

Guide on Gender-sensitive Reporting



Division for Cooperation on
Freedom of Expression

Co-funded
by the European Union



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Co-funded and implemented
by the Council of Europe

This Guide was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe under the programme Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye, by Council of Europe consultants Aleksandra Ničić & Dr Jelena Surčulija Milojević

The reproduction of extracts (up to 500 words) is authorised, except for commercial purposes as long as the integrity of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used out of context, does not provide incomplete information or does not otherwise mislead the reader as to the nature, scope or content of the text.

The source text must always be acknowledged as follows "© Council of Europe, 2025". All other requests concerning the reproduction/translation of all or part of the document, should be addressed to the Directorate of Communications, Council of Europe (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int).

All other correspondence relating to this publication should be addressed to: Division for Cooperation on Freedom of Expression Avenue de l'Europe F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France,

Tel. +33 (0)3 88 41 20 00,

E-mail: Horizontal.Facility@coe.int

© Council of Europe, July 2025. All rights reserved. Licensed to the European Union under conditions.

www.coe.int/freedomofexpression

Photo: Canva, Shutterstock

Guide on Gender-sensitive Reporting

Content

List of abbreviations.....	5
Introduction	6
1. European Regulatory Framework for Gender-Sensitive Reporting	7
1.1 Right to freedom of expression	8
1.2 Non-Discrimination and Gender-Sensitive Reporting	9
1.3 Council of Europe Regulatory Framework for Gender-Sensitive Reporting	9
2 Domestic legislation	14
2.1 What does the law say about gender-responsive information?	14
2.2 Domestic legislation and gender-sensitive language	17
2.3 What's in the the Law on Advertising?.....	18
3 Ethical Framework and the Importance of Self-Regulation.....	19
3.1 International Self-Regulatory Frameworks	19
3.2 Code of Conduct for Journalists of Serbia and Press Council Guidelines on Gender Equality and Gender-Sensitive Language	21
3.3 Recommendations on Media Coverage of Gender-Based Violence in Audiovisual News Programmes.....	23
3.4 Rulebook on Gender Equality of the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS).....	24
4 (Non)application of the rules on gender-sensitive reporting.....	26
4.1 Experiences of the Complaints Commission and some of the examples of violations of the Code of Journalists of Serbia.....	28
4.1.1 Interview with a serial rapist - a case in which almost every chapter of the Code was violated	28
4.2 Inappropriate publication of photos	31
4.2.1 Inconsistency of the title with the essence of the text	31
5 Understanding Gender-Sensitive Reporting.....	32
5.2 The Role of Journalism in Promoting Gender Equality	34
5.3. "Glass ceiling" - how to skip it in the world of media?	39
6 Importance of gender-sensitive reporting.....	40
6.1 Gender-sensitive language.....	40
6.2 Deviations in the application of gender-sensitive language.....	43

6.3	Representation of Women in Journalistic Reporting	44
6.4	Examples of stereotypical representation of women in the media .	46
6.5	. Examples of journalistic content that "break" stereotypes.....	48
6.6.	Representation of women in PR content and advertisements	50
6.7	Examples of representation of women in PR content and advertisements transmitted by the media	52
7	Artificial Intelligence and Gender-Responsive Reporting	55
8	Reporting on violence against women.....	57
8.1	Examples of Unethical Reporting of Violence Against Women	62
9	Recommendations for Gender Responsive Reporting	63
9.1	Avoidance of stereotypes	64
9.2	Reporting on victims of violence	64
9.3	Gender-sensitive language.....	66
10	Literature	67

List of abbreviations

UNS	Journalists' Association of Serbia
NUNS	Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia
PC	Press Council
REM	Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
ECHR	The European Convention on Human Rights
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
GMMP	The Global Media Monitoring Project
EFJ	European Federation of Journalists
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
MFRR	Media Freedom Rapid Response
LPIM	Law on Public Information and Media

Introduction

Gender-sensitive reporting is an indispensable part of professional, ethical and responsible journalism in modern society. The role of the media in shaping public opinion, norms and values implies special attention to the way women and men are presented, as well as to the visibility of different gender identities in the public sphere. The way in which gender roles, stereotypes, violence against women or the political participation of women are discussed can contribute to the strengthening of equality, but also to its undermining.

The Guide was developed in cooperation between the Council of Europe and the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS), as a contribution to the education of young journalists through the programme of the School of Journalism in Serbia. The aim of the Guide is to help future media professionals to recognise and apply a gender-responsive approach in their daily work, drawing on legal and ethical standards, both international and domestic.

Through three thematic units: the European regulatory framework, domestic legislation and ethical guidelines, the Guide provides an overview of key norms and recommendations related to gender equality and media reporting. A special focus is placed on the role of journalists in combating stereotypes and prejudices, as well as on the importance of self-regulation and respect for the ethical codes of the profession.

1. European Regulatory Framework for Gender-Sensitive Reporting

The development of an international regulatory framework for gender-sensitive reporting reflects a broader evolution in the understanding of gender equality as an integral part of human rights. Since the first general guarantees of the right to freedom of expression and the prohibition of discrimination, the international community has gradually recognised the specific challenges faced by women and gender-marginalised groups in the media space over the decades.

Over time, these documents have increasingly defined the obligations of states, media actors and regulatory bodies to avoid stereotypes, empower women in the media sector, use gender-sensitive language and encourage self-regulation.

Particularly noteworthy is the contribution of the Council of Europe, as an organisation that has set up one of the most elaborate systems of human rights protection in Europe. Through numerous recommendations of the Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly resolutions and political declarations, the Council of Europe has developed and promoted the principles of gender equality in all aspects of media action, from content and presentation to organisational structure and decision-making.

This chapter provides an overview of the most important international standards relevant to gender-sensitive reporting. It is based on the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and the prohibition of discrimination enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights. It then analyses the normative and policy documents of the Council of Europe relating to the portrayal of women in the media, the use of non-sexist language, the elimination of stereotypes, as well as the role of self-regulation and media ethics in achieving gender equality.

1.1 Right to freedom of expression

On the topic of gender-sensitive reporting, it is important to understand the right to freedom of expression and the prohibition of discrimination. The right to freedom of expression is a fundamental human right protected by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). However, it is not absolute, as it contains certain limitations. Article 10 (1) of the European Convention on Human Rights states that " Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises."

Article 10 (2) states that " The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary."¹

In its case-law, the European Court of Human Rights has established three criteria that must be met in order for freedom of expression to be restricted: that the restriction is prescribed by law, that there is a legitimate aim and that the restriction is "necessary in a democratic society". If these conditions are not met, the European Court of Human Rights will rule that there has been a violation of Article 10 of the Convention.

¹ Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Council of Europe.

1.2 Non-Discrimination and Gender-Sensitive Reporting

The prohibition of discrimination also includes gender-sensitive reporting. This is best illustrated in two articles of the European Convention on Human Rights, where Article 14 of the ECHR states that "The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status." This principle is reiterated in Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 on the General Prohibition of Discrimination, which states as follows:

(1) " The enjoyment of any right set forth by law shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status."

(2) " No one shall be discriminated against by any public authority on any ground such as those mentioned in paragraph."

1.3 Council of Europe Regulatory Framework for Gender-Sensitive Reporting²

The recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe are non-binding legal instruments (so-called soft law), which provide guidance to member states for improving legislation, policies and practices in areas such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, media and education. Although they do not have legally binding force unlike, for example, the European Convention on Human Rights, these recommendations carry significant political and professional authority and are frequently considered as relevant standards that reflect best practices and the direction of desirable institutional development.

² See also: Mushfig, A., Surculija Milojevic, J. (2019). Gender Equality and the Media: Guide for News Producers in Azerbaijan. Council of Europe, p. 8-13.

Recommendation No. R (84) 17 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe "On equality between women and men in the media"

was adopted in 1984 and proposes that media organisations should be encouraged to adopt "positive action programmes to improve the situation of women, particularly at decision-making levels and in technical service", and that they should apply "the principle of equal treatment between women and men as a result of rules laid down for the recruitment, training, remuneration, promotion and any other conditions of employment of persons employed in the media". Women should be encouraged to participate "in an equitable proportion in media supervisory and management bodies" as "in talks and discussions broadcast by the media".

Advertising campaigns in media sponsored by public authorities, must avoid "any sexual stereotypes [...] any exploitation of the bodies of women and men to draw attention to goods or services."

Recommendation No. 1555 (2002) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: Image of women in the media

calls on the governments of the member states to introduce and condemn the concept of "sexism" in their legislation, adopt a law on gender equality in the media, enable media associations the right to complain to the courts in cases of violations of human rights, finance and launch equality projects in the media, encourage advertisers to improve self-regulation, use positive discrimination measures, encourage women to participate at all levels of media decision-making and take up positions, and ensure that gender equality training is included in journalism education, and that comparative studies on gender and media are funded.

Recommendation No. Rec (2003)3 on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making

calls for the equal participation of women in all parts of the media process, and in particular for "the promotion of balanced participation in

decision-making positions in the media, including management, programming, education, training, research and regulatory bodies."

Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers No. CM/Rec(2007)2 on media pluralism and diversity of media content and **No. CM/Rec(2007)3 on the remit of public service media in the information society**. Both recommendations state that public service media should "play an active role in promoting social cohesion and integrating all communities, social groups and generations." with respect for their different identities and needs. Special attention should be paid to the content created by such groups, media serving such groups, as well as their access, presence and presentation in public media. Issues of gender equality should also be addressed.

Recommendation No. CM/Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Gender Equality Standards and Mechanisms calls on media organisations to create self-regulatory frameworks that should include the issue of "discrimination on grounds of sex/gender equality, [...] the use of non-sexist language and [...] non-stereotypical images and [...] violent or degrading material". It also suggests that "States should encourage effective measures to ensure that gender equality, as a principle of human rights, is respected in the media, in line with the social responsibility associated with the power they have in modern societies."

Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1557 (2007) and Recommendation 1799 (2007) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the "Image of Women in Advertising" note that women are often portrayed in advertising in situations that are humiliating and degrading, even violent and offensive to human dignity, sometimes as mere consumer goods or sexual objects. Respect for human dignity must be imposed as a constant goal of advertisers. It is important to give rights to women's associations to

take legal action in defence of the collective interest – the elimination of discrimination against women in advertising. The codes of ethics in the member states of the Council of Europe must be harmonised with these recommendations, and it is desirable to organise programmes in schools to teach children to distinguish between advertising and reality, especially in the information society.

[Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe CM/Rec\(2011\)7 on the new notion of media](#) calls on media content creators, editors and distributors to "adhere to relevant professional standards, including those designed to combat discrimination and stereotypes and to promote gender equality.

[Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe CM/Rec\(2013\)1 on gender equality and the media](#) is one of the most important recent documents on this issue. Gender equality is finally recognised as an "integral part of human rights". The document argues that "the exercise of freedom of expression can advance gender equality" and it is very important to use this as a principle in gender-sensitive reporting.

[Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe CM/Rec\(2017\)9 on Gender Equality in the Audiovisual Sector](#) offers for the first time guidelines for advancing gender equality in the audiovisual sector and concrete measures for their implementation. One of the most important measures relates to ensuring that a key figure in the audiovisual sector is appointed to "monitor the application of the principle of gender equality in decision-making and practices".

[Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe CM/Rec\(2019\)1 on preventing and combating sexism](#) was adopted in response to the emergence of the #MeToo movement, which highlighted the existence of sexism in all spheres of society. This

Recommendation requires the governments of the Council of Europe to "take measures to prevent and combat sexism and its manifestations in the public and private spheres, and to encourage relevant actors to implement appropriate laws, policies and programmes", to ensure the translation and dissemination of this Recommendation and to monitor progress in its implementation. The appendix to the Recommendation contains guidelines for preventing and combating sexism, together with measures for its implementation. **Sexism** is defined as "any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based on the idea that a person or group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, for the purpose or effect of undermining the inherent dignity or rights of a person or group of persons." causing physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or group of persons; Creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, humiliating or offensive environment; the representation of an obstacle to the autonomy and full exercise of human rights by a person or group of persons and the maintenance and reinforcement of gender stereotypes."

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as [the Istanbul Convention](#) , obliges member states (including Serbia) to encourage media outlets to adopt gender-responsive reporting. The Convention requires States to implement "legislative or other measures to encourage the media to set appropriate standards for self-regulation in order to promote respect and non-violence, and to prevent discrimination and strengthening of gender stereotypes." (Istanbul Convention, 2011: 4)'

[The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) was adopted by the United Nations in 1979 and is legally binding on all states that have ratified it, including Serbia. This Convention calls for the promotion of the positive role of

women as active participants in socio-political activities, and this promotion also includes the media (CEDAW, 1979, Article 5). Although the following sections do not describe the explicit actions of the media, the General Recommendations published by the CEDAW Committee emphasise the importance of adopting measures against harmful portrayals of women in the media.

The Beijing Declaration, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, often serves as a framework for gender equality for the media, non-governmental organisations, and governments. On Women's Day, the European and International Federation of Journalists (EFJ and IFJ) reiterate their call for her to be respected, condemning the suppression of women's right to freedom of expression and the silencing of the voices of those from marginalised groups. **The Beijing Declaration** and Platform for Action emphasise that states should ensure that women should be portrayed in a balanced and non-stereotypical manner in the media, recognising the diversity of women's roles and contributions to society. (Beijing Declaration, 1995: 11). Violent and pornographic content, as well as content that reinforces women's traditional roles and influences their participation in society, should also be avoided. This statement also emphasises the necessity of women's presence in the media. It also emphasises the need for effective self-regulatory frameworks, but also for "involvement of women in decision-making processes on the development of new technologies in order to have full participation and influence" (Beijing Declaration, 1995: 41)

2 Domestic legislation

2.1 What does the law say about gender-responsive information?

In media laws, the most important for the journalistic profession, gender-responsive reporting is primarily addressed through anti-

discrimination provisions, while separate parts related to the specifics of gender reporting do not exist in legislation, except in bylaws.

According to [the Law on Public Information and Media](#), media outlets are obliged to submit a document that envisages internal measures and procedures for achieving equality³. Any media that fails to comply with this obligation will be automatically removed from the Media Register.

The production of such content is in the public interest, as recognised by the Law on Public Information and Media (ZJIM) that stipulates the "support for the production of media content in order to develop awareness of equality, improve gender equality and eliminate stereotypes and prejudices against members of groups that are at risk of discrimination."⁴

The ZJIM contains an anti-discrimination provision that states that information, ideas and opinions in the media "shall not incite discrimination, hatred or violence against a person or a group of persons because of their belonging or non-belonging to a race, religion, nation, sex, because of their sexual orientation, gender identity or other personal characteristic..."⁵

However, intent is also a relevant factor under the Law, so if it is determined that the journalist did not intend to incite discrimination, hatred or violence against women, it will be considered that they did not commit hate speech⁶.

The publication of such discriminatory content that openly or covertly incites hatred or violence based on gender or gender identity is a

³ Law on Public Information and Media, Article 47, "Official Gazette RS", no. 92/2023

⁴ Law on Public Information and Media, Article 15, "Official Gazette RS", no. 92/2023

⁵ Law on Public Information and Media, Article 86, "Official Gazette RS", no. 92/2023

⁶ Law on Public Information and Media, Article 87, "Official Gazette RS", no. 92/2023

serious violation of the Law on Electronic Media (Law on Electronic Media, Article 40).

All these provisions are also in accordance with [the Law on Gender Equality](#), which states that "content in the media, including advertising, must not contain data that creates or encourages discrimination on the basis of sex or gender."⁷

This Law "prohibits the expression of hatred and belittling of women and men, as well as public advocacy, support and action based on prejudices, customs and other social patterns of behavior that are based on the idea of subordination or superiority of women and men, i.e. on gender stereotypes."⁸

[The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination](#) defines terms "discrimination" and "discriminatory treatment" as "any unjustified distinction or unequal treatment, or omission (exclusion, restriction or giving priority), in relation to persons or groups as well as members of their families, or persons close to them, in an open or covert manner", and it can be based, among other things, on gender, gender identity, and other personal characteristics. Forms of discrimination include direct and indirect discrimination, as well as degrading treatment, sexual harassment and incitement to discrimination⁹. Thus, this Law prohibits "the expression of ideas, information and opinions that incite discrimination, hatred or violence against a person or a group of persons because of their personal characteristics, in public media and other publications, at gatherings and places accessible to the public, by printing and displaying messages or symbols and in any other way."¹⁰

⁷ Law on Gender Equality, Article 44, "Official Gazette RS", no. 52/2021

⁸ Law on Gender Equality, Article 44, "Official Gazette RS ", no. 52/2021

⁹ Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, Article 5, "Official Gazette RS", no. 22/2009 and 52/2021

¹⁰ the same

2.2 Domestic legislation and gender-sensitive language

According to the Law on Gender Equality, the use of gender-sensitive language was intended to be mandatory in the media from mid-2024. However, as this provision encountered considerable public resistance, on June 27, the Constitutional Court initiated proceedings ¹¹ to determine the unconstitutionality of the Law on Gender Equality and suspended the application of provisions relating to the use of gender-sensitive language.

In 2021, immediately after the adoption of the Law, representatives of the Committee on Literature and Language of Matica Srpska, expressed concern about the mandatory use of gender-sensitive language, prescribed by the Law on Gender Equality, stating that its implementation "undermines the democratic nature of language choices and artificially imposes a change in the norm." In the letter¹², they stated that many forms of femininity have not yet come to life naturally in the Serbian language, and that its forced application could hinder communication, particularly in the fields of education and administration. They proposed that the Law be reworded to allow the use of both the grammatical masculine and feminine genders, allowing for linguistic flexibility and respect for the differing views among speakers.

At the time of writing the Guide, the Constitutional Court has not yet decided on the constitutionality of the provisions of the Law relating to gender-sensitive language, so their application has been temporarily suspended until the final decision of the Constitutional Court is issued.

The Law on Gender Equality defines gender-sensitive language as one that "promotes equality between women and men", but also as "a

¹¹ [the Constitutional Court; Published: June 27, 2024](#)

¹² [;Matica Srpska; published: 27. March 2021.](#)

means of influencing the awareness of those who use that language in the direction of achieving equality, including changes in opinions, attitudes and behaviour within the language they use in their personal and professional lives".¹³

According to the Law, the media bear significant responsibility in the promotion of gender-sensitive language, because, as previously pointed out, the use of the feminine grammatical gender contributes to greater visibility of women in society.

The law requires the media to use gender-sensitive language in their reporting. Print, online, and electronic media are obliged to promote awareness of the importance of gender equality and to contribute to combating gender stereotypes, discrimination, and gender-based violence.¹⁴

2.3 What's in the the Law on Advertising?

Since this guide will consider not only journalistic content, but also advertisements, it is important to refer to the [Law on Advertising](#), which also prohibits discrimination. According to this Law "an advertising message must not, directly or indirectly, encourage discrimination on any grounds, particularly on the basis of belief, national, ethnic, religious, gender or racial affiliation, political, sexual or other orientation, social origin, property status, culture, language, age, or mental or physical disability.."¹⁵

¹³ Law on Gender Equality, Article 4, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", no. 52/2021

¹⁴ Law on Gender Equality, Article 44, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", no. 52/2021

¹⁵ Law on Advertising, Article 8, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia", no. 6/2016 and 52/2019

3 Ethical Framework and the Importance of Self-Regulation

Self-regulatory frameworks are of crucial importance for gender equality, as they provide guidance for responsible reporting for many newsrooms. These frameworks include codes of ethics, recommendations, and guidelines, which are not legally binding, but serve to indicate when journalists act contrary to professional and ethical standards.

While existing laws prescribe a number of sanctions for non-compliance with professional standards, self-regulatory frameworks often result in reputational pressure. Moral condemnation by colleagues can, at times, be highly effective and may discourage media outlets from repeating the same mistakes in their reporting.

3.1 International Self-Regulatory Frameworks

The [Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists](#) was adopted by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) on 12 June 2019, at its 30th Congress held in Tunis. This charter was adopted as a supplement to the IFJ Declaration of Principles for the Conduct of Journalists (1954), known as the "Bordeaux Declaration". Journalists should "ensure that the dissemination of information or opinions does not contribute to hatred or prejudice and do everything in their power to prevent the spread of discrimination based on geographical, social or ethnic origin, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, disability, political or other opinions" (Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists, 2019).

In addition to this document, the International Federation of Journalists has also published the [Guidelines](#) for a journalism sensitive to diversity, equality and inclusion. One of the key guidelines emphasises the importance of recognising the interconnectedness of different forms of discrimination, particularly those based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social origin, and disability.

"For example, a black woman will face discrimination not only because of her gender, but also because of her ethnicity."¹⁶

This interconnectedness of different forms of discrimination is referred to as intersectionality and, as the Handbook says, should be especially taken into account when reporting and writing stories.

To improve journalistic reporting, it is necessary to overcome the "glass ceiling"(discussed later in the Guide) and analyse the work environment to ensure gender diversity. In this domain, it is also important to encourage inclusive leadership, which involves the active participation of women in leadership positions within the media.

his means developing a corporate culture in which all individuals feel valued and heard, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, origin, religion, or other personal or social characteristics. (Guidelines for a journalism sensitive to diversity, equity and inclusion, 2024: 14).

The UNDP Handbook on Gender-Responsive Reporting recommends that journalists avoid condescending attitudes towards women, refrain from presenting them as sexual objects, and prevent the use of stereotypes and objectification in audiovisual content. The Handbook also stresses that women should not be secondarily victimised through media coverage. (Pejović, 2022: 22-33).

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) has supported the initiative of its member from Belgium, the Professional Association of Journalists in Belgium (AJP), which has developed guidelines for gender-responsive reporting. These recommendations focus, on the one hand, on increasing the representation of women in editorial teams and leadership positions, and on the other, on outlining good practices in reporting¹⁷.

¹⁶ Guidelines for a journalism sensitive to diversity, equity and inclusion, 2024: 13

¹⁷ [the European Institute for Gender Equality; Published: February 2011](#)

[The European Federation of Journalists \(EFJ\) has published Guidelines on Best Practice for Gender Equality within European Associations of Journalists](#), some of the most important are:

- Adoption of gender equality guidelines
- Monitoring gender equality
- Adoption of positive discrimination measures
- Establishment of the Council for Gender/Equality
- Women's involvement in the work of the association
- Women's participation in decision-making
- Use of gender equality checklist
- Best practices within the European Unions of Journalists, concerning the impact of gender equality on workplaces:
 - Right to maternity leave
 - Fight for equal pay
 - Combating harassment
 - A plan for equality.
 - Networking
 - Mentoring Programs

As stated in the IFJ's Statement of Support, which was joined by the UNS, misogyny must be banished from newsrooms and from media narratives.

3.2 Code of Conduct for Journalists of Serbia and Press Council Guidelines on Gender Equality and Gender-Sensitive Language

The journalistic profession has [Code of Conduct for Journalists of Serbia](#), developed by the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) and the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (NUNS). These two largest and most representative Serbian journalists' associations are also founders of the Press Council, a self-regulating body, established to monitor compliance with the Code of Journalism of Serbia in print and online media. This self-regulatory body, through the Complaints Commission, resolves complaints from individuals and

institutions about the content of print (and online) media on a monthly basis.

The latest version of the Journalists' Code of Serbia, co-authored by the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) and (NUNS), contains a new section "**Respect for Dignity**", which, among other things, refers to the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender. Journalists are encouraged to use gender-sensitive language.

The Journalists' Code of Serbia, in its fifth section (V) Respect for Dignity, states that "Journalists shall not discriminate on the basis of, among other things, race, sex, gender, age, personal characteristics, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin", which clearly supports gender-sensitive reporting. In its Guidelines, the Journalists' Code of Conduct of Serbia further states that "membership in a particular ethnic, political, ideological or other group, as well as marital status, religious affiliation, social origin, shall be stated only in cases where this information is necessary for a full understanding of the context of the event being reported." Journalists **must avoid phrases that have chauvinistic, sexist or otherwise discriminatory connotations**. And finally, most specifically for the topic of the Guide: "Journalists **should use gender-sensitive language**, try to evenly include interlocutors of different groups relevant to the topic (gender, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation) and responsibly approach differences in society."

In addition to the Code of Journalism of Serbia, the Press Council has also issued [Guidelines for Professional Reporting](#), including recommendations related to gender equality and gender-sensitive language in print and online media content.

The guidelines state that media outlets should avoid "degrading or trivialised reporting on women's appearance, dress, and behavior,

instead of a balanced, information-based consideration of their views and opinions" (Professional Reporting Guidelines, 2022).

In addition to sexualisation, the problem that arises in journalistic reporting is the maternalisation, that is, the romanticisation of the sacrifice of women in the family. For this reason, the new guidelines recommend avoiding "reporting and portraying women and men in stereotypical roles within the family and community" (Professional Reporting Guidelines, 2022).

This is one of the problems that was presented in more detail in the previous chapters of this Guide. Women are stereotyped and discriminated against by emphasising their physical characteristics instead of their attitudes, expertise and intellectual abilities.



Meeting of the Complaints Commission (Photo: UNS Press Centre)

3.3 Recommendations on Media Coverage of Gender-Based Violence in Audiovisual News Programmes

The Working Group on Gender Equality in the Media of the Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities (MNRA), of which the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media in Serbia is a member, has adopted [Recommendations on media reporting on gender violence](#) that is important for gender equality. This document recommends that the fight against gender violence is an issue of general interest and one of the basic human rights, and that gender violence is not an exclusive issue for women, but a problem for the whole society. It is also recommended to respect the dignity of victims and their children, without revealing details of their private lives, as if the sources of information must be clearly indicated, in a specific context and with interviews with appropriate professionals. There is no place for sensationalism and drama, as well as hints of the circumstances of the people involved in the case. Reporting should help shed light on the consequences of violence and provide full details of contacts to support victims and prevent violence. The application of codes of ethics in this area is also emphasised. (Recommendations on Gender Violence, 2019:1-4). Although not binding, this document can ensure that the media that covers them are one step closer to reporting in accordance with professional standards.

3.4 Rulebook on Gender Equality of the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS)

UNS's **Rulebook on Gender Equality** points to the importance of principles and practices that would enable women and men to be equally represented and portrayed in an equal way, not only in traditional, but also in online media, digital platforms and social networks. The goal, as stated in the Rulebook, is for the media to be "free from gender stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination, and to create content that reflects the real image of society."¹⁸

¹⁸ UNS Regulations on Gender Equality, 2025

Equality in the production of media content, as stated in the Rulebook, also means that men and women are represented in the spirit of equality by the editorial concept. The Rulebook, therefore, recommends journalists to avoid showing gender stereotypes and discriminatory language in media reports.

"Women and men should be represented in balance, with respect for their real contributions in all aspects of life, and not only through the prism of traditional roles or according to gender norms," UNS states in the Rulebook.

4 (Non)application of the rules on gender-sensitive reporting

According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), the lowest representation of women in the media is found in expert roles, while they most often appear as individuals providing personal testimony. This is the basis for the guideline recommending that the media ensure the "greater representation of women as interlocutors and their meaningful participation in various professional and informative roles, especially when it comes to women from minority groups" (Press Council, 2022). This guidance was adopted by the Press Council from Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The document criticises "the unbalanced representation of men and women and the lack of meaningful participation of women in various professional and informational roles" (Council of Europe, 2019: 9). It should be emphasised that this Recommendation is primarily addressed to Member States, not to the media. However, the Press Council assessed the provision as valuable for guiding media practice.

The guidelines also recommend the use of gender-sensitive language, the aim of which, as it is stated, is "to equalise natural and grammatical gender when it comes to professions, titles, titles, orientations that designate women", especially in languages such as Serbian, where gendered forms exist. For instance, a woman who practises psychology is also referred to as a "psihološkinja" (the feminine form of "psychologist" in Serbian), that is, by the feminine grammatical gender, because her natural gender is feminine.

The Press Council Guidelines also criticise the use of masculine nouns as gender-neutral, recommending that "gender-neutral expressions such as *individual* or *person*, both singular and plural, be used"¹⁹.

Thus, it is always preferable to say: "novinarke (the feminine form of "journalist" in Serbian) i novinari wrote the text" or "persons who are engaged in journalism wrote the text", instead of "novinari wrote the text".

The guidelines also recommend that a female person should not be addressed by marital status.

"For example, if we say: Pera Perić came with a woman, we focus on only one person in the couple, a man, and we fall into the trap of sexism. Such a statement implies that a woman belongs to her husband, and that as a separate individual she is irrelevant, so much so that there is no need to even mention her name. Instead, it is more correct to say: "Pera and Ana Perić came, because this linguistic statement respects their individuality and the identity of each individual in the couple."²⁰

If it is unclear whether a particular document refers to men or women, it is necessary to specify both suffixes and separate them with a slash or indicate both parallel forms.

Examples of recommended forms are:

1. "It is necessary to make an appointment with your chosen "lekara/lekarke" (masculine and feminine forms of the noun doctor in Serbian), when both forms are listed and "separated" by a slash;

¹⁹ Press Council, Professional Reporting Guidelines, 2022.

²⁰ Press Council, Professional Reporting Guidelines, 2022

2. You need to make an appointment with your chosen "lekara" or chosen "lekarke", when both forms are listed and separated by the particle *or*;
3. You need to make an appointment with your chosen izabranog/e lekara/ke,, when the male form is listed, followed by a label to indicate the female" (Professional Reporting Guidelines, 2022).

4.1 Experiences of the Complaints Commission and some of the examples of violations of the Code of Journalists of Serbia

On the last Thursday of each month, the Complaints Commission of the Press Council organises public sessions at which it decides whether the Code of Conduct for Journalists of Serbia has been violated, based on the complaints it receives. Sometimes cases are resolved through mediation, so the Commission does not decide on violations of the Code. However, as practice has shown, mediation in cases of gender discrimination is rare, so the sessions usually end with a decision on appeal, i.e. decision whether the Code has or has not been violated. The following paragraphs will list cases in which women have been discriminated against or endangered, and in which the Complaints Commission has determined that the Code of Journalism of Serbia was violated.

4.1.1 Interview with a serial rapist - a case in which almost every chapter of the Code was violated

In 2022, an interview with the multiple rapist was published on the YouTube channel and the online edition of the daily newspaper "Informer," in which he recalled the details of the crime and thus re-traumatised the victims. When he was released after three decades in prison for these crimes, the editorial board of "Informer" contacted him for an interview. In an interview with the journalist of "Informer," he described the crimes in detail, speaking about them affirmatively. Immediately after the publication of the interview, UNS issued a

statement and pointed out that this content disturbed the victims, as well as all women who have suffered some form of violence.

"The Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS) protests against the publication of an interview in *Informer* with a multiple rapist who spent almost three decades in prison for these crimes because this content again harasses his victims as well as all women who have suffered some form of violence," UNS said in a statement²¹.

The UNS added that talking to former convicts or those who are serving their sentences is not prohibited, but that journalists and the media are obliged by the Code to act in the spirit of compassion for the victims.



From the protest in front of *Informer* for an interview with a serial rapist (Photo: A.N&M.S, UNS)

Informer justified the publication of this interview with the allegations that "interviews like this are done everywhere in the world - so that the people can see how the criminals think". For UNS, this explanation

²¹ [Association of Journalists of Serbia; Published on September 28, 2025](#)

was not valid, and in the aforementioned statement it was stated that the media content created in this way must not in any way disturb the victims of crimes. The Appeals Commission also decided that the Code was violated in the chapters Instinct of Reporting, Journalists' Responsibility, Journalistic Attention and the Use of Honourable Means.²²



***Protest in front of Informer over an interview with a serial rapist
(Photo: A.N/UNS)***

This interview was accompanied by public dissatisfaction, and after five protests in front of the editorial office of Informer, the controversial content was removed from the portal, while it is still present on the YouTube channel. This interview was also reported by the tabloids "Alo"²³ and "Blic".²⁴

²² [Press Council - žalbe.rs; Published: October 27, 2022](#)

²³ [Hello; Published on September 27, 2022](#)

²⁴ [Blic; Published on September 27, 2022](#)

4.2 Inappropriate publication of photos

In 2016, Olivera Viktorovic Djuraskovic complained to the Press Council²⁵ because the daily newspaper "Alo" published photos of her from the nudist beach on Ada Bojana, which were captured without her knowledge.

"She enjoyed Ada Bojana for hours completely naked, showing all passers-by, her breasts and crotch", "the famous stripper from 'Žika's dynasty' obviously and privately likes to undress", "to make matters worse, she educates children", are parts of the text that accompanied these photos. In her complaint, she stated that photography is prohibited on the nudist beach on Ada Bojana and pointed out that this article violated her dignity.

Members of the Commission assessed that the newspaper violated the right to privacy of Olivera Viktorovic Djuraskovic by secretly photographing her on a nudist beach. The comments, as they stated, violated her integrity and dignity, and because of the vulgarity, these comments were an example of disrespect for ethics and culture of public speech.

Therefore, the Appeals Commission decided ²⁶ that the daily newspaper "Alo", by publishing this content, violated the chapters Responsibility of Journalists, Respect for Privacy and Use of Honorable Means.

4.2.1 Inconsistency of the title with the essence of the text

In many years of decision-making practice, the Press Council Complaints Commission has also encountered cases in which the Code has been violated due to imprecise wording or a title that is not in line with the essence of the text. Thus, for example, at the 2017 session, it decided that the Code was violated in the text published in

²⁵ [Press Council - žalbe.rs; Published on September 29, 2016](https://www.presscouncil.rs/portal/presscouncil.rs/Published%20on%20September%2029,%202016)

²⁶ *same*

the printed edition of "Vecernje Novosti" with the title " Fines for flirting hit the wallet." Such a headline could mislead readers into thinking that courtship is criminalised, not sexual harassment, which is why the Autonomous Women's Center (AWC) filed a complaint²⁷. As stated by the AWC, such a title also violates the point of the Code in which it is written that the title must correspond to the essence of the text.

The text contained many other false claims, such as the one that fines are only imposed if the abuser is a partner or co-worker.

"In this text, courtship is 'mixed' with stalking and harassment, which are criminal offenses. Also, the text misrepresented that only 'aggressive courtship' or sexual harassment of women would be punishable, even though the law stipulates that both perpetrators and victims can be of any gender," the Appeals Commission said in explaining its decision.

5 Understanding Gender-Sensitive Reporting

Sometimes antagonism is evident when a female person presents herself as *psihološkinja, rektorka i direktorka* (femine forms of nouns psychologist, rector and director in Serbian language). Forcing gender-neutral patterns in the male gender, even though women do certain jobs, is an indicator of inequality in society that spills over into the media. Journalists and society have the task of changing this practice, because language is not only *a mirror of reality*, but, as Edward Sapir wrote a long time ago, it shapes the way we perceive reality. "Language and our thought patterns are inextricably linked and, in a sense, are the same thing" (Sapir, 1921: 9).

²⁷ [Press Council - žalbe.rs](https://www.presscouncil.rs/portal/press-council/2017/06/29/press-council-%E2%99%A2albe.rs/); Published: 29. June 2017.

If women are not visible in the language, they are not visible enough in society, and it is in this point of view that **the importance of using gender-sensitive language in the media** is reflected, which not only sends messages, but also forms meanings in society.

However, gender-sensitive language is, although indispensable, only one of the segments of gender representation in the media, important for gender equality in society. A full step forward is gender-sensitive reporting.

Gender sensitivity itself is "a principle that seeks to overcome inequality, because social inequality between men and women is an objective problem in society, and not a personal (subjective) experience of individual women" (Cvetičanin Knežević, Lalatović, 2019: 30).²⁸ Therefore, gender-sensitive reporting is precisely about overcoming gender inequality in the media landscape.

²⁸Cvetičanin Knežević, Lalatović, 2019: 30)

Glossary of Basic Terms for Gender Responsive Reporting

Before listing the challenges that journalists face in gender-responsive reporting, it is important to point out the meanings of basic terms in this domain.

Gender - "socially determined roles, opportunities, behaviors, activities, and attributes, which a particular society deems appropriate for women and men, including the relationships between men and women and the roles in those relationships that are socially determined according to gender" (Gender Equality Act, 2021: Article 2)

Sex is the biological characteristic by which people are defined as male or female. (Gender Equality Act, 2021: Article 2). It refers to biological characteristics that include chromosomes, hormones, reproductive systems, and other physiological aspects and is mainly determined at birth.

≠**The** terms "sex" and "gender" are often used interchangeably, but their distinction is essential for understanding gender issues and building an inclusive society. Understanding this difference is crucial in journalism because it allows for more accurate reporting that avoids stereotyping and misinterpretation. While gender encompasses biological aspects, gender deals with more complex social dimensions, such as expectations about what roles individuals should occupy in society.

Gender equality - enabling legal ("de jure") and equality in practice ("de facto") between men and women, as well as creating equal opportunities for both sexes in society (Alasgarli & Surčulija Milojević, 2019: 3).

5.2 The Role of Journalism in Promoting Gender Equality

The way women are represented in the media sphere is important because the media not only conveys messages, but also creates

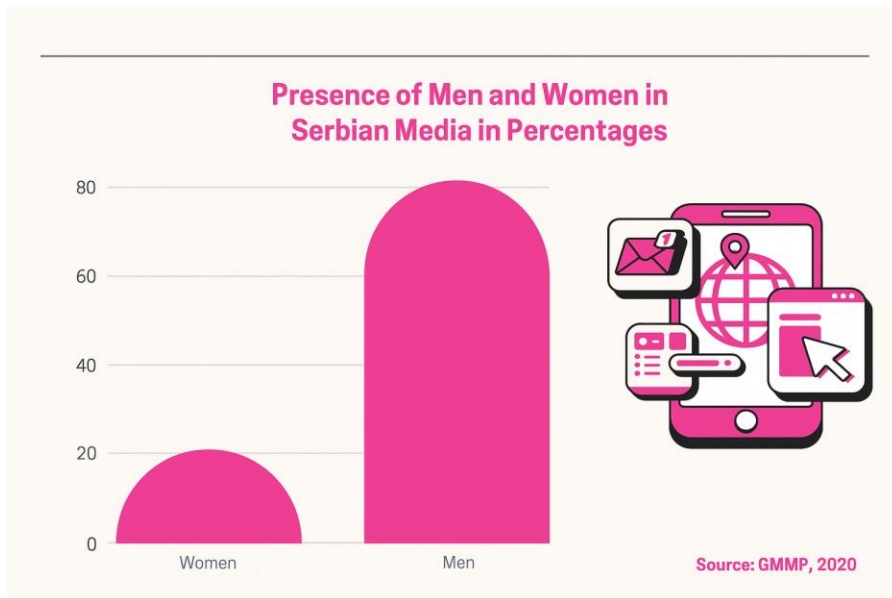
meanings in society. One of the most important theorists of media and culture, Stuart Hall, wrote about this, who called the process of producing meanings and their exchange in a particular culture media representation (Hall, 1997: 15).

"We give meaning to things by the way we represent them, the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images we create about them, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualise them, the values we place on them," he wrote (Hall, 1997: 1).

Media portrayals of women and other marginalised groups, according to Hall's writing, are such that they often deepen inequalities.

In order to determine how gender-(non)discriminatory the media are, it is important to consider how women are represented in the media, but also how much media space they actually occupy. Given these indicators, we are 67 years away from full media gender equality in the world, according to the latest GMMR report from 2020, if global media coverage does not improve or deteriorate. In Serbia, taking into account the lag of 8 percent compared to the European average and 2 percent compared to 2015, full gender equality could be expected a little later. According to the findings related to our country, in 2020, women were present in 20 percent of media content in traditional and

online media, while in 2015 they were present in 22 percent of reports and texts (GMMP, 2020: 21-22).



A recent survey by the Mediterranean Network of Regulators showed that women were present in 29.2 percent of programs at Radio Television of Serbia from January to April 2024 (Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities, 2024: 4).

If you look at media content, women make up the majority mainly in texts that talk about gender inequality, but these texts represent only one percent of the analysed content. The gender gap is smallest in stories about celebrities, arts and sports, in which 35 percent of the subjects or interviewees are women, while it is highest in topics related to crime and violence, where women make up only four percent of the interviewees (GMMP, 2020: 10).

Women in Serbian language media are less often presented as victims than men (GMMP, 2020), despite the increase in femicide and gender-based violence Truth be told, men were not presented as victims of

gender-based violence, but gender-based violence in the Serbian media, judging by the results, remained in the shadows.

This problem is also evident in other parts of the world, where reporting of gender-based violence is rare, although, according to the Mediterranean Network of Regulators, discrimination, control and abuse of women have "become more frequent and sophisticated" with the advent of the internet and social networks (Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities, 2024: 2).

Former Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin has been "demonised" by the media after dancing at a party of a Finnish pop star over the weekend and in her spare time. The public pressure was so great that she eventually tested positive for drugs – and announced that she was not. In her defense, she claimed that she had done nothing illegal, except that she had gone out with her friends to have a good time. Under public pressure over this event, she eventually resigned (BBC, 2022)

In the reports of traditional and online media in the field of politics, most often, as Charlotte Adcock points out, light is shed on women's private lives and physical appearance. "Election reports that portray women through private roles, sexualised identities, or undervalued professional traits contribute to a masculinised image of leadership and citizenship, limiting the possibilities for women's political representation," she stated (Adcock, 2010:16).

Not only in politics, but also in other areas, women are often invisible to the eye of the camera as an expert, and this has been shown by the Global Media Monitoring Project. According to this research, women are mostly present in the media when interlocutors are needed to convey their personal experience, while less than 20 percent of women in the media appear in the role of people who expertly comment on relevant events, problems or phenomena (GMMP, 2020).

In this way, they are visible only as eyewitnesses or participants in the event, i.e. sources who can provide information, but not as experts who can give an expert analysis of certain phenomena.

Women are discriminated against by the content itself, and their stereotypical representation ranges from comments on the account of interlocutors to the presentation of women to whom certain topics refer. "In this way, the social role of women in their communities is also limited to patriarchal patterns, and their contribution is minimised" (Matović, 2013: 1).

Although when discussing gender-sensitive reporting, we mostly talk about how women are represented, it is also important to point out that men face stereotypes and social roles that are "intended" for them. In other words, they are often expected to conform to *toxic masculinity* - "masculinity based on simplistic norms and understandings of traditionally masculine characteristics, such as violence, physical strength, suppression of emotions, and devaluation of women" (Elliott, 2021: 3).

The texts favoring Andrew Tate, influencer and kickboxer, known for statements that support physical strength and the devaluation of women, are real examples of the affirmation of "toxic masculinity". However, in the media representation of men, there is often another form of discrimination - the portrayal of poorer men and those from rural areas as more likely to embody toxic masculinity. Carol Harrington writes that "toxic masculinity is mostly associated with marginalised men" (Harrington, 2021: 4). Thus, in the media landscape, on the one hand, there is a problem with the promotion of "toxic masculinity", while on the other hand there is a negative presentation of women.

To prevent such patterns from being available, the individual efforts of each journalist **to ensure that reporting is gender-sensitive**, are important.

5.3. Glass ceiling" - how to skip it in the world of media?

Gertrude J. Robinson has called women's lack of success and their underrepresentation in leading positions in the media "*Glass Ceiling*." She points out that this phenomenon results in gender inequality at the organisational level being perceived as something that is natural, normal and indisputable (Lofelholz et al. 2008, 82).

The case of Samira Ahmed, the host of the "Newswatch" show, has shaken the British public. Samira Ahmed won the BBC in court in a dispute against co-star Jeremy Vine, the host of the show "Points of View". The ruling said that "her work at Newswatch is the same as that of Jeremy Vine, in the light of section 65 of the Equality Act 2010". Vine was paid £3,000 per episode, compared to £440 between 2008 and 2018. The verdict states that "the difference in pay is huge", and that both presenters were actually doing the same job. "No woman wants to file a lawsuit against her employer," said Samira Ahmed, especially because "she likes to work for the BBC" (BBC News in Serbian, 2020).

The fact that the "glass ceiling" is often a Serbian media reality is shown by the 2020 survey "Gender Structure of Directors and Editorial Positions in Information Media," according to which only 18 percent of editors-in-chief and 36 percent of directors of the analysed news media are women. According to the study, women make up 58 percent of the editors of individual sections. (Milivojević et. al, 2021: 4).

Although the results related to individual sections are encouraging, it is extremely important that the core editorial team is not exclusively made up of men, and that in order to promote women's points of view as opposed to their silencing and elimination, it is important that women also decide on journalistic content. When these basic assumptions are summarised, it can be established that gender-responsive reporting requires changes in editorial culture, which imply that women are more represented in management positions, but also the fostering of non-discriminatory reporting methods that respect women's rights. Representation of women in the media that reflects

understanding and diversity is important for gender-responsive reporting, and a series of guidelines and recommendations, as well as an overview of the situation in society, represent a step towards fulfilling this goal.

During a press conference where a reporter asked him what he thought of Sam Querrey becoming the first American to reach the semifinals of a grand slam since 2009, Andy Murray added: "A [male player](#)". After the journalist showed that he had not heard the answer, Andy repeated "male player", (The Guardian, 2017), referring to the Williams sisters, only to have the journalist who asked the question in the background laughing awkwardly. This is an example of how sometimes small gestures can contribute to the promotion of women, for example in sports, where the spotlight is mostly on men.

6 Importance of gender-sensitive reporting

6.1 Gender-sensitive language

As already indicated in the previous chapters, gender-sensitive language is primarily associated with breaking stereotypes and making women more visible in society. Language solutions are a counterbalance to gender discrimination in everyday and public communication.

It is important that language policies are gender-sensitive and reflect equality between women and men, as this could be a positive step towards social equality.

"Given that we live in a world where, less than 70 years ago, women did not have the legal right to dignified paid work, as well as formally equal access to education and employment, and that it was discovered last year that a university in Japan systematically reduced the points of candidates on the entrance exam for the Faculty of Medicine, we

cannot say that it does not matter whether someone is an editor or an editor." Lalatović: 15).

This, as the authors concluded, would mean that only male professions are "real" and that jobs are done well only when they are done "in a man's way". For this reason, it is good that in 2010 the Ombudsperson of the Republic of Serbia published [the Guidelines for Standardised Non-Discriminatory Speech and Behavior](#), which, among other things, point to the importance of gender-sensitive language. These guidelines are classified into three broad categories relating to (1) non-discriminatory language and behaviour towards women, (2) LGBT people, and (3) persons with disabilities. When it comes to gender-non-discriminatory etiquette, the guidelines state that "linguistic invisibility of women – the implication that women are included in nouns and pronouns in the masculine grammatical gender" is unacceptable (Guidelines for Standardised Non-Discriminatory Speech and Behavior, 2010: 1). Thus, the Protector of Citizens recommends that the grammatical feminine gender be used consistently when writing or talking about women.

"Terms denoting the names of positions, professions, occupations, titles, titles, workplaces of women, are listed, as a rule, always in the feminine grammatical gender," he states, adding that the term "miss" should be completely eliminated from oral, written and telephone communication (Guidelines for Standardised Non-Discriminatory Speech and Behavior, 2010: 1).

He adds that when writing e-mails, care should be taken to ensure that the e-mails are written by a woman, and use the form "respectful" (Guidelines for Standardised Non-Discriminatory Speech and Behavior, 2010: 1).

"However, we cannot help but wonder – why was these instructions issued by the "Zaštitnik građana" and not "Zaštitnik građana i građanki?" (In Serbian language, "građanki" is a feminine form for the

plural noun citizens), write Cvetičanin Knežević and Lalatović (Cvetičanin Knežević & Lalatović: 38).

Although when mentioning gender-sensitive language, it is mostly thought of denoting occupation with the feminine grammatical gender, its application is much wider. Gender-sensitive language "refers to finding a linguistic form that demonstrates the importance of a gender perspective in relation to a basic ideology about language that should reflect the activity in context" (Savić & Stevanović, 2020: 21).

Thus, the designation of occupation belongs to a subtype of gender-sensitive language called gender-differentiated language.

"The term gender-differentiated language insists more on acknowledging the differences between the masculine and feminine forms, which should be consistently emphasised with language" (Savić & Stevanović, 2020: 21).

The avoidance of highlighting marital status by distinguishing between the terms "Mrs. and Miss" are therefore examples of the use of gender-sensitive, but not gender-differentiated, language. On the other hand, the use of the term *journalist* for a female journalist is an example of the use of gender-differentiated as well as gender-sensitive language, of which it is a subspecies.

The use of gender-sensitive language goes much further than the use of terms such as *lawyer*, *doctor*, *minister*. If someone says that a person engaged in journalism is *a journalist*, but adds that he or she is a "grandmother", it can by no means be said that he or she used gender-sensitive language. In the Manual for the Use of Gender-Sensitive Language in the Media, the authors therefore stated that such terms, which offend certain groups of citizens, should not be used at all. Linguistic solutions in which men and women are portrayed in stereotypical roles, as well as sexist and stereotypical statements, should be avoided. They especially emphasise that the use of the

phrase "men and women" should be avoided, because it suggests that "only men are people" (Cvetinčanin Knežević, Lalatović: 79).

6.2 Deviations in the application of gender-sensitive language

The Code of Journalism of Serbia, as well as journalistic practice, confirm that the use of gender-sensitive language in the media is becoming more and more established. However, in this application, as with any language norm, certain deviations are possible. Thus, when women are laureates of awards with a male title in their name, the name of the award should remain in the language form in which it is posted, writes the Manual for the Use of Gender-Sensitive Language in Public Administration (Savić & Stevanović, 2020: 29). Such a recommendation is not surprising, given that these are names that have been recognisable for years and form a closer determinant of the award to which they refer. However, even in this case, the name of the profession should be gender-differentiated, i.e. in the feminine grammatical gender (Savić & Stevanović, 2020: 29).

"The Order of the Knight went to the writer Milka Milkić", is a fictional example that illustrates the proper use of gender-sensitive language in this domain.

In 2015, a new rule of service was adopted, according to which ranks in the military remain masculine when referring to women, with the addition of the term "*Mrs.*" *Mrs. Captain*). This decision, according to Savić and Stevanović, could represent "a transitional phase in the process of standardisation of gender-sensitive language in institutional practice, until the linguistic potential for the creation of women's names and the importance of women's linguistic representation in accordance with their real social roles are recognised (Savić & Stevanović, 2020: 21).

Possible deviations can also include professions that have both male and female gender, and the most frequently cited example is judge.

"As far as we know, today in the courts of Serbia the noun judge for both genders is established, while in media conversations both *judge* and *judge are used*. It is good practice to consult both representatives of the profession", writes the Guide to Gender-Damaging Language (Savić & Stevanović, 2020: 30).

6.3 Representation of Women in Journalistic Reporting

"You did it manly", was the first thing they said to Jelena Zorić when reporting from the 2020 protests, and she testified about it in the documentary series "She Wakes Up". Although this comment was not public, it reflects a discriminatory discourse, according to which strength indicates masculine and cowardice indicates feminine.

This way of presenting women reflects stereotypes that "spill over" into the media world. Susan T. Fisk defined stereotypes as "images in our heads that represent social categories and influence how we process information about individuals based on their group membership" (Fisk, 1998: 357). Gender stereotypes are particularly prevalent in society, adding that they affect women's chances in society and shape their social roles.

"They often incorporate traditional beliefs about men and women, such as assumptions that women are warm, caring, and emotional, while men are dominant, competent, and rational," she stated (Fisk, 1998: 369).

She believes that these values are already deeply rooted in culture, and this largely overlaps with what Walter Lippman wrote about, saying that in "the great, lush, jumbled reality of the external world, we single out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive what we have set aside in the form that our culture has stereotyped for us" (Lippmann, 1922: 81).

If we were to try to classify these stereotypes, they would encompass a multitude of categories, because every day a woman struggles with

some new way of perceiving herself in her environment. As the media themselves produce these perceptions, it is difficult to find clear groups of stereotypes in which each of them could be classified.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, a professor at Harvard University in Boston²⁹, described four types of language stereotypes faced by women in politics:

- "1) A woman as a mother,
- 2) A woman as a lover,
- 3) A woman as an "iron lady"
- 4) A woman as a sexual object.

These ways of seeing women can spill over into other areas of social activity.

- The Minister of Family Welfare, Milica Djurdjevic Stamenkovski, has been described in the campaigns of her political party as a caring mother and a devoted woman, and she herself often emphasised patriarchal values.
- Melania Trump is often described as a "darling" by putting her looks and relationship with her husband at the forefront. Her social role and all other political activities have been put in the background. Even Angela Merkel struggled with the role of "darling." Because of her collaboration with Helmut Kohl, she was called "Kohl's girl", although she already had all the qualifications to be successful in politics herself. She distanced herself from such qualifications when she gained her political independence after the 1999 financial scandal, in which she

²⁹ Mos Kanter, 1977: 233–236

opposed Cole and has since been perceived more as a "iron lady".

- When we talk about the "iron lady", the very description of almost every reader associates Margaret Thatcher. She was given this nickname because of her firm and decisive political stance, and it was given to her by the Soviet newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda*. The question is whether a man would ever have been nicknamed an iron man or a determined man.
- And finally, the most common in the media are texts and video content imbued with sexualisation. A woman is seen as an empty shell, whose priority would be physical appearance. In this kind of representation of women in the media, the goal is only to please the man. In the following lines, we will describe examples of this, the most common, form of representation of women.

6.4 Examples of stereotypical representation of women in the media

In the Daily Mail³⁰, Nikki Swift³¹, The³² Sun, and other tabloid media, Barbie is stereotypically portrayed as actress Margot Robbie, who plays her in the film. Ever since her roles in *Focus* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Margot Robbie has been described in the media as the "perfect beauty", which is why she has been objectified by the media. So, for example, in the tabloids, "the secret of her slender figure is revealed", as well as the reasons behind her on-screen wardrobe choices.

The Oscar-nominated film Barbie defied unrealistic beauty standards and stereotypical representation of women.

³⁰ [Daily Mail; Published: November 30, 2024](#)

³¹ [Nikki Swift; Published: May 19, 2022](#)

³² [;The Sun; published: January 17, 2017](#)



Photo: screenshot of the trailer for the movie Barbie

In the film, Barbie faced an existential crisis, flat feet, and discrimination in the real world. Margot Robbie has also faced sexist media content in the real world. They range from texts that demystify her appearance without makeup, published on the portals *Una*³³, *N1*³⁴ and *Telegraf*³⁵, to those that comment on her appearance during pregnancy, published in domestic media such as *Kurir*³⁶ and *Blic žena*³⁷. Although these are mostly positive comments, photos of paparazzi and such texts have triggered an "avalanche" of negative comments on social networks comparing her now and a few years ago. Paradoxically, the actress in a film that criticises stereotypes has become a victim of such media representation.

Actress Andjelka Prpić also faced stereotypical depictions embodied in excessive intrusion into her private life, and the Press Council, in its 2023 Report on Media Content Monitoring, cited media reports about

³³ [Una; Published: September 1, 2023](#)

³⁴ [N1, published: August 14, 2023](#)

³⁵ [Telegraf.rs; Published: January 21, 2020](#)

³⁶ [Courier; Published on August 31, 2024](#)

³⁷ [Flash Woman; Published: August 31, 2024](#)

her as examples of violations of the Code³⁸. "When it comes to public figures, the practice of excessive intrusion into their private lives continues, with the presentation of data that directly affects the lives of their children - even when they have not yet been born, as in the case of the pregnancy of actress Andjelka Prpić. The media most often treated her private life with numerous violations of the Code, in a way that could be called abuse³⁹, the Press Council said.

After the divorce and pregnancy, Blic.rs⁴⁰, Pink.rs⁴¹ Nova.rs⁴² and others published speculations about her private life, and the most important topics were her new partner and pregnancy. Two years earlier, Prpić left the press conference because of questions about her private life instead of her role in the series "Radio Mileva", after which the Espresso portal criticised this move, stating that the journalists were "just doing their job", and that "she made a scandal"⁴³, which in itself is an example of sexist undertones and disrespect for the personality of a woman.

6.5 . Examples of journalistic content that "break" stereotypes

An example of gender-responsive reporting is the contributions of Brainz TV, which promotes the achievements of young people - regardless of gender. With the shows broadcast on Brainz TV, the message is sent that women can be equally successful in areas that were once considered traditionally "masculine". Along with stories of achievements, programmers, entrepreneurs, scientists, etc. are shown. Brainz TV's content, which promotes successful young women and men, is the winner of the St. Sava Award for 2020. This award is given by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, for a significant contribution to the affirmation of

³⁸ [Press Council; Published October 2023, page 4](#)

³⁹ *The same*

⁴⁰ [Blic; Published: January 23, 2023](#)

⁴¹ [Pink.rs; Published: January 23, 2023](#)

⁴² [Published on December 23, 2022](#)

⁴³ [Espresso; Published 4. March 2021](#)

education at all levels, the promotion of formal and informal education⁴⁴.

In addition to articles published in traditional media, innovative media forms can also be an example of gender-responsive reporting. An example is the multimedia platform "Buffer Zone".⁴⁵ In 2019, journalist Iva Parađanin Ilić published the first episode of the podcast of the same name, in which, through conversation with interlocutors, she deals with topics related to the everyday position of women in society.

Parađanin Ilić is one of the members of the informal group "Women Journalists Against Violence", which through projects advocates that cases of violence against women should not be reported as an individual, but as a wider social problem. In the podcast "Tampon Zone", she deals with topics such as femicide and gender-based violence, but also the problems of stereotypical representation of women. She discusses authentic women's experiences with her interviewees and destigmatises topics such as menstruation and female reproductive health. These topics are explained from both a professional and a personal perspective. Parađanin Ilić has also developed a multimedia platform from the podcast, and from 2024 she began to develop a correspondent network, so that journalists could talk to women from smaller communities. She shares her experience in creating this type of podcast through IREX's Talent and Innovation Network, where she teaches young journalists how to use the podcast as a platform to educate citizens.

Communication scientist Nina Pavićević, on the other hand, publishes innovative media forms that demystify stereotypes on Instagram⁴⁶ and YouTube⁴⁷. On the pages entitled "Critical", Pavićević critically observes the stereotype patterns in reporting on women. Although

⁴⁴ [UNS; Published: August 29, 2024](#)

⁴⁵ <https://tamponzona.rs/o-nama/>

⁴⁶ <https://www.instagram.com/kriticki/?hl=en>

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1kPrtLi8lu5OU6fx0mtW6g>

the disadvantage of alternative media forms is the fact that journalists do not bear the responsibility they would have if they had published the content in a media, they can be a creative and innovative way to convey ideas. Content published on social networks can sometimes have media characteristics, but it should be emphasised that as such in the Republic of Serbia, it is still not subject to media regulation and self-regulation.

Professional standards in reporting violence against women can also be pointed out by men. An example of such media content is the series of articles "A Woman Is Not to Blame"⁴⁸, which was published in *Amplitud* magazine in 2024, and whose author is Aleksa Anđelić. Pointing to examples of bad practice, Anđelić points out that reporting on violence can also be stereotypical. On the other hand, by mentioning examples of good practice and interviews with journalists and members of the Press Council's Complaints Commission, it shows that journalists can fight against gender-based violence by presenting it as a broader social problem.

6.6. Representation of women in PR content and advertisements

"Editors are responsible for the entire content of the media, which includes texts, photographs, audio and video recordings, caricatures, as well as advertisements, supplements and comments of readers, including all content and comments on official media accounts on social networks" (Code of Journalists of Serbia, 2024).

This means that both PR content and advertising messages transmitted by the media can be the subject of complaints that are sent to the Council with the press.

Although political and commercial advertising must be clearly separated from journalistic content, journalists are certainly, according

⁴⁸ [Published: April 23, 2024](#)

to the Code, "obliged to be particularly careful when using press releases, texts and other materials of PR and marketing agencies, since they primarily have the purpose of providing clients (directly or indirectly) with free and favorable publicity" (Code of Conduct for Journalists of Serbia, 2023).

Therefore, in addition to journalistic content, the topic of this guide is the way in which journalists transmit PR and marketing texts, which should be implemented in accordance with the Code and/or existing laws. The problem arises when the media literally copy PR or marketing text, without emphasising that it is paid advertising or without processing it into a text that would respect journalistic ethics. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that advertising messages may also contain stereotypical depictions of women as housewives, sexual objects and "pets".

"In advertising messages, women most often advertise home cleaners, beauty products, cooking products and clothing such as underwear or swimwear, which can directly affect their mental state. Men are portrayed in a negative context through violence, cruelty, illegal actions, and in advertising they usually promote alcoholic beverages, banking services, sports, as well as extremely achieved success in the workplace", writes Čejvan Mehić (Mehić, 2025: 4).

Women in such examples will be represented in a distorted mirror, in which they are always imperfect.

Women in Serbia spend about 10,800 dinars a year on menstrual products, while women's cosmetic products often cost more than men's products with the same purpose. In the rare media reports and reports on this phenomenon called the "pink tax", according to Global Media Monitoring (GMMP), female economists will speak less often than economists. In these cases, more controversy than the topic itself will often be caused by the fact that they are presented *ekonomistkinje* (feminine form of the noun economist in Serbian, and not gender-neutral - as *ekonomisti* (Global Media Monitoring Project, 2020: 8). This

is just an example of resistance to gender-sensitive language, i.e. "spoken and written use of language aimed at pointing out gender equality" (Cvetičanin Knežević, Lalatović, 2019: 129).

6.7 Examples of representation of women in PR content and advertisements transmitted by the media

The Laguna publishing house encountered negative reactions from the public in February 2020, after it announced a prize game on its Instagram account on the occasion of the release of the novel *Recipe for the Perfect Wife*. In the post, users were invited to write a "recipe" for the ideal wife, listing their own "ingredients", while the example of Laguna included traits such as fearlessness, independence, boldness, but also sacrifice for the family – which indicated the expectations of a woman to be perfect in all roles. The awards were symbolic (spaghetti, spices, cosmetics), but the announcement was perceived as tasteless and retrograde, because it ignored the critical tone of the book itself and the feminist message that the author conveys.

Shortly after the criticism from users, Laguna issued a statement in which it tried to explain that the novel was actually a critique of the traditional female model and that the title should be understood ironically⁴⁹. However, the way the promotional campaign was designed did not reflect such a tone. The novel's author, Karma Brown, said she had not been consulted about the marketing campaign and did not agree with the messages that had been placed⁵⁰. After her response, Laguna apologised further and admitted that the campaign had failed.

This case clearly shows how even content with a feminist message can be compromised if promotional activities do not take gender

⁴⁹ [Instagram account of the publishing house "Laguna"; Published: January 31, 2022](#)

⁵⁰ Karma Braun's Instagram account; Published: February 1, 2022

sensitivity into account. Instead of supporting emancipatory messages, marketing strategies often fall into the trap of reproducing stereotypes that the books themselves or authors criticise.

A phenomenon that is often observed in advertising is the association of women with cars, which often relies on stereotypes and portrays women as an "accessory" to the car. It is therefore not surprising that such examples are often explored in advertising ethics. Namarta Sandu's analysis found that "there is a greater gender imbalance in car advertisements than in other types of advertisements" (Sandhu, 2019:1).

The second example comes from the field of commercial advertising. An advertisement for car tires "Sava" from 2001, which was on billboards in Belgrade, showed a woman in underwear in a string with the slogan "Adaptable to any surface". The tire was visually sidelined and inconspicuous, while the woman's body was at the center of the message. The campaign has been condemned for objectifying women and using the sexualised female body as a means of attracting attention, completely unrelated to the product itself.

In addition to content criticising gender-discriminatory advertisements, articles were also published pointing out the discriminatory attitudes of companies towards women participating in advertisements. An example of this is a column published in the New York Times in which multiple Olympic and world champion Alison Felix describes how Nike offered her 70 percent less money for advertising during pregnancy. Nike executives said in a column that "no one can guarantee that they will achieve the same success after pregnancy." A month after the New York Times published the column, Nike has changed its policy on women's maternity leave. According to the new policy, they will have a guarantee of payment of full royalties and additional bonuses for 18 months around pregnancy.

However, advertising can sometimes be a source of understanding and encourage gender equality, which makes it much easier for the media to convey advertising messages. An example is the commercial for Plasma released on March 8, 2021. "Just as a plasma biscuit is difficult to divide into equal halves, equality is an idea that is not easy to achieve. 87 percent of women take care of children, 84 percent of women do housework in rural areas, and 32 percent of women hold managerial positions in Serbia. As many as 55 percent of women believe that they have not reached their full potential in their careers due to a lack of support. We can only win the fight for equality if we work together equally. Equality comes from the home. Plasma", was said in the advertisement published by the company "Bambi" for International Women's Day. The statistics presented pointed to the inequality of men and women, as well as that understanding starts from home. A society where gender equality exists is better for men.

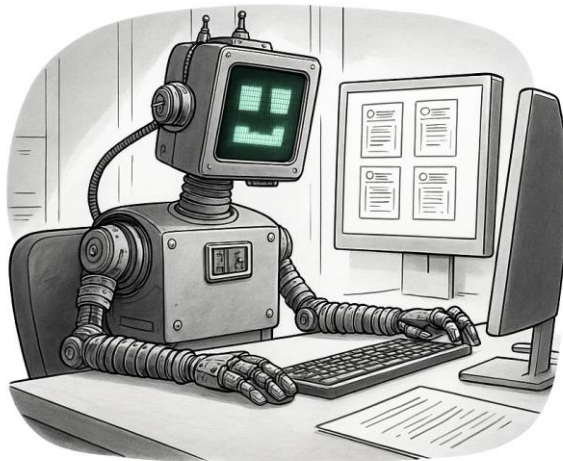
An advertisement that motivates women is the one with which the Sport England brand encourages girls and women to play sports without fear of judgment. "This girl can" and "I don't let obstacles slow me down", are the messages of this advertisement. Their research, they stated, showed that women avoid playing sports for fear of being judged on what it will look like. The reason for this is the dominant view that women must be beautiful while playing sports, but also that they will certainly be less successful in sports than men. Advertising, according to the GCSE Studies programme, challenges stereotypes and presents women from a positive perspective - as independent, self-confident and happy (GCSE Media Studies, 2016: 3).

"It is clearly focused on the face of women, which expresses pleasure and fun. By choosing such an image, the authors of the campaign seek to challenge sexism and male dominance in sports. The selection and production processes are carefully designed. This ad, like the others in the campaign, has a certain rawness, focusing on real women," writes the GCSE report (GCSE Media Studies, 2016: 3).

7 Artificial Intelligence and Gender-Responsive Reporting

Artificial intelligence (AI) has changed the DNA of media. Many of the things we've seen in sci-fi movies and dystopian novels are our reality, especially when we have generative models in mind, which are trained on large datasets to recognise patterns and generate new content (Baidoo-Anu & Owusu Ansah, 2023:5-7).

Journalists are increasingly using them to create text summaries and innovative media forms, generate ideas, but also create photos and video content.



**How to make AI an assistant
that solves problems, and not a
colleague who creates them**

Photo: UNS/ Gemini & Canva

Each of the generative AI models is stored with large datasets, and the photographs and literature used by these models can be permeated with numerous gender stereotypes.

Recently, biases and stereotypes have become the subject of heated debate in the machine learning community as well. Researchers and developers are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that some biases, such as gender and race, are deeply rooted in the algorithms that some AI applications rely on. AI, 2022: 1).

That is why it is important that they approach the data they receive from generative models with journalistic attention and that each of them goes through multiple editorial checks, in order to remove all possible stereotypes.

When considering the negative impact of AI tools, it is impossible not to mention the deepfake, which is defined as "the product of an artificial intelligence (AI) application that merges, combines, replaces, and places images and video clips to create fake videos that look authentic" (Westerlund, 2019: 1). In this way, computer-generated copies give the impression of a particular person, so that they appear to be doing something or saying something even though this is not the case. Many women have been the target of deepfakes, often through deepfake pornography, i.e. false vulgarised depictions spread through the media and social platforms.

Those who create deepfake pornographic content to discredit women "use images taken from social media to construct – or commission the production – of a pornographic video featuring any woman who has shared her photos online. While this technology seems complex enough to belong in Hollywood productions, it is quickly becoming free and easy to use" (Pechenik Gieseke, 2020: 3).

That is why the Paris Charter, published by "Reporters Without Borders", states that the use of any content that impersonates real individuals should be avoided, especially in the media (Paris Chapter, 2023: 1). According to this guideline, posting such content is not recommended, even if it is indicated that it is a deepfake.

On the other hand, according to the Paris Charter, journalists are allowed to publish AI content that has nothing to do with the dipfake, but under precisely regulated conditions. These conditions imply that each time synthetic content, created through artificial intelligence, is clearly separated from the authentic (Paris Chapter, 2023: 1).

Transparent and responsible application of artificial intelligence is one of the professional norms that are part of the Code of Journalists of Serbia, which states that a journalist is obliged to indicate when he uses AI, and that editors are responsible for that content as for any other (Code of Journalists of Serbia, 2023: chapter Responsibility of Journalists)

8 Reporting on violence against women

According to a global study, nearly one in three women in the world have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2021). The topic of gender-based violence is neglected in the media, while the way the media report on this problem is often not in line with professional and ethical standards.

This is confirmed by the [Analysis of Reporting on Violence against Women](#) of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media in Serbia, which compares the program of the public service - Radio Television of Serbia and Television Prva, which has a license for national coverage. In the period from January to April 2019, a total of 84 reports on violence against women were recorded on both televisions - of which 69 were broadcast on TV Prva, and 15 on RTS (REM, 2019: 6).

Although Television Prva reported more on violence against women, this television also used more sensationalist elements. These elements were certainly present on the programs of both televisions and contributed to the drama of the event, in order to provide the televisions with higher ratings. These included elements such as "close-ups, zooming, sad music, and linguistic elements" (REM, 2019:17).

These linguistic elements that sensationalise violence are present in print and online media, and as such relativise violence and ignore the essential problems that led to the crime.

"Cultural representations of violence against women are often mystified and eroticised. They often obscure and downplay the significance of violence, making it a social norm" (Chhabra et. al, 2020:1).

Mystification refers to the enigmatic depiction of violence that may even imply that it never happened, while eroticisation involves the use of sexualised narratives that do not condemn the crime.

Poor Reporting Practices on Violence Against Women

The Guidelines of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services on monitoring the application of reporting standards in cases of gender-based violence in the media, which was created within the initiative "Freedom of Expression and Media Freedom in North Macedonia," list poor reporting practices on violence against women.

These are:

1. "Lack of reporting on the social context in which men commit violence against women and children.
2. Maintaining myths, misrepresentations and stereotypes.
3. Shifting the blame and responsibility onto the victim-survivors.
4. A limited number of "expert" votes, mostly from law enforcement.
5. Limited sensitivity and knowledge about the impact, harm, and consequences of violence on victims and communities" (Sarikakis, 2022: 19).

The [Guidelines of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services of North Macedonia on monitoring the application of reporting standards in cases of gender-based violence in the media](#)

state that the media have a key role in the fight against violence against women, and that it is necessary to follow guidelines that will increase the number of examples of good practice and raise the quality of public debate. Thus, the author of the manual, Katarina Sarikakis, recommends that journalists present the overall picture of violence, including its causes and consequences, when reporting on gender-based violence, as well as critically analyse the responsibility of institutions. It is essential to dispel one by one of the myths about gender-based violence and allow women's voices to be heard in public discourse (Sarikakis, 2022:23-24).

Respect for the dignity of victims of gender-based violence, judging by the content of the Code of Journalists of Serbia, is an important prerequisite that journalists must meet in order to claim to report in a gender-responsive manner.

Journalists are obliged to respect and protect the rights and dignity of children, victims of crime, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

However, according to Sarikakis, it is necessary to use accurate terminology (rape, sexual violence, partner violence) in media reporting, so that the public is not misled, but also in order to protect the integrity of the victims.

The fact that femicide, victims and perpetrators are not called by their real names in the media reflects a lack of understanding of this problem in society. The ways in which femicide, victims and perpetrators are presented contributes to the further understanding of femicide as "an isolated case of violence, committed by monstrous individuals who are outside of social norms and considerations or persons who were led by objective circumstances or the victim's behavior to commit that act" (Salkanović, 2025: 106).

As already noted, when reporting on violence against women, the media rarely perceive the broader context, so it is recommended for journalists not to look at these cases as isolated. It is important to include interlocutors outside the judiciary, but also to analyse institutional inefficiency, lack of support for women, and stigmatisation (Sarikakis, 2022: 23-24).

Because victims are often discriminatory representations, journalists must avoid stereotypes about ethnicity, race, class, and other things that determine a victim's personality.

Editors are advised to entrust the interview with a woman who has suffered violence to journalists who have the necessary knowledge on this topic. In order for journalists to be able to professionally report on violence against women, the recommendation to editors is "to encourage journalists to attend trainings and to refer them to manuals, recommendations and guidelines on responsible media reporting on sexism, discrimination and violence against women, as well as to refer them to colleagues who have experience in this regard and who ethically report on this topic" (Gligorijevic et. al, 2021: 9).

This is just one of the suggestions within [the Guidelines for Media Reporting on Violence Against Women](#) recommended by the group "Women Journalists Against Violence", which consists of more than 70 female journalists and media editors, and which was created thanks to UNDP Serbia and the B92 Fund. This group was formed in 2017, with the aim of establishing a network that would contribute to the fight against violence against women through joint media activities. "Journalists Against Violence", as it is written on their official website, advocate that "in media reports on violence against women speak about it as a social problem, point out its causes, clearly condemn every form of violence, and call to account the perpetrators and institutions responsible for protection from violence."⁵¹

They recommend that the editors of "Journalists Against Violence" follow the event from beginning to end when reporting on a case of violence against a woman - bearing in mind all the consequences and causes. However, while the procedure is ongoing, the identity of the victim and the possible perpetrator should not be revealed, and in these cases the rule of presumption of innocence should be respected.

Media content must not "contain details of the act of violence/murder or statements of the interlocutor, which are irrelevant to the act itself.

"The stereotypical portrayal of a survivor/victim of violence implies that she is crying, shaken, with visible physical consequences of violence - this often does not have to be the case, especially when we are talking about psychological, economic or sexual violence, which creates the illusion that every woman reacts and copes with violence in the same way" (Gligorijevic et. al, 2021: 14).

Both in print and online media, attention should be paid to the visualisation of texts.

Therefore, as Journalists Against Violence writes, "photographs and videos showing bruised women should not be used when reporting - both because of retraumatisation, and because of the fact that in this way a profile of the survivor/victim who is always physically injured is created, which reduces the awareness of psychological, sexual and economic violence" (Gligorijevic et al, 2021: 18).

Even if the photos are edited or created by artificial intelligence, photos in which the abuser and the victim are next to each other should not be used. Such an action could, as stated by Journalists Against Violence, further traumatise the surviving victims, as well as their families (Gligorijevic et al, 2021: 18).

8.1 Examples of Unethical Reporting of Violence Against Women

The case, which, as stated in the 2016 Monitoring Report of the Press Council, has become an example of a drastic violation of professional standards in journalistic reporting is the murder of singer Jelena Marjanovic. The body of Jelena Marjanovic was found in the village of Crvenka on April 2, 2016. Her husband Zoran Marjanovic was convicted in the first instance for the aggravated murder of Jelena Marjanovic, but at the end of 2023, the Court of Appeals in Belgrade quashed this verdict and ordered a retrial⁵².

From 2016, when the murder took place, until the verdict was annulled, reports were published in the media that neglected the dignity of the victim, and this was confirmed by the Press Council's 2016 Monitoring Report. In this report, the Press Council stated that the media persistently reported on this case during 2016, and that "in almost all texts, at least one provision of the Code was violated."⁵³

This Report highlights the articles published in the tabloids "Alo"⁵⁴ and "Kurir", which are listed as drastic examples of violations of the Code, However ⁵⁵, the content to which the Board of Directors of this self-regulatory body reacted was published in the "Serbian Telegraph".⁵⁶ On the front page of this newspaper, disturbing photographs from the scene of the murder of Jelena Marjanovic were published. The Board of Directors of the Press Council stated that "such extremely inappropriate, unethical and sensationalist 'reporting' not only does not in any way contribute to better informing the public, which is the main task of the media, but also causes damage to the people it is reported on, as well as to the entire journalistic profession and the public interest."⁵⁷

RTS; Published: December 23, 2023

⁵³ : [2016 Press Council Monitoring Report](#), page 6

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, page 4

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, page 7

⁵⁶ [Published: Press Council; Published: June 5, 2018](#)

This position was also taken by the Association of Journalists of Serbia (UNS), which stated in a statement⁵⁸ that such content violated the Law on Public Information and Media and the Code of Journalism of Serbia. More specifically, the UNS stated that Article 70 of the then Law on Public Information and Media was violated, which states that "the depiction or description of a scene of violence in the media or media content must not violate the dignity of the victim of violence" (Law on Public Information and Media, 2016: Article 70).

In the Global Media Monitoring Project, as a negative example of reporting on gender equality, an article was cited about a woman from Uganda who at the age of 13 was "sold to a husband 27 years older". The text, published in the Blic newspaper, lists the forms of abuse and humiliation that he suffers on a daily basis, and this is reported sensationally and without empathy. This story does not analyse the forms of violence against women, nor does it show the systemic problems related to violence in Uganda. Her husband's behavior was not questioned, but the case was portrayed as "an interesting story about a woman who has thirty-eight children and who suffered violence" (Global Media Monitoring Project). A true story is approached as fiction rather than information about a social context. The text reflects myths, and there are no expert voices, as well as sensitivity and knowledge about the consequences of violence for the life of this woman.

9 Recommendations for Gender Responsive Reporting

In order to summarise all of the above, the Guide to Gender Responsive Reporting is exhaustively listed below a number of recommendations that would enable journalists to report on gender-sensitive topics in accordance with professional and ethical standards:

⁵⁸ [UNS; Published: June 5, 2018](#)

9.1 Avoidance of stereotypes

1. Ensure a balanced representation of women and men in stories

- This recommendation is especially important because of the GMMP's findings, according to which women as a topic or interlocutor are present in 20 percent of the media space. That is why journalists are recommended to contact both men and women as sources of information, and that, regardless of the topic in question, they take care that the number of female and male interlocutors is balanced.

2. Reporting on topics that break gender stereotypes - this kind of reporting involves breaking down ingrained patterns in understanding women's roles in society. Thus, it is recommended that women be more represented in roles that were predominantly male (e.g. - report more on women in sports, on female engineers, etc.)

3. Validate AI-generated content - Since generative AI tools are stored by large data sets, in order to generate content, each of that data can reflect some stereotype. Therefore, it is desirable for journalists to check whether the data provided by AI tools are stereotypical, as well as to try not to reflect these stereotypes on the published media content.

9.2 Reporting on victims of violence

4. Approach reporting on gender-based violence with empathy - When reporting on gender-based violence, journalists are advised to report in a spirit of empathy and avoid sensationalist descriptions.

5. Consider the broader context and focus on systemic issues – When it comes to gender-based violence, journalists are advised not to report on individual cases in isolation, but rather to examine the wider social context and systemic problems, which are also important underlying causes of such incidents.

6. Visualise the content responsibly - it is recommended to avoid photos (AI, edited or real) that depict the victim and the abuser in any way. Such visuals can further traumatise the surviving victims, so they should not be used. The media is advised to avoid sensationalist elements such as sad or dramatic music, close-ups of the victim, sensationalist descriptions of scenes.

7. Do not question the victim's reaction - the recommendation is for journalists not to examine the victim's reaction, because situations of gender-based violence are unpredictable and specific. It is unacceptable for journalists to implicitly or explicitly indicate that the victim could have been the cause of the violence.

8. Respect privacy while ensuring accountability - Journalists must ensure that their reporting protects the privacy of victims and potential perpetrators, and does not disclose their identities in any form. However, it is necessary to point out the responsibility of the perpetrators, the institutions that were supposed to protect the victim, and to emphasise the public interest of the topic.

9. Respect the presumption of innocence - No one is guilty until the court decides so. Therefore, journalists are advised to refrain from using terms such as "murderer," "rapist," "monster," "abuser," and similar labels when referring to suspects or defendants.

10. Do not further victimise victims - Journalists are advised to avoid portraying victims of gender-based violence solely through a lens of pity, and instead to highlight their strength and resilience, as well as any steps taken towards addressing violence as a systemic issue.

11. Education on gender-sensitive topics - Journalists are recommended to attend as many trainings on gender-sensitive reporting as possible, especially when it comes to reporting on victims of violence. Editors have a responsibility to actively support and

encourage participation among editorial staff, and should also demonstrate leadership by attending such training themselves.

9.3 Gender-sensitive language

12. Use gender-differentiated language for all occupations where applicable - gender-differentiated language implies that the grammatical gender overlaps with natural gender when referring to professions. In the Serbian language, this involves the use of feminine suffixes such as -ca, -ica, -ka, and -kinja to denote female occupational titles wherever appropriate

13. Consult the profession - When using occupational nouns that exist in both masculine and feminine forms (such as judge in Serbian), or in cases where the feminine grammatical form is not yet widely established in the media or professional practice, it is recommended that journalists consult representatives of the profession to determine their preferred form of address.

14. Avoid terms that emphasise a woman's marital status - journalists are advised to avoid using the titles "Mrs" and "Miss" to denote marital status. It is preferable that all women be referred to as "Ms". It is recommended that journalists avoid presenting a man by his full name, and a woman only by her last name, particularly in contexts that frame her primarily as his wife..

15. Avoid gender stereotypes and disparaging expressions - avoid expressions such as "beautiful presenter", "the weaker sex", or "although a woman, successful in her work", even when used jokingly.

16. Do not alter the names of established awards - When referring to awards that have borne the same name for many years, journalists should not modify their titles, as doing so can undermine or diminish the achievements of female recipients (e.g. Order of the Knight).

10 Literature

A Handbook on Gender Equality Best Practices in European Journalists' Unions. (2014). European Federation of Journalists/ International Federation of Journalists.

Adcock, C. (2010). The politician, the wife, the citizen, and her newspaper: Rethinking women, democracy, and media (ted) representation. *Feminist Media Studies*, 10(2), 135-159.

Alasgarli M. & Surčulija Milojević J. (2019). Gender Equality and the Media: Guide for News Producers in Azerbaijan. Council of Europe

Analysis of reporting on violence against women – RTS 1 and TV Prva. (2019). Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM).

Andy Murrey corrects journalist for overlooking female players. (2017). *The Guardian*.

Baidoo-Anu, D., & Ansah, L. O. (2023). Education in the era of generative artificial intelligence (AI): Understanding the potential benefits of ChatGPT in promoting teaching and learning. *Journal of AI*, 7(1), 52-62.

Chhabra, M., Fiore, L. B., & Pérez-Villanueva, S. (2020). Violence against women: representations, interpretations, and education. *Violence against women*, 26(14), 1743-1750.

Cvetinčanin, Knežević H. & Lalatović, L. (2019). Handbook for Gender-Sensitive Media Reporting. UN Women. Coordination Body for Gender Equality of the Government of the Republic of Serbia

Elliott, K. (2018). Challenging toxic masculinity in schools and society. *On the Horizon*, 26(1), 17-22.

European Convention on Human Rights (1950) of the Council of Europe.

Fiske, S. T. (1998). Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

GCSE - Set Product Fact Sheet - This girl can advert. (2016). GCSE Media Studies

Gligorijević, J., Pavlović, S., Cvetičanin Knežević, H. (2021). the United Nations Development Programme.

Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists. (2019). Tunisia.

Global Media Monitoring Project. (2020). Who makes the news?

Guidelines for a journalism sensitive to diversity, equity and inclusion. (2025). International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

Guidelines of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services on monitoring of the application of reporting standards in gender-based violence cases in the media. (2021)

Hall, S. (1997). The spectacle of the other. Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices, 7, 223-290.

Harrington, C. (2021). What is "toxic masculinity" and why does it matter?. Men and masculinities, 24(2), 345-352.

the Istanbul Convention. 2011. Council of Europe.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). Men and women of the corporation. New York: Basic Books.

Code of Conduct for Journalists of Serbia. (2025). Press Council.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). (1979). United Nations.

Lippmann, W. (1965). Public opinion. 1922. URL: <http://infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/etext04/pbp nn10. htm>.

Loeffelholz, M. (2008). Anthology Form and the Field of Nineteenth-Century American Poetry: The Civil War Sequences of Lowell, Longfellow, and Whittier. *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 54(1), 217-240.

Marinucci, L., Mazzuca, C., & Gangemi, A. (2023). Exposing implicit biases and stereotypes in human and artificial intelligence: state of the art and challenges with a focus on gender. *AI & SOCIETY*, 38(2), 747-761.

Matović, M. (2013). The Gender Dimension of the Journalism Profession in Serbia. *Genero: Journal of Feminist Theory and Cultural Studies*, (17), 97-118.

Milivojević, S. (2021). Gender structure of directorial and editorial positions in news media. OSCE

Journalists against violence. (2019). Reporting on Violence Against Women. UNDP.

The Beijing Declaration. (1995). United Nations.

Recommendation No. (84) 17 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe "On equality between women and men in the media". (1984). Council of Europe.

Recommendation No. 1555 (2002) Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: The portrayal of women in the media. (2002). Council of Europe.

Recommendation No. Rec (2003) 13 on the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making. (2003). Council of Europe.

Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers n. (2007) 2 on media pluralism and diversity of media content. (2007) 3 on the obligations of public service media in the information society. (2007). Council of Europe.

Recommendation No. (2007) 17 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Gender Equality Standards and Mechanisms. (2007). Council of Europe.

Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly no. 1557 (2007) and Recommendation No. 1557 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. 1799 (2007) on "Depicting Women in Advertising". (2007). Council of Europe.

Gender and Gender Equality in Cyberspace. (2025). A good book

Ross, B. (2011). Artisanal mining in Namibia—Understanding the cycle of poverty and the impact of selling collector minerals in the local marketplace. The University of Arizona.

Sapir, E. (1921). Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech. NEW YORK: HARCOURT, BRACE

Posetti, J., Maynard, D., Bontcheva, K., & Aboulez, N. (2021). Maria Ressa: Fighting an Onslaught of Online Violence. International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)

Recommendations on media coverage of gender-based violence. (2018). Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities (MNRA).

Sarikakis, K. (2021). Guidelines of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services on monitoring of the application of reporting standards in gender-based violence cases in the media. Council of Europe

Savić. S & Stevanović M. (2020). A Guide to the Use of Gender-Sensitive Language in Public Administration in Serbia. OSCE.

Professional Reporting Guidelines. (2022). Press Tip.

I'm looking forward to Jelena. (2016). Permission to restrict freedom of expression in accordance with European instruments and media legislation of the Republic of Serbia, Doctoral dissertation, Faculty of Law, University of Belgrade, Belgrade

Guidelines for Standardized Non-Discriminatory Speech and Behavior. (2010). Gender Equality. Protector of Citizens, Ombudsperson.

World Health Organization. (2021). Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. Geneva: World Health Organization.

Gieseke, A. P. (2020). "The New Weapon of Choice": Law's Current Inability to Properly Address Deepfake Pornography. *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 73(5), 1479–1515.

The Law on Public Information and Media, "Sl. RS Gazette", no. 92/2023 and 51/2025).

The Advertising Act, "Sl. RS Gazette", no. 6/2016 and 52/2019 – other law.

The Gender Equality Act, "S. RS Gazette", no. 52/2021).

The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, "Sl. RS Gazette", no. 22/2009 and 52/2021).

This Guide was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe under the programme Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author(s). Views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the Council of Europe.

The project "Protection of Freedom of Expression and Media in Serbia (PROFREX)" enables beneficiary institutions and civil society organisations in Serbia to progress towards fulfilling their reform agendas in the field of freedom of expression and media freedom, in line with European standards. The aim of the project is to contribute to an improved environment for the realisation of the right to freedom of expression, in particular by journalists and media actors, in a more pluralistic and secure media environment, and in accordance with the standards set in accordance with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

ENG

The Member States of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

www.europa.eu

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

www.coe.int

Co-funded
by the European Union



Co-funded and implemented
by the Council of Europe