



European  
University  
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SCHOOL OF  
TRANSNATIONAL  
GOVERNANCE

Issue 2019/05  
June 2019

# POLICY BRIEF

## *Women, Leadership and the Media*

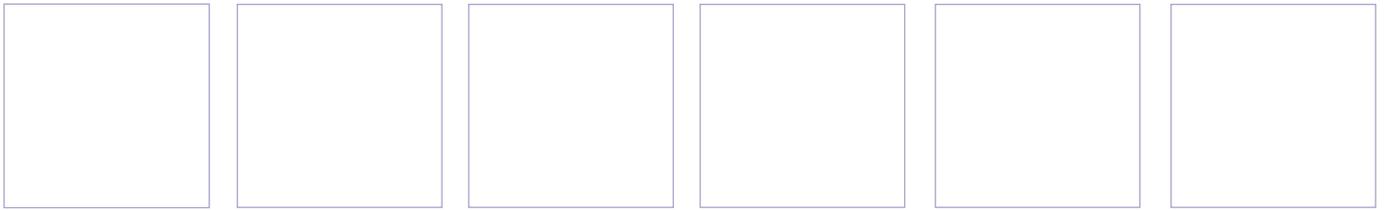
On 24 September 2018, policy experts, journalists, leading academics, lawyers and other professionals in the field of media met to discuss current developments and persisting issues relating to media, leadership and women's position in societies. In particular, the challenges women face in the media workforce and the challenges around women leaders' portrayal in media were discussed. The unique expertise, made possible through the dialogue between practitioners and academics, led to the identification of the most pressing concerns and the proposition of realistic and impactful measures to change the key situations that need to be corrected.

Following these discussions, this policy brief presents 6 key recommendation areas:

1. Transparency and enhanced media monitoring;
2. Mixing top-down and bottom-up approaches;
3. Effective use of quotas;
4. Effective family policies;
5. Women's media representation: a freedom of expression issue;
6. Actor-specific responsibilities.

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*The opinions of the authors represent personal opinions and do not represent the position or opinion of the European University Institute*



## Introduction

During the High Level Policy Dialogue, participants highlighted that the issues we face today are not new. Starting at least in the 1970's, women entering the media workforce have spoken out against discriminatory behaviour, both in terms of harassment in the workplace and in barriers in the access to decision-making roles. Yet the same issues persist today.

For at least ten years women have been graduating with journalist and media degrees at a higher rate than men, but this is not sufficiently reflected in the workforce, in particular at higher levels. Moreover, the way women, and notably women leaders, are portrayed in media is a) intrinsically undesirable from an equality perspective, and b) an indicator of the problems most societies still have with accepting women's growing role as decision-makers in the public sphere. Interestingly, it was pointed out that these issues are common in both 'developing' and 'developed' countries.

Considering these discussions, this policy brief presents the following key recommendation areas:

1. Transparency and enhanced media monitoring
2. Mixing top-down and bottom-up approaches;
3. Effective use of quotas
4. Effective family policies
5. Women's media representation: a freedom of expression issue
6. Actor-specific responsibilities

## Key Issues and Proposals

### *1. Transparency and enhanced media monitoring*

Participants brought up the importance of transparency in many contexts throughout the debate. A key element of this issue is the openness with which the equal treatment of those in the media workforce can be addressed. For example, it is not possible to address the issue of the

gender pay gap in the media sector if companies do not disclose incomes.

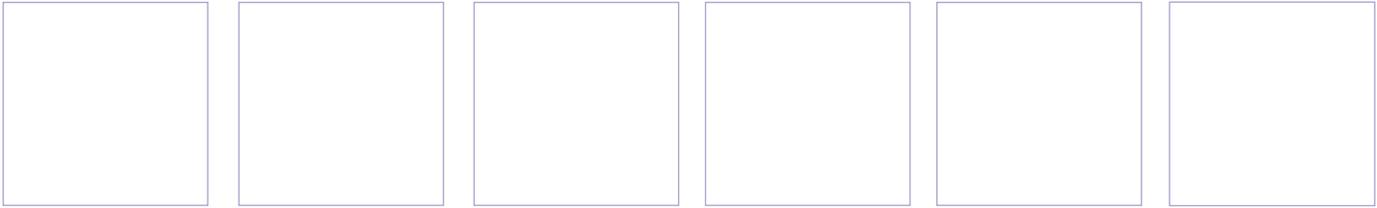
The larger part of the discussion focused on publishing the results of media monitoring. In many cases, media companies are producing extensive monitoring of their own content and workplaces, but are not publishing it. Progress towards gender equality goals will not be achieved unless there is pressure on media companies to publish the results of such monitoring. This pressure would ideally come from media authorities and media monitoring organisations.

Monitoring women in media, and publishing the results, should be seen as a bottom line: in an age when subscriptions are decreasing, it is worth it for media companies to invest in monitoring their content in order to find avenues for increasing their consumer base by appealing to audiences outside the traditional (mostly male) audience.

Participants emphasised that women consumers react positively to more, better and less stereotypical representations of women in media. It is therefore a competitive advantage for media companies to track their representation of women and their gender pay gap, in order to showcase improvements, bringing in new groups of female consumers and other markets, as well as avoiding embarrassment.

Media monitoring organisations should track countries' compliance with and implementation of international agreements on the representation of women in media. If these organisations can identify the countries that are not fulfilling the international promises they have made, countries can more easily be held accountable. Yet, coming down from the national to the organisational level, a much greater impact will be achieved when media take responsibility for their own content. This is likely to be more common if media are expected to publish the results of their monitoring.

Finally, transparency and monitoring in the media sector should not only pertain to gender, but also to other social identities that tend to be misrepresented and whose



members are also excluded from decision-making roles in the media workforce. An intersectional perspective in monitoring is vital to ensure that the most excluded groups are no longer excluded, and that policies with good intentions do not help women while posing barriers for other groups (including gender minorities). This includes when monitoring focuses on the safety of journalists, which includes many aspects, gender being only one.

## II. *Mixing top-down and bottom-up approaches*

Participants discussed the need to approach solutions from top-down and bottom-up approaches, as well as the need to combine both.

The necessary changes in workplace culture that are needed to ensure women’s equal treatment in the media sector must come from the management level. Structural changes will be achieved more easily when women occupy decision-making positions in the media.

Participants shared the experience that descriptive representation of women in the boardroom and beyond leads to different priorities and ideas than those that are possible without them, allowing workplace cultures to change, both in terms of the output produced and the treatment of female co-workers. Moreover, women already in such positions should see themselves as role models for new generations of women.

**Table 1 - Women in decision-making roles in public broadcasting organisations in the EU<sup>1</sup>**

Role	Percentage who are women
Presidents and Members of Board/Council	38%
CEOs, Executives and Non-Executive Directors	36%

In terms of bottom-up strategies, all media workers should engage with social movements such as #MeToo. The most impactful strategies will be those that are up to date with the latest technological changes, and female journalists in particular must ensure that (regardless of their level of experience) they are not left behind in the changes experienced by the media sector.

Another avenue for bottom-up action would be for all media workers to speak against rhetoric that blames women for their lesser power and influence. For example, arguments that women self-select out of high status roles in media are based on incorrect assumptions that women are no longer discriminated against in promotions and negotiations.

A final bottom-up initiative would to involve schools (at all levels) in teaching young people to use a ‘gender lens’, to understand how their thinking is impacted by their gendered socialisation and how gendered media could be feeding into these stereotypes.

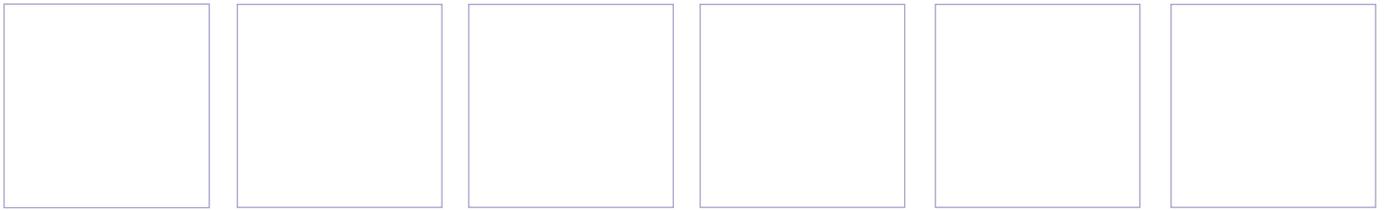
Lastly, gender should be mainstreamed into all policies in the workplace, both via bottom-up and top-down initiatives. This should be coordinated by middle management, and promoted through training targeted at this level, as it is at this level that holds the power to produce the desired change.

## III. *Effective use of quotas*

Participants had mixed opinions on the use of quotas in the media workforce. However, they agreed that quotas cannot be seen as a panacea: even in countries where quotas have been successful in many ways, there is still no gender parity at the highest decision-making levels.

The issue with quotas that participants had most experienced regards their inauthentic use. An example is the situation in which companies open a few positions for women and only let new women in such positions.

Still, there are also issues regarding the perception of quotas. Some people still have the misguided idea that



quotas are condescending to women, arguing that this allows women with lower competences to progress in the workplace. Instead, when quotas are put in place it must be stressed that their purpose is to give qualified women the same opportunities as qualified men, which will not be detrimental to competent men. Indeed, the workforce will benefit from gains in terms of efficiency and healthy competition for high status positions.

Quotas are most effective when they are comprehensive. All positions must be considered and be open to men and women. Quotas must also be 50/50 and nothing less, as participants agreed that half of the workforce would not be satisfied with 30 or 40% of the decision-making power or representation. The effective and comprehensive use of quotas must also take into consideration gender minorities and social identities other than gender. Finally, quotas will only be effective if they are genuine: often, only a few positions in a boardroom or other decision-making positions have real power, and it is these positions that must be genuinely open to quotas.

#### ***IV. Effective family policies***

A recurring issue participants brought up during the dialogue is the need for better and more effective family policies.

Family friendly policies are needed to disrupt the ‘mummy track’ that many women in the media workforce find themselves on. In particular, flexibility must be the norm in journalism. The 24/7 news cycle may make this difficult, but women are affected much more than men when they are expected to be available for work at any time.

Both in developed and developing countries, policies are less effective when subtle practices that undermine gender equality policies are commonplace. For example, women are often asked if they are considering building a family or getting married during interviews. Proactive implementation of safeguards against such behaviour are needed alongside policies.

Moreover, these policies should be framed in terms that highlight how they benefit men as well as women; it is not only women who want to care for their children, and it is often very difficult also for men to do this. Family friendly policies are therefore beneficial for everyone.

Participants also stressed that gender and family friendly policies must be commonsensical. For example, if the application procedure for paternity leave is made more complicated than that of maternity leave, men will of course be less incentivised to apply for them.

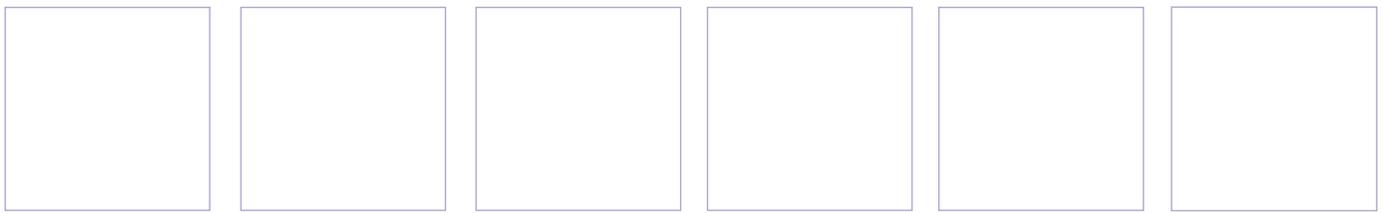
#### ***V. Women’s media representation: a freedom of expression issue***

The objection to policies ensuring better representation of women in media are often based on the right to freedom of expression. However, participants felt very strongly that this link is a clear misinterpretation. They argued, instead, that to not represent women’s voices equally with that of men and to not seek actively for both sides of the story is itself a violation of the right to freedom of expression. Plurality of sources is a key element for good journalism, making gender equal representation a necessary priority.

In particular, participants felt that female experts are not sought out as much as male experts, and the representation of women in politics is both insufficient and stereotyped.

Expert lists of women exist, but these are often not used by journalists. Better publication and expanding of these lists is therefore needed.

Participants felt strongly that it cannot be the responsibility of female journalists to ensure better representation of women in media. Training for all journalists is needed. This training should not only focus on giving an equal voice women and men, but also on reducing the use of gender stereotypes by encouraging women to report issues in areas where their representation is reduced. In addition, it is pivotal to ensure that ‘normal’ women, rather than only extraordinary women at the top of their careers are shown as examples.



**Table 2 - Numbers of stories in newspapers, radio and television news reported by women and men, by main topic (2015)<sup>2</sup>**

Topic	Number of stories	Percentage reported by women	Percentage reported by men
Politics and government	678	30%	70%
Crime and violence	343	34%	66%
Social and legal	1,256	38%	62%
Celebrity, arts and media, sports	341	42%	58%
Economy	403	43%	57%
Science and health	237	44%	56%
Other	26	46%	54%
Total	3,284	38%	62%

## VI. Actor-specific responsibilities

Participants pointed out many different actors who have a role to play in improving the situation of women working in media as well women's representation therein.

1. Trade unions: Those elected to represent media in trade unions have an impact on how seriously women's issues are taken.
2. Schools and academia: Journalism schools should include gender aspects in the training of all journalists. Moreover, academics researching related topics have a responsibility to disseminate their research to appropriate audiences, rather than assuming media actors will find such research.

3. Media monitoring organisations: On top of their vital role in producing data on media, these organisations also have a role in educating on the status of media representation and the media workforce at all levels, and to provide data for media to self-improve.
4. UN and global institutions: The UN initiative Gender Champions is a good example of engaging individuals to act in their everyday environment in order to empower women, including in the workforce.
5. States: Many participants expressed a concern that states, in particular less democratic states, could use policies supposedly meant to help women in order to censor the media. However, other participants felt that states can contribute to change the power relationship between advertisers and mainstream media. Currently, advertisers have considerable influence on the content of media, which is undesirable in the opinion of many media actors. Public service media can at least act as a guide in how to implement better gender practices.
6. Media companies: Feminist media houses, which are specialised in addressing gender issues, should be taken as an example for other media houses with regards to these questions. Moreover, media should prioritise increasing subscribers or being selective in their advertisers, to appeal more to women.

## Conclusions

Participants highlighted many considerations that should be addressed in order to achieve the goals set out in this policy brief. Most importantly, we cannot accept the abnormal as normal; it is not normal to represent half the population as though they are a minority group and it is not normal for women to be harassed in the workplace and blocked from decision-making positions. Second, small changes can add up when they are company or institution-wide, leading to structural changes. Third, women should not have to be exceptional to have decision-making power, the same standard of competence must apply regardless of gender. Fourth, men must be

partners in diversity and inclusion work. Fifth, media must embrace its role in transforming culture and challenging biases, rather than focusing solely on its role as the seller of a product to consumers. Media has a responsibility derived from its role as the primary source of information on most politically and socially relevant topics. To conclude, in many issues relating to women, leadership and the media, the prognosis is less clear than the diagnosis: more research and sharing of success stories is thus needed.

#### Endnotes

1 European Institute for Gender Equality (2017) Gender Statistics Database and EU Parliament, Gender Equality in the Media Sector Study (2018).

2 Global Media Monitoring Project (2015), GMMP Global Report and EU Parliament, Gender Equality in the Media Sector Study (2018)

## The School of Transnational Governance

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Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

The European Commission supports the EUI through the European Union budget. This publication reflects the views only of the author(s), and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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doi:10.2870/792800  
ISBN:978-92-9084-769-4  
ISSN:2599-5928  
QM-AY-19-005-EN-N