

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

# CHANGING THE NARRATIVE OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

An overview of the various features of gender-based discrimination in the media

**MA Valbona Sulçe Kolgeci**  
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Improving the working environment of journalists, respecting labour rights and empowering women and girls in having leadership positions in the media.



Media self-regulation through strengthening of journalists and women's organizations in the media to build strategic plans in order to improve gender reporting.



Strengthening the rules for audio-visual operators regarding gender discrimination and sexism in the media accompanied by media education of audiences.

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## 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This publication aims to provide an overview of the various types of gender-based discrimination in Albanian media, along with some suggestions to help remedy the situation.

Two issues are closely intertwined with one another – on the one hand, the genuine portrayal of gender in the media, and on the other the features of the gender discrimination of female professionals in the media sector. A working environment in which its own professionals are discriminated due to their gender, cannot possibly produce media pieces that are free from prejudice and discrimination. Studies around the world have shown that editorial boards are dominated by an inherently male culture, that is an impediment for a balanced portrayal of women in the news. Some academic and media reports have shown that male and industry biases are ubiquitous in media companies, and that they are embraced by both men and women alike. Therefore, one's professional identity prevails over one's gender identity, hence the reason why even in media companies with an overwhelming majority of female journalists, there is a lack of good gender-balanced reporting.

For years, sexism in the media and the lack of professional reporting on gender-based issues, in particular domestic violence and the trafficking of girls and women, has been a concern that has been covered by studies and articles, although these were indeed far and few. Numerous efforts have been made to train journalists on improving how they report gender-discrimination in the media. Nevertheless, results have not met expectations, and the process has been very slow in yielding results. The main reason for this is because senior management, such as editors, editors-in-chief, directors of information, etc, have neither been involved themselves, nor have they shown any particular will to improve gender-based reporting. Other than RTSH, the national public broadcaster (Albanian Radio-Television), media company's Steering Boards have no editorial policies in writing, and they fail to comply with or respect the Journalist's Code of Ethics.

On the other hand, awareness-raising efforts have focused primarily on journalists alone, thus leaving aside all others who work in the media sector, in TV stations, in

particular, such as talk show programmes, or programmes with a single author, which play a very important role in strengthening harmful gender stereotypes. Neither the Albanian School of Journalism, nor the Academy of Arts/film schools have any consolidated curricula on gender-sensitive reporting, despite the fact that they account for the new and future generations of media professionals. In so far as the legal framework is concerned, the Audio-visual Media Authority, the regulatory body, does not seem to be clear about, nor does it have the capacities to monitor the situation in this regard, as such allowing plenty of scope for the continuous portrayal of girls and women as sex objects in advertisements, too. Girls and women make up more than 60 per cent of the labour force in the media sector, and yet, due to weak trade union and/or gender structures, they have been unable to impose themselves as a very important interest group.

This clearly shows the lack of genuine policies to address this very important matter for the whole of the public discourse in Albania. The experience and practices of developed countries suggest the need for a well-thought-out and a well-coordinated, in particular an intentional approach amongst all media stakeholders so as to enable changing the narrative on girls and women in the media.

### THEREFORE, THREE THINGS OUGHT TO BE DONE:

1. Improving the working environment of female journalists, monitoring the implementation of the Labour Code, the Law on Protection from Discrimination, and clear policies are put in place to fight gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment.
2. Empowering girls and women to take on senior roles and positions in the media sector. No-one else but those in senior positions can affect editorial policy or media content. The more women there are in senior management positions, the better it is for both the media and society at large. In addition, a new management style is required, one in which gender equality is not an appendix but a fundamental part of the development cycle of the organisation.

3. Strengthening female journalists' organisations, along with organisations of women working in the media sector, so they are capable of drafting strategic plans in order to improve gender issues/reporting. The Code of

Ethics should be changed to include sexism as an ethical violation, strengthening the rules for audio-visual operators on the phenomenon of gender discrimination and sexism in the media.

## 2

## THE MEDIA IN ALBANIA – GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Albanian media landscape is quite dynamic and rather plentiful in numbers, although the numbers themselves do not necessarily mean diversity and abundance of content, too. Although the print media seems to be on the decline, despite covering international news, there are nonetheless 18 daily newspapers for a population of fewer than three million people living here. The financial standing of audio-visual media outlets is seemingly better than the print media's, whilst the number of radio and television stations per capita is rather high. The Audio-visual Media Authority records 51 local radio stations, 4 community radio stations serving the larger religious communities in the country, 2 privately-run national radio stations, and the national public radio station which has its own local stations in four districts. There are also 45 local TV stations, 87 cable TV stations, 5 nation-wide digital platforms with their respective programmes, and the public broadcaster's own digital platform of 12 channels.

In the past few years in particular, there has been a considerable increase of online media portals. As they are not obliged to register with the authorities, there is no exact information as to their numbers, although the Union of Albanian Journalists estimates these numbers to be around 800. The proliferation of online media has been due to both technological developments and improvements in internet access across the country. According to World Internet Statistics, internet penetration in Albania reached 73.5% in June 2019,<sup>1</sup> whilst the National Telecommunications Regulatory Body reports that in the third quarter of 2019 the number of active broadband internet users from mobile networks on T4 was close to 1.7 million. Similarly, the use of social media has gone up considerably, with Facebook topping the list with 1.4 million users<sup>2</sup>.

The statistics on the one hand, and the fact that there are no impediments to use any media of any sort in the country on the other, clearly indicate the huge diversity of alternatives available to the public when it comes to the medium of their choice.

Hence, in 2019, INSTAT conducted a survey of 16,000 people<sup>3</sup> in 2019, which showed that television dominates media consumption in Albania – 91% of women and 88% of men watch television at least once a week. “Watching news, soap operas and political debates is a very important pastime for Albanians. Other sources of information are newspapers (17% of women and 25% of men read newspapers at least once a week) and the radio (15% of women and 30% of men listen to the radio at least once a week). Only 8% of women and 10% of men are not exposed to any of three traditional media.” The survey also found that internet is widely used, and that men use it more than women (84% vs. 73%).

According to another report,<sup>4</sup> television is also the most trusted medium, followed by radio, newspapers, online media and social media. TV audiences are reportedly made up of mostly less educated viewers and the elderly.

Audio-visual media ownership is highly concentrated; mostly in 4 family-owned businesses who also own other types of media, such as newspapers, online media portals, publishing houses, recording labels, advertising companies, and other important businesses in the construction industry, higher education, production of beer, health, etc. These links make the said companies truly dependent on government tenders, thus undermining their independence. Another feature is the large number of 24/7 news channels – there are more

1 <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm#europe>

2 <https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa2.htm#al>

3 <https://www.monitor.al/anketimi-i-instat-nentë-nga-dhjetë-shqip-tarë-janë-të-ekspozuar-ndaj-mediave/>

4 <http://www.institutemedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Imazhi-i-Medias-te-publiku-dhe-media-trust-ne-Shqiperi.pdf>

than 7 such channels, whilst television stations of a more general nature do provide a rather large amount of time to political talk shows. Political control over news agencies, media companies and network distributions is also considered high.

Since the fall of communism in 1991, Albania has continuously been rated as a partly free country in the annual rankings of organisations monitoring political rights and civil liberties.<sup>5</sup> The media sector has experienced rapid growth in terms of technology and work equipment. The number of people working in this sector has increased continuously, with new online media springing up, creating the perception of a pluralistic media market. In reality, journalists have had to deal with quite a few work-related issues, such as the non-formalisation of employment, and/or failure to comply with contracts when in place, remuneration and other related factors, disregard for working conditions, unfair

dismissals, job uncertainty following work-related threats, etc. All of these combined have adversely affected the sector. For instance, 2019 was the first year since 1991 with a drop in the number of people working in the media sector (down to 5,900 from 6,200). The main reason is the closing of some media businesses, although it is also related to journalists abandoning the profession because of their disaffection with working conditions. In addition, due to the digitalisation process<sup>67</sup> cuts are expected to take place, with some local media also closing their doors. Some studies<sup>8</sup> in 2018-2019 have also highlighted the difficulty of being employed in the media sector because of the lack of formal employment contracts, delays in salary payments and low wages. As of March 2020, the situation due to COVID-19 has worsened for some media businesses in Albania, with cuts in the number of personnel and decreasing the number of programmes they broadcast. The media sector was not part of the government's stimulus pay-out during the first lockdown.

5 [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/feb2019\\_fh\\_fitw\\_2019\\_reportforweb-compressed.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/feb2019_fh_fitw_2019_reportforweb-compressed.pdf)

6 [http://www.osfa.al/sites/default/files/peizash\\_i\\_medias\\_online.pdf](http://www.osfa.al/sites/default/files/peizash_i_medias_online.pdf)

7 [reporter.al/kostot-e-dixhitalizimit-mbyllin-televizionet-lokale/](http://reporter.al/kostot-e-dixhitalizimit-mbyllin-televizionet-lokale/)

8 <https://idracompany.com/files/ALB-Studimi%20mbi%20hendekun%20e%20aft%C3%ABsive%20n%C3%AB%20media.pdf>



## 3

## GENDER-RELATED ISSUES ENCOUNTERED BY FEMALE JOURNALISTS

Studies have shown that gender plays a role in the violation of journalists' rights in the workplace. The most recent comparative study on gender found that a higher number of violations are perpetrated against female journalists than their male counterparts.

There are several problems that are encountered in the workplace. However, some seem to be female-specific:

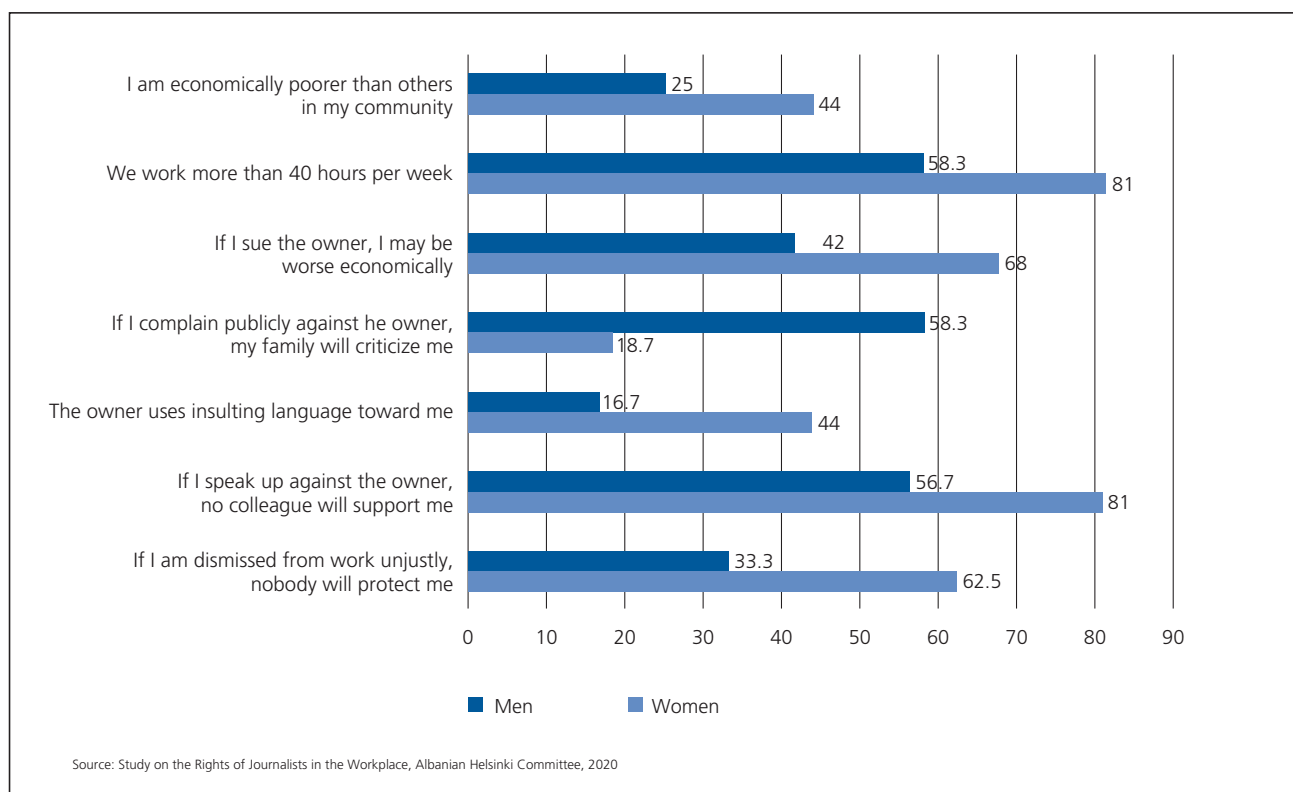
- Sexual harassment in the workplace
- Offensive/degrading language used against female journalists
- Lower wages
- Exclusion from leading/senior positions

### 3.1 SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Women are frequently the victims of sexual harassment in the workplace, also due to the fact that the majority of employers are males who use the power they have over their employees. When asked about this, 25 % of female journalists responded that they felt under pressure by male superiors. 31% of these respondents said they knew cases of their peers having been sexually harassed at work.

Graph 1:

**Opinions of female journalists versus male journalists on some of these issues.**



Although they will not say this out loud, the lack of clear policies against gender discrimination and sexual harassment in media companies, speaks volumes about lack of will on their part to deal with the problem in a serious manner. Every company is legally bound by the Law for Protection against Discrimination to have anti-discrimination policies in place along with well-defined internal bodies to which incidents can be reports. However, Albanian media companies are renowned for their centralised vertical structure with the media owner dealing directly with employees, therefore leaving no room whatsoever for Human Resources to play a role in this matter, as they are yet to be consolidated.

In addition, the fact that the *Me too* movement had a very weak, if any, impact at all in Albania, shows that sexual harassment continues to be taboo in society at large, with the media sector being no different than the rest of society. At the time, only three TV programmes covered this matter but the examples used for the purpose of discussion were cinema- or Hollywood-related, and none dared launch a debate on sexual harassment in the media sector. The Union of Journalists, for instance, the largest organisation protecting the rights of journalists in Albania, does not believe or accept that sexual harassment is a problem to contend with in the workplace. Their proviso is that there are sporadic cases and that these are at a minimum.

### 3.2 OFFENSIVE/DEGRADING LANGUAGE

Offensive and degrading language in the workplace has also been reported as a major issue – and more so for female journalists than their male counterparts. 44% of female respondents spoke of their male employer addressing them in offensive language. However, only 16.7% of male journalists reported the same phenomenon. In addition, women experience any violations towards journalists – of either sex – more adversely than men do. For instance, longer hours or working late at night have more of an adverse effect on women, in those cases when they are also expected to meet family expectations as wives and mothers in a society that is overwhelmingly patriarchal, encouraging and expecting women only to deal with chores such as house work.

Offensive and degrading language against female journalists has been noted in the public domain, too. Edi Rama, the Albanian head of government, has been criticised frequently for the intimidating language he uses against journalists in debates, and in some cases, the burden seems to fall mostly on female journalists, with the prime minister frequently belittling them and reminding everyone of the role they have to play as mothers. A few years ago, for instance, the prime minister was invited to a TV programme anchored by Ilva Tare, a renowned journalist. When pressing for answers, the prime minister retorted back that she should have known the answers had she prepared properly for the programme which she had

not done allegedly because she had become a mother only a while back, and as such had been otherwise engaged.<sup>9</sup> There were also inappropriate comparisons to the criminal underworld and characters depicted by the big screen (Ms Eni Vasili), or labelling female journalists “uninformed/ignorant” about matters that were being discussed by the members of the panel in the TV programme (Ms Klodiana Lala<sup>10</sup>). On another occasion, the Chair of the Academy of Sciences, Prof. Skënder Gjinushi, invited the lady journalist to “calm down” after she asked him a question about being elected for a second time in the post<sup>11</sup>. This degrading and humiliating atmosphere against women is also found in TV debates between public figures, such as the debate between Julian Deda, an actor, and Mira Kazhani<sup>12</sup>, a journalist, or the debate between Frok Çupi, analyst, and journalist Sonila Meço<sup>13</sup>.

This treatment only encourages internet trolls and others who feel free to comment in the most unethical and aggressive manner, using hate speech against any female journalist who is part of a televised debate. In some case, this type of language comes out of the TV studios and is used in public attacks, as was the case of Klodiana Lala, a journalist, who was verbally abused outside Parliament by supporters of the former Minister of Interior Saimir Tahiri whilst she was interviewing him about the Prosecution’s criminal proceedings against him for alleged involvement in drugs trafficking.

### 3.3 THE GENDER PAY GAP – LOWER WAGES FOR WOMEN

Low wages have been a characteristic feature of the media sector for years. In fact, this issue has persisted irrespective of gender. Journalists complain that their pay is not on par with the work they do, and in some cases, in the regions in particular, their pay is below the minimum living cost. In this context, the gender pay gap, i.e. lower pay for female journalists, is not even accepted as a phenomenon that exists, and, therefore, the discussion is firmly focused on higher pay for the community of journalists at large, rather than it being gender-specific. According to the 2020 Albanian Helsinki Committee *Study on the Rights of Journalists in the Workplace*, only 3.33% of respondents believe that men are paid more than women, and 30% believe both genders are paid equally. 81% of female journalists confirm that they work

9 <https://politiko.al/ske-faj-qe-sje-pergatitur-ilva-tare-flet-per-ndodhinë-me-edi-ramën>

10 <https://opinion.al/tjetër-përplasje-rama-lala-ku-fiket-kjo-gazetarja-nuk-mund-të-gënjesh/>

11 <https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/i-sapozgjedhur-kryetar-gjinushi-i-kthehet-gazetares-je-shumë-e-eksituat-shko-mjekohu>

12 <https://sot.com.al/aktualitet/gazetaruce-e-deshtuar-gjej-një-burrë-plas-sherri-mes-jul-dedes-dhe-mira-kazhanit-me-sa>

13 <https://exit.al/këshilli-shqiptar-i-medias-dënon-sulmet-e-frrok-çupit-ndaj-sonila-meços/>

more than 40 hours per week, and yet they report being worse off than their male counterparts, which, in turn, is an impediment for them to follow matters through the courts, also due to the high informality in the sector and lack of employment contracts. For instance, 68% of female respondents/journalists state that if they were to sue their employer, their financial state of affairs would deteriorate even further. Media managers, however, do not accept that this phenomenon is present in their institutions.

The gender pay gap is also reflected in female journalists' maternity pay, which in quite a few cases is denied or not fully paid, as per the Albanian legislation. Even in those cases when the employer does recognise this right, their maternity pay is calculated on the declared wage rather than the real wage. Therefore, their take home pay during maternity leave is significantly lower than what it would have been, had the employer complied with the law rather than declared a fictitious wage to the authorities, which seems to be the case across the board.

### 3.4 WOMEN'S EXCLUSION FROM SENIOR POSITIONS

In 2017, Albania was ranked below the EU average in the Gender Equality Index in the field of women's social power, which measures representation in the Organizing Boards of research, media and major sports. As example shared was the fact that the representation of women in the ART Steering Council was only 9.1% compared to 36% in the EU countries. The situation continues to be

the same in 2020 and it has even worsened as Parliament voted for an absolute majority of men in the vote to renew the Steering Council, reducing to zero the quota of women in this Council. This happened following the constant appeals made by women's organizations, such as the Albanian Woman in Audio-visual, AWA, to observe the Law on Gender Equality and amend the provisions in the Law on Audio-visual Media.

The governing body of the Albanian Radio and Television is also composed of an absolute majority of men - the General Director, Deputy Director, Director of News, Director of Programming, and the Director of Technical Issues are all men. Other figures related to seats/vacancies in Departments also indicate a male dominance.

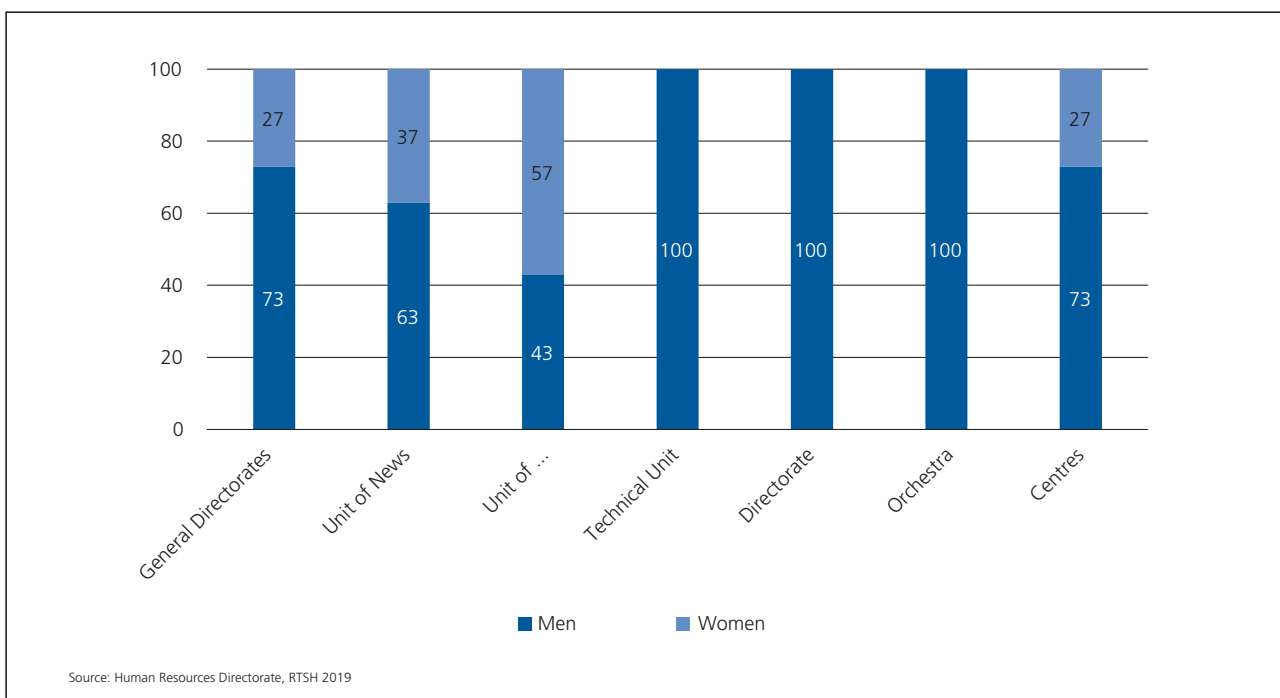
In the private media sector, which carries the lion's share from the point of view of the media market, the journalists observe discrimination in the work place, while for men/boys this is justified.

*"There is gender discrimination, I see it on the part of the executives, editors-in-chief and media executives. I do not know why they think that only men can do this job; there are also capable men, I admit, but there are capable ladies, too."*

*(journalist, visual media)*

*"I know of a case where a newspaper was looking only for a (male) reporter, because the female reporter would get married and have obligations. In television outlets they prefer boys more, yes girls work harder and get paid*

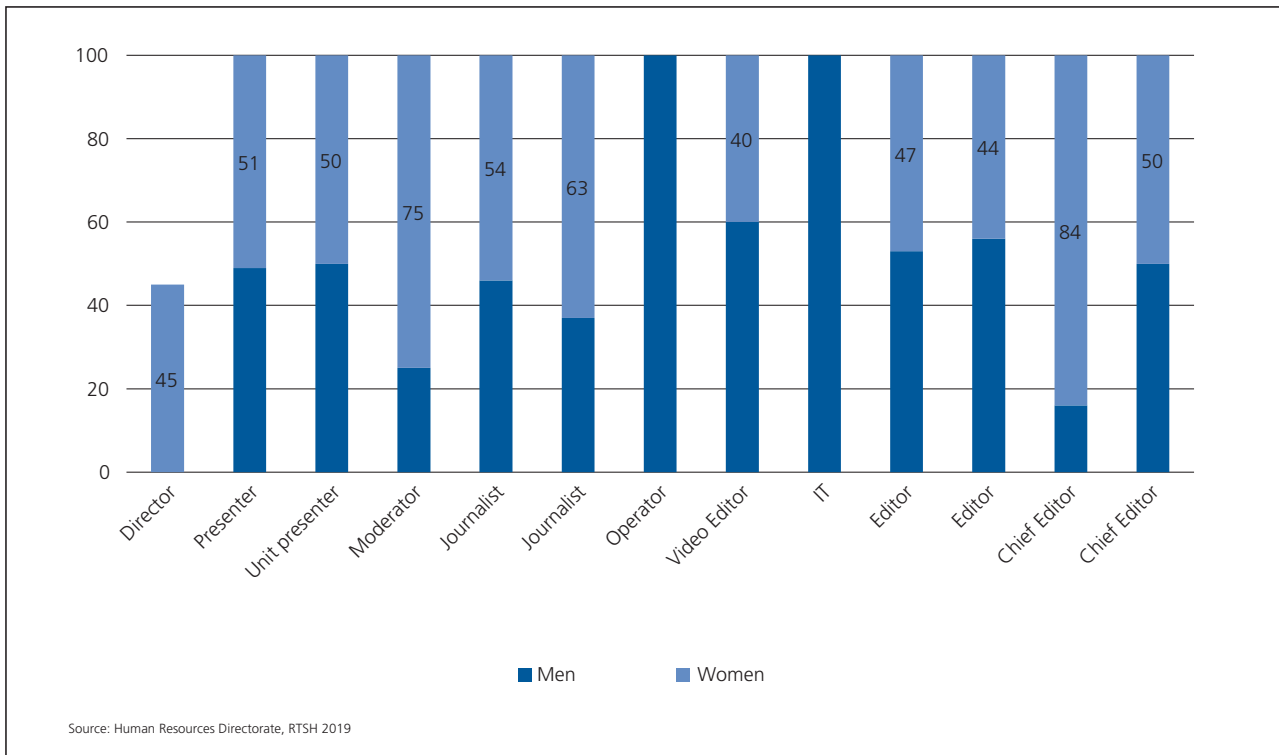
Graph 2:  
Women in leadership positions, in %, RTSH



less. Young female reporters are mostly taken to difficult places because they are more agile; we have very good women reporters and we have male reporters who are less agile and yet the support for men is greater.”  
*(journalist, visual media)*

The editors-in-chief are to an absolute extent men, with the exception of Euronews Albania, as well as the authors of the most watched talk show programmes, where again we have only two women (Ms Eni Vasili with her *Open* Programme and Ms Sonila Meço with her *Tempora* Programme).

Graph 3:  
**Gender composition in the creative sectors of ART, in %, RTSH**



# 4

## THE GENDER NARRATIVE IN THE MEDIA – GENDER PORTRAYAL ISSUES

According to the UNDP 2020 Gender Index, 91% of men and 86% of women in 75 countries representing 85% of the population, have at least one prejudice against women.

The media have a central role in representing women in society, through their way of reporting and covering their role and life. Women also make up for at least half of the potential audience of any mainstream media. An independent, free and effective media provides a unique platform to engage citizens with the idea of achieving and maintaining an equal gender balance within society. The facts on the Albanian media prove that the media can be both a negative and a positive factor: they can be either a conduit for gender discrimination, presenting stereotypical and sensational images of women, or they can provide a balanced coverage empowering women, by exposing cases of gender inequality.

Of course, journalists cannot be held solely responsible for perpetuating gender inequality. Journalists are only one part of the media industry conveying distorted images or clichés of men and women, including advertising, feature films, showbiz, entertainment, and more. But, as informants and observers of our public life, journalists have an important role to play in changing the situation and improving gender perspective reporting. Hence, if journalists understand and are convinced of the importance of fair gender coverage in their reporting, we will have better media coverage that challenges stereotypes. They will better defend their arguments for the articles they will write, thus making the audience have fewer sensational titles set by editors, fewer headlines set by editors and so on and so forth.

Journalists are a key link in the big media chain and can be a factor of change in the media where they work, because if they embrace this reporting style, they can also influence other sectors, such as advertising and entertainment features.

In general, one cannot say that the Albanian media have

fulfilled their role in raising awareness and reporting on gender issues satisfactorily. Although there has been progress from year to year in improving reporting on gender equality issues, it still remains insufficient to provide a consistent model to follow.

In this context, some analysis of the discourse produced by the media on the portrayal of women in society and comparison with that of men, have revealed that there are three basic problems:

### 4.1 THE LOW REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN NEWS AND TV DEBATE PANELS

The latest study showed that on TV shows, about 73% of guests are men, while only 27% of them are women. The study conducted by a Pro-LGBT organization in cooperation with the German Embassy in Albania, monitored 109 TV shows and 293 print media articles in the period of from March to August 2020. Earlier, other studies have confirmed the same trend. The variety of professions has increased, while the fixed figure of the female journalist has served to close the big gap with the other gender. In general, the figure of the woman in the Talk Shows dealing with topical issues, is in the professional dimension, not related to other persons or traditional gender roles. They are rarely invited at the quality of someone's mother, sister, or wife. Exceptions are sports shows, where women are mostly seen in the third role, as a sexual object.

There is a marked lack of women in the TV political debates, with rare exceptions, reinforcing the widespread stereotype that "politics is a men's job." The inclusion of journalists in talk shows is a trend that significantly alleviates the imbalance of guests in terms of gender in topics as the likes of economy, security, justice. However, it is important to understand that even in "serious" topics, such as economics, there are highly qualified girl and women professional, who are economists, financial experts or economic analysts, who should be made

visible, because, so far, men are the ones who talk more about the economy, too.

Sexualization of women through the sports shows moderators is very obvious on Albanian TV outlets. There is a lack of a genuine professional debate on this topic.

When the authors of the programs are women and girls, increased attention to the issue of gender equality is noted. Aurora Sulçe, producer on A2 CNN, for instance, has clearly stated her intention to give women entrepreneurs space in her program.

## 4.2 WOMEN AS VICTIMS RATHER THAN STRONG CHARACTERS

The focus of the news on black chronicle and politics, on the other hand, has led to the predominance of women and girls as victims. This is a global trend given that in the last century women, although represented in the news media in a ratio of one to five, are mostly found in crime/violence stories and in VIP characters. Women are much less present in political news. There are few profiles of women in strong management positions, i.e. as police officers, military staff, economists, entrepreneurs, which reinforces the idea of the inferior status of women in society. Televisions are mostly covering women as mothers, housewives, or wives, mostly interested in fashion, beauty, and appearance. This is a distorted narrative of reality as it only deals with the surface and with what goes wrong, not allowing women and girls on the other side to see the positive role models they would want to follow. According to a well-known expression "you cannot be what you cannot see."

The distorted models of women and girls, especially on screens, but also on portals, which have turned into almost pornographic magazines, are damaging the self-image of young girls and are giving breath to gender-based violence. It is very easy to switch to physical violence once you have objectified the women and girls on screens and culture. Therefore, if we want to curb this phenomenon, we must also regulate the appearance of women and girls in the media, with respect to dignity and professionalism. Also, even when it comes to the presentation of cases of violence, there are some parameters that must be applied professionally, which are found in a UNESCO publication, translated into Albanian, entitled *Indicators of gender sensitivity in the media*. The analysis of chronicles on violence against women in the Albanian media shows that the media does not meet the required standards for this type of news topic, because it lacks contextual information and statistics to present gender-based violence as a social problem rather than an individual problem or personal tragedy.

There is a lack of inclusion of local information providing support and services to persons affected by gender-based violence. Gender-based violence stories take first place

only when they end with the loss of life, which shows the tendency to consider them as black chronicle stories, or reality shows, rather than as a problem-based/social chronicle.

In the Albanian TV media, there is a prevailing sensationalist coverage of violence against women, with no context and in-depth analysis of causes and policies. Gender-based violence continues to be treated as a matter of the black chronicle, not as a social problem.

Gender inequality has no place in the news topics. Gender perspective is lacking in news coverage of all areas.

Civil society organizations are concerned about the narrative surrounding women victims of violence in Albania. More than once, they have called upon journalists to respect professional reporting norms, not exposing the person, but the phenomenon. "We express our concern and indignation over the repeated cases of abuse, published in the online media, which incite hate speech and gender-based violence, violate the Code of Ethics and the right to privacy, by easily publishing and identifying the victim, regardless of the impact of the size of the event on her well-being", reads a press release from the *Woman to Woman* organisation, after the macabre event of the rape of a minor by a school guard in May this year.

Some attempts to introduce the concepts of constructive or solution-based journalism are still embryonic and very difficult to reach the real environment of journalism, where the old sensationalist practices and ethical violations still operate.

## 4.3 HATE SPEECH/MISOGYNY

The same 5-month monitoring of television and online media in Albania revealed that hate speech and discrimination continue to be widespread and target mostly women and marginalized communities. "Women constitute the largest group affected by hate speech/sexism/discrimination, where in 68.9% of journalistic articles or programs, cases of hate speech against women have been identified," the report said.

Hate speech is defined as language that covers all forms of expression that propagate, incite, promote, or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or other forms of hatred based on intolerance.

The monitoring shows that the most targeted categories in Albania are women, followed by the Roma and Egyptian community, the LGBT community, religious communities as well as people with disabilities.

A recent debate between analyst Frok Çupi and former MP Grida Duma, has once again sparked discussions about the role of the media in promoting misogynistic language

or preventing it through stricter rules, interventions of moderators, and even a boycott of persons using misogynistic language on the screens.

Hate speech against women is more present in the comments section in the online media, due to the

lack of editorial filters and the lack of necessary staff for these sections. The targets are mainly politicians and showbiz girls or women. An initiative by former MP Majlinda Bregu for a draft-law condemning the language of online hate speech against women, remained unfinished.

# 5

## EXISTING INITIATIVES

Over the years, efforts have been made to address the issue of gender discrimination in the media through various initiatives. Their aim has been to shape a gender awareness within the media to expose discrimination and improve the portrayal of women in the Albanian media. By looking at their trajectory, we can draw some conclusions about what can be done better in the future in order for us to see more results.

### 5.1 UN WOMEN MEDIA FORUM

In 2012, UN Women in Albania established the Women's Media Forum, as part of the 16-day campaign against gender-based violence. The idea was for women-run media, mainly magazines, programs and portals, to engage with messages against violence against women. During that year, these programs placed the campaign logo on their covers and published messages against domestic violence. Over time, the Forum was reorganized to support chronicle journalists in improving their reporting of trafficking in women and girls. In 2019, the Forum was dedicated to strengthening the capacities of journalists engaged in writing about violence against women and in particular sexual violence with a series of seminars, where law lecturers, representatives of institutions that are part of the referral mechanism of domestic violence, organizations providing services for survivors of domestic violence, international journalists, and other relevant stakeholders were invited to attend.

UN Women also helped the Union of Journalists to strengthen its capacity on gender perspective reporting, providing expertise from UNESCO and proposing the establishment of a gender equality group within the

Union, which marked no further developments following the project completion in 2012.

### 5.2 THE FORUM OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN ALBANIA

Established in 2015 by journalist Eni Vasili, as a response to the sexist environment of the Albanian media, the Forum has organised several activities mainly related to monitoring and reporting violence against children and women. The Forum has published a statement on the measures taken at the Shkodra Orphanage and then echoed Eni Vasili's book, *I have killed* with the support of ASCS. The last activity published on Facebook dates back to 2017 and is related to visual media monitoring related to gender reporting.

### 5.3 AWA- ASSOCIATION OF ALBANIAN WOMEN IN AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA

It is an organization established in 2018 by well-known figures of the audio-visual world including television, cinema and multimedia. The mission of the organization is to narrow gender inequality in the media by strengthening and/or amending the legal framework and building the capacity of creative women in the audio-visual media for more quality participation. In addition, the role of media as educators of audiences, especially in terms of sexism in the media, is another objective of the organization, which has successfully organised first round of open fora with University students in May-November 2020. The organization has a 3-year Strategic Plan drafted with the support of local experts, and is pushing forward a legal proposal to include fight against sexism in the media in the relevant law, which will be submitted to the Assembly in December 2020.



## 6

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The fight for gender equality in the media sector is growing all over the world. In particular, following the *Me too* Movement in Hollywood, there are efforts by the industry to adjust the balance in the media sector and there is a greater awareness of regulatory bodies on this issue. Countries like France or Belgium have banned sexism in outdoor advertising, while powerful operators like the BBC have undertaken ambitious projects like 50:50 to narrow the gender gap on and off screen. In Italy, GIULIA network of women journalists is operational, and the Commission for Equal Opportunities operates within the Order of Italian Journalists. In Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Spain, public TV outlets have set up Departments for Equal Opportunities to “watch” over gender-based recruitment policies and the implementation of the working conditions for male and female employees. Even in Asia, countries like Japan or India are creating models of women’s empowerment in the media through media that is friendly to them, or media dedicated only to women.

**In fact, all efforts prove that the fight for gender equality in the media succeeds only when it is intentional.** Hence, when the media environment itself takes responsibility for regulating this balance and sets its own example with policies dedicated religiously to narrowing gender differences. This is an axiom that can be easily verified in the Albanian environment too, given that because of the situation depicted above, one can clearly see how the efforts from outside to regulate gender inequality by virtue of sporadic training and external media, have not been successful to the extent of generating concrete and tangible change in this regard. Even in recent years, we can attest to the fact that sexism in the media has increased and the image of journalists has been further damaged by the unethical discourse of government officials, officials or other people in power. This shows that the path to be followed to achieve lasting change, passes first through the media itself as a responsible enterprise, by respecting the rights enshrined in the Labour Code, which would guarantee an environment free from discrimination and prejudice against women and girls and career advancement on merit. But, how can this be achieved?

## 1. IMPROVEMENT OF THE LABOUR ENVIRONMENT

Instead of changing women and girls by forcing them to adapt to an environment that violates their fundamental rights, let us try to change their working environment by enforcing the applicable legislation and increasing incentives for companies that have clear gender equality policies. The Labour Inspectorate should conduct more detailed checks on working conditions, including gender discrimination, leaving clear enforcement tasks. Editors, editors-in-chief and authors of media programs should be involved in gender equality training. The media should be encouraged/assisted to create a gender equality plan that aims to bridge the gap between journalists and program authors. AMA should impose stricter conditions on licensing audio-visual operators by asking them to undergo a mandatory training on sexism in the media.

## 2. EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

Instead of establishing another network of journalists, why not help women journalists become media executives. Rather than acquiring more training, women journalists need to be motivated to become media executives/managers. They should have a detailed professional development plan within the media, helping them climb the career ladder. This goes hand in hand with improving the media environment. We all know that decisions about media content are made by editors and editors-in-chief, who are mostly men. No one can influence or change the gender narrative unless you are an editor or editor-in-chief. This, in turn, relates to the working environment, given that so far women and girls have refused to take management positions because they do not agree with the existing model, with this model being “an editor-in-chief who works 24 hours a day, does not have a life of his own, who sits at tables with owners, eats lunch and dinner at any time possible”. In conditions when a balance between work and family life is increasingly being sought after, women and girls are found to be disadvantaged even by this model echoed in the media. We need more women and girls in management positions, but according to the professional and human model, like the one that was raised, for example, by Sheryl Sandberg in Facebook. A satisfied employee is the

employee who has the highest productivity. The issue of women in management positions is not just a matter of numbers, but a management philosophy, which is built on the integrity of the employee and on treating the employee as a slave. Even a male executive who is aware of the impact of fair gender policies in the workplace would be a good role model. As stated above, change can only come from people who have a purpose and the purpose is to make the working environment more equal. Women authors of their programs can be the first to set their example on clear editorial lines of the programs they cover, the moment when one of the guests makes a sexist comment. In addition to drawing the person's attention on the matter, he should also be boycotted up until a public apology is sought. If this becomes a routine, it shall be followed even by program authors or moderators.

Media education of audiences should be a priority of AMA and of the media companies, because a media-empowered public is a deterrent to sexist messages.

### 3. MEDIA SELF-REGULATION

The absence of an Order of Journalists means that the media community is not very organized in terms of its professionalism. Journalism without rules is a misleading journalism. The Code of Ethics is insufficient to oversee the situation of gender equality in the media, because it lacks clear provisions on sexism and gender discrimination. Journalists within the Union can be organized to add a media gender reporting clause, as self-regulation is considered the best way to avoid ethical violations. By filling in this void, we remove the excuse of journalists that they have not violated any ethical rules, as they always transfer their responsibility to editors and editors-in-chief. If this were a general rule that would originate from the community of journalists, there would be less possibilities of abuse. The Alliance for Ethical Media is a good effort, but needs to be expanded and strengthened with clear provisions on this issue.

Women's associations in the media should also be given a helping hand in order to have a clear strategic development plan, to work to increase their ranks and create sustainable initiatives. Co-operation rather than overlapping projects would bring added value to the movement for gender equality in the media, too.

### 4. INCREASING GENDER AWARENESS AMID MEDIA PROFESSIONALS AND THE PUBLIC

The presence of more women has not brought about more and better coverage of women in the media. Quite the opposite is true - more women in management positions have made a difference. More men with high gender awareness have made a difference, too. The European Public Broadcasting Union (EBU) has published a guide on how to make our media environment more equitable. Managers who have embraced this journey have shown that the main mindset posing obstacles to achievement of equality is the patriarchal one. Schools of journalism and media should introduce mandatory modules of reporting with a gender perspective, stereotypes and prejudices in their curriculum.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MA Valbona Sulçe Kolgeci** is a journalist, media and communication researcher and trainer. She started her career as a journalist in the National Private TV Telearbëria in 1998, where she was part of the team of Kosovo War or Peace Programme, which won the first prize as the television program of the year. From 2012 to 2017 she managed the Fourth Day blog at [shqiptarja.com](http://shqiptarja.com) newspaper. From 2014 to 2019 she was a member of the Steering Council of ART. As a lecturer, she has covered for many years the subject of Media Diversity Reporting at the Albanian University and is the author of the first module on Reporting of Trafficking in Women and Girls at the University of Tirana. She is one of the trainers of the Albanian Media Institute on the topics of children, gender equality and media education.

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Responsible:

**Stine Klapper** | Director of “Friedrich Ebert” Foundation

Tel: 00355 4 22 509 86

[www.fes-tirana.org](http://www.fes-tirana.org)

Programme Coordinator:

**Mariola Qesaraku**

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## CHANGING THE NARRATIVE OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

An overview of the various features of gender-based discrimination in the media



This paper aims to provide an overview of the different dimensions of gender-based discrimination in the Albanian media and to present some proposals for solutions.

The analysis of the situation shows, on the one hand, that the issue of fair gender portrayal in the media on the and, on the other hand, the specifics of gender discrimination in the media market for women and girls professionals are closely interwoven.



Experience to date and models from developed countries suggest that a well-thought-out, coordinated and especially deliberate approach is needed by all media actors to change the narrative about women and girls in the media. Among the areas in need of priority intervention are:

1. Improving the working environment of journalists, respecting labour rights and empowering women and girls to hold management positions in the media.
2. Media self-regulation through the



empowerment of journalists' and women's organizations in the media to build strategic plans in order to improve gender reporting.

3. Raising gender awareness among media professionals and the public through amendments to the Code of Ethics for Journalists to include sexism as an ethical violation, strengthening the rules for audio-visual operators on the phenomenon of gender discrimination and sexism in the media associated with media education of audiences.

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