



# The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

## Women and the Media

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### Comments Paper - Sweden



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# The Swedish paradox of gender equality and the media

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## 1. Sweden Context

### 1.1 Background and historical development

Sweden is like many Nordic countries proud to be one of the frontrunners when it comes to achieving a gender-equality in society. It is also proud of its long legacy of protecting freedom of expression and freedom of the press dating back to 1766. These fundamental values have not always been enforcing each other in Sweden.

The development of gender equality in the media is closely intertwined with gender equality development in society as a whole. Women in Sweden were the last to achieve the right to vote in the Nordic countries (1921). Gradually the same rights and opportunities were formally achieved for men and women in society, but women may still facing lower salaries and pensions, are more responsible for unpaid care work and are still facing gender-based violence, just to mention a few areas of concern. Several legal acts to promote gender equality were introduced in the 1970-ies; individual taxation (1971), shared parental allowance and shared parental leave (1974) and the right to six-hour workday for parents of young children (1979). A separate Equal Opportunities Act and an Equal Opportunities Ombudsman were introduced 1980. This Ombudsman lasted until 2009 when Sweden decided on a joint Discrimination act and a joint Discrimination Ombudsman. In 2016, the legislation was (again) sharpened to demand annual mapping of gendered pay gaps. It is worth noting that even though the share of working women and men is high, the labour market is very gender divided, only six of the 30 largest occupations had an equal sex distribution (40-60 percent balance considered equal).<sup>1</sup> The media sector used to be male dominated but has lately become female-dominated in some areas, but there is still a male dominance in the top management and in the ownership.

In 2018, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency started operating with its goal to implement the Swedish gender equality policies.<sup>2</sup> The overarching goal is for women and men to have the same power to shape society and their own lives. This goal has six sub-goals: influence, economy, health, education, work and bodily integrity. Gender mainstreaming is the tool to achieve these goals. Media is part of that equation but is not the main area of concern for the Agency.

### 1.2 Self-regulation is important

The overall Swedish position on freedom of expression is to safeguard the independence of the media, also to keep a diversity of media, accessible for all.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Sweden 2018 Women and men in Sweden, Facts and figures 2018

<sup>2</sup> Website the Swedish Gender Equality Agency <https://www.jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/en>

Lately the safety of journalists has become a core issue for the Swedish government; Fojo Media Institute is commissioned to create a global center for threatened journalists with a special focus on women.<sup>3</sup> Media Literacy is another core area in Swedish politics, especially concerning young people, monitored by a government agency, the Swedish Media Council.

Sweden as a State party has signed both CEDAW 1979 and The Beijing Platform for Action from 1995, but there is a strong reluctance to interfere with the media industry as this could be considered as a kind of censorship from the state. Self-regulation of the media is a strong tradition, when efforts have been made to address and regulate the lack of gender equality in the media there have been protests, both from the industry and politicians. An example of this is sexist advertising in the public sphere. To avoid regulation the Swedish advertising industry created their own “Ombudsman” in 2009 to monitor sexist and stereotyped advertising. All the other Nordic countries have regulation for gender-discriminatory advertisement.<sup>4</sup>

Large parts of the Swedish news media seem to be lagging behind on gender equality compared to the Swedish society in general. Twelve of the 15 largest newspapers have currently men as editors-in-chief and the top management in the largest media corporations is still male dominated. The three public service broadcasting companies all have women CEOs.<sup>5</sup> The under-representation of women as news subjects persists, (31 percent) and the lack of female experts in the news is still prevailing (21 percent).<sup>6</sup>

It is however worth noting that some newsrooms do have a gender balance in the news due to leadership and regular monitoring, see for instance Swedish Television Umeå and the newspaper Västerbottens-Kuriren.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3. The case of the Swedish Film Institute

One media field where Sweden is in the forefront in terms of addressing lack of gender equality is the film industry. The Swedish Film Institute was created in 1963 and it is tasked by the Swedish government to implement the film policy in Sweden. The Institute strengthens Swedish film by supporting the production of new films, distributing and screening films of value, preserving Sweden’s film heritage and making it accessible, and representing Swedish film at an international level. The gender equality perspective now permeates everything that is done at the Swedish Film Institute: from production funding to the choice of films to promote from the archive, to the recruitment of new personnel.<sup>8</sup> The Swedish Film Institute is working

<sup>3</sup> Fojo Media Institute (2018) #Journodefender Turning Trolling against journalists on its head [https://fojo.se/images/publications/SE\\_journodefender\\_public\\_v1.pdf](https://fojo.se/images/publications/SE_journodefender_public_v1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See Svensson, Eva-Maria & Edström, Maria (2014). Freedom of expression vs. Gender equality – conflicting values when regulating gender stereotypes in advertising. *Tidsskrift for Rettsvitenskap*. 127:5/2014 ‘Regulation of Gender-Discriminatory Advertising in the Nordic Countries’ *Tema Nord* 2017:534 Nordic Council of ministers. <https://norden.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:1108955/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Source: Media company websites, October 2018. See also Edström, Maria & Ulrika Facht (2018) *Men and (a few) women in the top 100 international media corporations* Fact sheet. Nordicom

<sup>6</sup> Global media Monitoring project 2015 <http://whomakesthenews.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Edström, Maria & Mølster, Ragnhild (red.) (2014). *Making change. Nordic Examples of Working Towards Gender Equality in the Media*. Nordicom <http://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/publikationer/making-change>

<sup>8</sup> Swedish Film Institute (2017) Looking back and moving forward Gender Equality Report 2017 [http://www.filminstitutet.se/globalassets/\\_dokument/rapporter/gender-equality-report-2017\\_eng.pdf](http://www.filminstitutet.se/globalassets/_dokument/rapporter/gender-equality-report-2017_eng.pdf)

with the goal of 50/50 by 2020, a vision they successfully have exported, and it is currently the strategy for Eurimage/Council of Europe 2018-2020.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Policy Debate

As mentioned earlier, Sweden has a tradition to let the media industry regulate themselves as far as possible. However, in 2014 the Ministry of Culture assigned the Swedish public service broadcasting a more explicit overall goal that their content production should have an overall gender equality and diversity perspective.<sup>10</sup> By this, the public service broadcasting companies can be held accountable and explain their rationale for how they include these perspectives in their production. It also spur editors to take up the monitoring of the content.

### 2.1 Research and education initiatives

Globally, there is still an overall general lack of comparable and consistent sex-disaggregated data on the media. According to UNESCO, only 15 percent of the UN Member States collect such data.<sup>11</sup> The existing comparable data have mostly been collected by efforts from civil society, activists and researchers in joint action such as the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) and the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) mapping of newsrooms. In 2013, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) also did the first EU Beijing Platform for Action follow-up of gender equality in decision-making media organisations. Therefore it is important that the Swedish Research Council has founded an international media research project, *Comparing gender and media Equality across the globe* that has created an open-access database to be launched in 2019. Existing data from GMMP, IWMF and EIGE is curated and quality checked so that it can be used together with other available global statistics. This opens up for a multidimensional approach to the meaning of gender equality, involving systematic, empirical analysis in order to understand qualities, causes and consequences of media and gender equality. The dataset offers opportunities for scholars around the world to do their own analysis on gender and media equality and then to go beyond the numbers. However, future data collection about the media is crucial, especially from countries that are not part of any data collection at all on gender equality.

A recent important contribution to rewriting history in Sweden is the Biographical Dictionary of Swedish Women (SKBL). It provides free access to 1000 biographies of women who actively contributed to Swedish society. The online resource is created to counter the stunning male dominance in the Swedish Biographical Dictionary where 90 percent of the persons included are men. The Dictionary will function as a resource for the public and the media to remember women in Sweden who made history.

Another hopeful sign is that the EU Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme supports *AGEMI, Advancing Gender Equality in the Media Industries*. The project is

<sup>9</sup> EURIMAGES' GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY (2018-2020): Aiming for 50/50 by 2020  
<https://rm.coe.int/eurimages-gender-equality-strategy-2018-2020-aiming-for-50-50-by-2020/1680760bff>

<sup>10</sup> Broadcasting permit Swedish Television 2014-2019, § 6: ... "Programverksamheten ska som helhet bedrivas utifrån ett jämställdhets och mångfaldsperspektiv ..."

<sup>11</sup> Seager, Joni (2013) Sex-disaggregated indicators for water assessment, monitoring and reporting UNESCO  
[http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/Sex\\_disaggregated\\_indicators\\_for\\_water\\_assessment\\_monito.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/SC/pdf/Sex_disaggregated_indicators_for_water_assessment_monito.pdf)

aiming to bridge academia and the media industries with a learning platform, a resource bank and encounters between students and media representatives. AGEMI is a consortium of three universities (Newcastle, Padova, Gothenburg) and two associations of media professionals (EFJ and COPEAM).<sup>12</sup>

## 2.2 Civil society initiatives

There have been waves of demand for gender equality in the media, at least since the beginning of the 1970-s in Sweden. Here are some ongoing initiatives in Sweden aiming to address gender inequalities in the media:

- *The Swedish Women's lobby* has been campaigning for many years for a legislation against sexist advertising (Reklamera). They are currently monitoring the decision from the city of Stockholm to ban sexist advertising in public spaces (2018).
- *Feminist Perspective* is an independent online news site that started in 2011. It covers global and local news. Funded by subscribers and press subsidies.
- *Equalisters*. Every year since 2015 the organisation Equalisters do a monitoring of online news in Sweden, their 2018 analysis shows a minor increase of women (32 percent) and individuals of non-Nordic background (13 percent)
- *The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation* work in conflict areas and produced a handbook, *Gender and Conflict Sensitive Journalism* (2015), and mapped the impact of nationalism on gender equality, *Patriotism and Patriarchy* (2014).
- *Doris Film* and *WIFT* (Women in Film and Television Sweden) are two important civil society stakeholders in support of the work of the Swedish Film Institute.
- *The Gender Photographer*. Tomas Gunnarsson is a photographer that successfully has educated many organisations and municipalities on how to counter stereotypes and to share open-access pedagogical materials.<sup>13</sup>
- *Bilders makt* is an online educational resource to explore media stereotypes with focus on racist images, many with a gendered content.

Worth mentioning is also the 2017 #metoo-movement in Sweden that gathered 64 lists from all parts of society such as law, medicine, education, media, sports and politics. 100 000 women demanded change. Some also named their perpetrators in social media posts; a few names also became public in traditional news media. This caused an ethical debate about the media acting as a court, since the accused men were not convicted. The journalist-#metoo was furthered supported by an anthology, *Between the lines*, where women from various newsrooms describe more subtle sexist or/and racist behavior in the newsrooms.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A final version of the platform will be launched spring 2019 [www.agemi-eu.org](http://www.agemi-eu.org)

<sup>13</sup> A material in English and Russian will be published in 2019 *Imaged that change the World* Swedish Institute, [www.sharingsweden.se](http://www.sharingsweden.se)

<sup>14</sup> Nordlander, Jenny (2018) *Mellan raderna. En bok om att vara kvinna och journalist* Natur & Kultur.

## 2.3 Industry development

Since 2015, several of the large news organisations are using algorithms to monitor gender in their online content.<sup>15</sup> The largest Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* also developed a gender bot in 2018 that on a monthly basis deliver individual statistics to the journalists on gender performance in their texts. The aim of the gender bot-report is to spur reflections of the choices made. The Swedish example has recently been followed by similar actions taken by Financial Times.<sup>16</sup> Lately both the Swedish union of journalists and the media publishers are committed so counter hate speech and sexualised hate speech.

Newsrooms in Sweden that succeeds in a gender balance in their news points to the need for ongoing discussions and leadership that complements the daily monitoring. The Swedish Film Institute sums up their gender management: (1) leadership, (2) measure of progress on all levels, going beyond gender equality and make every voice count. (3) Inclusion strategies and counter every argument with actions.

## 2.4 Future topics

It is crucial to engage men in this conversation since our understanding of gender is relational and because men still tend to find men's doings and sayings more interesting to focus on in the media. Civil society organisations such as *Män för Jämställdhet* a non-profit, feminist organisation founded for men to take action against men's violence towards women is important contributors when combatting gender stereotypes in the media.

The media industry also needs to expand their knowledge about age management in order to provide newsrooms that are more inclusive and to be able to address gendered ageism in the media.<sup>17</sup> The efforts to combat limiting stereotypes are also important to take into account when new technologies develop.

## 3. Transferability aspects

Sweden could learn from the active monitoring measures by the French authorities and regulators. In Sweden, there are mostly in-house monitoring from the industries, but the numbers are seldom publicly shared and if they are, they are not compatible with other studies. Also, French media companies, at least Radio France and AFP seem to be more transparent about their activities.

From Sweden to France: Building infrastructure and supporting initiatives to promote gender equality in general. The creation of an online biographical dictionary of women who contributed to society is an important social innovation since women tend to be

<sup>15</sup> Genews and Prognosis are the two Swedish algorithm-companies focusing on creating gender-equality trackers for news media. Prognosis have online trackers for eight countries "shamebots" on twitter; @shamebot\_se, @likestillingbot @shamebot\_fr etc.

<sup>16</sup> Waterson, Jim (2108) Financial Times tool warns if articles quote too many men The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/nov/14/financial-times-tool-warns-if-articles-quote-too-many-men>

<sup>17</sup> Edström, Maria (2018) Visibility patterns of gendered ageism in the media buzz: a study of the representation of gender and age over three decades, *Feminist Media Studies*, 18:1, 77-93. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14680777.2018.1409989>

forgotten in history. The dictionary could be connected and developed on a European level.

Some of the strategies from the Swedish Film Institute seem to be transferable. The regular counting, by hand or through algorithms might also be transferable, but the success depends on leadership and action, counting gives just the baseline.

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

Gender equality in the media is a matter of expanding freedom of expression. Cultural and historical conditions matters. Sweden is a wealthy nation with structures that support gender equality such as individual taxation, shared parental leave, day care centres and public systems for caring of older and frail persons. This affect the conditions in the media sector as well. Regardless of the conditions in the individual country, there are ways forward for all. The new UN Global Agenda for Sustainable Development from 2015 is key. Gender equality is one of the 17 new goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. The portal text reaffirms the Beijing Platform for Action and the importance of gender equality for sustainability: *“The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities”* (paragraph 20). This provides State Parties, civil society and industries with a plan to take action.

- Promote media issues in global agendas – Follow the commitment to CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, BpfA. Monitoring of actions already decided on should be mandatory. Focus on the BpfA 25+ evaluation of Section J.
- Collect comparable and consistent sex-disaggregated data about the media – otherwise it is impossible to know if there is progress. Create stable infrastructures for data collection.
- Support efforts like the Global Media Monitoring Project and encourage more countries to get involved. Support scholars and media watch organisations.
- Make it an obligation for publicly financed media to be more inclusive, and keep track of how other dimensions/structures such as age and ethnicity interact with gender in the workplace and in the media output. Beware of the binary trap.
- Provide spaces to exchange good practices, support the ones that already exist, such as AGEMI. Involve media educations and editors in the conversations and use the media literacy platforms to advance gender awareness among all age groups. Understand that this is also a leadership issue.

Finally, it is important to remind ourselves why human rights, gender equality and freedom of expression are a foundation for democratic societies, especially in times when these values are contested. We need to keep explaining why gender equality is important for the planet, so that everyone can live their rights.