



GENDER EQUALITY POLICY IN THE MEDIA CONTENT



RECOMMENDED BY THE COMMISSION ON JOURNALISM ETHICS

Policy author:

Lisa Kuzmenko, Head of the NGO “Women in Media”, Member of the Commission on Journalism Ethics.

Reviewer:

Otar Dovzhenko, media expert, Head of the Independent Media Council.

Released with the support of the OSCE Support Program for Ukraine. This publication expresses exclusively the views of the authors. They do not necessarily coincide with the official position of the OSCE.

INTRODUCTION

Media in today's society has enormous potential for social change. This is emphasized in the Recommendation CM/REC (2013)1 of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to Member States on gender equality and the media.

The media potential to raise awareness and protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of women and facilitate their empowerment was recognized at the international level as early as 1995 during the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Media organizations should be encouraged to adopt self-regulatory measures, internal codes of ethics and internal oversight, and develop media broadcasting standards that promote gender equality to foster appropriate internal policies and create working conditions.

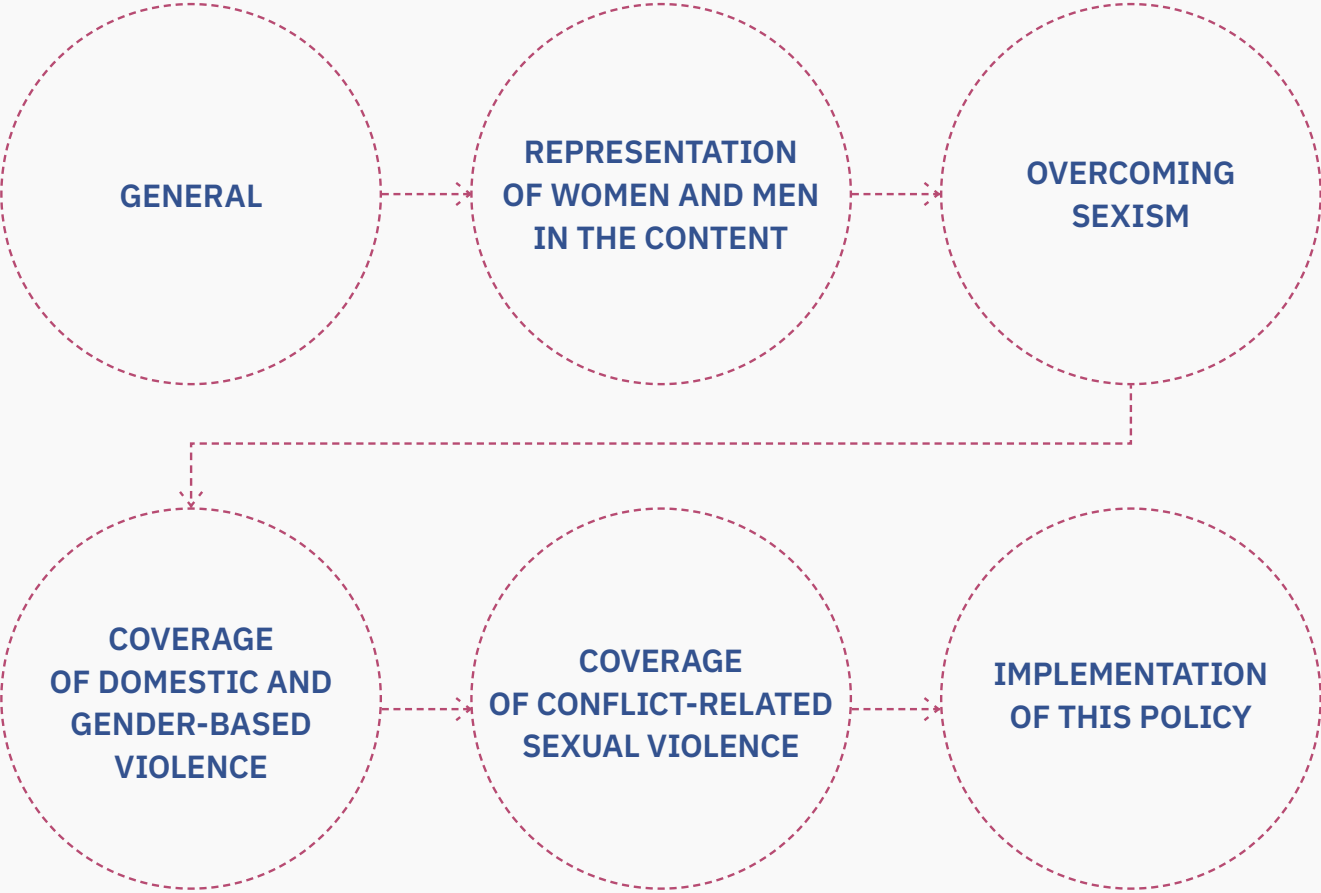
Ukraine's 2005 Law "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" emphasized that the media could adopt codes of professional ethics and other corporate standards to prevent gender-based violence, including all forms of violence against women.

The State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030 requires ensuring media coverage of information in a gender-sensitive manner.

To make this a common practice, we suggest that editorial boards adopt a policy of gender equality in the content and strictly adhere to it.

The Commission on Journalism Ethics, as a body of self-regulation of journalists and editorial boards in Ukraine, together with the NGO “Women in Media” offers a standard policy of gender equality in the media content. This policy can be adopted by any type of the media, regardless of the information dissemination method, in its entirety or integrated into existing documents.

THE POLICY CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING PARTS:



We recognize that democracy means equal participation of women and men in public life. Gender equality means balanced presence, empowerment, responsibility, and participation of both women and men in all spheres, including the media.

Achieving gender equality is a prerequisite for achieving social justice.

WE ARE AWARE THAT GENDER EQUALITY EXISTS AT TWO LEVELS OF OUR WORK:

EQUALITY WITHIN THE EDITORIAL TEAM

it is about equal opportunities and treatment, equal access to management positions, equal pay for the same type of work, and more.

EQUALITY IN THE CONTENT WE CREATE

when it comes to maintaining a gender balance in the selection of experts, overcoming gender stereotypes, avoiding sexism, etc.

We stand for human rights, and, therefore, we understand that as a media we can play a positive role in countering the spread of gender stereotypes.

For this purpose, our editorial board will make efforts to recognize, understand, and overcome such stereotypes.

This editorial gender policy is part of our commitment to our team, partners, and our audience.

II. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE CONTENT

We strive to ensure that both men and women are mentioned equally in news and events. This allows us to better reflect the diversity of our society and show the opinions and problems of different people.

We periodically track how many men and women have been mentioned in our materials and how they are distributed by various characteristics, e.g., affiliation with a national community, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, place of residence, etc.

In our materials, we strive to promote a positive image of women as active participants in social, sporting, economic, and political life.

It is also about meaningful **participation of women in materials as experts.** We take effort to give them a voice instead of talking about women indirectly or mentioning them only in passing.

With a certain regularity, **we track and measure the percentage of stories in our media that focus on women and / or on issues such as gender-based violence or women's political participation.**

We also track the percentage of time or space on our pages that goes to stories where women are the sources of information or viewpoints. We track the proportion of women compared to men depicted as survivors or victims of war, crimes, disasters, etc.

We try to create a balanced representation of women and men, inviting female experts and professionals on the subjects where women are unfairly underrepresented, in particular in military affairs, army, politics, economy, finance, etc., and not only in education, social sphere, culture and art.

We recognize that the principles of gender equality should apply to different types of editorial content, such as reports, columns, comments, stories, documentaries, interviews, talk shows, and others.

We will take care of gender equality in the materials regarding all the spheres we write about, for example, politics, economics, science, technology, agricultural development, sports, etc.

We consider the percentage of stories devoted to gender issues to be the indicator of adhering to this principle, on the front page or during prime-time, or on the front page of online editions, as well as the percentage of stories that include disaggregated data (*gender-disaggregated data is data that is broken down by sex, provides information separately for men and women, boys and girls, and is the basis for effective gender analysis*).

We avoid inappropriate comments on the appearance of women and men. For example, we do not focus on their clothes, hairstyle, make-up, and we do not ask if they have time for family, household management, etc., when we talk about individuals performing their professional duties.

Our materials are not the place for outdated stereotypical images of women such as: *the “hearth-keeper woman”, the “Barbie woman”, or “the woman is the weaker sex”*. After all, norms of behavior, appearance, or professions do not depend on gender.

We do not promote stereotypical images of femininity / womanliness and masculinity / manliness, which impose ideas about certain mandatory types of behavior, personal qualities, or external features for a person of any sex.

For example, we do not say that *“pink is for girls and blue is for boys”* or *“only a man can be a truck driver”*, *“a woman’s role is cooking and taking care of children”*.

Visualization (an illustration or a photo) is an important and full-fledged component of the materials. It can reinforce the written text, and, therefore, either promulgate the principles of equality, or broadcast gender stereotypes. We carefully select visuals for our materials to be consistent with our gender policy.

In our work, we do not emphasize sex, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, nationality or race, disability, social status, marital status of women and men, if it is not an important, substantively determined component of the material.

Where possible, we make an effort to use gender statistics, i.e., statistics disaggregated by sex. It provides our audience with information about socio-demographic characteristics of such groups as women and men. For example, about the level of pay for work of equal value, about the share of men and women in various civil service positions, about the level of education and the incidence of diseases that can affect more women or men. About the quantitative ratio of women and men in political parties. About the number of male and female drivers or about those who take a child-care leave, etc.

We consistently use feminine forms according to Ukrainian spelling, considering this practice important for increasing the visibility of women’s social and political contribution. The use of the masculine gender for women is possible in the characters’ direct speech, if they insist on it, but not in the indirect and author’s language of our materials.

III.

OVERCOMING SEXISM

WHEN PREPARING MATERIALS, WE AVOID NOT ONLY HOSTILE SEXISM BUT ALSO BENEVOLENT SEXISM. Benevolent sexism is sexism that, like hostile sexism, discredits women, but in a more subtle way; it can even be confused with compliments. These are passages about women being “*weak*”, “*fragile*”, “*beauties*”. For instance: “*a fragile blonde fights in a motorized infantry brigade*”.

WE VERIFY OUR MATERIALS USING THE INVERSION RULE (the so-called “mirror rule”) or role reversals to help illustrate the meaning of the stereotype. Would a certain statement look equally appropriate in materials about a woman or about a man?

WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE ADJECTIVES “BEAUTIFUL”, “PRETTY”, “WEAK”, “STRONG” AND THE LIKE ARE ASSESSMENTS BASED ON OUR AUTHORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY AND STRENGTH. Instead, we can provide specific details for our audience: “*she lifts 80 kg in the gym*”, “*she is wearing earrings, which were given to her by a friend*”, “*she is small, with a shoe size of 36, so there was no pair for her in the warehouse, and she had to buy it with her own money*”.

THROUGH OUR MATERIALS, WE ENCOURAGE CHANGE IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL MODELS OF BEHAVIOR of women and men to eradicate prejudices, customs, traditions, and all other practices based on the idea of inferiority of women or stereotypical roles of women and men.

IV. COVERAGE OF DOMESTIC AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

We avoid sharing content that promotes or may promote sexualization and / or objectification of women and men, i.e., the process of treating a person or presenting a person as an object that serves exclusively for the sexual satisfaction of others.

When covering the topic of domestic violence, we show zero tolerance for violence in the content, remembering that responsibility for violence lies only with the offender, not with the victim.

Given our responsibility to our audience, we try to reduce excessive sensationalism when presenting information: we do not use stereotypical headlines and do not support texts with shocking photos or illustrations. For example, the title *“She lived in fear of reprisals: in the Ternopil Region, another “monster husband” who abused his wife was exposed”*, can be given as *“A case of domestic violence was discovered in the Ternopil Region: what is known?”*. Such a headline remains restrained and communicates the essence of the event without sensational accents.

We emphasize the fact of the committed crime, not its details and the survivors’ emotions, we take care of their confidentiality and consider the risks of re-traumatization.

In materials about violence, we necessarily **indicate the contacts and addresses for assistance to the survivors**, we support the materials with expert comments from human rights organizations.

We realize that **responsible journalism will help cover a problem or a phenomenon**, whereas careless coverage of sensitive topics can exacerbate the situation and expose survivors to an additional risk.

We use **non-judgmental language that avoids victim blaming**, and we avoid victimization, e.g., we do not use expressions *“it’s her fault”*, *“she provoked”*, *“she asked for it”*, *“she was dressed like that”*, *“why did she go there in the first place”*, etc.

We **distinguish between consensual sexual activity and criminal acts**. In particular, we avoid phrases like *“fulfillment of matrimonial duties”*, *“courtship”*, *“show attention”*, *“expression of feelings”*, when it comes to sexual crimes or rape.

We use **exclusively correct terminology in our materials**. Example, *“survivor”* or *“a person who survived a traumatic experience”*, *“a person who suffered from violence”* instead *“victim”*, if the person who suffered violence survived. The word “victim” is stigmatizing.

We use **general information and statistics to present gender-based violence as a social issue**, and not as an individual, personal tragedy or part of criminal news.

We **include information with local contacts in the materials**, including hot-lines, crisis rooms, shelters available to persons who suffered domestic and gender-based violence.

V. **COVERAGE OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE (CRSV)**

In covering conflict-related sexual violence, we recognize that it is **one of the most challenging tasks in journalism and requires serious preparation.**

We recognize that **sexual violence is a war crime** and entails heavy physical, psychological, social, economic consequences for the survivors, witnesses, and also deeply destabilizes society.

When working on this topic, we are guided by the [Global Code of Conduct for Gathering and Using Information about Systematic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence \(Murad Code\)](#) and [Media Interaction Protocol](#) created by the NGO “Sema Ukraine” – an organization that unites women in Ukraine who survived CRSV.

When preparing such materials, we necessarily **ensure a balance between our right to publish socially important information and our responsibility to protect survivors**, as well as the impact of such information on our audience.

We avoid excessive sensationalism. For example, the title *“Ombudsman: Russian soldiers raped a 6-month-old girl with a teaspoon”* is shocking, better to put it as *“The ombudsman claimed “mass proportions” of rape in the territories occupied by the Russian troops”*.

We see survivors of sexual violence as individuals – which means that the safety, health and dignity of sexual violence survivors are our highest priority over other goals.

We understand that **contact with the media may expose survivors to risks of re-victimization, repression, stigmatization, information and other risks.**

We respect sexual violence survivors' right to control and autonomy, and therefore we do not contact them without prior warning. If we believe that direct contact could harm a person, we will use all options available to us to contact them through an intermediary – a lawyer, a loved one, etc. – and only if such options are completely unavailable, will we consider the option of direct contact.

We will refuse a direct interview with the survivor if there is a concern that this will contribute to re-traumatization. In this case, we will record interviews with psychologists, lawyers, and social workers who provide services to the survivors.

We will ensure comfort for the survivors during the interview to avoid re-traumatization. Signs of re-traumatization include, e.g., obvious signs of emotional stress, crying, restlessness, aloofness, passivity, outbursts of anger. When such signs appear, we will show understanding, offer a break, or, if necessary, stop the conversation, with the survivors' consent.

We encourage CRSV survivors to always have a “third party” with them, e.g., a family member or someone else they can trust during the interview.

We guarantee that we will not put pressure on survivors, forcing them to disclose information about their experiences of violence.

We will make it clear that **survivors may chose not to answer any individual questions.** We respect the decision of sexual violence survivors to end the interaction at any time.

We make sure to clearly inform survivors which of their photos, audio and / or video will be shared through our media and for which purpose.

Before publishing interviews, photos or videos, **we provide our characters with the opportunity to review the material.** They can see how it will look, ask for changes, and make an informed decision about the publication.

Our policy provides that **even after obtaining consent from survivors, we may remove material from open online access** if we believe it necessary to protect their privacy and dignity.

We understand that preparing such complex topics requires our time and resources, and removing the material after its publication or refusing to publish it at the stage of its readiness may cause us disappointment due to failed expectations. However, we are convinced that an integral part of our responsibility is not to cause additional trauma to those who have already experienced violence. This is part of our responsibility to our readers and the public at large.

We will ensure that victims are informed that their names and / or photos may be made public and visible worldwide for an unlimited period of time, as well as of the consequences of such disclosure (in particular, the information to be disclosed will remain publicly available and cannot be hidden). When publishing any materials depicting children who have experienced traumatic events, their faces and / or personal data that can identify them must be hidden.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY

THIS POLICY IS IN WRITING AND PUBLICLY AVAILABLE. We apply it in practice in our daily work. All employees, whether full- or part-time, are required to comply with this policy at work (or within the scope of cooperation with our editorial board), regardless of their own views.

THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OR HIS / HER DEPUTY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS POLICY IN THE EDITORIAL WORK.

ALL OUR EMPLOYEES ARE AWARE OF THIS POLICY. We regularly report on its implementation to our audience, executive board, and / or supervisory board.

WE MAKE AN EFFORT TO FIND RESOURCES FOR ORGANIZATION OF GROUP EDUCATIONAL EVENTS, trainings, seminars on gender equality and non-discrimination for our editorial staff, and we also encourage individual participation of our employees in external training and awareness-raising events.

WE PERIODICALLY PERFORM INTERNAL MONITORING OF THE MEDIA CONTENT to measure the effectiveness and evaluate the results of such activities and the implementation of this policy.

THIS POLICY IS REVIEWED AND UPDATED REGULARLY to meet new challenges of the time. би відповідати новим викликам часу.

