



**Coverage of Electoral Processes from a  
Perspective of Gender Equality  
Self-Assessment Tool for Media Representatives**

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The content of the document is that of the authors only and does not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the National Democratic Institute.

The self-assessment tool on gender sensitivity proposed within the framework of the document is intended for media representatives and is based on an analysis of the results of monitoring the materials of online and TV media with nationwide and regional coverage and of the focus group discussions held with the participation of journalists covering the elections during the period preceding the elections to the RA National Assembly and local self-government bodies in 2021. It includes a questionnaire that can be used by both journalists and media managers to implement a gender-sensitive self-assessment which will allow developing an understanding of possible gaps that are often left without attention during coverage of electoral processes.

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# 1. Visibility of female candidates in the media: assessment of the situation and trends of dynamics

## Women and mass media: international review

Equal coverage of women and men by mass media is considered one of the important indicators of the level of gender equality in society. It is not accidental that Beijing Platform for Action<sup>1</sup>, one of the fundamental documents on protection of women's interests, mentions among twelve critical areas of concern the area of *Women and the Media*, which sums up all problems related to coverage of women and ways of resolving them. It is noteworthy that the document points out, on the one hand, the necessity of protecting the rights of female journalists working in the area and engaging women at the decision-making level and, on the other hand, the importance of media coverage of women's activities and gender issues, as well as the importance of creating a non-stereotypic image of the woman in the press, regarding media monitoring as the main tool for detecting manifestations of unequal treatment and discrimination.

At the international level, periodic monitoring<sup>2</sup> carried out within the framework of the “Global Media Monitoring Project” (GMMP) is such a tool, the purpose of which is to reveal women's representation in the media coverage of the whole world. Since 1995, the results of six monitoring activities carried out once every five years (in the years of 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2020) have demonstrated very slow progress in the volumes of women's coverage, from 17% (1995) to 25% (2020).<sup>3</sup> According to these results, the world's news streams not only offer a male-centered perspective, but are also striking with their gender bias and stereotypes reinforcing discrimination, sexism, and violence against women<sup>4</sup>. Although the number of countries involved in GMMP monitoring has been increasing every year, reaching 116 in 2020, Armenia has never been covered by this study. At the same time, the results of the media monitoring conducted at the national level are comparable to the data of GMMP monitoring and point to an unbalanced coverage, the existence of stereotypes diminishing women's role, and gaps related to overlooking gender issues. In particular, based on the research results of the past decade, one can state that since 2011 the number of female speakers/experts and actors on online media and in TV production has increased only by 8 points, constituting 11%<sup>5</sup> in 2011, 14%<sup>6</sup> in 2014, and 19%<sup>7</sup> in 2019. This means that the pace of growth has been very slow and does not exceed 1% in a year.

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<sup>1</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action [https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u1281/bdpfa\\_e.pdf](https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u1281/bdpfa_e.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> According to the project's methodology, a simultaneous observation of news streams is carried out in different countries of the world during one day.

<sup>3</sup> Official page of “Global Media Monitoring Project” (GMMP) <https://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-2020-final-reports/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem

<sup>5</sup> Research on Woman's Image in Media, ProMedia-Gender NGO, 2011 [https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Womans-Image-in-Media\\_Full-Report\\_Arm\\_web.pdf](https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Womans-Image-in-Media_Full-Report_Arm_web.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Research on Men and Women in Armenian Media, the Caucasus Institute, 2014 <http://c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/2014-gender-media-monitoring.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Discrimination and Violence on TV and Online Media: How Gender Sensitive the Armenian Media Is, OxyGen, Journalists for the Future NGO, 2019

## Trends in coverage of female candidates

It is worth paying special attention to media monitoring carried out during electoral processes. It serves as an important tool for gauging adherence to the principles of democracy, inclusiveness, pluralism, and transparency in elections. Methodological guides on the conduct of media monitoring during elections, which have been developed by a number of international organizations, including OSCE/ODIHR<sup>8</sup>, National Democratic Institute (NDI)<sup>9</sup>, and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)<sup>10</sup>, include gender-sensitive approaches.

Media monitoring during electoral processes in Armenia does not, as a rule, contain gender components and sex-disaggregated data, in general. For the first time, sex-disaggregated data were introduced in the results<sup>11</sup> of monitoring the coverage of the **2007 parliamentary election campaign**, according to which, the volumes of coverage of female candidates did not exceed 10% fluctuating between 3% to 10% in different media outlets.

Based on the data of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission reports, one can state that during **the 2012 parliamentary elections**, the volumes of coverage of female candidates in mass media did not exceed 5% and during **the 2017 elections**, they did not exceed 9%<sup>12</sup>, at the time when in the 2017 elections, representation of female candidates in the national and territorial candidate lists of the parties made up about 30%.

Media monitoring<sup>13</sup> conducted during **the 2018 snap parliamentary elections** did not include a gender component. However, looking at the data of the monitoring activities on references to political forces and their representatives in mass media, one can state that there were almost no women among the most mentioned political figures, although women's representation in the party national lists made up 32% and in territorial lists 33%. According to the assessment by OSCE/ODIHR observers<sup>14</sup>, *“Parties rarely featured women candidates as central figures in their campaigns. Women candidates only occasionally campaigned on their own and rarely appeared as speakers during campaign rallies.”* In addition, the election observation mission expressed concern about widespread manifestations of hate speech during the campaign, especially about those targeting women candidates, and facts of sex-based derogatory rhetoric with respect to them.

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<sup>8</sup> Handbook On Media Monitoring for Election Observation Missions

<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/0/92057.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections . An NDI Handbook for Citizen Organizations

[https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Media%20Monitoring%20To%20Promote%20Democratic%20Elections\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Media%20Monitoring%20To%20Promote%20Democratic%20Elections_EN.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Election Coverage from a Gender Perspective . A Media Monitoring Manual. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance /IDEA, UN Women. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/election-coverage-from-a-gender-perspective.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Monitoring of Election Campaign Coverage in Armenian Mass Media, the Caucasus Media Institute, 2017

[http://www.caucasusmedia.org/doc/Armenia\\_Final\\_report\\_Am.doc](http://www.caucasusmedia.org/doc/Armenia_Final_report_Am.doc)

<sup>12</sup> OSCE/ODIHR elections observation mission reports: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/1/91643.pdf> ;

<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/7/328226.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Monitoring of Armenian Media Coverage of the December 9, 2018 Snap Elections to the RA National Assembly, Yerevan Press Club <https://bit.ly/3fTLDL3> Results of Media Monitoring during the 2018 Snap Parliamentary Elections: Final Report, *Independent Observer Alliance* [https://uic.am/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/final-report\\_parl-elections.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3JmjON7FjUQC4zIYuiRA6f9ITE1f9gsXzwHFF3OwdGvVHCTN6yZ6EejVI](https://uic.am/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/final-report_parl-elections.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3JmjON7FjUQC4zIYuiRA6f9ITE1f9gsXzwHFF3OwdGvVHCTN6yZ6EejVI)

<sup>14</sup> Armenia, Early Parliamentary Elections, 9 December 2018: Final Report

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia/413555>

The OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission report<sup>15</sup> on **the 2021 early parliamentary elections** does not dwell on the issue of coverage of women candidates, however, it notes that *“despite the 30 percent gender quota, women were notably sidelined in campaign events, rarely participating as speakers. Only 24 out of 153 observed speakers during rallies were women (16 percent), and 51 out of 73 observed campaign events (70 percent) featured no female speaker.”*

The divide between the number of female candidates increasing with each election thanks to the gender quota stipulated by the RA Electoral Code and their coverage volumes has been confirmed also by the results of the [monitoring](#)<sup>16</sup> of the parliamentary and local government elections coverage from a gender perspective conducted within the framework of the project **“Women in Media – Elections 2021.”** According to these results, the visibility of women candidates as speakers in the mass media<sup>17</sup> observed during the parliamentary elections made up only 9% against their 37% representation in the party candidate lists. The visibility of women candidates as speakers in the mass media observed during the local government elections<sup>18</sup> was still lower, making up just 4% against their 34% representation in the party candidate lists.

Overall, the results of monitoring the coverage of women candidates during **at least five parliamentary elections** demonstrate an absence of any progress with their visibility in mass media. Since 2007, women’s visibility in media has not exceeded 10% and that at the time when women’s participation in elections as candidates has increased from 22.6% to 37% over the same period, and the quota ensuring the positive dynamics has increased from 15% to 30%. Hence, this confirms the monitoring conclusion drawn within the framework of the project **“Women in Media – Elections 2021”** that *“the recorded expansion of participation of female candidates thanks to the gender quota stipulated by the RA Electoral Code is not accompanied by an increase in their visibility in mass media.”*

### **Coverage of women/gender issues**

No progress is noticeable in the elections also in terms of coverage of women/gender issues.

According to the data of the monitoring of six online media outlets observed by *Region Center*<sup>19</sup> during **the 2018 parliamentary elections**, the topic of women/gender issues was one of the least mentioned last four topics out of the overall 30 topics covered during the election campaign. In particular, only twelve materials out of the observed 3 607 publications raised the topic of women/gender issues, which makes up 0.3%.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia/413567>

<sup>16</sup> Elections 2021: Women Candidates’ Coverage on TVs and Online Media: Analysis of Monitoring Results: <https://cutt.ly/hPcSYuo>

<sup>17</sup> The 2021 NA pre-election coverage-monitoring sample included four nationwide broadcast and four online media outlets.

<sup>18</sup> The 2021 local self-government pre-election campaign coverage monitoring sample included six broadcasting media with three of them being nationwide TV channels and three TV channels with regional coverage, and three online media outlets for local government elections held on October 17 and November 14. For local government elections held on December 5, the monitoring sample included one nationwide terrestrial TV channel and three regionally broadcast media outlets.

<sup>19</sup> The 2018 Snap Elections and Post-Election Political Agendas on Armenia’s Online Platforms, *Region Center*, <https://bit.ly/2WQsJcA>

In the **2021 snap parliamentary elections**, the topic of women/gender issues was also overlooked, making up 0.1% of the materials on the elections on TV and 0.2% of those on online media.

Although, according to the data of the monitoring activities carried out outside electoral processes in 2019<sup>20</sup>, women's visibility on TV and online media cannot be considered satisfactory (19%), it was higher than during the elections. The same can be stated about the coverage of women/gender issues. These facts demonstrate that consistent work should be done with the media in the periods between elections and, in the context of this approach, recommendations of gender monitoring of other topics covered by Armenian media can also be valuable.

As regards the inclusion of gender approaches in the content agenda of elections, this vision is a necessary part for ensuring the inclusiveness and pluralism of electoral processes and requires united actions by all stakeholders in elections.

## **2. Summary of focus group discussions with journalists covering the elections**

Certain information on the reasons for the low visibility of women candidates revealed by the results of the monitoring carried out within the framework of the project “Women in Media – Elections 2021” has been obtained through the conduct of two focus group discussions with journalists covering the elections.

### **Focus group objectives:**

- To complement the monitoring results with qualitative and cause and effect assessments;
- To reveal positions and opinions of journalists and media on gender aspects of coverage of the elections.

### **Sampling of focus groups and content of discussions**

- The main and mandatory principle for the selection of FGD participants was at least several years of experience covering political processes and, especially, elections, which would enable the journalist to interpret and assess trends in the coverage of female political figures.
- Participants in FGDs related to the coverage of the parliamentary elections were selected from media with nationwide coverage, and in the case of FGDs related to the coverage of the local government elections, it was found expedient to engage the participation of journalists from regionally broadcast media.
- The engagement of representatives of the sampled media in FGDs was meant to help clarify and check the monitoring findings and receive cause and effect explanations for them from journalists.

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<sup>20</sup> Discrimination and Violence on TV and Online Media: How Gender Sensitive the Armenian Media Is, OXYGen, *Journalists for the Future* NGO, 2019 [https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Media-Monitoring-Report\\_Final.pdf](https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Media-Monitoring-Report_Final.pdf)

- The selection of FGD participants was not limited only to the media outlets representing the monitoring sample, which provided an opportunity to compare the differences in the opinions of journalists from the monitored and other media outlets, as well as to generalize the research conclusions.
- Engaged in FGDs were journalists of different sexes. However, female journalists made up the prevailing majority, which reflects the actual gender composition of those involved in journalism.
- FGD questionnaires were compiled based on and in consonance with the research objectives, which allowed specifying the monitoring conclusions.

### **Results of focus group discussions**

The cause and effect analysis of the results of the focus group discussions with journalists covering the elections has helped reveal a number of issues of profound nature, which relate not only to the media field. In particular,

- The visibility of women candidates in media is incomparably lower than the level of the actual participation of women in the electoral processes and this fact is a consequence of lack of gender sensitivity in the work of media and journalists and the absence of gender policies in the media.
- Although journalists objectively admit the existence of problems related to the low visibility of women candidates in mass media, they do not see their share of responsibility for them.
- The problem with low visibility of women candidates in the local government elections should be viewed in unity with other factors for poor coverage of local elections, namely: absence of editorial policies for local government elections coverage, low level of technical, personnel, financial, and other resources at regional media, as well as lack of gender sensitivity among the media and journalists.
- The discourse of gender equality and women's issues is missing in the coverage of the elections and the agendas of political forces, in general. The reasons for that should be first of all sought in the programs of political forces and next in the skeptic attitude of journalists to that topic.
- The evasive behavior of women candidates with respect to coverage, as well as to raising women/gender issues has the same bases: women are afraid of being targeted.
- The political forces running in the elections are not concerned with ensuring broad-based public visibility of women included in their electoral lists and this issue needs to be addressed first of all by political parties.
- The passivity of women candidates during the election campaign can be attributed to a lack of political preparedness, awareness, and skills of interaction with media. This problem requires exertion of joint efforts by political parties, NGOs dealing with women issues, and the media.
- The problem with the low visibility of women in the media during elections is part of the problems related to gender policy implementation by the state and is a consequence of a neglectful attitude in this respect.



- The problems with women's visibility in the media indirectly attest to the overlooking of this problem by NGOs dealing with women issues, as well as to a low level of their cooperation with parties.

Summing up the results of the focus group discussions, one can state that they confirm the necessity of carrying out continuous work with mass media, including periodic media monitoring, in order to enhance gender sensitivity of the media, to present a balanced, non-stereotypic image of women to the public, and to ensure gender-sensitive approaches during elections. At the same time, taking into account the concerns and problems voiced by journalists in their work with women much needs to be done in terms of strengthening women political figures and developing their skills of interaction with media.

### **3. Gender-sensitive coverage of electoral processes: self-assessment questionnaire**

One of the first steps towards ensuring inclusive gender-sensitive coverage of electoral processes can be gender-sensitive self-assessment, which can be done through the questionnaire presented below. This self-assessment tool can be used for both media managers and rank and file journalists. The tool allows developing an understanding of the possible gaps that are often left without attention or are not properly appraised during coverage of electoral processes. The comment "Why is it important?" presented for each question is intended to clarify the essence and importance of the given question. The questionnaire can serve as a basis for creating an electronic quiz, as well as for developing a relevant manual for journalists.

#### **Ten questions that will help assess gender sensitivity of journalists or media outlets**

- 1. Does your media outlet have a specially developed policy for covering elections and, if yes, does that policy include gender-sensitive approaches?**

##### **Why is it important?**

Having a special policy for election coverage means that the media realizes the importance of its role in providing the electorate with unbiased and inclusive information and in shaping public opinion about topics of public significance. The availability of a special policy guarantees that the media outlet pays proper attention to electoral processes of all levels, both parliamentary and local.

The inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches within the policy on elections coverage means that, when covering elections, the media outlet adheres to the principles of pluralism and inclusiveness and shows an unbiased attitude towards candidates not only in terms of their party affiliation but also in terms of their sex.

2. Does your media outlet support the idea of gender equality, carry out a gender-sensitive policy or have gender-sensitive approaches incorporated in its internal regulations?

### Why is it important?

Securing gender-sensitive approaches in the documents regulating the media's activities demonstrates that the given media supports the principle of gender equality, and, therefore, shows a gender-balanced attitude to covering any topic, including electoral processes. Such a policy of the media rules out the possibility of discriminatory manifestations even in those cases when a journalist representing that media is not a bearer of the principle of gender equality.

In addition, securing gender-sensitive approaches in the media's internal regulations is also important because it guarantees equal treatment of female and male journalists working for that media, including in terms of work remuneration and career growth.

Finally, documentary clarification of the attitude towards gender equality by the media guarantees to pay attention to and properly cover gender/women issues, including during elections.

The requirements and criteria defining the media's role and responsibility for the dissemination of the idea of gender equality are based on the recommendations outlined by the Beijing Platform for Action<sup>21</sup> adopted in 1995. Recommendations aimed at ensuring gender-sensitive policy by the media are contained in a number of documents of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and PACE, which view gender equality as the main requirement for human rights and democracy and emphasize the leading role of the media in strengthening and promoting this idea in public perceptions.<sup>22</sup>

3. Does your media outlet have regulations or a self-regulatory mechanism defining criteria of journalistic ethics and do they include provisions ruling out manifestations of discrimination and sexism based on sex and other grounds?

### Why is it important?

In international practice, regulations defining criteria for journalistic ethics contain, as a rule, provisions ruling out sex-based discrimination. For example, the Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists developed by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)<sup>23</sup> requires that *“journalists shall ensure that the dissemination of information or opinion does not contribute to hatred or prejudice and shall do their utmost to avoid facilitating the spread of discrimination on grounds such as geographical, social or ethnic origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, disability, political and other opinions.”*

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<sup>21</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

[https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u1281/bdpfa\\_e.pdf](https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u1281/bdpfa_e.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media  
[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ifj.org/who/rules-and-policy/global-charter-of-ethics-for-journalists.html>

Along with general requirements, developed are also regulations defining principles of gender-sensitive journalism, which are based on the best practices in different countries of the world. Among them are gender-sensitive indicators for the media developed by UNESCO.<sup>24</sup>

4. Do you follow publications of the media monitoring results, do you participate in discussions of these results, do you take into account recommendations made by experts?

### Why is it important?

Periodic media monitoring from a gender-sensitivity perspective is the main tool for revealing manifestations of unequal treatment and discrimination towards women and men and the Beijing Platform for Action<sup>25</sup> emphasizes the importance of this tool. Special importance is attached to the application of this tool during elections, which is attested by methodological guides developed by a number of international organizations for monitoring coverage of electoral processes. As a rule, these guides contain a gender sensitivity component or are created to carry out election observation from a gender perspective. However, the conduct of monitoring is not an end in itself, of no less importance is ensuring the dissemination of the results, discussions about the results, and adoption of the relevant recommendations by the media community and other stakeholders.

5. When covering pre-election sociological research results do you pay attention to or show interest in sex-disaggregated data? When publishing statistical data on election participants do you show interest in or attach importance to whether they are sex-disaggregated?

### Why is it important?

The availability of sex-disaggregated data is an important indicator of gender sensitivity of electoral processes, which allows assessing the level of women's participation in elections, their activism, the chances for their election, as well as to ensure pluralism, to evaluate women's role and to communicate this information to the electorate, thus contributing to the development of public perceptions about the importance of women's political participation.

6. Do you take notice of manifestations of sex-based discrimination, sexism, and hate speech? Do you cover them critically, do you try to point out behavior that goes beyond ethics and help electors understand the inadmissibility of similar phenomena, or do you just present the facts without comments?

### Why is it important?

Manifestations of sex-based discrimination, hate speech, and sexism are the factors hindering women's entry into politics. Journalists' reactions to and positions on these phenomena are an

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<sup>24</sup> UNESCO'S GENDER-SENSITIVE INDICATORS FOR MEDIA

<https://www.media-diversity.org/resources/unescos-gender-sensitive-indicators-for-media/#:~:text=Published%20by%20UNESCO%20in%202012,social%20diversity%20in%20the%20media>

<sup>25</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

[https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u1281/bdpfa\\_e.pdf](https://archive.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/u1281/bdpfa_e.pdf)

important precondition for normalization of the political field and adherence to the rules of a civilized political struggle. This is especially important during elections when electors' preferences and demands are formed with respect to political figures and forces. Simple recording of the facts by journalists is not enough. The community of journalists, thus contributing to the maintenance of the principles of justice, tolerance, and correctness during elections should subject behavior of political figures that goes beyond ethics to criticism. It should be mentioned that there are numerous cases when female journalists become the target of sexism and insults.

The role of journalists is also important in the context of difficulties associated with the public's recognition of sexism manifestations and their evaluation of sexism. In this respect, things to be done by the Council of Europe member states and all institutions and actors that shape the public opinion are best presented in the Recommendation CM/Rec (2019) on preventing and combating sexism<sup>26</sup> adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 2019.

7. Can you claim that discriminatory or stereotypic approaches are absent in your coverage and you show an unbiased attitude when covering female and male candidates?

### Why is it important?

As demonstrated by the results of gender sensitivity monitoring of the Armenian media, the existence of gender stereotypes and approaches continues to remain a problem in media production. Gender stereotypes are often reproduced by journalists at the subconscious level in a way not noticeable to authors. They can be reproduced through the use of generalizations of stereotypic nature (for example, “female happiness,” “male promise), improper mention of and speculations about stereotypic norms on femininity and masculinity especially in debates of political nature, emphasis on the appearance of women political figures, use of stereotypic labels, accentuated references to women's family responsibilities and personal life in conversations with them, as well as through questions of other nature directly unrelated to their political activities, which male interlocutors are usually not asked about. Similar reproduction of gender stereotypes directly or indirectly affirms inequality between sexes, emphasizes women's subordinate status, diminishes their role in politics and the country's development processes, in general. The importance of this issue and the role of the media in overcoming gender stereotypes are emphasized in the fundamental UN documents<sup>27</sup> and later in resolutions and recommendations<sup>28</sup> adopted by the Council of Europe structures, which view gender

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<sup>26</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 <https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894>

<sup>27</sup> UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=60505>, as well as General recommendations CEDAW <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/recommendations.aspx> ; Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action [https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing\\_Declaration\\_and\\_Platform\\_for\\_Action.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> PACE [Recommendation 1931 \(2010\)](#) and [Resolution 1751 \(2010\)](#) Combating sexist stereotypes in the media

stereotypes, sexism, discrimination, violence against women, and inequality as interconnected phenomena and conceptions.

8. You are organizing a debate or conducting blitz surveys of the public opinion. Do you maintain gender proportion among invitees or interviewees? What steps do you take when women candidates refuse to appear on TV or to give an interview? How consistent are you in maintaining the diversity of women's and men's opinions?

### Why is it important?

Adherence to the principles of pluralism and inclusiveness is one of the important preconditions for unbiased coverage of elections. Hence, journalists should be concerned in their work not only about equal coverage of the positions of political forces running in elections but also about the engagement of female and male candidates. This is necessary for presenting women and men's opinions and their contribution to the public discourse on problems of concern to the public, thus promoting the overcoming of stereotypes related to women's political participation. The low visibility of female speakers according to the results of the monitoring of the coverage of women candidates in the 2021 elections demonstrates that journalists do not show initiative and consistency in covering women candidates, attributing that to women's evasive behavior and facts of their refusal to be covered. In terms of public perceptions, important is also the maintenance of visual balance with respect to women's and men's photos in news streams.

9. Do you touch upon the content of pre-election programs of parties in your coverage of elections and their references to women/gender issues? Do you promote the formation of discourse on these issues or prefer to bypass this topic?

### Why is it important?

Consistent and in-depth coverage of the content issues of the elections by the media contributes to raising the level of electoral culture. However, the results of the monitoring of the coverage of the 2021 elections demonstrate that within the framework of the pre-election campaign, candidates touched upon non-programmatic topics related to the process of the elections more frequently than upon programmatic content-rich topics. The covered programmatic topics hardly included gender equality and women issues, both in candidates' statements and in questions and issues raised by the media. Meanwhile, important is not only the issue of shaping discourse on women/gender issues in the political field, which largely depends on parties shaping the political agenda, but also the application of gender-sensitive approaches in the coverage of issues of public significance and presentation of their impact on women and men, which requires certain skills and additional knowledge on the part of journalists. Women candidates too can bridge the gap in the coverage of women/gender issues, however, they often avoid raising issues associated with women's rights being afraid of being targeted.

10. Have you ever cooperated with NGOs and parties on women's participation issues?

### Why is it important?

A positive response to this question means that the journalist or the media appreciate the issue of women's political participation, have a positive experience of covering this issue, and are taking steps to promote the gender equality idea. Thanks to their cooperation with NGOs dealing with women issues, journalists can enhance their knowledge in the area of gender education, receive the necessary information and commentary about gender-sensitive legislation, forms of discrimination, sexism, violence against women, and other issues related to gender inequality. Cooperation with parties can provide an opportunity to smooth out the problems with coverage of women candidates, shaping an atmosphere of trust in their relations with them and allaying their fears of a biased attitude or of being targeted.

#### 4. General principles of future steps

The gender sensitivity self-assessment questionnaire is part of those recommendations, which were made based on the results of the monitoring of the parliamentary and local elections coverage from a gender perspective and focus group discussions.

Taking into consideration the range of revealed problems, recommendations aimed at inclusive coverage of elections by the media and future steps should be addressed not only to journalists, media outlets, and journalistic organizations, but also to other institutions and structures participant in and responsible for elections, which include state structures, NGOs dealing with women issues, political forces, and women political figures.

Accordingly, future steps include a wide range of actions, tools, and mechanisms. Among them are the three most important ones, around which it is possible to provide a wide field of cooperation between the stakeholders of elections:

- **Conduct periodic monitoring of the media gender sensitivity during elections and outside them** and wide dissemination and discussion of the monitoring results;
- **Different initiatives for capacity development and training**, which, on the one hand, are aimed at enhancing the social responsibility of journalists and the media for their gender awareness, expansion of women's political participation, and development of skills of gender-sensitive journalism, and, on the other hand, are addressed to parties aiming to facilitate the development of interaction skills of women political figures with the mass media;
- Introduction of adherence to gender equality and gender sensitivity principles and to the requirement to rule out manifestations of discrimination, hate speech, and sexism into **the behavior of the media in electoral processes, including into the rules of journalistic ethics.**