

Modernising an old-fashioned media



Asociația Femeilor Jurnaliste din România „Ariadna”

Ariadna

In brief

Gender imbalances permeate the Romanian media landscape. Gender stereotypes, influenced by advertising, are ever-present. Although Romanian civil society is sensitive to women’s issues, this is not reflected in the way media organisations appoint staff nor in their editorial policies. Few women rise to top jobs in the media, and media organisations pay little attention to gender. In fact women play a subordinate role in public life generally, and there is no legislative framework that might change this. Even women journalists show little awareness of the gender patterns that determine their working conditions.

The Ariadna association responded to this situation by developing a series of training courses for women in the media. They covered subjects such as *Gender and media in Romania* and *Eliminating gender stereotypes in the media and Romanian society*. Each module included a thematic presentation, workshops, case studies and best practices, and rounded off with evaluation and certification. These were delivered in live training sessions and also in the form of electronic course books. The courses reached 80-100 professionals from print, radio, television and online media.

Evaluation shows that there has been a significant effect on the way the media portray women and address women's issues. The trainees have been empowered to build coalitions and to start fighting for improved gender equality, and the tone of public debate has changed so that now there is pressure for legal and institutional changes to the law and the creation of gender-related bodies and budgets in the Romanian government.

Widespread gender imbalances

Gender imbalances are widespread in the Romanian media system: as far as access to expression through the media is concerned, gender issues are rarely covered and the representation of women in the media does not reflect the real social conditions and everyday life of women.

Advertising too in Romania abounds in negative stereotypes of women which are sometimes assimilated in other media content. Despite Romanian civil society being sensitive to gender equality issues, within news organisations awareness is low: women journalists are generally unaware of the specific gendered patterns regulating their career and access to the media. The level of criticism, even with regard to sexism in advertising and media content in general, is low.

Women are also under-represented in decision-making bodies within media organisations: the reasons for this lie in the inadequate national legal framework for the media regarding gender equality and in the total absence of institutional points of reference: media organisations in Romania do not have departments to deal with gender and media issues; neither do they have professional media associations.

On the other side of the coin, civil society associations campaigning on women and media issues exist, but they find it difficult to access the financial resources to carry on their work. More generally, the gender imbalance in decision-making in the media reflects that in Romanian society and politics: there is a widespread feeling of discouragement on the part of women, due to the small number of women occupying prestigious roles in the public sphere.

Gender training

Media course November 2013, Bucharest

In 2011, the Ariadna association ran a series of training courses for media professionals, delivered through teaching modules and electronic course handbooks. Examples of courses provided are Gender and media in Romania, which was supported by the Grundtvig Programme Voix des Femmes en Europe (Women's Voices in Europe) (FEM21), and Eliminating gender stereotypes in the media and Romanian society, which received funding from the EU-funded Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development (POSDRU). The courses were modular and addressed the issue of women's access to expression and decision-making. For instance Gender and media in Romania included modules regarding women's careers and leadership, and Eliminating gender stereotypes in the media and the Romanian society included modules referring to key players, content, standards, policies and legislation.

Each module included a thematic presentation, workshops, case studies, and best practices, and rounded off with evaluation and certification. Course materials, including what was discussed in training sessions and toolkits, were made into course handbooks which were available to course participants on the website www.evaf.ro.

There were 80-100 trainees for all courses who were media professionals from print, radio, television and online media. In addition to access to course modules and materials, trainees benefitted from networking and working together.

The project's evaluation showed that impact might have been improved by organising information campaigns to advertise the results of the training, and by obtaining support from authorities competent for media and communication and governmental gender equality bodies.

Various amounts of finance were made available for the training by Ariadna and other NGOs, and from the FEM21 (Grundtvig) and POSDRU programmes.

Changing the media climate

The project's global objective was to promote gender equality in the media and in Romanian society. More specifically, it aimed to increase trainees' awareness and know-how regarding gender issues, to provide them with tools to use, and to certify them on gender issues. Beyond that, it encouraged trainees to form coalitions and take action for gender equality.

Thereby, it aimed to increase women's access to media products, give them a louder voice, raise the prestige the media accord them, and increase the media's attention to women's social, economic and cultural issues. It also aimed to increase the number of women in top-level positions in media organisations and in media policy-making and production.

The project evaluation finds that the gender equality objective initially set (compensating for the lack of specific educational programmes to enhance media professionals' ability to address gender issues) has been achieved. The beneficiaries were able to take advantage of the changes that were brought about, which can be summarised as follows:

- media professionals have better awareness, expertise, access to best practices, certification, networking and action;
- in media organisations, employees are better prepared on gender and media issues, and have created new networks;
- reporting of gender issues is more balanced, and there is less gender stereotyping in media contents.

The practice has had a positive impact on the wider environment and has produced a significant increase in gender equality beyond its immediate reach. This impact concerns precisely those factors mostly responsible for gender imbalances in media organisations and contents in Romania: women media professionals who have attended the courses have become more aware of their gendered position within the media system and better networked. This, in turn, has produced many positive outcomes, some of which have affected legislation and institutions: there has been widespread pressure in Romanian public debate to change the law in order to ensure women's access to decision-making positions in the media and in politics, and to introduce gender-related bodies and budgets in the Romanian government.

Increased prestige

In the short term, it has increased women's access to prestigious roles in media production and content, and given women more opportunities to be heard. It has contested women's segregation into 'female' issues, and increased the attention that the media pay to women's social, economic and cultural issues. Positive preliminary results from internal monitoring also indicated women's increased access to leadership in media organisations.

Looking at longer-term results, the project secured funding from various EU bodies, and built coalitions among various women's NGOs, media organisations, and even national governmental bodies to configure content and secure trainees. Former trainees have united to take action for equal opportunities in media professions and women's advancement in social and political life. They have started campaigns to attract young professionals into activities dedicated to promoting equality and started to foster new alliances among women's and media associations.

Its work was relevant since the training, as well as Ariadna's other activities, are grounded in an ongoing assessment of needs. As to efficiency, the project results to have been achieved at reasonable cost in terms of financial and human resources: a small number of experts affiliated with Ariadna were able to secure funding, produce materials, and run training for a significant number of media professionals.

The managing organisation, the Ariadna association, has the potential to produce all the resources (in terms of both funding and institutional arrangements) needed to continue the project's work. It is affiliated with COM, Conventia Organizatiilor de Media din Romania (the Convention of Media Organisations in Romania) and ROWL, the Romanian Women's Lobby (Bucharest), which is part of EWL, the European Women's Lobby (Brussels). Also, the benefits produced by the training organised by Ariadna are likely to continue to flow after external funding has ended: the trainees are potentially able to function as propagators of the training contents and to transfer the skills and awareness they have acquired to their colleagues and media organisations.

A replicable model

The project succeeded because it carefully assessed the gender equality needs shared by media organisations and professionals, and designed the content of courses and materials to specifically address gender and media issues. The courses and modules offered addressed real problems and were grounded in the knowledge of the professional routines, social practices and relationships that are characteristic of media organisations. Trainers had specific competence in the field and the training courses benefitted from the expertise developed by networks of women media professionals, gender experts, associations of women and advocacy groups. The training relied on a well-developed strategy that included evaluation and certification. It succeeded in promoting coalitions and networks among media professionals, thus compensating for the absence of sector-based associations in Romania.

The main obstacles it faced were uncertainty in securing continuation funding and the lack of political will to adequately support the training on the part of authorities competent for media and communication and governmental gender equality bodies.

The training has not yet been replicated. Nevertheless, with the exception of the political and institutional framework, all the other elements that contributed to the effectiveness of this practice are not specific to the cultural or legislative environment of Romania nor to the institutional arrangements of the media in Romania. For these reasons, the training can easily be replicated in other organisational and geographic contexts.

The experience shows how important it is to address the real problems media professionals face in their daily work in order for media reporting practices to better reflect gender issues. A new generation of media professionals is needed who know gender policies and are committed to applying them. To achieve this, the various regional, national and international organisations committed to fostering gender equality need to work together.

Sources:

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Barometrul de gen România (The Romanian gender barometer). Publisher: Foundation for an Open Society and the Gallup Organization. Bucharest, 2000

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Further information

[Ariadna website](#)



[Training materials](#)



[Fem21](#)



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