

A database of gender-aware journalists



CELEM es la Coordinadora de asociaciones de mujeres más importante de nuestro país. Se trata de la representante en España del Lobby Europeo de Mujeres (EWL) y cuenta con más de 30 asociaciones.

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Database of Professional Women in the Media with a Gender Perspective

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In brief

CELEM, the Spanish coordinator of the European Women's Lobby, wanted to find a way to ensure that the messages it sent to the Spanish media were acted upon rather than ignored, as they tend to be in a male-dominated press. It therefore researched who the journalists were that were likely to be sympathetic to the cause of women's equality. It established a database of these names, which it uses to build up long-term relationships with the journalistic profession.

The existence of the database has raised the profile of women's issues in the press, especially on the front pages and in the hard news sections. It has helped journalists to take a gender perspective when reporting the news, and established CELEM as an expert source of information on gender. This feeds into the global objective of improving the gender balance of media contents and bringing media attention to bear on social, economic and cultural rights such as equality, gender violence and women's empowerment.

The construction of the database was an arduous process, as data protection legislation makes people hard to find. Once established, though, running costs are very low. Queries are answered and updates made with a very small staff.

Long hours bar women from decision-making

Most national and international studies show that women are seriously underrepresented in the media. This is so in all areas: women have a weak presence in high-profile media products and spaces, such as newspapers front pages, and the number of women journalists and experts covering hard news (politics, economics, etc.) is very low compared to that of men.

Over 60% of journalism students in Spain are women. However, 59% of journalists are men. In management, the disparity is even greater, with only 20% of female managers. The share of women on media company boards is even lower, at 10%. Men have easier access to posts as editors and decision-makers, and equality is still very far from a reality in Spanish boardrooms.

As these figures show, the main gap concerns the lack of women in management. This absence of women in management and senior editorial positions means that men decide the topics that are covered in the news. However the exclusion of women from top positions does not explain why so few women have access to the front page or the hard news section. An analysis of the main local newspapers reveals that women write just 26% of the articles on the front page, while men get 63% of the bylines.

Spain has made a major legislative effort and adopted laws to reduce gender imbalances, but their enforcement is far from effective. The biggest problem is the bad work-life balance caused by unreasonable work schedules, which mainly affects women. As a consequence, it is men who take the decisions on editorial lines and news stories. New technologies and the chance to work from home do not compensate for this gender imbalance. Staff who choose and design the news have to be available 24 hours a day, and attend meetings very early in the morning or very late in the evening. The front pages of newspapers are thus usually entrusted to men because they are seen as more committed to their jobs, but this is a misconception.

Finding the right messenger

CELEM, Coordinadora Española para el Lobby Europeo de Mujeres (Spanish Coordinator of the European Women's Lobby), designed and established a Database of Professional Women in the Media with a Gender Perspective. This enables it to find a receptive ear it wants to send out a media message.

The idea behind the project was to spread CELEM's message by identifying the best-qualified and most appropriate intermediaries, and building long-term relationships with them. Instead of trying to address male-dominated media institutions directly, the messages would be channelled through the female journalists and decision-makers within these institutions, who in general have a more open attitude towards gender issues. The project feeds into the global objective of improving the gender balance of media contents and attracting media attention to issues of social, economic and cultural rights such as equality, gender violence and women's empowerment.

With little funding and resources, the database has achieved its goals of getting CELEM's messages into the media. It has increased the attention the media pay to women's issues, and given women a voice in hard news topics and other traditionally male-dominated areas. It has established a new form of work in CELEM in terms of media relations, one that works in both directions, i.e. from CELEM to the media and the media to CELEM.

Strengthening the ties between women in gender mainstreaming and women in the media, brought about a positive process. CELEM has more credibility with the media, and thanks to this the NGO has become a spokesperson for the media to address when looking for information on these topics. The work has also helped to build a sense of community among women journalists, and increased gender awareness among media professionals in general. They are thus better able to take a gender perspective when reporting news. Media coverage of women's has increased accordingly, and formal and informal networks are now stronger.

The NGO uses the database to maximise the impact of its gender-awareness messages in the media. Therefore, the impact on the wider population could be a significant change in the way in which the Spanish public views the role of women in society. However, such an impact will be difficult to measure.

Worthwhile results from a small outlay

The database supports the Spanish government's gender equality objectives, and also fits CELEM's aims because it is embedded in its gender mainstreaming and communication strategy (website, Facebook page, Twitter account, etc.), which is based on well-entrenched experience.

The directory is very sustainable, because using it is part of the organisation's everyday work. It was created using CELEM's own funds, and CELEM had to spend some considerable time identifying women journalists and ensuring that they had a gender perspective. However as regards running costs it has proven very efficient, and CELEM still uses and updates the information regularly. In fact, the NGO recognises that it does not have specific funding for this type of tool, and plans to improve this situation in the future. With a small staff and very few other costs it has been possible to achieve very acceptable results, but it requires highly committed personal.

Though no formal evaluation has been carried out and no statistics exist to demonstrate its results, CELEM claims that the directory's impact can be noticed on a daily basis. Certainly, its establishment has led to a rise in the quantity and quality of information published on gender issues, much of which was provided to the media by CELEM. It has made women visible to media professionals and built a better relationship between the CELEM and the media industry. This will help it to change public perceptions and overcome stereotyped views of the role of women in society.

Possible improvements might include create an additional directory, complementary to the first one, that includes male journalists who have demonstrated a commitment to equality and a high awareness of gender issues.

The value of building two-way relationships

The database's successful creation owes much to the high level of commitment CELEM showed, and the methodical way in which it worked. The tool allows its users to reach journalists directly and not through their institutions, which ensures that message arrive in the right hands The data are constantly updated and therefore are steadily refined the more the database is used.

CELEM encountered three significant problems when designing this tool. Firstly, the Spanish Data Protection Act makes it very difficult to obtain personal contact details of media professionals. It is much more common that the addressees given are those of the sections and not the workers themselves. It was necessary to contact several different people in order to gather the data. Secondly, job mobility is very high in the media industry. Unfortunately, very few professionals have sufficient stability to create an ongoing collaboration between the companies they work for and CELEM. Thirdly, creating the database demanded a large input of time by CELEM staff.

The idea of the tool and CELEM's strategy could be transferred to other NGOs in different countries if there were a willingness to do it.

The lesson learned from the database project is that gathering data of this type is a smart strategy for NGOs with limited financial resources. The NGO showed that it is better to build long-term relationships with media professionals, instead of just sending press releases without actually knowing who receives them on the 'other side'. The two-way communication CELEM established with media professionals proved advantageous for it, and helped it become a reference point on women's issues in Spain.

Contacts/Further Information

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Further information

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More good practices

EIGE's collection of good practices



EIGE's approach to good practices



Downloads



A database of gender-aware journalists - Spain

EN (PDF, 156.33 KB)

Metadata

TOOL: Monitoring