



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Women and the Media

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### Comments Paper - Latvia



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# Gender and Media policy and research

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## 1. Relevant Country Context

According to World Economic Forum gender equality report data, Latvia takes the 20th place in gender equality in 2017. Gender equality is a comparatively new concept in Latvia. Latvia regained its independence in 1990. The judicial system had to undergo significant changes within a short time period. Gender equality was not on the top of the priority list in this stressful time. Therefore, Latvia has not yet developed a strict and consistent gender equality policy. The institutional mechanism for gender equality was created in 1999, making the Ministry of Welfare responsible for the development of gender equality policy (Ministry of Welfare, 2014).

In 2017, the Ombudsman of Latvia claimed that gender equality must be encouraged in Latvia, as the salary of males and females still differs by 16,2% (EU average – 16,3%). The priority in Latvia is to ensure an equal representation of genders in spheres like pedagogy or social care, dominated by females, and finance sector, dominated by males (Tiesībsargs, 2017). An improvement must be made to the fact that outside jobs, females dedicate most of their time to family and children, whereas men devote the time to their hobbies and leisurely activities.

Latvia lacks current data and research on gender equality in media organisations, gender stereotype distribution in media content and gender representation in journalism. For instance, Latvia's data is not included in Global Media Monitoring Project, which examines 114 countries. Although media content in gender context is scarcely researched, the existing studies come to the same conclusion as in other countries: that cultural and social traditions often make the gender inequality situation seem normal and appropriate (Zitmane, 2018), thus strengthening the gender stereotypes that source men's employment in politics and business, connecting women's role with family and care.

### 1.1. Media organisations and gender equality

The media environment in Latvia reveals contradictions in gender equality context. On the one hand, Latvia provides free access to media and journalism job market, there are no formal requirements to be employed (education, experience, licence, registration of professional action, being a member of professional associations) (MPM, 2016); since the Soviet reign, media employs more women than men. On the other hand, media lack variety in gender cross-section, as men are more likely to comment socially significant economic and political issues in publications. Latvia's media environment is divided by language, as 35% of Latvia's inhabitants are Russian-speaking (Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and others), consuming media in the Russian language. Assessing media content, it was concluded that Latvian and Russian language media differ not only in journalism schools (Šulmane, 2012) and media responsibility perception (Dimants, 2018), but it was also found that Russian language media include patriarchal discourse even more than the

Latvian language media. Most of the news in media of Latvia are created from a men's interest perspective and addressed towards men (Zitmane, 2018).

According to the Report on the implementation of the Beijing platform for action in the area of Women and the Media (2013) the proportion of women in decision-making positions in the major media organisations in Latvia is slightly more than men (60% and 40%). Analysing the ratio of men and women at different levels of decision-making positions, a tendency is seen - the higher the level of decision-making, the lower representation of women in it. The proportion of women at the highest decision-making level (Member of the Board, President, Director) constitutes 25%, while men - 75% of decision-makers. At the level of chief senior operational managerial positions (chair and members of senior operational board), the proportion of women and men is equal - 50%. At the third level - senior operational management (heads of unit/directorate/specific area of responsibility) the proportion of women constitutes 60%, but of men - 40%. At the fourth and the fifth levels – operational positions (heads of section) the proportion of women constitutes 67% and men – 33%. The proportion of women and men in the public and private media organisations' boards is 50%. This is higher than the EU average (25% and 75%) (Ministry of Welfare, 2014).

Analysis of gender equality aspects between public media board members shows that Latvia takes the 17th position among the EU countries on the European Gender Equality Index. A study revealed that the gender proportion among public media boards in 2015 was the following: 6.7% women, 93.3% - men. Latvia's figures are below the EU average, as they display 32.2% women and 67.8% men in public media boards (Zitmane, 2018).

In 2018, the gender proportion in public media has changed. Latvian Radio board of administration consists of 3 women, whereas in Latvian Television it is 3 men; therefore, the sphere is balanced out. However, the 2016 and 2017 European Media Pluralism research ranked Latvia within the medium-risk group, as public media have no gender equality policy and the legal framework lack a specific gender equality law (MPM, 2016).

Available data provide only a partial information on journalist salaries. In 2016, editor salary was 700-800 EUR, journalist salary was 600-700 EUR. In 2017, a small-scale survey (70 respondents) showed that journalist salaries have not changed: 48% receive 501-1000 EUR before tax, 25% receive up to 1500 EUR, 10% receive a salary higher than 1500 EUR. The journalist average salary in Latvia in 2018 is 627 EUR (Zitmane, 2018). According to the data of Central Statistics Bureau, in August 2018 the average wage in Latvia reached the level of 1000 EUR (including taxes; around 715 EUR after taxes).

The relatively low salary in media sector and the weak social insurance level could be explained by the fact that media and journalism have long been employing mostly women. Many media professionals receive payment as article publication charges (honoraria or authorship fee), which do not subtract social insurance percentage. This means that a lot of journalist income diminishes or disappears in the case of an illness or maternity. Because social insurance payments create the future pension capital, media professionals in Latvia belong to the risk group that can find themselves in a socially disadvantaged status after retiring.

According 2016 research analysing differences in media content created by men and women, some respondents claim that gender plays a significant role and overall

journalism in Latvia is tolerant and soft-spoken because of the many female employees in publishing houses (Rožukalne, 2016). The CEO of a news agency, Sigita Roke, was convinced that Latvia's media has such a large female proportion because of the low-income level, as she has observed that male journalists refuse to do the stressful job and 'sacrifice' themselves to a salary that does not provide for a separate home, and family. Other respondents claimed that a greater importance is attributed to the character of the individual and his/her professional approach instead of gender. However, all respondents view that to an extent, women journalists more effectively reflect social topics, tragic, emotional events (Rožukalne, 2016).

## 1.2. Media content and gender issues

To assess media content regularities in the gender section, data published on October 15, 2018 is useful. The study analyses the representation of gender in political and economic discussion content in Latvian media, both in Latvian and Russian language. The research analyses discussions, interviews, comments, and opinions on the 2017 tax reform (Zitmane, 2018). This topic has been chosen because the European Institute of Gender Equality has pointed out that men dominate in decision-making positions in finance sphere. Males predominantly make important decisions regarding the economic development, monetary stability, employment and development. These important issues affect men and women's lives differently. M. Zitmane, the author of the study (2018), claims that it is the duty of the media to expand and strengthen the society's knowledge about women in finance and economic sphere, as well as the different impact of the decisions on individual needs in gender section (Zitmane, 2018).

Nearly all monitored public media broadcasts have a man as their host or moderator of programs on significant political and economic issues. Diversity is not represented in broadcasts, as women hosted only 15 of 52 analysed broadcasts. The dominance of male experts has been observed in all discussed topics within the research, apart from a broadcast considering an issue concerning orphanages. It shows that childcare in Latvia is a responsibility of women, in society's view. Of the women that were invited to broadcasts as experts, most were journalists viewing the topic or government institution representatives.

Discussions in public media programs in Russian show the proportion of invited participants as follows - 59 males and 23 females. Local government election debate broadcasts had 40 males and 7 females as participants. Politics in Latvian media wear a man's face, as per M. Zitmane (2018). Women are invited to broadcasts concerning child or health care, however politics, economics, external affairs are not women's competencies.

Public radio discussions show a better balance in gender proportion: as experts, 199 men and 109 women were invited to broadcasts. Men in radio broadcasts discuss transport and foreign affair, local government debates are dominated by men. In broadcasts hosted by a woman, men are more frequent guests than women are. Women are mostly invited to partake in radio discussions as government institution and non-governmental organisation representatives, journalists and researchers (Zitmane, 2018).

Reasons for inviting men and women differ in Latvian and Russian broadcasts. In Russian programmes, women are less frequently invited as experts. Women mostly talk about issues regarding care, whereas men pose opinions and explain a variety

of social issues. Researcher pointed out that a host of the broadcast address women as 'girls' or 'nice ladies', lowering their expert status.

Discussions on tax reforms on the radio and TV analyse economic impacts and use men as experts, only one broadcast viewed it on an individual level, mentioning nurses and mothers of large families. Nurses are representatives of all receivers of small salaries. Overall, radio and TV discussions on tax reform are distinctly masculine. Thematically, they concern mostly economics and entrepreneurship, traditionally classified as men's action and competence sphere.

## 2. Policy debate

Latvia has no specific law for discrimination or gender equality. The Article 91 of Civic Basic Rights section of Latvian Constitution claims that human rights are exercised without any discrimination. The general principle of non-discrimination is embedded in all the codes of conduct of journalists' professional ethics. The most significant acts encouraging gender equality are the Labour law and Labour protection law. Latvia lacks a law or suggestion for gender equality in media, politics and entrepreneurship. However, women in Latvia are better represented in decision-making positions than other EU countries. Gender stereotypes are mostly mentioned as the main obstacle to equal representation (Ministry of Welfare, 2014).

Latvia's media policy does not concern gender equality issues. In an indirect way, media environment and employee status could be improved by the support attributed to media in Latvian media politics (2016) guidelines. Since 2017, with the help of Media Support Foundation for high-quality journalism (analytical and investigative journalism, media criticism, media literacy, high-quality regional media content etc), media receives 1.2 to 1.3 million euro each year. This support is especially important to regional media employees, whose salaries are lower than national media and where the 70% of the employees are women. Media support foundation projects create more stable work environment and increase regional media professionals' income. Overall, this support improves high-quality journalism development and increases professional growth opportunities in Latvian media.

## 3. Transferability aspects

There are many aspects, which can be discussed in Latvia to prepare implementation of the beneficial practice of France in gender equality policy. First, the ministries should be urged to consider gender equality in their policy and actions. Specifically, the Ministry of Culture, which represents media policy issues, shall cooperate with the Ministry of Education and Science in promoting both knowledge on mass media functions and roles and creating pedagogical tools for the critical understanding of media operations, contents and effects. Even more, ministries must develop policies that stimulate media literacy content and activities (including gender equality aspects), addressed not only to school children or teachers but including diverse groups of media audiences.

Secondly, although the Labour Law of Latvia includes a general principle of equal rights in labour market (article 7 speaks on anti –discrimination characteristics), the France law of 17th of August should be discussed and implemented in Latvia by defining and using the term "sexist abuse". These aspects refer to responsibilities and competences of Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Welfare.

Thirdly, the good practice of France in media authority competences strengthening can be learned to establish more balanced incentives for gender equality policy. Thus, Latvia could adapt the law similar to the France Gender Equality Policy law of 4 August 2014, which extended the independent regulatory authority High Audiovisual Contents (CSA) regulatory powers. This law provides an opportunity for regular monitoring gender equality in the media and increases the chance of fighting for fair representation of men and women in audio-visual media content, as well as, this document improves understanding of sexism and violence against women in radio and television contents. According to power given by another law – 27 January 2017 law, CSA is in charge of controlling women’s portrayal in advertising.

Considering to the analysis of the Ministry of Welfare (2014) in May 2013, Latvia rejected the European Commission’s proposal to set a target to implement the mandatory minimum for the less representative gender between the board members of joint stock companies, namely 40% to be achieved by 2020. It should be noted that politicians did not support gender quotas. Former president of Latvia Vaira Vīķe – Freiberga, expressed dissatisfaction with gender quotas initiative, naming quotas “humiliating”. Solvita Ābolīņa, speaker of the Parliament, did not support gender quotas, while contributing to the promotion of equality in education of men and women and economic independence (Ministry of Welfare, 2014). This demonstrates that there are many culture-based barriers used by high-level politicians to limit implementation of more detailed and effective gender equality policy in Latvia. Therefore, the experience of France to create High Steering Committee for Gender Equality can be learned in Latvia, as the problems of gender stereotypes and roles are not openly discussed in political sphere in Latvia.

In order to tackle sexism in media, as well as, objectification of women and men in advertising, the experience of France Professional Regulatory Authority for Advertising can be used. There is only one professional non-governmental organisation the Association of Advertising in Latvia, which Committee of Ethics can focus on the issues of professional ethics of advertisement industry players. Even more, as the development of Media Ombudsperson institution of Latvia is in progress in 2018; professional organisations of most important public communication fields could include gender equality issues in the agenda of discussion about Ombudsperson’s responsibilities.

In addition, there is lack of data on gender inequality issues in public communication sphere in Latvia. Therefore, to develop understanding of the situation with women and men stereotypisation and representation in media, sexism in advertising, reasonable support for research projects should be elaborated.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

While developing the state media policy, gender equality aspects must be included, attributing them to public media boards of administration. Public media authority National Electronic Media Council must create and implement public media gender equality policy.

By developing media literacy part of media policy, the Unit of Media Policy at the Ministry of Culture must include extension of society’s education of understanding of media practice that leads to gender stereotypisation, and implement research projects that discover media effects related to gender stereotypes in journalism and advertising.

While planning the studies on media content and media audience, to be commissioned by the Ministry of Culture Unit of Media Policy, include in these studies gender equality research in media content and media organisations.

In collaboration with journalist and advertising professionals' non-governmental organisations, educational programmes on gender communication in media and social media platforms must be created.

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