The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Women and the Media
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Comments Paper - Malta

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Justice

Languishing in inertia –
gender issues & media landscapes

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1. Malta

1.1. Contextualising Media and Gender

It is the southern-most country in Europe and it is striving to secure real gender mainstreaming and equality, with the help and efforts of academics, lobbyists and political activists who work hard to bring about change. Scholars engaging specifically with gender issues are few, but gender and the media are firmly on the research map. There have, in the last two decades, been several key projects that have addressed representation of women and men in the news, in the broader media, and in decision-making in media organisations. The significant research and documentation with regard to equal opportunities in the media sector are detailed below.

1.1.1. Provision of equal opportunities within the media sector

In 2018, Malta featured in a case study for the FEMM Committee: Women's Rights and Gender Equality (European Parliament Committee). Researching women in media organisations in Malta, the investigation focused on women's experiences working in the media. Interviews were carried out with women in all sectors: media producers (gaming, news, social media); women's organisations and regulators, and examined gender balance in the media (workforce/content).

Malta has been part of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) for 20 years and has participated in data capture and reporting in 2000, 2005, 2010 and in 2015. It has been a powerful strategy for helping raise awareness amongst media practitioners, policy makers, educators and the public. Involvement in the GMMP is crucial for Malta, as there are few opportunities to a) gather local data and; b) ensure that the analysis and interpretation of local data is rooted in a broader context.

In 2013 Malta took part in research around 'Women in decision making in the media'. This project was carried out on behalf of the European Institute for Gender Equality and the tasks included: Data collection, coding, analysis, involving expert interviews with senior women in Maltese media industry. This project generated a Report (above): *Advancing gender equality in decision-making in media organisations*: European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013.

1.1.2. Fighting gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes in the media impact on women and men. Women continue to be portrayed in narrow and damaging roles and are more likely to be objectified, hyper sexualised and boxed-in in stereotypical roles. In Malta there have been several projects that have addressed and examined stereotypes in the media including:

women in print media, stereotypes in news, and stereotypes around how women are portrayed in the media as politicians.

- The research carried out in 2018 for the Committee on Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) addressed stereotypes in the media.

- In 2017 a publication, based on EIGE research in 2013, mapped women in the media looking at decision-making AND portrayal in broadcast content.

- COST 2013-17 – appearance of women and men in print media was the scope of the project. It compared advertising stereotypes in Malta, Greece and Ireland.

- Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) looks at representation, portrayal and stereotyping of women in the news. Longitudinal data for Malta spans 20 years.

- The EU funded Gender News, Good News Project (2005-6) involving Malta, Italy, France and Spain, produced guidelines for programme-makers around gender stereotyping;

- In 2006 Malta was involved and represented a European-wide project, Portraying Politics, which addressed how female politicians are portrayed in the media. The project produced a tool-kit for trainers and educators addressing key issues around framing, stereotyping and giving equal voice to women and men.

1.1.3. Broader Scenarios

Taking a broader view, Malta has been working hard to address other issues that impact on gender equality such as Domestic Violence in conjunction with the Commission for Domestic Violence and other bodies; the pay gap in conjunction with the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality NCPE; and free childcare for working parents.

It is important to note that the number of female graduates has exceeded males in Third Level Education; that Malta has the highest Glass Ceiling Index in the European Union; EU data indicates that Malta had the least number of women on company boards; and it is one of the countries where the share of female members of parliament (MPs) has fallen over time. Malta has never had a female as a minister for finance or economy, and there are only a few female judges (Cutajar et al. 2017).

2. Policies: Gender Equality

Notwithstanding some prevailing sexist attitudes within the general population, the legal structures in Malta have been systematically updating and improving. In 1947 Maltese women won the right to vote, in the mid-1960s, the 'breadwinner's wage' was abolished and in 1981 the public sector removed its ban on the employment of married women. A government commission and secretariat (which was later given the higher status of department) was set up to work on addressing gender issues. In 1991, amendments to the Constitution were passed that allowed redress against discrimination based on sex and further allowed for the possibility of special temporary measures to be introduced, which are aimed at accelerating the de facto equality between the sexes. In 1993 further amendments to the Family Law, gave men and women equal rights and responsibilities in marriage and legalized the joint administration of property acquired after marriage.

In 2004, the above-mentioned commission and department were incorporated into the newly set up National Commission for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women as a result of the Equality for Men and Women Act (2003). This commission identifies and monitors national policies with a view to preventing and addressing discrimination and promoting gender equality. The Employment and Industrial Relations Act (2003) clarified the illegality of harassment on the grounds of gender. It introduced and regulates conditions of employment that are 'family friendly'. In 2006 the Domestic Violence Act came into force, as did the Commission on Domestic Violence. Divorce was introduced in 2011 and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) was ratified by Malta in 2014.

While acknowledging the advancement towards equal status for women in the timeline detailed above, there are still indicators that gender equality is not fully entrenched. For example Malta has been cited as having the lowest percentage of female board members in the European Union (European Commission, DG for Justice 2013). Women are also underrepresented at parliamentary level. In 2014, 9 out of the 69 members of Parliament were female. In 2014, only Hungary had a worse track record than Malta within the EU. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) Malta has one of the lowest levels of women's political representation in the EU in 2018.

2.1. Research & Good Practice

Research has been detailed above and there is a lot of investment by academics and public servants into identifying and addressing better practice. Public measures having been taken since 1960s to improve the situation with regard to gender mainstreaming, the responsibility for the care and well being of children, the elderly and other relatives with support needs, still tends to be taken on by women, who as a result leave the labour market or do not join it in the first place. Nonetheless gender stereotypes on the respective roles of women and men, however much challenged, seem to still be alive in Maltese society (Cutajar et al 2017).

2.2. Future Developments

Currently there are several issues being raised and debated in Malta. Femicide and Domestic violence are highly visible issues. Malta is the first country to host the European Observatory on Femicide (EOF), which was launched on 1 March 2018. The *Kunsill Konsultattiv* was launched in November 2017 and this brings together twenty-two women's NGOs. Its role is to discuss policies, legislation and measures being implemented. In 2017 emPOWer, Malta's first Platform of Organisations for Women, was facilitated by the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society. Its remit is to encourage more women to participate in positions of influence and leadership, while also creating closer synergies among national organisations for women in the world of commerce, business, and social activism.

Later this year an NGO dedicated to Media and Gender will be launched which will work closely with existing organisations such as the GMMP, CEDAW, AGEMI and EIGE as well as local organisations and policy makers.

3. Transferability potential

The document prepared by the Host country is robust and extensive in its approach. There is transferability potential of the policies proposed in most parts. *See below.*

Proposal	Response
Better knowledge of the situation	Scholars have a thorough understanding of the current situation in and there is a rich repository of data that can aid development of good practice – see all research carried out to date (above and below).
Input from Female Experts	Perspective and input from Female Experts brings knowledge to the discussion. However the female expert's presence & knowledge needs to be recognised and 'listened to' by decision makers and practitioners. Institutional deafness to women is symptomatic of the broader gender inequality that prevails.
Sanctions against sexism	Legislation may drive change but it is enforcement that ensures change of behaviour and actions. Sanctions are an important strategy but must be significant otherwise they will loose their impact and meaning.
Low wages and precarious employment	The proposals suggested may be challenging to introduce into the local media industry.
Vertical and horizontal segregation	It is imperative that segregation is addressed by applying a wide lens when considering the issues.
Sexism and sexual harassment	To combat sexism within media institutions there needs to be policy guidance and institutional desire to address issues and bring about a culture change.
Under representation of women IN the media, age discrimination & stereotypical representations	Portrayal of women in the media is marked by underrepresentation, invisibility and stereotypical portrayal. Age and race/ethnicity are intersectional variables. Portrayal is further challenged as women age and/or when they belong to an additional 'marginal' group.
Lack of visibility of women's skills and expertise	Linked with portrayal issues above 'women as experts' are more difficult to locate. Strategic policies are needed to address portrayal issues.

Additional Assessment Comments

In Malta, based on the FEMM report and others, it emerged that practitioners consider the lack of regulation to be a core issue. They voiced concern with regard to a lack of legislation and absence of self-regulation and codes of practice and codes of conduct in media industries.

This section has been informed by the FEMM report, and CHOGM 2015 position paper (which looks to Beijing 1995 and the progress that has taken place since). It is argued that alongside a need for a fundamental culture shift there is a need for change in awareness and language, followed by legislation and enforcement. Additionally, there is a need for a greater critical mass of women in the media industry and in media management. Media education emerged as another important tool in order to bring about gender equality in the media (and beyond) and bring about culture change. Media Education needs to be two pronged: 1. Better and

broader media education (from Kinder to Tertiary), 2. Continuous in-house training for journalists. In summary, to achieve an equitable media industry it is necessary to address:

- Childcare provision and flexible working.
- Working cultures (address sexism and harassment; and balanced decision making landscape).
- Internal codes of practice, policies and legislation, coupled with enforcement.
- Mentoring.
- Regulation and sanctions.

- Pay gap.
- Monitoring.
- Improved media content to address sexism, stereotypes & invisibility.
- Education - media literacy and gender equality training.
- Audience activism and advocacy.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

20 years after United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Beijing1995, the *UN Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20* observed that women in all types of media tend to be thin and sexualized. They talk less than men. They have fewer opinions. And they are far less likely, in the entertainment industry, to play roles as leaders or professionals, or even as women who work for a living. Research spanning more than 100 countries found that while women represent half of the world's population, 31% (less than a third) of all speaking characters in film are female. 4 out of every 5 filmmakers are male (79% male : 21% female), and 23% of films feature a female protagonist. Additionally new media has added to the media landscape. Roughly half of social media users are women, and while the internet is lauded as a transformative platform for social change, misogyny and abuse are rife online. Cyberviolence has extended the harassment and stalking of women and girls to the online world. In the US 26% of young women aged 18-24 are being stalked online and 25% were targets of online sexual harassment (UN Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20 Online).

At the EU and national level there is a need to implement strategies for change. At EU Level:

- Introduce explicit policies and actions encouraging the media sector to promote and support more women in decision-making positions.

- Make use of the existing indicators for regular monitoring of the advancement of gender equality in media sector.

- Improve awareness of gender equality in the media by disseminating and sharing good practices identified in this area.

- Assure specific funding and support civil societies' initiatives on gender equality in the media.

- Cooperate with the media and civil society organisations on creating a platform and sharing good practices on women and the media.

At national level:

- Adopt a proactive approach to ensure gender equality in media organisations by including equality in the media in national action plans on gender equality.

- Encourage national media regulatory bodies to develop and implement specific policies on gender equality.
- Professional media organisations and associations to act as role models by striving for gender equality in their own internal structures.

The interventions need to approach on two fronts and in two directions:

- **Top down** – policy, legislation & enforcement, regulation, monitoring & training.
- **Bottom up** – media literacy and gender equality training; activism, & advocacy.

Key Publications

Murphy, B. (2017), 'Malta: A critical mapping of women in the media - absences and contested occupancies - from Boardrooms to Broadcasts'. In Ross K. and Padovani C. (Eds.) Gender Equality and the Media: A Challenge for Europe. London: Routledge.

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Murphy B. (2009), 'Gendering the Media: stereotypes at work, strategies for change', In Exploring the Maltese Media Landscape, Eds. J. Borg, A. Hillman and M. A. Lauri, Malta: Allied Publications

Key Reports / Projects:

FEMM Committee Report: Murphy B. (2018) 'Malta – a case study,' In Gender Equality in the Media Sector, Committee on Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), (European Parliament Committee) Media Research – Report, Authors: McCracken, K., FitzSimons, A., Priest, S., Girstmair, S., & Murphy, B.

Murphy B. (2018) Media guidelines for Journalists reporting Domestic Violence

Murphy B. (2015) Global Media Monitoring Project 2015 (GMMP) Nat. Report.
----- (2010) Global Media Monitoring Project 2010 (GMMP) National Report Malta.
----- (2006) Global Media Monitoring Project 2005 (GMMP) National Report Malta.

2013-17 ISCH COST Action IS1210: Appearance Matters – Member of Management Committee and Coordinator in Working Group 5
http://appearancematters.eu/

2013   Advancing gender equality in decision-making in media organisations: Report. Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States: Women and the Media: European Inst. for Gender Equality 2013 Murphy B. (2010) Global Media Monitoring Project 2010 GMMP (Malta), http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/restricted/national/malta.pdf

2006   Portraying Politics: A toolkit on Gender and Television EU funded http://portrayingpolitics.org