



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Women and the Media

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### Comments Paper - Poland



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# Poland Comments Paper

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## 1. Women and the media: a general context in Poland

### 1.1. Introductory comments

After the political transformation that occurred in Poland in 1989 the media industry in Poland underwent democratisation, internationalisation, and privatisation. However, during the transformation process it became evident that media institutions remained vulnerable to political pressure groups, especially to the pressure of political parties, and to a varying degree, to government influence. The latter is mainly exercised by attempts to control media regulatory bodies, e.g., the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) as well as Boards of Trustees, Boards of Directors, and Programming Councils of public media institutions. A relatively recent example of such, unfortunately successful, attempts was a legislature introduced by the ruling *Law and Justice* party which allows the government to have control over the National Broadcasting Council and over the election of members of Boards of Trustees and Boards of Directors of public media institutions. What is more, the new regime went as far as replacing almost all leading journalists, including the anchors, and programming directors of the public TV, by people who have been known to be supporters of the ruling party. The result of these changes has been an unprecedented since the communist time propaganda of the government activities and political brainwashing. Fortunately enough, the biased presentation of the news by the public media is balanced by largely independent of the government's influence private media institutions.

### 1.2. Women's presence in Polish media

Women's presence in Polish media institutions should be therefore seen from the above general perspective, which furthermore takes account of the participation of women in the media industry both as news providers and news source. In short, women's presence in the media amounts to defining (a) to what degree women manage and make the news and (b) to what degree media concentrate on women as news objects.

#### 1.2.1. Who manages media institutions in Poland

The relevant research shows that the participation of women in management and policy-making bodies in Polish media is insignificant when compared with men. The representation of women in top-ranking management, i.e., the Boards of Trustees and Managing Boards of media institutions fluctuates between 15% (Oleksy & Oleksy, 2017)<sup>1</sup> and 13% (Byerly, C. 2016)<sup>2</sup>. This means that strategic decisions and

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<sup>1</sup> Oleksy, W. & E. H. Oleksy. 2017. „Gender bias in Polish news media”. In: Ross, K. & C. Padovani (eds). *Gender Equality and the Media. A Challenge for Europe*. New York & London: Routledge. 145-157.

<sup>2</sup> Byerly, C. 2016. *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media: Eastern Europe*. Washington, D.C. : International Women's Media Foundation.

policy directions in media institutions are the domain of men. Women's participation is slightly better in less prestigious roles as reporters, announcers, and presenters in electronic media: TV-48%, radio-57%, but it is considerably insufficient in the press media-28%, and the new media- 16%.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that around 40% of the journalists in lower ranking managerial positions who are employed in Polish media institutions are women (Malarczyk, M. et al, 2017) yet it is a confirmed fact that women's impact on the programming and media content is insufficient and much lower than their overall presence in media institutions.

### 1.2.2. Who media programmes focus on

Women are very poorly represented as the central focus of the news releases (merely 7% of women were found to be the central focus of the programmes in the GMMP monitoring project) and they have been equally under-represented in the roles of experts, celebrities, and politicians (15%), according to the findings of the *Media Monitoring Project* (Monitoring Mediów) which was initiated by the *Polish Women Congress* (Kongres Kobiet) in the years 2016-2017, (see Malarczyk, M. et al, 2017)<sup>4</sup>.

### 1.3. Research on women in the Polish media

Research on various aspects of the representation of women vis a vis men in Polish media both as media makers and media sources is a much neglected research area and it seldom addresses directly the subject of women's representation in Polish media business (Kowalczyk, I. et al, 2009, Oleksy, W. 2015)<sup>5</sup> as the majority of publications concentrate on the portrayals of women in film and television. However, it needs to be stressed that women's participation in the media industry in Poland is gradually gaining more attention of researchers, mainly due to the activities of NGOs and researchers based at universities.

### 1.4. Gender equality in media institutions

From the formal point of view, it is the *Media Ethics Council* created in 1995 which is supposed to be overlooking such matters as gender equality in Polish media institutions. However, the Ethical Chart, created by this body and signed by virtually all media institutions in Poland does not even contain a mention of gender equality. The same can be said about ethics councils which exist in media institutions and quite many of them are headed by women journalists. From the above it can be concluded that (a) gender equality in Polish media institutions is a much marginalised issue, and (b) there is a lack of gender equality awareness among journalists in Poland, including women journalists.

### 1.5. Visibility of women in the media

As previously stated, women are very poorly represented as professionals and experts in the Polish media. In order to counterbalance this situation a group of women associations, NGOs and media institutions (*Foundation of Women in*

<sup>3</sup> The monitoring project was directed by E.H. Oleksy as Poland's representative in GMMP and was carried out by the Women's Studies Centre at the University of Lodz in 2010 and 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Malarczyk, M. et al. 2017. "Monitoring mediów". In: Broniarczyk, N. et al. (eds). Raport z Monitoringu Polityki, Mediów i Reformy Edukacji. Warszawa: Kongres Kobiet.

<sup>5</sup> Kowalczyk, I. et al. 2009. Nierówne media. In: Piotrowska, J. & A. Grzybek (eds). Raport Kongres Kobiet Polskich 2009. Warszawa: Feminoteka.  
Oleksy, W. 2015. „Gender w mediach”. In: Gackowski, T. (ed). Mediamorfozy. Warszawa: Wyd. Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Science, S. Brzozowski Association, among others) joined forces to establish a database of women experts [www.expertki.org](http://www.expertki.org) to which media institutions can reach out for comments and expertise. This initiative was followed by a series of seminars and workshops in a number of locations all over Poland during which issues related to women's presence in media institutions were discussed.

## 1.6. Examples of good practice

Despite the lack of institutional regulations concerning gender equality, as indicated in 1.4 above, it is increasing frequent that cases of discrimination against women journalists are reported by mainstream media. One such case was widely reported in 2015 and involved sexual harassment and mobbing by a prominent male journalist directed at three women colleagues. The TV station at which the journalist was employed set up an investigation and eventually fired the journalist while the three women journalists were financially compensated.

Another example of good practice is a circular letter dispatched by one of the biggest media institutions in Poland to all its employees in which the management pointed out that gender discrimination and any form of mobbing in the workplace is unethical and subject of procedural review which may lead to the termination of employment.

## 2. Policy debate: issues, regulations, initiatives

### 2.1. Issues, regulations, initiatives

Currently, the political debate in Poland is dominated by the major questions of the violations of the democratic procedures involving the election of members of the Supreme Court, the immigration issues, turbulent relations with the European Commission, and other legal regulations undertaken or attempted by the present government which are considered by many experts to be violations of the Polish constitution. In this situation, the questions of gender equality and related matters are largely absent from the media coverages. However, in a recent commentary by a prominent feminist and women's cause activist, published in a liberal daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (October 22, 2018), a very bitter criticism is directed at private and public TV stations in whose discussion programmes during which the results of the recent local government elections were discussed not a single woman was present among the invited commentators and experts. Sadly, one of the anchors in these programmes was a woman. From the same commentary we learn that a private radio station recently fired a well-known woman journalist because she used to invite women to her discussion programme. The commentary concludes that the Polish viewers are exposed to a deformed vision of reality because it is seen, discussed, and commented on almost exclusively by men.

## 3. Transferability

### 3.1. Transferability potential

The French experience as described in the Discussion Paper has a very high potential of transferability in the Polish context. This is especially recommendable in the case of the following:

- monitoring of media institutions: periodic, e.g. every 4 years, monitoring of media institutions with a view to assess women's representation in all aspects of media activity
- empowering women journalists through raising awareness and running educational programmes as well as introducing institutional regulations
- improvement of visibility of women journalists by means of increasing their involvement as programme directors, editors, leading anchors, and commentators

### 3.2. Suggestions to the host country

**Women's experts database.** Following the Polish example discussed in section 1.5 it is suggested that the creation of database of women experts in France, from which the French media institutions can draw women experts and professions, seems advisable.

**Building awareness among women journalists.** Organisation of seminars and workshops for women journalists would raise awareness among women journalists of their professional potential.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

### 4.1. Conclusions

The situation of women in the Polish media is especially neglected in the following areas:

1. Low participation of women in top managerial bodies of media institutions.
2. Lack of gender equality regulations concerning payment, professional progress and promotion,
3. Lack of gender awareness among women journalists.

### 4.2. Recommendations

It is recommended that in Poland, and in all those Member States in which the participation of women in the media business is insufficient progress could be achieved if the following steps be undertaken:

**Implementation of EU gender equality regulations.** Media institutions should be made accountable for the implementation of the EU regulations which target the increase of the presence of women in senior managing and programming sections of media companies and promote gender equality. Among these are: *The European Pact for Gender Equality:2011-2020*, *Breaking gender stereotypes in the media*<sup>6</sup>, *The European Parliament Report, On eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU*<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> *Breaking gender stereotypes in the media.* Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Brussels: European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs and Equality Opportunities Directorate, (2010).

<sup>7</sup> *On eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU.* Report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. The European Parliament. Brussels, (2012).

**Gender equality education.** Courses on gender equality and gender stereotyping in the media should be introduced into the educational programmes for students of journalism.

**Codes of ethics.** Media institutions should introduce specific formulations into their codes of ethics concerning all aspects of gender equality, sexual harassment and promotional policy. These formulations should be explicitly expressed and should not be the subject of inference.

**Financial support.** Financial support should be provided to women's associations, NGOs, and university centres at the national and EU level (e.g. through the European Institute of Gender Equality-EIGE) to train women journalists in managerial and media logistic skills.

**Monitoring.** Media institutions should be surveyed periodically by external research institutions so that the monitoring of their conduct regarding gender equality is possible.

**Dissemination.** It is of paramount importance that results of monitoring activities and available research be disseminated among media institutions by means of printed documents, seminars, and workshops.