



# Gender Representation Guidelines for Discussion Programmes

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A fairer representation because, after all, both sexes are affected by themes of current affairs, both sexes are affected by decisions taken in every aspect of life, whether political or not, both sexes can have their say in everything that is happening in Malta and abroad and therefore this must be reflected on television programmes.

**Dr. Joanna Spiteri**, Chief Executive

*September 2020 during the launch of the study conducted by the Broadcasting Authority*

# Message from the Chairman of the Broadcasting Authority

FRANK V. FARRUGIA

The role of the Broadcasting Authority is not limited to the rules and legislation it implements in broadcasting, but from time to time it also provides guidance and information on the interpretation of certain provisions in broadcasting. This was the case regarding the guidelines on gender representation. In actual fact, the need for broadcasting to represent the genders in a balanced way, was also one of the points raised when the Authority in 2019 was preparing an analysis report on the quality of broadcasting. Lack of equal and fair representation between genders is one of the elements that not only reduce quality, but also do not reflect what exists in Maltese society. The imbalance between gender representation also leaves out or even missing opinions, thoughts and information in discussion programmes or current affairs programmes. The Authority therefore immediately welcomed the Government's request to draw up guidelines on gender representation in discussion and debate programmes. In this way, it was merging what was being felt as lacking in broadcasting as it also saw that there was a political will to strike a balance between the wider representation of the gender. To this end, the Authority engaged itself and carried out an analysis and gathering of information on what was being broadcast on local stations to take a snapshot of what was happening in discussion and current affairs programmes to see how it will be focusing the guidelines on gender representation. After the Authority had these figures in hand, through the Chief Executive, Dr Joanna Spiteri, a small committee started to study this subject. I recall that the Broadcasting Authority had already drawn up guidelines on gender representation in broadcasting back in 2006, but the exercise, which is being presented here, is more focused on a particular genre, which genre is very popular with the Maltese audience. The committee chaired by Dr. Spiteri

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I AM CONVINCED THAT THESE GUIDELINES WILL HELP THE SECTOR AND FACILITATE THE WORK OF JOURNALISTS, PRESENTERS AND PRODUCERS TO NOT ONLY BE AWARE OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN BROADCASTING BUT GIVE MUCH GREATER IMPORTANCE TO A FAIR PRESENTATION BETWEEN THE TWO SEXES

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and composed of Dr. Joanne Muscat, Mr. Adriel Vella for the Broadcasting Authority and Mr. André Callus, an official within NCPE under the guidance of the NCPE Commissioner, Ms. Renee Laiviera, worked hard to draw up these much-needed guidelines in a few months. These guidelines started with a section on definitions, programme format and the production process. An essential element in these guidelines is the checklist for producers to deliver a balanced result from a gender perspective. I am convinced that these guidelines will help the sector and facilitate the work of journalists, presenters and producers to not only be aware of gender representation in broadcasting but give much greater importance to a fair presentation between the two sexes. This project will surely be another step forward in the continuity to improve the quality of broadcasting, but also the Authority is being at the forefront in initiating changes in Maltese culture, and that broadcasting will be a reflection of the Maltese society. I only hope that all those involved in broadcasting, especially those working in discussion programmes, recognise the importance of these guidelines through which they will have a better-quality product and fairer content that reflects the participation of different genres.





# Introduction

Broadcasting media are well placed to shape and influence perceptions, ideas, and behaviour prevalent within society. Nevertheless, shocking balance discrepancies between men and women persist since most of the time broadcasts are designed on the premise that viewers, listeners, or followers are uniform. However, society is diverse, and thus programmes should be responsive to the different expectations and varied needs of their participants and audiences and as such are obliged to portray a spectrum of reality through fair gender representation.

These guidelines were developed in the context of the 2017 manifest proposal for the *"introduction of guidelines in televised debates so that, when possible, a balance is achieved in the representation of the two sexes"*, and are also in line with OPM Circular 15 of 2012 *Gender Mainstreaming in Practice* which requires the public administration to adopt a pro-active approach in identifying those areas where any degree of inequality could potentially arise, assess the underlying causes for such inequalities, and take the necessary steps to bring about change.

These guidelines are targeted for the media service providers /stakeholders that fall within the remit of the Broadcasting Authority with the intention to raise awareness whilst helping to narrow the representation gap between men and women in discussion programmes. The disparities portrayed on broadcast media should

be addressed to reflect the reality pertaining within the Maltese society and thus a step towards the right direction is a must for a just presence of women and men reflecting the composition of society, human experiences, actions, views, and concerns not only on-screen but off-screen too. Media producers have the responsibility to provide a gender balanced media content as far as possible. This applies to all media and programme genre, however, these guidelines mainly focus on discussion programmes.

These guidelines are targeted to programme managers, producers, presenters, journalists, and all those who are involved in media content.

The Guidelines are divided into four sections:

- **Definitions of key words:** discussion programmes, gender, gender equality, gender stereotypes, gender-discriminatory language and gender-inclusive language;
- **Programme format:** the role that programmes play in improving equality between men and women through programme format;
- **Production Process and Checklist:** the different stages of production and the different ways to address/integrate a gender (men and women) perspective in each step of the production process through the checklist provided;
- **Management:** the role gender plays within the management structure of the media service provider.



# Definitions of Key Words

## **Discussion programme**

Discussion programme is a format, which puts forward a topic or topics that are discussed/ analysed during the programme, very often through speakers/ guests who are invited to the programme. They can be radio, television, or online programmes in which various topics are discussed. The purpose of a discussion programme is to inform the audience about a topic or to present the viewpoints of the people participating in the discussion. Topics can vary from current affairs issues, subjects with political and industrial controversy to topics which are light and at times entertaining. Discussion programmes have a number of similarities to interviews but tend to be less scripted and structured. Discussion programmes can either be studio based but can also be presented on location. At times, these programmes can also engage the audience through different ways of presentation and interactivity.

## **Gender**

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between boys and girls, women and men, as well as the relations among women and those among men and is part of a broader socio-cultural context. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context / time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed, and valued in a woman or a man in a given context.

## **Gender equality**

This refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of boys and girls, women and men. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women.

## **Gender stereotypes**

Gender stereotypes are preconceived ideas whereby males and females are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. Gender stereotyping can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of boys and girls, women and men, their educational and professional experiences as well as life opportunities in general. Stereotypes about women result both from and are the cause of deeply engrained historical attitudes, values, norms, and prejudices against women in society in general.

## **Gender-discriminatory language**

Gender discriminatory language includes words, phrases and/or other linguistic features that foster stereotypes or demean or ignore women or men. At its most extreme it fails to treat the genders as equal in value, dignity, integrity, and respect.

## **Gender-inclusive language**

Gender inclusive language means speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender, or gender identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes. The correct use of language plays an important part in the fair portrayal of women and men and the promotion of gender equality. Gender inclusive language can be in two:

**Gender Sensitive language:** attained when women and men are addressed through language as persons of equal value, dignity, integrity, and respect, such as avoiding the use of language that refers explicitly or implicitly to only one gender and ensuring, through inclusive alternatives, the use of gender-sensitive and inclusive language.

**Gender-neutral language:** not gender-specific and considers people in general with no reference to women or men. It is also called gender-blind language. Gender neutral language may be appropriate in certain contexts, but it is not suitable when different needs and concerns of women and men need to be highlighted.



# Programme Format

## Hosts, Presenters and Reporters

- Aim for a balance of women and men hosts, presenters and reporters within and across discussion programmes, representative of different groups in society.
- Ensure that age and physical appearance are not factors for choosing hosts, presenters and reporters, when not a genuine requirement.
- Aim for an equal representation of women and men hosts, presenters and reporters within main and secondary roles.
- Allocate equal time for presentation and discussion to women and men hosts, presenters and reporters
- Avoid the stereotypical distribution of stories and reports to be presented by women or men. Both women and men hosts, presenters and reporters should present topics and areas that are traditionally associated with either the masculine or the feminine.

## Guests and Interviewees

- Aim for a balance of women and men guests and interviewees during discussion programmes, representative of different groups in society.
- Ensure that age and physical appearance are not factors for choosing guests and interviewees, when not a genuine requirement.
- Aim for an equal representation of women and men guests on discussion panels and ensure that both women and men panel members are treated and portrayed fairly and non-stereotypically.
- Strive for the equal representation of women and men guests and interviewees in roles of authority and expertise.
- Ensure that the women and men guests and interviewees are given equal time to speak.
- Ensure that the questions and reactions of hosts, presenters and reporters convey equal value and importance to the contributions of women and men guests and interviewees.

- Seek to break gender stereotypes by inviting women guests and interviewees in occupational and social roles that are generally perceived as masculine, and men guests and interviewees in occupational and social roles that are generally perceived as feminine.

## Topics and Language

- Apply a gender-perspective to all topics and areas covered during discussion programmes by ensuring fair and non-stereotypical portrayal of women and men in each topic or area. Assess whether the topic or area is, implicitly or explicitly, connected to stereotypes and unequal power relations, and ensure that these are challenged.
- Ensure that gender-specific topics (such as gender-based violence and gender pay gap) are given adequate coverage in discussion programmes. Portrayal of gender-specific topics should be informed and accurate, and every effort should be made to avoid misrepresentation or trivialisation as well as disempowerment of those experiencing inequality.
- Use gender-inclusive language and images, highlighting the different needs, concerns and experiences of women and men, where appropriate.

## Setting

- Aim for the balanced participation of women and men in all studio and outdoor settings of discussion programmes, including face-to-face interviews, telephone/video links, competence-based contributions, panels and groups, live links, audiences and vox pops.
- Ensure that the placement of women and men on the set or on location gives equal visibility and importance to both.



# Production Process

Achieving gender-balanced representation at all levels of the **production process** requires addressing the basic fundamental of who, what, when, where, why and how each step of the way. Furthermore, it is vital that adequate training for gender awareness is provided and advice sought from stakeholders involved in safeguarding equality between men and women. Media content needs to be discussed at all levels of the production process whilst keeping in mind balance between men and women.

This section consists of an overview of the steps involved in the Production Process. In addition, it provides a checklist to be used by media stakeholders at all the stages of production. Although the checklist is not exhaustive it may help improve representation of men and women in broadcast media.

**Pre-Production:** this is the period used to plan and prepare for the production, the choice of topic and themes to be discussed and the format to be used.

- Conduct thorough research on the topic, themes and people involved in the discussion programme whilst factoring in a fair gender representation.

**Production:** this is the way the subject/topic will be tackled – visually and content wise and the way the discussion is developed as part of the programme.

- Consider the way in which men and women are considered within the station management for the production process.
- Adhere to relevant professional standards, including those designed to combat discrimination and stereotypes and to promote equality between men and women.

**Post-Production:** the stage after production when the filming is wrapped, and the editing of the visual and audio materials begins.

- Consider fair gender representation when cutting raw footage, assembling that footage, adding music, and dubbing among other.

**Editing:** this takes place after the recording/ production stage, interviews and sounds are played back and the best sequences are selected.

- Ensure editing of add-on audiovisual clips so that the discussion is free from gender stereotypes and shows fair representation of both men and women.
- Pay the same attention, and give the same treatment, to viewpoints of both men and women; allocate fairly time and attention for both male and female contributions.

**Conducting interviews:** the ability to communicate or ask questions to someone to get information.

- Ensure that the people involved, such as journalists or hosts, are known and trusted.

**Programming/ Broadcasting:** this is the actual programme, which is being aired, taking into consideration the scheduling of the programme as well.

- Present programmes to heads / hosts, both to approve the broadcast and to offer any comments or observations which might help to improve the programme before it is aired.
- Guarantee that programme promotions content and their scheduling reflect a balanced picture of men and women.

**Monitoring / Evaluation:** these are tools which can measure the impact (positive and/or negative) in time and space that the broadcast has had on a community, including its impact on attitudes, behaviour, and knowledge, as well as on the socio-economic environment.

- Monitor and evaluate programme impact to analyse the performance of the programmes designed and broadcast at any time, and to make timely design or technical improvements/ adjustments, as necessary.

**Post-mortem:** the stage to conduct an examination or discussion after the broadcast event.

- Conduct a 'post-mortem' of the programme broadcast between the producer and the editor of the audio-visual media genre.



# Management

Another important concept to look at is to consider the way in which men and women are considered within the management structure of the media service provider, not only who is involved in the programme format or the production process but also from a Human Resources point of view.

- Women and men shall be treated equally, at all times, during the recruitment, training, remuneration, promotion and any other condition of employment within the media industry.
- Women shall be encouraged to occupy supervisory and managerial posts.
- There shall be a balanced participation of women and men in decision-making positions including management, programming, education, training, research, and quality control. A balanced participation can be

achieved through various means such as a flexible working environment, the just valuation of women's work, criteria for promotions/recruitment that take into account the different experiences and abilities of wo/men and internal equality policies.

- Women shall be involved in the creation, editorial and distribution processes in media.
- Equal participation of women and men in media decision making positions, in content, and the establishment of databases of women experts on all subjects shall be encouraged.
- Media organizations shall adopt positive actions which are taken by the employer to address imbalance between men and women in order to improve equality, especially at a decision-making and technical services level.
- Consultation with other stakeholders listed under useful links is also encouraged.

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## Conclusion

There is no straightforward answer for a realistic gender representation in discussion programmes, but gender remains everybody's business and all involved should work towards a balanced representation. These guidelines aim to raise awareness whilst help minimise the shocking gender balance discrepancies registered locally through better understanding of gender related terminology, and better exposure and portrayal of men and women. The aim is to encourage a wider participation by women in talks and discussions broadcast whilst safeguarding their dignity and integrity.

The Discussion Programmes were the rationale behind these guidelines however they can apply across all genre and different media platforms. Although these guidelines are not exhaustive, they may help instigate culture change as they aim towards a just gender balanced and inclusive society. If all stakeholders are on board to make an effort irrespective of the pace, they can contribute to decreasing the disparities of gender representation across all media and contribute to gender equality in society. Fair gender representation is a professional and ethical aspiration that can be achieved through the steps highlighted in these guidelines.

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### USEFUL LINKS:

*National Commission for the Promotion of Equality:* [https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Pages/NCPE\\_Home.aspx](https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Pages/NCPE_Home.aspx)

*Directory of Professional Women:* <https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Pages/Directory/Search.aspx>

*National Council of Women:* <http://www.ncwmalta.com/home?!=1>

*Malta Women's Lobby:* <https://mcwo.net>



# Checklist

Production Stage	Questions & recommendations
<b>Pre-Production</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the topic of interest to men/women?</li> <li>• What are the conclusions of gender analysis regarding the theme and context?</li> <li>• What is the best way of handling the topic with men/women?</li> <li>• What viewpoints on the topic are predominantly held by men or women?</li> <li>• Choose topics that are of interest to both groups to achieve a good balance between the preferences of various audience sectors</li> </ul>
<b>Production</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would it be better to talk to men and women at the same time, or separately?</li> <li>• What is the best way to approach a topic in the case of a man/woman?</li> <li>• Take account of the sensitivity and viewpoint of both men and women.</li> <li>• Balance the experiences of men and women in the broadcast</li> <li>• Use gender inclusive language that is inclusive of both men and women</li> <li>• Avoid using adjectives that are irrelevant or which reinforce gender stereotypes</li> <li>• Do the images/ graphics or illustrations used contradict the content or lead the public to understand the story content differently?</li> </ul>
<b>Editing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid reproducing negative images or stereotypes;</li> <li>• Present information in such a way that both men and women can find interest in it.</li> <li>• Avoid presenting the interests of some as threats for others.</li> <li>• Choose fade-in music that promote and bring together men and women.</li> <li>• Promote positive images of women as active participants in social, economic, and political life, and positive images of men in non-traditional roles such as carers. and in jobs that are seen as feminine.</li> </ul>
<b>Interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would it be better to talk to men and women at the same time, or separately?</li> <li>• What is the best way to approach a topic in the case of a man or a woman?</li> <li>• Take into account the sensitivity and viewpoints of both men and women.</li> <li>• Balance the experiences of men and women in the broadcast.</li> <li>• Consider balance between men and women interviewees to determine who is best suited to answering questions on the theme chosen.</li> <li>• it is essential to take cultural sensitivities into account.</li> </ul>
<b>Programming/ Broadcasting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay the same attention and give the same treatment to viewpoints of both men and women.</li> <li>• Allocate equal airtime to the opinions of both women and men.</li> <li>• Avoid reproducing negative images or other stereotypes.</li> <li>• Present information in such a way that both men and women can find interesting.</li> <li>• Do not present the interests of some as threats for others.</li> <li>• Will the broadcast timetable accommodate both men and women?</li> <li>• Ask that mutual respect be shown between male and female participants.</li> <li>• Ensure that the time available is used fairly and that neither the men nor the women are allowed to dominate the conversation.</li> <li>• Awareness-raising messages offer an excellent opportunity to share information on gender and highlight topics that might be sensitive.</li> <li>• Remember not to lapse into stereotypes when you need to convey short messages.</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring/ Evaluation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many men and how many women spoke during the broadcast?</li> <li>• Has the production offered a fair gender representation?</li> <li>• What have been the reactions/feedback of men and women? Is there a difference?</li> <li>• How was feedback from audiences provided?</li> <li>• Could anonymity be safeguarded?</li> <li>• Has regular monitoring of availability of content by gender or the key content creators been performed, in particular in the broadcasting scheduling and in the prominence on on-demand platforms?</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Production</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the programme does not contain any elements that are insensitive to men or women.</li> <li>• Appoint a man and a woman with the specific task of paying attention to this point during the listening/viewing session.</li> <li>• Make sure that gender has been taken into account at all stages.</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Mortem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What feedback was received and from whom?</li> <li>• What went well and not so well?</li> <li>• Why: was it because of female/male responses or lack of it?</li> <li>• Was feedback biased towards one gender?</li> <li>• How can this be addressed for next programme?</li> </ul>

