

# **GUIDELINES ON GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER PORTRAYAL IN THE BROADCASTING MEDIA**

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### **1. Executive Summary**

**1.1.** These guidelines apply to all programmes, including news and advertisements, broadcast on radio and television stations and are intended to make the broadcasting media more sensitive to gender equality. These guidelines are directed to the people in production, decision-makers of programme structures and producers of advertisements, amongst others.

**1.2.** These guidelines aim to sensitise producers to use gender inclusive vocabulary and images.

**1.3.** These guidelines deal with sex-role portrayal in television and radio programming and attempt to address the issue of stereotyping in the broadcast media. Media images and productions should provide an equal representation of women and men in roles of authority in characterization and in production as well as in caring situations.

**1.4.** Also these guidelines are targeted to broadcasting stations to sensitise licensees to the issue and to reduce the incidence of unequal portrayal of the sexes in broadcast programming.

**1.5.** These guidelines focus on the equal representation of men and women in the broadcasting media. Such representation should be recognized and the portrayal of men and women should reflect their actual social and professional achievement, career, interests and roles. The broadcasting media should reflect the continuous change in Maltese society with regard to the professional roles of men and women.

**1.6.** Such guidelines provide guidance for broadcasters who should portray the role diversity for both genders. These guidelines guide broadcasters on how to use media as a tool to promote equality and thus promote change rather than perpetuate gender stereotypes.

**1.7.** Radio and television broadcasters should eliminate media representations which encourage discrimination and degradation on the basis of gender. It is to be emphasised that such an approach is illegal.

**1.8.** Since negative portrayal and representation of one sex may be linked to the lack of gender policy guidance, these guidelines are intended to advance the awareness of, and sensitivity to, the problems related to the negative or inequitable sex-role portrayal of persons. These guidelines aim to help producers develop positive images of men and women and eliminate systematic discrimination.

**1.9.** These guidelines recommend that production of programmes targeted mainly to one sex should be given general titles incorporating the family or the home and in this way such programmes would appeal to a wider range of listeners and viewers.

### **2. Portrayal**

**2.1** Broadcasters should ensure that the portrayal, reporting and representation of women and men respect their dignity. Television and radio programming should promote equal opportunities for men and women.

**2.2** Men and women should be portrayed in a wide range of roles, both traditional and non-traditional, in paid work, social, family and leisure activities. Men and women should both be seen as taking decisions to support the family and in household tasks and home management.

**2.3** Television and radio programming should portray diversity in family structures, that is, not only marriages between woman and man but the portrayal of single parenting and adopted children. Indeed, the portrayal of different family structures should be done in such a manner as to avoid 'victimisation' of atypical structures. It is imperative that these are not depicted in a pitiful state.

**2.4** Broadcasters should promote recognition of tasks usually associated with women and portray them equally important as traditional male tasks and which should be carried out by both genders.

**2.5** Certain subjects like family planning, welfare, health of the mother and the child, education and upbringing of children, should be directed at both men and women.

**2.6** Broadcasters should ensure diversity in portrayal of men and women with diversity in age, abilities, physical appearance, occupation and family status. Broadcasters should emphasize gender equality and non-stereotyped gender roles of men and women within the family.

**2.7** Media should eliminate sex-role stereotyping.

**2.8** Broadcasters are encouraged to refrain from presenting women as inferior beings and exploiting them as sexual objects as it is illegal to do so.

**2.9** Broadcasters should eliminate negative sex-role portrayal. This refers to the representation which associates particular roles, types of behaviour and characteristics to people on the basis of gender without considering the characteristics of each individual.

**2.10** Moreover, negative comments on the role of women, men or children should be eliminated.

**2.11** Programmes should not reinforce the patriarchal power relation of society where men are seen to be more powerful. The broadcasting media should not over emphasise certain roles of women mainly the domestic and sexual role and portray as submissive.

**2.12** Men and women should be portrayed in both public and private spheres.

**2.13** Radio and television programmes should not ridicule and stigmatise people on the bases of gender and sexual orientation.

**2.14** Women should appear more on the screen and should not be seen in limited roles. Women's thinking abilities and men's caring abilities should also appear on the screen.

**2.15** Women should not be segregated in one type of programme known as women's programmes. Such programmes should be also targeted to men. Subjects of interest to women are also interesting to the fathers of the children. Such programmes are to be categorized as 'family programmes' and not 'women's programmes'.

### **3. Gender inclusive Language**

**3.1** These guidelines ensure that non-sexist language, that is the exclusion of one sex on the basis of gender, is not used in radio and television programming. Sexist language reflects the idea that one sex is superior to the other. Such language contributes, promotes or results in the oppression of one of the sexes to the detriment of the other and exploits an unfair distinction between sexes. Sexist language imposes stereotypes.

**3.2** Also radio and television productions should not use language that can be offensive, misrepresents and excludes women or men. Generic terms which include both sexes should be used with regard to the

question of language in the media.

**3.3** All discussion programmes' panels should be constituted of both genders.

#### **4. Human Resources in Media Organisation**

**4.1** Television and radio stations should increase the participation and involvement of both sexes in broadcasting as producers or decision makers in the industry. Men and women should have equal responsibilities in the broadcasting industry. Broadcasters should ensure both sexes equal access to all areas and levels of the broadcasting media.

**4.2** Broadcasting companies should recruit a gender-balanced staff.

**4.3** Broadcasting organisations should adopt an equality policy and a structure for the employment of both sexes in key sectors and in managerial level.

**4.4** Both sexes need to be involved in decision-making to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in the broadcasting media.

#### **5. Legal Framework**

Although the above paragraphs are intended to serve as guidelines to the broadcasting industry, it must be borne in mind that Maltese law also contains provisions which prohibit discrimination in the media. In particular, reference is made to article 10 of the Equality for Men and Women Act, Chapter 456 of the Laws of Malta, which reads as follows:

**Discriminatory Advertisement. Cap. 452.** **10.** (1) Without prejudice to the provisions of article 26 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Act, it shall be unlawful for persons to publish or display or cause to be published or displayed any advertisement, or, otherwise to advertise a vacancy for employment which discriminates between job seekers or to request from job seekers information concerning their private life or family plans:

Provided that the provisions of this subarticle shall not apply in such cases where employers prove that the work in connection with the situation advertised can only be performed by a person of a specific sex.

(2) It shall not be lawful for persons to publish or display or cause to be published or displayed any advertisement which promotes discrimination or which otherwise discriminates.

(3) Persons who act in breach of subarticle (1) and (2) shall be guilty of an offence against this article and shall, on conviction, be liable to the penalties established for contravention.

(4) For the purposes of subarticle (1), advertising includes disseminating information about the vacancy by word of mouth from person to person.

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