

**The Future of Media Commission
Submission on the Underrepresentation of Women in Media
The Equality Expert Group**

The Equality Expert Group welcomes the opportunity to submit a proposal to the independent Future of Media Commission as set out in its invitation for public consultations – <https://futureofmediacommission.ie/public-consultation/>

The Equality Expert Group is a new collective of experts drawn from a variety of fields, public and private, seeking to support equality and diversity in Irish social, economic and cultural life.

CONCERNS LEADING TO THIS SUBMISSION

The Future of Media Commission (FOMC) poses three central questions.

1. How should Government develop and support the concept and role of public service media and what should its role in relation to public service content in the wider media be?
2. How should public service media be financed sustainably?
3. How should media be governed and regulated?

It is proposed to consider those questions through the lens of the key concern of the Expert Group, namely the under representation of women in media.

The under representation of women in media in Ireland is acute, both in terms of gender portrayal across media and the underrepresentation of women within media organisations, particularly at senior editorial levels where key decisions are made.

As in other areas of public life, the absence of women in media, relative to men, has profound implications for major public policy decisions and private attitudes towards women and girls.

The perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes, the often sensationalist coverage of issues such as domestic abuse, sexism and image-based abuse are among some of the issues that need to be urgently addressed.

The Expert Group submits its proposal at a time when online attacks against female journalists are increasing worldwide¹ often translating into real life attacks. Almost 100 female journalists have been murdered worldwide, the ultimate act of censorship, since the early 1990s².

¹ See, inter alia (<https://theconversation.com/online-attacks-on-female-journalists-are-increasingly-spilling-into-the-real-world-new-research-150791>)

² See <https://www.dw.com/en/violence-against-women-journalists-it-is-about-silencing-women/a-55732723>

In this regard, the Expert Group notes that the online harassment of female journalists and writers in Ireland has led to at least one prosecution in our criminal courts.³

Gender equality is critical to the operation of a fair and functioning democracy, requiring the full and equal participation of women and men in society.

Yet in Europe, women represent only about a quarter of the persons heard, read about or seen in the news, according to the Council of Europe⁴.

The underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in media is well documented by international monitoring bodies such as Who Makes The News⁵; The Global Media Monitoring Project⁶; the International Women's Media Foundation⁷ and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).⁸

However, there is a dearth of adequate, reliable and trackable data, as well as ambitious targets, in respect of monitoring and tackling the underrepresentation of women in media in Ireland.

The most recent study, a survey of gender balance in the Irish and UK media carried out by the Institute for the Future of Journalism at Dublin City University, captures the scale of the problem.

The study, carried out by the Institute as part of the 5th Global Media Monitoring Project 2015, found that women struggle to comprise even a third of media professionals, with radio being the least inclusive of women media professionals.⁹

This is despite the fact that, as of 2019, women comprise just over half of Ireland's population. Females (2,483,500) outnumbered males (2,438,000) by 45,500, according to the Central Statistics Office.

The FuJoMediaEU study found that since 1995, there has been a slow but steady improvement in the visibility of women as producers and subjects of news in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

³ See, inter alia <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-30964141.html>

⁴ See <https://www.coe.int/en/we/genderequality/women-in-media>

⁵ See www.whomakesthenews.org

⁶ See (<https://waccglobal.org/our-work/global-media-monitoring-project-gmmp/>)

⁷ See <https://www.iwmf.org/resources/global-report-on-the-status-of-women-in-the-news-media/>

⁸ See - <https://eige.europa.eu/node/344>

⁹ See, inter alia, <https://fujomedia.eu/gender-equality-in-news-media/> and <https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/una-mullally-gender-balance-is-lacking-throughout-media-1.3224047>

In the past five years, however, progress appears to have slowed down and, in some aspects, there is evidence of regression¹⁰.

Other studies of note include the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI)¹¹ funded Hearing Women's Voices: Exploring women's underrepresentation in current affairs radio programming at peak radio times¹².

The lack of female voices in media has been highlighted by initiatives such as Women on Air¹³, which has campaigned tirelessly to increase gender balance on the airwaves.

A new Womenonair.ie database for media of women who are ready, willing, and able to contribute to broadcast media opportunities was recently launched by Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media Catherine Martin TD.

The accomplishments of women in media have been recognised mostly by other women in the form of awards including the annual Women in Media (WIM) Conference¹⁴ and Irish Tatler Women of the Year Awards (WOTYA).

However, we believe that without Government led and supported measures, gender equality in media will not be achieved for decades to come, increasing risks to the lives, livelihoods and status of women in Ireland.

¹⁰ See UK and Ireland results of global survey at <https://fujomedia.eu/gender-equality-in-news-media/>

¹¹ Note that The BAI has published a Gender Action Plan, which states that the authority has a central role to play in promoting diversity and equality in the Irish audio-visual industry - https://www.bai.ie/en/media/sites/2/dlm_uploads/2018/04/20180423_BAI_GenderActionPlan_vFinal_AR.pdf

¹² See full report at https://cdn.thejournal.ie/media/2015/11/hearing_womens_voices_2015_final.pdf

¹³ Women on Air was founded in 2010 by journalist and Entrepreneur Margaret E Ward – see <https://womenonair.ie/about-us/>

¹⁴ See <https://www.womeninmediaballybunion.com> and <https://irishtatler.com/wotya>

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS/SUGGESTED ACTIONS

QUESTION ONE

How should Government develop and support the concept and role of public service media and what should its role in relation to public service content in the wider media be?

Women, who constitute just over 50pc of the Irish population, consume media and pay for publicly funded media just as men do.

They are entitled to hear their concerns, their views and most importantly their voices on the airwaves and across all relevant media platforms.

As part of its commitment to public service media and content, the Government should implement the measures outlined in Recommendation CM/REC (2013) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Gender Equality and Media¹⁵.

The Expert Group also invites the Commission to consider the recommendations of the Council of Europe following its landmark report on gender equality in the audio-visual sector¹⁶

These include but are not limited to:

- The adoption and implementation of national indicators for gender equality in the media;
- Research and publication into gender equality and media;
- The creation of a dedicated legal framework on gender equality in the media, including mandating media regulators and organisations to include an assessment of the implementation of gender equality policy in the media in their annual reports;
- Carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of the situation of gender equality in the media at national level;
- Oblige media organisations to ensure equal access to, and representation in, media work for women and men;
- a balanced participation of women and men in management posts, in bodies with an advisory, regulatory or internal supervisory role, and generally in the decision-making process;
- - a non-stereotyped image, role and visibility of women and men, avoidance of sexist advertising, language and content which could lead to

¹⁵ The measures can be accessed here -

https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e

¹⁶ See <https://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-adopts-landmark-recommendation-on-gender-equality-in/1680751d44>

discrimination on grounds of sex, incitement to hatred and gender-based violence.

We know that the collection, monitoring and publication of data are key to ensuring accountability, as the work of bodies such as Balance for Better Business¹⁷ and European Movement Ireland¹⁸ have demonstrated time and time again.

QUESTION TWO

How should public service media be financed sustainably?

The Expert Group would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Commission with a view to discussing the broader, complex issue of financing of public service media.

However, consideration should be given to linking the financing of public service media, and the granting of any licences/privileges thereto for public bodies¹⁹ - and organisations that are otherwise in receipt of public funds - to meeting thresholds in respect of diversity, including gender equality.

Repeat and/or egregious violations of said commitments may, it is submitted, give rise to a review of an operators' licence and/or receipt of public funding.

QUESTION THREE

How should media be governed and regulated?

The Expert Group does not envy the task of the Commission in this regard, not least because of the vexed question of what constitutes media in the digital age and the unsustainable assertion, in the view of the Expert Group, that Internet companies such as Google, Facebook and others are not publishers²⁰.

This existential question has potentially profound consequences, by extension, for future decisions on what entities should be funded, regulated and/or subjected to diversity and inclusion - in particular gender equality monitoring and compliance initiatives - by national governments.

¹⁷ See reports at <https://www.betterbalance.ie>

¹⁸ See EMI accountability report at https://www.oireachtas.ie/ga/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_european_union_affairs/2015-10-21/2/

¹⁹ Public bodies as defined under the IHREC Act 2014

²⁰ See, inter alia, Dearbhail McDonald "It's Time for a Proper Debate on the Future of Media in Ireland" - <https://www.independent.ie/business/media/dearbhail-mcdonald-its-time-for-a-proper-debate-on-the-future-of-media-in-ireland-35229733.html>

Once again, the Expert Group would welcome the opportunity to furnish the Commission with further, more detailed recommendations, perhaps in the form of future discussions and/or a White Paper.

As the Council of Europe has acknowledged in its 2019 update on Gender Equality and Media, most member States have been cautious in introducing legislative provisions expressly addressing gender equality and media, which can be partly explained by a reluctance to interfere with press and media freedom²¹.

That concern is acknowledged by the Expert Group, not least because of the importance of upholding the independence of the media as part of its democratic function (s).

However, it is submitted that there is a greater risk for women and girls, and for society at large, to allow the current discriminatory and, in many cases, harmful gender disparity in media, to persist.

The regulatory approach must, therefore, be one of carrot and stick via media leadership, accountability via monitoring and research and ensuring the social licence to trade is commensurate with high commitments to gender parity.

More than twenty-five years after world leaders agreed upon the landmark Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, progress on gender equality remains uneven.

However, given the centrality of gender equality of the Government of Ireland's successful campaign to secure a seat on the United Nations Security Council, as well as its commitments under the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), now is the optimal time to reappraise the issue of gender equality as it relates to our society and public discourse.

Dearbhail McDonald, Áine Kerr, Margaret E Ward, Carol Hunt, Jillian Van Turnhout and Noelle O'Connell on behalf of the Equality Expert Group.

²¹ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-064620-gbr-2573-gender-equality-in-media/16809f0342>