcaster. It might force an end to all male panels and better advancement for women into decision-making. But it will depend if they include the media — often government is too nervous of the media.'

Niall Crowley

Some participants favoured mechanisms such as self-regulation and reporting. This was for various reasons including: freedom of expression and gaining buy-in from the media. Arguably, the media is also a unique sector that European governments are wary of regulating too much.

'My experience in France in particular is that self-regulation is the route which is most likely to gain the buy-in of media companies; however that — to be really effective — must be accompanied by effective monitoring of change/impact in terms of gender equality. Such monitoring could be in-house in the media company, but can also be very effective when it is external, for example carried out by a public authority.'

Vicki Donlevy

There was a sense from other participants that it was not just a case of governments being wary about media regulation, arguing that regulation on gender was actually a case of increasing freedom of expression.

Policy initiatives stretched beyond the issue of legislation. Participants provided a range of additional examples of good practice. The question of how to turn policy into action also touched on some of the ideas from the previous sessions. In particular issues of lack of implementation and of drivers for implementation came up and particular attention was placed on strengthening the role of equality bodies, press ombudsmen and advertising bodies.

Conclusions

Overall, participants agreed on the importance of increasing women's access to decision-making and expression and of improving their portrayal in the media. Increased gender equality in the media can occur only with the joint effort of three actors. First are the women themselves, who can advance their position in the industry through strengthening their professional network. Second are the media companies, which should promote a gender-sensitive organisational culture and enhancing competences related to gender, for example through the use of gender training. Finally, public policy should also make a contribution to fostering gender equality in the media, which should be regulated through laws and policies to be implemented consistently.

ABOUT THE STUDY

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) commissioned a study to support progress towards Objective J1. of the Beijing Platform for Action. The aim of the study is to collect methods, tools and identify good practices in the field of Women and the media, in EU Member States. The study was implemented in the period August 2012–May 2013.



Publications Office



ABOUT EIGE

The European Institute for Gender Equality is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans and beyond, by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable information on gender equality in Europe.



More information:

<http://eige.europa.eu>

More information about the study:

<http://eige.europa.eu/good-practices>