



## “Women in Politics, Public Administration and Civil Society” Project

### POLICY BRIEF

### ON

### THE ROLE OF PUBLIC POLICIES IN DEVELOPMENT OF NON-STEREOTYPICAL IMAGE OF WOMEN IN MASS MEDIA

## INTRODUCTION

*Creation of a non-stereotypical image of women in mass media is a just one of the issues of the overall concept of gender equality, however, it has a fundamental significance for overcoming discrimination of and bias towards women and for reinforcing the bases of the state’s gender policies.*

*Taking into consideration the fact that contemporary mass media is a powerful institution that affects and shapes the public opinion, the role of mass media in both developing and overcoming stereotypical perceptions can hardly be underestimated.*

*The mass media not only reflect, but also construct a reality through defining certain criteria of life and behavior. In this context, they can impose a distorted perception of women’s role and significance on society by reproducing stereotypes and myths impeding women’s progress. However, the mass media can equally well present a non-stereotypical image of women to the public and help change public perceptions of women’s role and importance. It is another issue, though, as to what extent, today, the mass media are ready to initiate these changes, thus promoting the idea of gender equality and supporting the implementation of the state’s gender policies.*

*Of no less importance are the questions as to what role the state can have in its relations with the mass media regarding this issue, what role it reserves to the mass media from the perspective of implementing its gender policies, and whether it views them as partners...*

## SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

### PART 1. International documents on the role of the mass media in strengthening gender equality

The key role of the mass media in equal coverage of women and men and in presentation of a non-stereotypical image of women to the public is reflected in all basic documents making up the system of women rights protection, particularly in *the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (1979)<sup>1</sup> and *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (1995)<sup>2</sup>, as well as in *Sustainable Development Goals* (2015).<sup>3</sup>

In particular, Article 5 of **the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Convention)**, which touches upon the change of social and cultural models of male and female behavior, obligates the state to take steps to eliminate all those prejudices, customs and practices that are based on the idea of stereotypical roles of men and women. The role and influence of the mass media on shaping the public opinion can hardly be underestimated. Hence, the mass media is that key institution for overcoming gender stereotypes, by means of which it is possible to influence public perceptions and implement the steps recommended in the Convention.

In almost all its concluding observations on Armenia's periodic reports (1997, 2002, 2009, 2016, and 2022), **the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Committee)** have consistently touched upon the implementation of the provisions of Article 5 of the Convention, expressed concern about reproduction of patriarchal positions and discriminatory stereotypes in the media and pointed to the necessity of promoting the positive image of women in the mass media.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://havasari-infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/9\\_UN\\_Convention-on-the-Elimination-of-All-Forms-of-Discrimination-against-Women-CEDAW\\_ARM.pdf](https://havasari-infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/9_UN_Convention-on-the-Elimination-of-All-Forms-of-Discrimination-against-Women-CEDAW_ARM.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://havasari-infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/12\\_BEIJING\\_Declaration\\_and\\_Platform\\_for\\_Action\\_ARM.pdf](https://havasari-infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/12_BEIJING_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action_ARM.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://havasari-infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/1\\_TRANSFORMING-OUR-WORLD-RESOL\\_2015\\_ENG.pdf](https://havasari-infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/1_TRANSFORMING-OUR-WORLD-RESOL_2015_ENG.pdf)

In particular, in its Concluding observations (2022)<sup>4</sup> on the Republic of Armenia's last, seventh periodic report, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended that the state:

- **Develop and implement a comprehensive strategy** with a view to eliminating discriminatory stereotypes on the roles and duties of women and men in the family and society, including the online domain, by targeting community and religious leaders, teachers, girls and boys, women and men;
- **Develop a number of targets and indicators** to measure, in a systematized way, the impact of the undertaken strategic interventions;
- Provide training to relevant public officials and media employees, as well as to representatives of the business sector **to help them get rid of discriminatory gender stereotypes and use gender-sensitive language with a view to combating female objectification and promoting the positive image of women in the mass media as active participants in development.**

The Committee has also recommended that the state undertake measures against manifestations of discriminatory attitudes and hate speech towards women involved in politics. Emphasized is also cooperation with the mass media with the purpose of developing skills of female political actors for conduct of public campaigns.

Issues related to the special role of the media in overcoming gender stereotypes are featured most comprehensively in **the critical area of concern *Women and the Media* of the Beijing Platform for Action**, within the frames of which two strategic objectives are highlighted:

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[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FARM%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FARM%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en)

***1. Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication;***

***2. Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.***

In essence, the Beijing Platform for Action views the critical area of concern *Women and the Media* in two planes, on the one hand, touching upon women's participation and enhancement of their role in the mass media management processes and, on the other hand, targeting the problem of gender-sensitive content of the mass media.

The fifth objective of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>5</sup> relating to gender equality views under one of its targets the expansion of the use of information and communication technologies as a means of promoting women's empowerment.

### *UN regulations for using gender sensitive vocabulary in public written and oral communication*

*In terms of experience of ensuring the principles of gender equality in public written and oral communication, regulations operating inside the United Nations are exemplary. In particular, the UN Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language and other methodological manuals published in six official languages of the United Nations, which are addressed to the employees of the organization, aim at ruling out sex-based discriminatory manifestations under different conditions: in oral and written communication, formal and informal environment, both inside the organization and when communicating with broad public circles. At the heart of this requirement for using gender sensitive vocabulary is the United Nations System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, by which the organization takes up the obligation to rule out gender discrimination in the procedures and actions of all its structures.*

**Source: *Manifestations of Sexism in the Public Domain and Speech*, a Guide, OxYGen , 2020**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://armenia.un.org/hy/sdgs/5>

## *Internationally recognized first definition of sexism*

*In 2019, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 to member states on preventing and combating sexism, within the framework of which an internationally recognized first definition of sexism was given. According to that definition, “sexism is any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behavior based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline.”*

Source: *Manifestations of Sexism in the Public Domain and Speech*, a Guide, OxYGen , 2020  
*Guidelines for gender-inclusive language*  
<https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>

The gender-sensitive policies of the mass media and the role of the media in overcoming gender stereotypes and sexism are in the permanent spotlight of the documents of European structures, specifically, of a number of resolutions and recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). It is noteworthy that the documents of the recent years relate to discriminatory stereotypes and hate speech spread not only through the traditional media outlets, but also through the social media, which is considered a grave challenge to democracy. A special reference is made to that topic also within the context of issues associated with the media in electoral processes.

### **Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**

- CM / Rec (2013) 1 on “Gender Equality and Media”<sup>6</sup>
- CM / Rec (2017) 9 on “Gender Equality in the Audio-Visual Sector”<sup>7</sup>
- CM / Rec (2019) 1 on “Preventing and Combating Sexism”<sup>8</sup>

### **Resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

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<sup>6</sup> [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2013\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media](https://go.coe.int/OWWun)  
<https://go.coe.int/OWWun>

<sup>7</sup> [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2017\)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality in the audiovisual sector](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016807509e6)  
[https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016807509e6](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016807509e6)

<sup>8</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894>

- Resolution 1557 (2007): “The image of women in advertising”<sup>9</sup>
- Resolution 1636 (2008): “Indicators for media in a democracy”<sup>10</sup>
- Resolution 1751 (2010): “Combating sexist stereotypes in the media”<sup>11</sup>
- Resolution 2254 (2019): “Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections”<sup>12</sup>
- Resolution 2256 (2019): “Internet governance and human rights”<sup>13</sup>

Overall, all international documents related to the topic emphasize the responsibility of not only states, but also of the mass media for, on the one hand, poor representation of women and their viewpoints in the media and for, on the other hand, reproduction of stereotypes and dissemination of hate speech. Accordingly, the proposed actions include both implementation of legislative reforms and recommendations relating to application of administrative and self-regulatory tools and to development of relevant programs and policies.

## **PART 2. The role of the mass media in implementation of gender policies in Armenia**

The fact that, as envisioned by **the RA Constitution**, in addition to the provisions relating to the legal equality of women and men (Article 30) and prohibition of discrimination (Article 29), promotion of de facto equality between women and men is one of the main objectives of the state policies (Article 86) obliges by itself the mass media to be guided by the principle of gender equality in their activities.

**The RA Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2013)** touches upon the role of the mass media in the process of implementation of state policies aimed at

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<sup>9</sup> <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17552&lang=en>

<sup>10</sup> Resolution 1636 (2008) Indicators for media in a democracy <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/xref/xref-xml2html-en.asp?fileid=17684&lang=en>

<sup>11</sup> <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=17893&lang=en>

<sup>12</sup> Res. 2254 (2019) Media freedom as a condition for democratic elections <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/25409#trace-5>

<sup>13</sup> Res. 2256 (2019) Internet governance and human rights Principles for a fundamental rights-compliant use of digital technologies in electoral processes [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2020\)037-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2020)037-e)

gender equality by stipulating that *“the mass media outlets support progress with gender equality by disseminating information relating to gender equality in their programs and releases”* (Article 17).

The law also prohibits making an offensive and derogatory public statements about persons based on their sex, including through the mass media outlets (Article 6), and secures the right of civil society to carry out advocacy for gender equality provision through the mass media outlets (Article 17).

In line with the goals outlined by international documents, the importance of creating a non-stereotypical image of women in the mass media is also reflected in **the Republic of Armenia Concept Paper on Gender Equality (2010)**<sup>14</sup>:

*“Implanting positive perceptions of gender equality and of an image of female leaders in the public consciousness through the mass media, educational system and other institutions of socialization by means of providing information on gender equality policies.”*

**The 2019-2023 Strategy on Implementation of Gender Policies in the Republic of Armenia and its Action Plan** touches upon the role of the mass media within the framework of its fifth priority on Prevention of Gender Discrimination:

*“Increasing the gender sensitivity of the mass media, including through incorporation of a gender component in professional education and training of journalists.”*

**The section on *Corresponding Actions* of the same document envisions:**

- Incorporation of issues on gender equality in annual activities in the area of disaster risk management, preparation of materials on them and their dissemination through mass media;
- Organization of special training courses on gender equality for representatives of the mass media;
- Enhancement of gender sensitivity of the mass media.

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<sup>14</sup> [https://www.gov.am/u\\_files/file/kananc-xorh/Gender-hayecakarg.pdf](https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/kananc-xorh/Gender-hayecakarg.pdf)

**In the section on *Anticipated Results*, it envisions:**

- Increase in gender sensitivity through the mass media and improvement of understanding of the legal equality of the sexes.

**In terms of the indicators of the *Strategy Performance*, it is envisaged that:**

- Special training courses on gender equality are conducted for mass media representatives with the indicator for the number of participants in the courses of each successive year exceeding the indicator of the preceding year by at least five per cent and after each training course the awareness about gender topics of at least 70% of the trainees being higher than before the course.
- Prepared and broadcast are TV programs and film series with gender-sensitive content and their number is increasing every year.

It is noteworthy that the action plan, having certain expectations from the mass media, does not view the mass media as a partner or a co-implementing structure, with the help of which the envisioned activities will be carried out and a large-scale awareness of gender equality will be achieved; whereas non-governmental organizations are noted in the plan as co-implementing entities for a number of activities. The only exception is the Public TV Council, which is mentioned as a co-implementing entity in increasing the gender sensitivity of the mass media. Taking into account the scope of the powers of the Council, it is assumed that the Public Television Company will simply set an example for other mass media outlets. The noted gap in reality demonstrates the imperfection of the state-mass media cooperation.

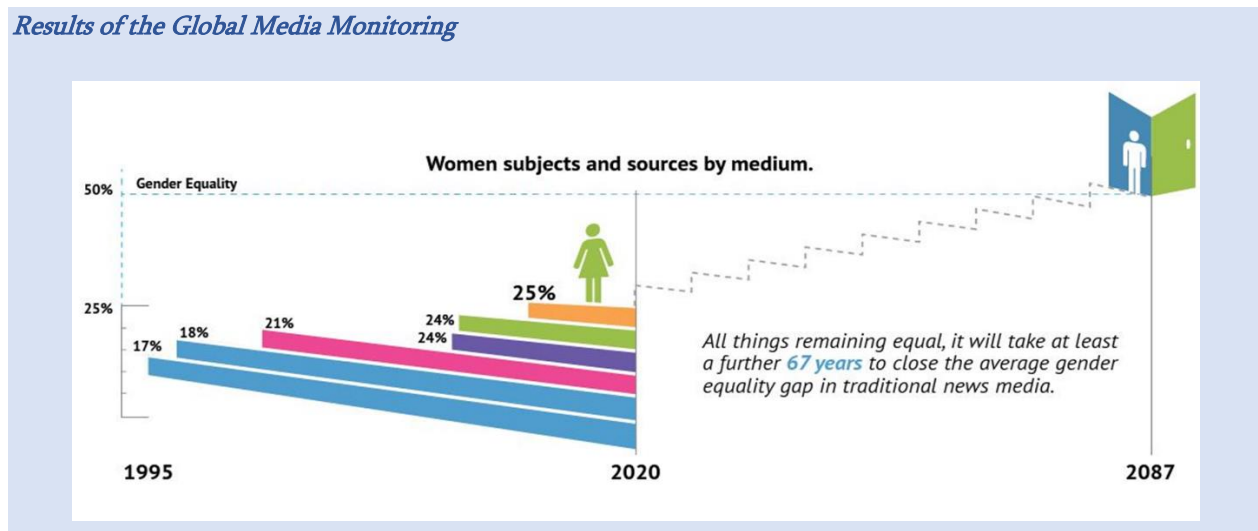
### **PART 3. Media monitoring as a tool to measure the gender sensitivity of the mass media**

The Beijing Platform for Action attaches importance to the media monitoring as a main tool for revealing unequal attitude and manifestations of discrimination. For this very purpose, immediately



after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, *Global Media Monitoring Project* (GMMP) was created, within the framework of which every five years since 1995, periodic monitoring<sup>15</sup> has been conducted to reveal women's representation in the coverage of the mass media world-wide.

### *Results of the Global Media Monitoring*



*Since 1995, the results of six monitoring activities (1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2020) have demonstrated an extremely slow progress in the volumes of women coverage: from 17% in 1995 to 25% in 2020.<sup>16</sup>*

*According to these results, the news streams of the world not only present male-centered opinions, but also are also conspicuous by their gender bias and stereotypes reinforcing discrimination, sexism, and violence against women.<sup>17</sup>*

*According to expert assessments, if this pace of change is maintained, it will take at least 67 years to ensure equal coverage of women and men.*

*Although the number of countries involved in the GMMP monitoring has been increasing each year reaching 116 in 2020, Armenia has never been involved in this study.*

<sup>15</sup> The methodology of the Project provides for simultaneous monitoring of news streams in different countries of the world during one day.

<sup>16</sup> The official website of the *Global Media Monitoring Project* (GMMP), <https://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-2020-final-reports/>

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem

The results of the media monitoring conducted in Armenia are comparable with the data of the GMMP monitoring and point to an unbalanced coverage, presence of stereotypes derogating women's role and gaps linked with disregard for gender issues. In particular, based on the research results of the past ten years, one can state that since 2011 the general volumes of women coverage have not exceeded 20% with the number of female speakers/experts on online media and in the productions of TV channels increasing only by seven percentage points and making up 11%<sup>18</sup> in 2011, 14%<sup>19</sup> in 2014 and 19%<sup>20</sup> in 2019.

*According to the results of the monitoring conducted in Armenia in 2011-2019, the number of female speakers/experts on online media and in the production of TV channels has increased only by seven percentage points, making up:*

*11% in 2011*

*14% in 2014*

*19% in 2019*

Although the review of the literature relating to the topic allows concluding that there have been few non-periodic and different methodology-based media monitoring activities in Armenia<sup>21</sup>,

<sup>18</sup> *The image of women in media*, research, the ProMedia-Gender NGO, 2011,

<https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Womans-Image-in-Media-Full-Report-Arm-web.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> *Men and women in Armenian media*. research, the Caucasus Institute, 2014, <http://c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/2014-gender-media-monitoring.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> *Discrimination and violence on TV and news websites: how gender-sensitive Armenian media is*, OxyGen, the Journalists for the Future NGO, 2019, <https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Media-Monitoring-Report-Final.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> - *The image of women in media*, research, the ProMedia-Gender NGO, 2011,

<https://armenia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Womans-Image-in-Media-Full-Report-Arm-web.pdf>

- *Men and women in Armenian media*. research, the Caucasus Institute, 2012, <http://c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/2012-Men-and-Women-in-Armenian-media-CI-UNDP-eng-PB.pdf>

- *The image of Armenian women in mass media (TV): from gender sensitivity to gender stereotypes*, research, Yerevan State University, 2015, <http://www.y-su.am/files/Lilit%20Shakaryan%20-%20ARM.ENG%20Report.pdf>

- *Masculinity and gender-based violence in Armenian TV series*, Yerevan State University, 2014, <http://www.y-su.am/files/Reserch%20paper%2003.09.2014..pdf>

- *Discrimination and violence on TV and news websites: how gender-sensitive Armenian media is*, the Journalists for the Future NGO, UNDP/OxyGen, 2019, <https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/%D5%81%D5%A5%D5%BC%D5%B6%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AF.pdf>

- *Elections 2021: Women candidates' coverage on TV and online media, analysis of monitoring results*, the Journalists for the Future NGO, NDI/OxyGen, 2021, <https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final-Report-Coverage-of-female-candidates-Elections-2021-ARM.pdf>

their results have allowed to make a number of revelations about problems of quantitative and qualitative nature present in the media publications and broadcasts:

- Women's low representation and discriminatory coverage in news streams;
- Few references to gender issues;
- Deliberate reproduction of and speculations about sexism, violence against women, manners offending and derogating women, and stereotypical viewpoints in TV series;
- Women's stereotypical portrayal and objectification in advertising.

In fact, in spite of some positive dynamics recorded over the last years, the volumes of women coverage in news streams are significantly smaller than those of men and do not exceed 20%, which shows that women's expert or professional opinions continue to be neglected in many cases, and, in terms of content, the image of women presented to the public is often based on reproduction of stereotypes and discriminatory norms, thus impeding women's advancement and their full participation in the country's development processes.

Striking among the conducted research are trends of female candidates' coverage in electoral processes, which are a mandatory part of the media monitoring carried out by international observation missions.

Based on the data of the reports of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions on a number of parliamentary elections, one can state that:

- ✓ Since 2007, women's visibility in Armenian media **has not exceeded 10%** and that at a time when
- ✓ Women's participation in the elections as candidates **has increased from 22.6% to 37%** over the same period, and
- ✓ The quota providing for this positive dynamics has increased **from 15% to 30%**.

Year of the NA elections	Volume of female candidates' coverage	Female candidates in proportional lists	Percentage of the gender quota
2007	3-10%	22.6%	15%
2012	5%	22.8%	20%
2017	9%	30%	25%
2018		32%	25%
2021	9%	37%	30%

The noted regularity is also confirmed by the research on *Elections 2021: Women Candidates' Coverage on TV and Online Media, Analysis of Monitoring Results*,<sup>22</sup> according to which, the recorded significant increase in female candidates' participation in the parliamentary and self-government elections thanks to the gender quota defined by the RA Electoral Code has not been accompanied by increase in their visibility in the mass media.

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<sup>22</sup> *Elections 2021: Women candidates' coverage on TV and online media, analysis of monitoring results*, [https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final\\_Report\\_Coverage-of-female-candidates\\_Elections-2021\\_ARM.pdf](https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final_Report_Coverage-of-female-candidates_Elections-2021_ARM.pdf)

For example, the visibility of female candidates as speakers made up only 9% at a time of their 37% representation in the candidate lists of the running political forces, and during self-government elections, coverage of women candidates did not exceed 4% at a time of their 34% representation in the candidate lists of the running political forces.

In addition to the concern about poor coverage of women in the elections, in their reports on the last two elections the OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions have expressed concern about prevalence of hate speech during the campaigns and especially about targeting female candidates and the cases of the sex-based derogatory rhetoric about them.<sup>23</sup> The existence of the problem is also confirmed by the results of local monitoring activities and by the PACE assessments in its resolution on the *Functioning of democratic institutions in Armenia*.<sup>24</sup>

In reality, the problem is manifested in the domain of social networks and is not regulated by the legislation in effect.

The attempt to criminalize serious insult, which the authorities initiated in 2020 through introduction of changes in the RA Criminal Code,<sup>25</sup> did not lead to the anticipated results and was declared null and void under the pressure of international and

#### *According to the mass media monitoring results*

- Although during **the 2021 RA NA elections**, female candidates made up **37%** of the party candidate lists, and during local government elections **34%** of the party candidate lists, their visibility during the NA pre-election campaign was just **9%**, and during the local elections even less: **4%**.

- **During the 2021 RA NA elections**, in the coverage of candidates on the observed TV airtime only one out of every ten speakers was a woman, and on online media only one of every twelve speakers.

- **During the 2021 local government elections**, on the observed TV companies' airtime male candidates as speakers (whose direct or indirect speech was cited) were allotted overall 6.5 hours, whereas female candidates 0.3 hours, which makes up 1.5% of the overall time allotted for candidates' speech.

- **During the 2021 local government elections**, the coverage of female candidates as speakers on the observed online media made up 6.3%, and as actors (someone the source talks about or the material is devoted to) 7% as compared to 93% coverage of men.

[https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final\\_Report\\_Coverage-of-female-candidates\\_Elections-2021\\_ARM.pdf](https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final_Report_Coverage-of-female-candidates_Elections-2021_ARM.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia/413567>  
<https://www.osce.org/hy/odihr/elections/armenia/413564?download=true>

<sup>24</sup> PACE resolution 2427(2022) “The functioning of democratic institutions in Armenia”  
<https://pace.coe.int/en/files/29803#trace-3>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=141919>

local human rights structures, which evaluated the criminalization of the offence as a serious setback in the area of democracy and freedom of speech.

The solutions to these problems lie in the field of ensuring inclusive elections, which requires joint efforts by all stakeholders participating in elections, and the mass media can have an important role in similar joint formats.

According to the monitoring assessments of the content of the mass media production, gender-sensitive releases are exceptional during both electoral processes and other periods, which can be explained by the lack of gender sensitivity among journalists and absence of gender policies in the mass media.

### *Media coverage of women/gender issues*

*- According to the monitoring data obtained by "Region" NGO through observation of six online media during the 2018 parliamentary elections, women/gender issues out of the 30 topics raised during the campaign were among the least mentioned last four topics. In particular, the topic of women's gender issues was covered in twelve materials out of the observed 3607 publications, which made up 0.3%.*

*- According to the data of the monitoring conducted in 2019, insufficient number (7.4%) of sensitive publications on gender issues and passive or cursory coverage of the topic is due to the fact that it is not ranked among priorities of the journalistic field and continues to be overlooked by the media.*

*- During the 2021 early parliamentary elections, the topic of women/gender issues was also disregarded making up 0.1% of the materials on the elections on TV and 0.2% of the materials on online media.*

[https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final\\_Report\\_Coverage-of-female-candidates\\_Elections-2021\\_ARM.pdf](https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final_Report_Coverage-of-female-candidates_Elections-2021_ARM.pdf)

The scarcity of gender-sensitive publications revealed by the mass media monitoring results, the passivity of journalists with regard to the topic is due to the fact that the topic is not ranked among the journalistic priorities and one of the reasons for that is lack of gender education among journalists.

In this respect, noteworthy are also the recently developed guides<sup>26</sup> and interactive tools on increasing gender sensitivity of journalists, which can be used in gender training of journalists noted within the framework of the state gender policies.

On the other hand, the existence of this problem is determined by non-sensitive policies of the media. Although the *RA 2019-2023 Strategy for Implementation of Gender Policies* envisions certain activities for increasing the gender sensitivity of the media, these activities have not yet produced any results and should be accompanied by application of other mechanisms.

Taking into consideration that the state's gender policy implementation strategy aims, among other things, at incorporating a gender component into professional education and training of journalists, it is expected that gender-sensitive approaches will be applied by the Commission on Television and Radio (CTR), a state body regulating the activities of audio-visual media, in its work.

However, 1) monitoring activities carried out by the Commission do not contain a gender component and no special gender monitoring is conducted or envisioned; 2) the composition of the Commission is far from being gender balanced, its powers are limited in terms of responding to the media productions containing discriminatory content about women. Meanwhile, the Commission is the only public body, through which the state can promote the idea of developing a non-stereotypical image of women in the mass media.

On the other hand, commendable is the cooperation between CTR and Ethics Observatory of the mass media, which was secured by signing a memorandum at the beginning of 2022 and is aimed at providing expert support on issues of professional ethics in the sector of audio-visual media and at improving the rules of ethics.

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<sup>26</sup> *Manifestations of sexism in the public domain and speech*, UNDP/OxYGen, 2019, <https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/%D5%81%D5%A5%D5%BC%D5%B6%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AF.pdf>  
*Coverage of electoral processes from a gender equality perspective: self-assessment tool for media representatives*, the *Journalists for the Future* NGO, NDI/OxYGen, 2022, [https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Gender-Sensitive-Self-Assessment-Tool\\_for-Media\\_ARM.pdf](https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Gender-Sensitive-Self-Assessment-Tool_for-Media_ARM.pdf)

## PART 4. Peculiarities of legislative regulations

Among a number of laws regulating the media sector of Armenia gender-sensitive provisions are contained in *the RA Law on Audiovisual Media*,<sup>27</sup> which was adopted in 2020 to replace the formerly effective *RA Law on Television and Radio*, as well as in *the RA Law on Advertising*,<sup>28</sup> Article 8 of which prohibits advertisements containing expressions, comparisons, and images offensive to race, nationality, profession or social origin, age group or sex, language, religious and other beliefs.

At the stage of discussing the bill on Audiovisual Media, proposals of interested NGOs on gender-sensitive provisions were accepted only partially and relate to the prohibition of abuse and the status of public broadcasters and the principles of their activities.

The RA Law on Audiovisual Media also stipulates the requirement of ensuring gender representation in the composition of the Council of the Public Broadcaster Council (Point 2, Article 23) and the Commission on Television and Radio (CTR), a regulatory state body (Point 1, Article 35), however, the proportion of the sexes is not specified. Consequently, the seven-member compositions of the Council of the Public Broadcaster and the Commission on Television and Radio include only one female each.

### *The RA Law on Audiovisual Media*

#### **Article 9. Prohibition of Misuse of Audiovisual Programs**

7. Audiovisual programs that pursue or contain information that promotes discrimination based on national, racial, gender and religious affiliation shall be prohibited.

#### **Article 22. Status of Public Broadcasters and Principles of the Activities thereof**

6. Public broadcasters shall be obliged:

c. To provide such programs to the consumers, which are aimed at overcoming stereotypes including features of national, racial, religious and gender discrimination.

#### **Article 57. Fine**

12. Audiovisual programs of erotic nature and films containing horror and apparent violence, as well as violation of requirements for broadcasting of audiovisual programs having potential negative impact on health, mental and physical development, and education of minors shall entail imposition of a fine in the amount of 0.02 per cent of the Revenue, but not less than four hundred-fold of the fixed minimum salary.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=145079>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docid=145079>



The gender proportion is closer to equality in the composition of the Ethics Observatory of the mass media<sup>29</sup> operating as a self-regulatory initiative since 2007 and including five women among its 14 members.

Evaluating the legislation in effect from the perspective of ensuring gender sensitivity of the mass media, one can note that an exceptional case was recorded when in response to the complaint letter addressed by human rights NGOs to the Commission on Television and Radio, a media outlet was fined based on Article 57 of the RA Law on Audiovisual Media for preaching violence against women. In many cases, discriminatory content broadcast by the media remains beyond the scope of powers of the Commission on Television and Radio.

Another exceptional case was recorded with respect to the activities of the Ethics Observatory of the mass media when responding to the complaint letter of human rights activists about scenes of violence against women in a TV series, the Observatory, within the scope of its mission, came up with a statement, which expressed concern about the actions, motivations and manner of speaking of the main characters portrayed in the TV series, which are implanted in TV viewers as “accepted” behavioral models.

No similar precedents have been recorded based on the RA Law on Advertising and the RA Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in terms of ensuing consequences because of violating their provisions on prohibition of discrimination, offence, and sexism.

Outside of legislative regulation is also information disseminated via Internet, which requires special mechanisms for ruling out discrimination, propaganda of violence, sexism, and hate speech.

The unsuccessful attempt of criminalization of heavy offence undertaken in Armenia in 2020 and subsequently rejected have made it a pressing issue of the day to seek effective regulations against dissemination of hate speech, propaganda of violence, discrimination, offence, and disinformation. In this respect, of importance are different formats of cooperation between the journalistic community and state structures. For example, there are certain positive expectations from the tripartite

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<sup>29</sup> <https://bit.ly/3ViQGHj>

memorandum of cooperation<sup>30</sup> signed by the RA Ministry of Justice, the RA NA Standing Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport and journalistic organizations within the context of the recent legislative reforms aimed at improvement of the informational field. As it is noted in the memorandum, it aims to pursue modernization of the policies for development of the media sector and improvement of legislation regulating the activities of the media in response to contemporary challenges and in line with the new conditions for advancement of telecommunication technologies through application of international best practices and norms.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.moj.am/article/3141>

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above noted observations, one can conclude the following:

- Although the RA Constitution recognizes promotion of de facto equality between women and men as a state policy objective, the mass media, as the most important institution shaping the public opinion, do not yet feel responsible for assisting in attainment of that goal.
- In its steps taken towards implementation of gender policies, the state regards the mass media, unlike NGOs, as an addressee of gender education or beneficiary and not as a partner or co-implementing entity envisioned by the action plan.
- The 2019-2023 RA Strategy for Implementation of Gender Policies and its Action Plan disregard mechanisms promoting gender sensitivity of the mass media and award-giving by the state and do not envision relevant advocacy campaigns with participation of the mass media in spite of the fact that successful examples of such campaigns have been recorded in the struggle against sex-selective abortions. The awareness raising of the public about the idea of gender equality through the mass media is noted in the plan only as an anticipated result. The role of the mass media is limited in the action plan to their preparing and disseminating materials on gender equality in the area of disaster risk management.
- In essence, instead of the direct state-mass media partnership development, the preference is given to mediated cooperation through engagement of NGOs or international structures.
- In many cases, the expert or professional opinion of women continues to be neglected, and in terms of content, the image of women presented to the public is often based on reproduction of stereotypes and discriminatory norms, thus impeding women's progress and their full participation in the country's development processes.
- The voice of women political actors is not audible in electoral processes, the volumes of coverage of female candidates do not match their representation in party candidate lists and these problems are not regulated by the electoral legislation.
- The scarcity of gender-sensitive publications revealed by the results of media monitoring can be explained by both lack of gender education among journalists and non-sensitive gender policies of the media outlets.

- The media monitoring by the Commission on Television and Radio does not contain a gender component, especially as no special gender monitoring is conducted or envisioned.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- To carry out periodic monitoring to reveal gender sensitivity of the mass media and the image of women in the media and introduce the practice of publicizing and discussing the monitoring results.
- To conduct gender mainstreaming of the legislation regulating the sector, relevant national programs, as well as of the activities of the Commission on Television and Radio, including its regulations and monitoring methodology.
- To specify, in the RA Law on Audiovisual Media, the gender proportion in the compositions of the Commission on Television and Radio and the Council of the Public Broadcaster securing at least 30% women's representation in these bodies.
- Apply the practice of state sponsorship with a view to shooting TV series featuring non-stereotypical images of women, gender equality, equal distribution of family duties, and other issues of the state's gender policies.
- To offer education and training programs on increasing gender sensitivity of journalists.
- Introduce encouragement mechanisms for mass media outlets carrying out gender-sensitive policies.
- To organize award giving to the mass media for the best coverage of gender issues.
- To introduce the principles of gender equality and gender sensitivity, as well as requirements for ruling out manifestations of discrimination, hate speech, and sexism in the rules on journalistic ethics, in particular in *the Code of Ethical Principles of Armenia's Media and Journalists* of the Ethics Observatory of the Mass Media.
- To encourage and initiate different cooperation formats with the mass media with a view to organizing discussions on hate speech, sexism, propaganda of violence, and other gender issues.
- To analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of the 2019-2023 RA Strategy on Gender Policy Implementation and its Action Plan to reveal problems associated with fulfilment of the provisions on the mass media.

- To encourage initiatives aimed at the institutional development of the self-regulatory system on the mass media ethical and professional issues.
- To take steps towards studying the international experience on the topic of concern and towards implementation of the RA international obligations.

**This policy brief has been prepared based on an analysis of the results of the research carried out in Armenia over the recent years and reflects the viewpoints of the project's experts, as well as of participants in policy dialogue events held in Yerevan and the RA marzes.**

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