

Ekvilib
Inštitut

INSTITUT
ZA JAVNU POLITIKU

Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Reporting



Prepared by Anita Ramšak, PhD

The guidelines for gender sensitive media reporting have been developed in order to support the media in their efforts to depict the world in more gender sensitive and gender responsive manner, thus contributing to more inclusive and equal societies.

The guidelines are divided into four sections, each convening one aspect of gender sensitive reporting:

- Section 1:** Selection of sources and stories in order to achieve balanced presence of women and men in media, reflecting the composition of society and human experiences.
- Section 2:** Fair portrayal of women and men through elimination of stereotypes.
- Section 3:** Use of gender fair language.
- Section 4:** Gender equality within media organisations.



REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



MEĐNARODNO RAZVOJNO
SODELOVANJE SLOVENIJE
SLOVENIA'S DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY and HOW on gender sensitive reporting.

WHO	The reporting journalists, editors, editors-in-chief, photographers, managers, board ... Gender is everybody's business.
WHAT	To be sensitive to gender inequalities and portray and treat women and men in a fair and just manner.
WHERE	On all levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at the managerial level where the general directions are made, • at the editorial department where decisions are taken about stories to be covered, • on the field when information is being gathered, • at the desk when the information is being selected, •
WHY	Fair gender portrayal is a professional and ethical aspiration, similar to respect for accuracy, fairness and honesty. It can importantly contribute and co-create more gender balanced and inclusive societies.
HOW	Achieved through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selection of sources and stories, • fair portrayal of women and men through elimination of stereotypes, • use of gender fair language, • promoting gender equality within media organisations.

1.

Selection of sources and stories in order to achieve balanced presence of women and men, reflecting the composition of society and human experiences.

World is composed of almost equal number of women and men, however women are heard about or read about only in approximately 23% of the world news. With other words, *“76% of the people heard or read about in the world’s news are male. The world seen in news media remains largely a male one»*. This does not reflect the actual composition of society; it also does not show the various human experiences in the societies, and also makes the large (mainly female) part of our societies relatively invisible.

Furthermore, when women do make it to the news, they are rarely presented and involved as an expert or spokesperson. *In 2010 in world’s media only 19% of spokespersons and 20% of experts were women. In contrast, 81% of spokespersons and 80% of experts in the news were male.* This again portrays the world of experts/professional mainly as a »men’s world«, while women were more often depicted in the *»ordinary people categories«*. This is limiting possibilities for the women’s angles and expert’s opinion to be heard and to shape our world.

Furthermore, there is a lack of coverage of stories linked to gender or women’s rights, such as gender based violence, making those stories, although often the reality of great share of women’s (and men’s) experiences, almost invisible or non-existent. Therefore, it is essential to work towards fair coverage of real issues, which are important to women and which fairly present their experiences.

Data source: Global Media Monitoring Projects, 2010.

In order to achieve more gender equality in the content in the media, try to:

- Pay attention to achieve balanced representation of **women and men seen, heard or read about** in news and current affairs. Also make special consideration to make sure diverse stories and voices of people, particularly the ones that are often almost invisible in media (e.g. older women), are included and represented.
- Pay attention to **balanced representation of women and men in the news and media in all spheres**, including making sure to report on stories of women in the (often male dominated) areas, such as politics and government, economic and business, war and conflicts, science and technology, sports, etc.
- Pay attention to balanced representation of **men and women as a source of information, opinion and expertise** in the news (e.g. make sure you pay attention to involve women as experts and professionals, not only as “ordinary” persons or victims).
- Pay attention that **your sources represent range of opinions coming from diverse groups**, including from often neglected groups (e.g. persons with disabilities, ethnic communities, etc.). If relevant **consult women’s rights NGOs and other groups working on gender equality** or representing the group in question, to get more balanced view.
- Pay attention that proportion of stories **focuses specifically on women or issues considered as a particular concern for women** (e.g. gender-based violence, women’s rights, women’s achievements, etc.). Also, you need to pay attention to covering stories focusing on issues of **gender equality/inequality** (stories about specific cases of equality or inequality between women and men, relevant policies, legislative issues, programmes designed to promote gender equality and transform unequal gender norms). **Make sure these stories get a fair share of prominence in your media.**

2.

Fair portrayal of women and men through elimination of stereotypes and promotion of multi-dimensional representation/portrayal.

The media plays a very significant role in shaping public perceptions about women and men, therefore it is important that reporting avoids any form of gender stereotypes, which often limit and trivialize females and males, as well as presenting an inaccurate view of the world and its possibilities. Furthermore, the use of stereotypes reflects a mental block not only in terms of what society may expect from women and men, but also—more seriously—in terms of what women and men may expect from themselves.

UNESCO, 2012.

In order to ensure fair portrayal of women and men, try to:

- **Avoid stories with stereotypes**, including openly sexist's interpretations of the characteristic and roles of women and men in society. Furthermore, try **not to make any gender based assumptions**, including in depiction of traditional "feminine/masculine characteristics and male/female roles" (e.g. *try to avoid representing certain jobs or roles as only appropriate for, or held by, women or men, i.e., farmers are men and elementary teachers are women, or using common stereotypes reinforcing gender roles, e.g. portraying women as mothers, homemakers, etc.*).
- Do not represent females and males as possessing **stereotypic gendered attributes and characteristics**. *For example, do not always imply that girls are timid and boys are brave, males are admired for their accomplishments and women for their physical attributes, females are passive and males are active. Equally, in the case of crime, violence, disasters do not portray only women as victims and men as survivors.*
- Make sure you include stories that show multidimensional representation/portrayal of men and women (indicating journalistic effort to challenge/counter challenge gender based stereotypes).
- Make sure you have a **fair portrayal of men and women in commercial ads, commercial messages and images**, trying to minimise ads for various product categories or services that stereotype or naturalise gender roles (e.g. *household goods associated with cooking and cleaning, food, beverages, products for children, electronic goods; mainly women in services such as education, health, childcare, and men in banking and investment, real estate, sport events*).
- Avoid depiction of sexuality in ads and images, particularly depicting women as sexual objects. Also pay attention to having a balanced proportion of ads that show women and men appearing assertive rather than passive in advertisements (voices and images), and that show occupations of women and men in ads, etc.

3.

Use of gender sensitive language

Structures of many societies have been based on assumptions of sex-biased roles, which are entrenched in the use of language. To be truly equal, women and men must be seen and heard to be equal. This means eliminating language that misrepresents, excludes or offends women. Careful use of language and images in the media will give a more accurate reflection of your audience or readership, and this can positively affect people's consciousness over time.

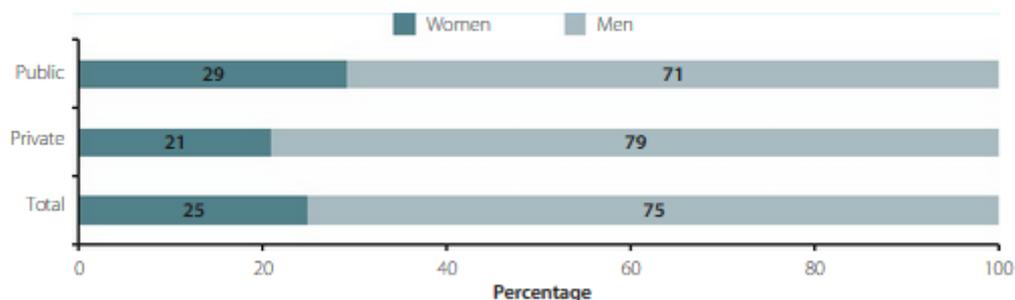
UNESCO, 2012.

In an attempt to use the gender sensitive language, try to:

- **Avoid using “he” as a generic pronoun**, unless the gender of the subject is known and is relevant to the context. The pseudo-generic *he* or *his*, when referring to both a female and a male excludes the female. To be inclusive, use both *he* and *she*, and consciously balance pronoun use by sometimes reversing their order.
For example: Instead of “If a student studies hard, he will succeed”, use “If a student studies hard, he or she will succeed. If a student studies hard, she or he will succeed. Students who study hard will succeed”.
- **Avoid using “man” as a generic noun**, as if men represent the whole human race. The use of the word *man* to represent both women and men excludes women, and it minimalizes their contributions and their worth as human beings.
For example, to make language more inclusive use “humanity, human beings, people” instead of “mankind”, “artificial materials” instead of “man-made materials”; use “the best person for the job” instead of “the best man for the job”, etc.
- When describing a job or career both men and women might perform avoid using term that specifies gender and replace **gender-specific words with gender-neutral word** in order to avoid associating men and women with certain professions.
For example: chairman/chairwoman vs. chair, coordinator, moderator, presiding officer, head, chairperson; businessman/businesswoman vs. business executive, manager, businessperson, policeman/policewoman vs. police officer; mailman vs. postal worker, letter carrier, etc.
- Seek **alternatives to language that omits, patronizes, or trivializes women**, as well as to language that reinforces stereotyped images of both women and men.
For example: Don't use terms like “the little lady” or “better half” when you are referring to someone's spouse, or wife. Avoid the use of exaggerated language such as “Blonde beauty wins song contest!”, “Mother of three elopes with lover”, “Woman driver crashes into fence”, “Maria is a career woman”, “Spinster”, etc...
- When referring **to men and women, make sure they are addressed in the same manner**.
For example, instead of saying “Mr Smith and Mary Jones” refer to them as “John Smith and Mary Jones” (using both of their first names) or “Mr Smith and Ms Jones” (using titles, rather than names), instead of “The reading list included Jane Austen, Joyce, Proust, and Virginia Woolf”, use “The reading list included Austen, Joyce, Proust, and Woolf (or Jane Austen, James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Virginia Woolf)”.
- Use courtesy titles that promote gender equity.
For example: Instead of Miss, Mrs, use Ms.
- Describe a **woman as her own person, and not in relationship to someone else**. Try to avoid forms of address that depict a woman as the mere appendage of her husband, which trivializes women or render them invisible.
For example, instead of saying “Mary Smith, who is married to John Smith”, say “Mary Smith, who is a writer” or instead of “The steward seated Mr. Clinton and his lovely wife Hillary”, use “The steward seated Mr. and Mrs. Clinton”.

4. Gender equality within the media organisations

Figure 3: Proportion of women and men in decision-making bodies in media organisations, EU-27, 2012



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, 2012

The studies show that while women have considerably outnumbered men in university-level and practice-based journalism programmes and that the employment of women in media is increasing, the organisational culture of media remains largely masculine and women are still significantly under-represented at the decision-making level.

In order to achieve greater gender equality in your organisation, try to:

- Guarantee **balanced representation of women and men in ownership, business management, board positions**, as well as of women and men holding leadership positions within media (editors in chief, editors, head of departments, and heads of desks.)
- **Develop policies on gender equality/codes of conduct**; equality opportunities/diversity (including gender); sexual harassment in the workplace; dignity in the work-place; work-life balance (policy of flexible working arrangements, availability and accessibility of quality child care and support facilities for all staff members, etc.)
- Develop a **human resource policy on gender equality**, securing equal treatment with respect to general working conditions/environment and rights including wages and promotion rates of women and men, equal and transparent recruitment practices (e.g. all interview panels should be gender balanced, etc.), transparent pay scale within the media company, using the same criteria to determine pay structures for men and women.
- Set the **gender desk or gender mainstreaming officer for monitoring and evaluation of gender equality** in the work space.
- Introduce **practical measures to foster women's advancement and the portrayal of women** in the media including trainee positions specifically for women; leadership/management training for women; equality awareness training for staff.

CHECKLIST FOR DETECTING AND AVOIDING GENDER INSENSITIVE REPORTING

Who are the sources of the reports?

- How many sources are government and corporate officials?
- How many belong to the progressive, public interest groups?
- How many sources are women?
- How many sources are from minority groups?

From whose point of view is the news reported?

- In whose interest does the report serve?
- Does this interest coincide with that of the government?
- Does it coincide with that of the corporate world?
- Is the report in the public's interest? Which public?

Are there double standards in the news report?

- Are there contradictory double standard?
For example, single fathers sympathized with for their circumstances, while single mothers are said to "deserve" the hardship.

Are stereotypes used in the news report?

- How is one group portrayed in the story?
- Is this group always associated with certain characteristics?

Is loaded language used?

- Is the language objective enough to not sway public opinion?
- Is the language objective enough so the public can form its/ own opinions?

Is the report contextualised?

- Is the story put in context so the public can form its own opinions?

Does the graphics used match the content?

- Do the images and illustrations used contradict the content?
- Do they lead the public to understand the story content differently?

Inspired by: UNESCO.

Resources consulted:

- Global Media Monitoring Projects, 2010. Who Makes the News. Available at: <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2010-reports>
- UNESCO. Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media. Framework of Indicators to Gauge Gender Sensitivity in Media Operations and Content. Paris, 2012.
- National Council of Teachers of English. Guidelines for Gender-Fair Use of Language. Available at: <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang>
- UNESCO. Gender sensitive reporting.
- European Institute for Gender Equality. Advancing gender equality in decision-making in media organisations, 2012. Available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/content/document/advancing-gender-equality-in-decisionmaking-in-media-organisations-main-findings>