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*Briefing note*

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Regulation, self-regulation  
and co-regulation in media  
and gender equality

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# Abstract

Across the globe, media industries suffer from a significant gender pay gap and gender-based discrimination and harassment. Women are underrepresented in media professions in some contexts, a challenge particularly evident at the decision-making level. This is aggravated by inequalities - in newsrooms and society - that are increasingly mirrored in media content wherein women and men are often framed in stereotypical ways. In addition, gender-based inequalities often intersect with other forms of discrimination.

This briefing note is designed to give readers a basic understanding of the role of media regulatory and self-regulatory systems in promoting gender equality and inclusion. The note is aimed at media practitioners who do not necessarily have a deep understanding of the field of gender in media development; it also aims to be of interest to and relevance for women's rights organisations, other civil society organisations, and those who want to push for gender equality and inclusion in and through the media.

The briefing note does not constitute an exhaustive list of all media-regulatory and self-regulatory systems that apply in the context of gender. Self-regulatory systems are fluid, subject to change, highly contingent on their national, social, and cultural context, and thus part of processes that need constant revision. Therefore, this note will highlight the main self- and regulatory systems that reflect or affect the role of media - from the perspective of gender - and will offer a basic understanding to inspire the reader to take action and initiate change in the field.

The final goal is to help inspire the introduction of a co-regulatory system wherein both regulation and self-regulation models combine to improve women's human rights and gender equality in and through media, telecommunications, and digital platforms.

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# Introduction

The Beijing Platform for Action (hereafter BPfA) has been the roadmap for the improvement of gender equality in and through the media and information technologies, at national and international level, since 1995. The imperative to advance gender equality in these sectors was indicated in Section J and its two Strategic Objectives:

- Strategic objective J:1. Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication.
- Strategic objective J:2. Promote a balanced and non-stereotypical portrayal of women in the media.

The BPfA laid the foundations for the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5 – Gender Equality – which requires the improvement of gender equality in and through the media and digital technologies. In March 2015, at the United Nations' 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 59), the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) called on member states to include a target and specific indicators on gender equality in and through the media and ICTs in the SDG's Goal 5, based on the argument that media and information technologies promote the empowerment of women, whereas existing indicators were limited to mobile telephone and the provision of ICT skills to individuals. A key point here is that media plays a crucial role in achieving gender equality as it can help to transform culture, set the political agenda, create awareness on social injustices, break taboos, and demand accountability from decision makers.

In May 2015, the prominent gender and communication scholar and activist Margaret Gallagher assessed progress in implementation of Section J's recommendations:

“We are now, in 2015 – in a period of backlash and backpedalling by governments on women's human rights [...] Media empires are among the most lucrative global businesses [...] After years of lobbying, the existence of Section J seemed at last to give us an internationally agreed blueprint for action. But when we look at the implementation of Section J, the past 20 years have not lived up to our expectations.”

Now, twenty-six years after the publication of the BPfA, gaps are wider than ever and new ones have emerged. The global media landscape has evolved dramatically since the Fourth UN World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), when media were recognised as critical for the advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men. Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action underlined several issues, including gender bias in media organisations, stereotyped and pornographic media images of women, and the unexploited potential of information technology for women's progress.

Evidence shows that governments and media and telecommunications have widely disregarded recommendations in BPfA's Section J. New industry players - such as social media platforms - have also failed to take responsibility for implementing effective strategies to promote women's human rights, particularly in protecting women from online violence.

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) reveals that in 2020, women constituted only 24% of news sources globally, up from 17% in 1995, an increase of just 7% in twenty-six years, which seems like a slow progress. Stereotypes continue to abound in media, especially in advertising, while governments leave any watchdog role to scholars and activists.

The 2015 UNESCO Global Survey on Gender and Media shows that only 14% of governments have budgets to promote gender equality in media staffing and 29% in media content. Only 19% of the surveyed countries say publicly-owned media have developed specific gender awareness programmes.

In 2011, the International Women's Media Foundation published findings from its study of women's employment in news companies, showing men held 75% of top management and board positions globally. Women's presence was larger in routine news gathering roles and weakest in technical roles, such as camera operating or creative directing. In 2013, a study by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) found that of 3376 senior posts, 30% were held by women, 16% of CEOs were women as were 21% of Chief Operating Officers. In short, although a proportion of women hold positions of authority, they are much less likely to hold positions of power. While the number of women working in media and communications has increased worldwide, their presence in senior management remains negligible. For instance, in 2017, only six of the one hundred largest international media corporations in the world had female CEOs (Edström & Facht, 2017).

An estimated 4.4 billion people – mostly poor, female, rural and living in developing countries – have no access to the internet. According to the International Telecommunication Union, internet penetration rates are higher for men than for women in all regions of the world and the global internet user gender gap grew from 11% in 2013 to 12% in 2016. There is a huge gender gap with 200 million more men than women accessing internet.

Digital violence against women and girls (DVAWG) - defined as the perpetration of different acts of violence against women, through digital media such as social networks, mobile messaging, email, and so on - has been recognised in recent years as a global problem. The Broadband Commission's 2015 Report on Cyber Violence reveals that almost three quarters of women have been exposed to some form of online violence - such as hacking, mobbing, impersonation, surveillance, harassment, recruiting and malicious distribution - and urges governments and industry to work harder and more effectively together to provide better protection for the increasing number of women and girls who are victims of online threats and harassment.

A central problem, worsened by digital communication, is the wide dissemination of pornography. It is difficult to calculate the amount of pornography on the internet, but statistics show that 4.2 million web pages - some 12% of the total number of web sites in the world - offer pornography and one hundred thousand web pages offer child pornography. In terms of financial profit, internet pornography makes more profit than Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, Amazon, Netflix and Apple combined, that is, 97.06 billion dollars per year (Feminist Peace Network, 2006). Videogames is another dimension of the problem: some of the most popular feature assaults on women, rape, prostitution and murder (Maltzahn, 2006). A general lack of access/current data on this topic means older sources are used in this section.

The prevalence of pornography has facilitated the internet's increasing role in the sexual trafficking of women, girls and boys. Information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as file-share platforms, have multiplied, thus providing opportunities for traffickers to recruit and exploit victims, to advertise trafficked women, girls and boys, and to consolidate trafficking as a global business (Maltzahn, 2006). Sex trafficking operates mainly in places that lack internet regulation and policy (UN, 2005), such as developing countries with a high percentage of poor women whose social class makes them, as so often, more vulnerable.

Violence against women journalists, online and offline, has increased dramatically in both conflict and non-conflict countries in recent years. Offline, women journalists continue to face disproportionate risks of physical, psychological, sexual and femicide violence. The UN Secretary-General's 2017 report on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity notes the "increase in violence, threats and harassment against women journalists". According to UNESCO's 2020 Global Survey on Online Violence against Women Journalists, 73% of surveyed professionals have been targets of online violence in the course of their work; 25% have received threats of physical violence; 18% have received threats of sexual violence and 20% have been attacked offline after violent threats online. A 2015 study by the OSCE produced stark evidence of the chilling effect of online harassment of women journalists, including their withdrawal from the profession and psychological damage. Other online risks include surveillance by government. This is happening around the

world, but the impact is greatest in conflict and post-conflict countries where the human rights of women journalists have become more precarious.

Another form of online gender-based violence (GBV) is gendered and sexualised disinformation. It can be defined as, “a subset of online gendered abuse that uses false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives against women, often with some degree of coordination, aimed at deterring women from participating in the public sphere. It combines three defining characteristics of online disinformation: falsity, malign intent, and coordination” (Jankowicz et al. 2021). This type of harassment is planned and set in motion deliberately to silence women who raise their voices on social media, and the abusers often deploy both sex- and race-based narratives, compounding the threat for women of colour. As adversaries attempt to exploit widespread misogyny, women may be less likely to choose to participate in public life. However, while this reoccurring issue affects women all over the world, few if any resources are dedicated to understanding how profoundly this phenomenon affects our democratic process. The impact of gendered and sexualised disinformation on women in public life, as well as its corresponding effect on national security and democratic participation, is conspicuously absent from the discourse on disinformation.

All the types of violence outlined above result in a cycle of impunity, and news media companies and governments are not ensuring safe working conditions for women journalists.

Finally, in terms of gender media policy, while the Beijing Platform for Action lists actions which could help achieve gender equality, there is no single formal policy on gender and communication. Little progress has been registered the last twenty-six years at the national level. This is largely due to the power of the male-dominated media and telecommunications sectors, which have opposed state regulation. However, a good example at the regional level is the Council of Europe’s recently-approved Recommendation on Gender Equality for the Audio-visual Sector. At the national level, another example is Mexico’s new Law of Telecommunications and Broadcasting, which includes nine articles aiming to improve gender equality in and through these sectors.

The Covid-19 pandemic is reconfiguring all these critical areas with enormous implications for women’s human rights: the increase of online and offline violence, the over-reliance on men rather than women as key sources of information about the pandemic, the precarious working conditions for female journalists and so on, the list can be made long.

In summary, over the last twenty-six years, the media landscape has changed dramatically. Globalisation has exacerbated the concentration of media conglomerates and cross-media ownership, which combines broadcast, press and digital media. However, what has not changed is the exclusion of women from media industries, the stereotypical images of women in media and digital content and a lack of safety for women that compromises their human right to communicate.

## **Section J and the call for regulatory mechanisms**

Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action listed specific recommendations to be accomplished by governments, media conglomerates and other sectors for the achievement of gender equality. Among the main tasks were the improvement of regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms.

Section J encourages international media systems to develop regulatory mechanisms, consistent with freedom of expression, including voluntary initiatives that promote balanced and diverse portrayals of women by the media and the increased participation of women in production and decision-making.

Also, the BPfA encourages the participation of women in the development of professional guidelines and codes of conduct or similar self-regulatory mechanisms to promote balanced and non-stereotyped portrayals of

women by the media. In particular, the platform calls on governments to promote legislation against pornography and the projection of violence against women in the media.

Finally, Section J recommends that media organisations promote professional guidelines, codes of conduct and other forms of self-regulation to eliminate stereotyped images of women and to address violent, degrading or pornographic materials concerning women in the media, including advertising.

But what has been the level of compliance with those recommendations since 1995? This note, in the pages that follow, will present a discussion on regulation, self-regulation, and co-regulation, citing examples of mechanisms that have been improved in recent years.

# Regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation

Media and communication policy involves critical areas of contemporary society: information, news and cultural production; that is to say creation and distribution of content. It includes broadcasting, cinema and print, and is different from telecommunication policy. However, just as digital communications led to technological convergence, this in turn necessitated regulatory convergence between media, telecommunications and other aspects of communication and information, such as technology, infrastructure, and online communication (Van den Bulck, et.al., 2019: 3-4).

Media and communication policy is important because it impacts the creation, processing, dissemination and use of information and communication that, combined, will impact people, society, democracy and economics (Van den Bulck, et al., 2019: 3-4, 2019: 8-9).

Media policy is about formulating and implementing rules and monitoring. It involves the relationship between the state, media organisations and society. Models of media policy include:

- a) the liberal paradigm, which advocates for free-market principles and promotes commercialisation of media systems
- b) the social responsibility paradigm that emphasises the responsibility of the state in favouring public service media institutions (Van den Bulck, et al., 2019).

Resulting from this classification, regulation and self-regulation are often seen as opposed to each other, not as complementary models.

## Regulation

Media regulation can be defined as “the specific instruments that are deployed on media organisations in order to achieve specified policy goals” (Van den Bulck, et al., 2019: 6). It involves the deliberate state influence of media systems at local regional, and transnational levels by regulation of public service or net neutrality, subsidies for the promotion of independent production and public information campaigns such as media literacy programs.

The forms of rules that aim to organise media systems are defined as media governance. These cover “a much wider range of governing efforts by public and private actors, resulting in both a horizontal and vertical extension of power” (Van den Bulck, et al., 2019: 7). The horizontal extension refers to governance that covers statutory regulation, self-regulation and co-regulation.

The private sector advocates for a low-law model to avoid state control over media. Protecting freedom of expression has been the main argument against regulation. However, within a system of media concentration, these institutions can also limit a society’s right to freedom of expression (Gómez, 2013). Media are not only platforms that enable access to information and freedom of expression; media also function as a social actor with particular positions on public issues.

This is why state participation is necessary: to guarantee media pluralism and diversity, thus ensuring freedom of expression. However, this can be challenging in authoritarian states, where restrictions on freedom of expression and gender equality are common. “The absence of state intervention on its own is not a guarantee



of a rich media environment. On the contrary, to promote a media environment characterised by pluralism and diversity, state intervention is necessary” (Puppi, 2011).

What is it needed to guarantee media pluralism and diversity? Norms for public, commercial and community-based broadcasting, building professional capacity of media workers, infrastructure capacity, laws to prevent monopoly and concentration and laws to ensure freedom of expression.

According to Gustavo Gómez (2013), the state should regulate:

- The existence of free and independent media
- The existence of three types of media: public, private and community
- To guarantee access and participation of citizens to media ownership
- To promote equal conditions for community media
- To prohibit any form of censorship
- To recognise and guarantee editorial freedom
- To guarantee freedom of expression

On the other hand, the state must not regulate:

- Journalism ethics
- Critical views on issues of public interest
- Critical views against governments

The state plays a key role in media content. “Freedom of expression is not an absolute right, and it can be restricted to protect the rights of others, for example by prohibiting speech that incites violence or hatred. The accepted practice is for such restrictions to be narrowly defined and only applied by courts where there is a clear public interest in so doing” (Puppi, 2011: 11).

There is a belief that keeping the state out of regulating media will automatically guarantee freedom of expression, as media are conceived as platforms for public debate and for the exercise of freedom of expression. However, this does not necessarily happen when structural conditions promote discrimination against women. As noted earlier, media in general reinforce inequality by stereotyping women, marginalising women or even vindicating violence against women. This discussion has limited the state’s role in regulating media for the improvement of gender equality, arguing that it is a risk to freedom of expression. However, freedom of expression can amplify and support other human rights, such as gender equality. Both freedom of expression and gender equality are integral components of human rights.

Directed by norms and policies, the state must play an active role in the promotion of women’s human rights. Pornography calls for discrimination, and the vindication of violence against women and girls are critical areas that have been regulated. However, the recurring debate about freedom of expression versus gender equality is a false dichotomy. In particular, there is a hazy line between hate speech and freedom of expression. Gender-based/sexist hate speech is rarely included in national legislation. However, in its most comprehensive report on the issue, published in September 2020, the UN’s Plan of Action on Hate Speech defined it as “any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor” (United Nations, 2019).

Restriction of freedom of expression, is not censorship. Restrictions, when applied proportionally and as a means of achieving a legitimate aim, serve to protect other human rights (Gómez, 2013). They should be proportionate; not promote discrimination, nor attempt to limit freedom of expression.

According to the European Court of Human Rights, in order to be compatible with freedom of expression, regulation should be:

- Prescribed by law
- In pursuit of a legitimate aim
- Necessary in a democratic society
- To encourage a responsible self-regulation (OSCE, 2008)

In summary, the discussion is not about the appropriateness – or not – of state regulation, but about what the state should regulate and about the self-regulation mechanisms that media should develop (Gómez, 2013). It is important to note, however, the challenges of applying this in authoritarian states.

## Self-regulation

“Self-regulation implies that an industry-level organisation sets the rules and standards relating to the behaviour of firms in the media industry” (Van den Bulck, et al., 2019: 8). It has emerged as the main tool for global and commercial media as a new means of governance.

It has two main characteristics: independency of government control and the involvement of members of the media organisation in the regulation process. “Self-regulation begins with members of an industry establishing a regulatory body to achieve shared goals that could not be met by any individual members. The central tenet of self-regulation is that it is a voluntary process in which industry establishes a code of conduct that is to be beneficial for all members” (Cishecki, 2002: 9).

Self-regulation has been seen as a means of media accountability enabling these industries to commit with the general public to set minimum principles on ethics, accuracy, human rights, and as a way to preserve freedom of expression (OSCE). It is considered as a mechanism to avoid authoritarian systems of censorship, to minimise state interference, to preserve editorial freedom and to promote media quality (OSCE, 2008: 12). It involves owners of media, telecommunications and digital platforms companies, media professionals, editors, producers, journalists and CSOs.

The advocates of self-regulation argue that the state should not interfere with media, which justifies the existence of self-regulatory mechanisms. The benefits of self-regulation include it being a more efficient system of regulation because, supposedly, media understand their own internal structures better than governments understand them. Also, in a global media environment, this model can fill the resulting gap of jurisdiction; is less costly and more flexible than state regulation; and can improve professional standards, thus encouraging greater compliance.

Self-regulation promotes standards. Codes of ethics are traditional self-regulatory mechanisms as a guidance on editorial standards. This is seen as the core of media self-regulation and its purpose is to safeguard the autonomy and freedom of media professionals. However, as this is often established voluntarily, codes of ethics rarely meet the real needs of society. In Mexico, for example, the Federal Law of Telecommunications and Broadcasting mandates that commercial media develop codes of ethics. However, broadcasters rejected this mandate, arguing that it could undermine freedom of expression.

Another problem for the development of codes of ethics is the inequality between three main stakeholders - industry, civil society and government. In Canada, for example, media were required by regulation to for example, develop guidelines and codes of ethics to challenge stereotypes connected to violence against women. However, according to Media Watch (an NGO that works to eliminate sexism in media), even when civil

society organisations and experts' inputs were incorporated, there was a lack of equality and symmetry between the influence of those three actors. "There is skepticism among equity-seeking groups that Self-regulation is a good tool to combat systemic sexism" (Cishecki, 2002: 4).

Other tools include complaint mechanisms for audiences to report on media that fail to meet principles, for example through press councils or an ombudsperson. However, this has become another fragile area of self-regulation. In most cases, these mechanisms are little known or used and are frequently limited by the audience's role in monitoring media and/or ability to do so; both require a high level of media literacy, which is often lacking.

In real terms, self-regulation is used by media organisations as a way to increase their legitimacy and credibility in society; to avoid adverse political interventions; to control trade and to mitigate bureaucratic government regulation (Cishecki, 2002). For governments, benefits include easing financial and administrative pressures on the state.

## Co-regulation

Co-regulation is a combination of self-regulation by media industries and regulation from the state. The current media landscape demands a communication/governance model that is more inclusive. "Co-regulation involves government, independent regulatory agencies, industry, independent self-regulatory agencies, civil society organization and citizens" (Cishecki, 2002: 10).

Self-regulation is often enforced hand-in-hand with the state, "with the paradoxical situation that deregulation is fostered by the regulator, the state thus disengaging itself from its engagements" (Frau-Meigs, 2004: 85).

Experience shows that when the state leaves self-regulation to media industries, the latter tend to be both judge and party (Frau-Meigs) and the results suffer from a "lack of transparency at all levels" (Frau-Meigs, 2004: 86).

A more effective model is that based in regulation, through regulatory policies, such as production quotas. One example is the case of media consumption among young people, where media regulation measures "have succeeded in modifying some consumption patterns" (Frau-Meigs, 2004: 87).

In order to improve gender equality in and through the media and digital platforms, we probably need to move to a co-regulation system, to call on "all major actors of the media environment (decision-makers – producers and broadcasters) and to hold them accountable" (Frau-Meigs, 2004: 95). However, co-regulation has yet to be developed.

# Regulation and self-regulation tools for gender equality

Following the two strategic objectives of the BPfA Section J, regulatory mechanisms have been developed at national, regional, and global levels. Examples include:

- General Recommendations of the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Violence against Women 35, 33, 26 and 27
- Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 47 and 62 Sessions Agreed Conclusions
- Montevideo Strategy of Latin American States towards the 2030 Sustained Development
- UN Human Rights Council Resolution on the Promotion, Protection and Joy of Human Rights on the Internet
- Council of Europe’s (CoE’s) Recommendations on Gender Equality and Media 2013, 2016, 2017. For example, Recommendation Rec (2013) 1 encourages media organisations to “adopt self-regulatory measures, internal code of conduct/ethics and internal supervision, and develop standards in media coverage that promote gender equality.”
- The Istanbul Convention, adopted in 2011 and in force since 2014, aims to combat all forms of violence against women, to take measures to prevent such violence and protect victims, and to prosecute the perpetrators. Article 17 points specifically to the participation of the private sector and the media to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies and to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women. In Article 14, which focuses on the role of the educational system, the role of the media is also mentioned.
- The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity is also relevant when looking at gender media and self/regulatory system(s) as female journalists face specific risks, such as sexual violence, because of their gender in the exercise of their work.
- National laws on women’s human rights, including those combating discrimination and violence against women which meet media and digital platforms accountability.<sup>1</sup>

Also, in recent years, Self-regulation tools have been developed in two dimensions: media structures and content. These include:

- Codes of ethics for journalists. Codes have been created for the improvement of accuracy, objectivity, impartiality and truthfulness. The Azerbaijan Press Council adopted, in November 2018, amendments to its Code of Professional Ethics called “Protection of the principle of gender equality and non-discrimination”. With this initiative, Azerbaijan became the first member state of the Council of Europe to approve such a self-regulation tool.<sup>2</sup> The Media Council of Kenya states that: “Quoting persons making derogatory remarks based on ethnicity, race, creed, colour and sex shall not be allowed.” Furthermore, “Pictures of grief, disaster and those that embarrass and promote sexism shall be discouraged.”
- Sweden’s Code of Ethics for the Press, Radio and Television reads: “Do not emphasize ethnic origin, sex, nationality, occupation, political affiliation, religious persuasion or sexual disposition in the case of the persons concerned if such particulars are not important in the specific context and demeaning.”

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in April 2021, Mexico approved a reform to the Law for the Access of Women to a Life Free of Violence in order to recognise both media and digital violence.

<sup>2</sup> Azerbaijan Journalists Code of Ethics: <https://rm.coe.int/azerbaijan-codeofethics-final/16808eb4fd>

- Portugal’s Code of Conduct includes fewer grounds of discrimination: colour, race, nationality and gender.
- Italy’s codes of conduct do not mention gender and all responsibility to follow the guidelines falls on journalists themselves.
- Editorial Guidelines. This is another tool related to media content. In recent years, media organisations have developed specific editorial guidelines to report on violence against women. The BBC provides specific guidelines to report on Violence Against Women (VAW) throughout its sections, such as ‘Harm and Offence’ which includes specific recommendations on violence, sex, intimidation and humiliation and portrayals. Also, on ‘Privacy, Fairness, Contributors and consent’, ‘Reporting crime and anti-social behaviour’, ‘War, terror and emergency’ and ‘Religion’, among other sections<sup>3</sup>.
- Professional Guidelines. To balance freedom of expression and accountability, governments, civil society organisations and media industries have developed professional guidelines for gender sensitive reporting. In 2018, the BBC launched its 50/50 initiative to guarantee equal representation of women and men in media content. The government of Slovenia launched a set of ‘Guidelines for Gender Sensitive Reporting’, which focuses on four main areas:
  - Selection of sources and stories to balance the presence of women and men in media, reflecting the composition of society and human experiences
  - Fair portrayal of women and men through elimination of stereotypes
  - Use of gender-fair language
  - Gender equality in media organisations

In recent years, and echoing the feminist principle of intersectionality<sup>4</sup>, media have adopted tools for fair coverage of sexual diversity. The journalists’ section of the Spanish Trade Union CCOO has adopted guidelines for reporting on the LGBT community. Also, Taboom Media in South Africa promotes training, mentoring, publishing, monitoring and response programs to foster ethical journalism about LGBT rights. However, in order to tackle all forms of discrimination, further efforts are needed to ensure that media content reflects the different ways gender intersects with other characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, age, class and disability.

- Ombudsperson. This is an expert in charge of handling complaints from the audience.
- Equality editor. This is a new, self-regulatory mechanism created specifically to tackle gender inequality in media content. The New York Times (USA) and El País (Spain) are pioneers of this tool.
- Combating Violence Against Women in media content. This refers to specific tools that some countries have developed to tackle gender-based violence in media content and on digital platforms. In Mexico, in 2019, the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) combined with the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and UNESCO to launch the National Deal to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls in media and digital platforms. This includes recommendations on content and media structure. In Morocco, the regulatory body High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (HACA) developed editorial policies to eliminate GBV in media content.
- Gender equality in media organisations. Internal regulations have been improved to guarantee gender balance. The Belgian Ethics Press Council (CDJ) adopted policies against discrimination on its ethical board. The Swedish Press Council adopted a gender quota for its board.
- Media and Information Literacy (MIL). Media and information literacy constitutes a composite set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and practices that allow individuals to access, analyse,

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<sup>3</sup> BBC Editorial guidelines:

[http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/Editorial\\_Guidelines\\_in\\_full.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/Editorial_Guidelines_in_full.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Intersectionality is the feminist principle that acknowledges that all women share oppression on the basis of their sex and subsequent discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV), however not all women have equal access to resources. Then race, ethnicity, age, class, sexual preference, geographic location and disability are structural factors that determine the way women experience gender inequality.

critically evaluate, interpret, use, create, and disseminate information and media products through existing means and tools on a creative, legal, and ethical basis<sup>1</sup>. MIL plays a significant role in determining how widely gender will be considered an important and legitimate social, political, cultural issue. Women and marginalised groups can be involved directly in media content production and media can raise awareness on gender issues. Gender media monitoring is one strategy for building critical gender-aware media information literacy and advocacy skills (for an example, see UNESCO's indicators<sup>5</sup>). Media literacy can equip citizens with media and information competencies to question gender norms, enable self-expression, and allow those unheard to tell their own stories.

- Awareness-raising tools. These include trainings, conferences, and campaigns to raise media professionals' awareness of the need for women to be represented equally in decision-making positions. The Gender Equality Plan of ORF, the Austrian public broadcaster, is a good example and focuses on four areas: training of professionals, promotion of equal opportunities, quotas for job posts, and policies for women and men to reconcile work and private life.

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO (2012). Gender-sensitive indicators for media: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/gender-sensitive-indicators-for-media-framework-of-indicators-to-gauge-gender-sensitivity-in-media-operations-and-content/>

# Final comment

This briefing note demonstrates that states, media organisations, and civil society organisations must respond urgently and in a coordinated way to tackle gender inequality and discrimination of women - in and through communication and information sectors - and to increase inclusivity overall. Further efforts are needed to ensure that media content reflects the different ways gender intersects with other characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, age, class, and disability. Co-regulation, which combines regulatory mechanisms and self-regulation tools, seems to be the best way to ensure that media can help to improve and promote women's human rights and overall increased inclusivity, in and through media.

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