

Combating sexist stereotypes in the media

Resolution 1751 (2010)¹

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes and deplores the fact that women are the victims of sexist stereotypes in the media. On the one hand, they are under-represented, if not invisible in the media. On the other hand, the persistence of sexist stereotypes in the media – confining women and men to the roles traditionally assigned by society, i.e. the women at home, the men in the professional and political world, women as victims or sexual objects, men as competent and powerful leaders or sexually driven persons – is a barrier to gender equality.
2. The sexist stereotypes conveyed vary from humour and clichés in the traditional media to incitement to gender-based hatred and violence on the Internet. Sexist stereotypes are too frequently trivialised and tolerated under the banner of freedom of expression. Furthermore, these stereotypes are often subtly conveyed by the media which reproduce the attitudes and opinions seen as the norm by societies where gender equality is far from reality. Accordingly, all too often, court action cannot be taken against sexist stereotypes nor can they be penalised by regulatory or self-regulatory authorities, except in the case of the most serious violations of human dignity.
3. Nonetheless, the impact of sexist stereotypes in the media on the formation of public opinion, especially among young people, is disastrous: they perpetuate a simplistic, immutable and caricatured image of women and men, legitimising everyday sexism and discriminatory practices and may facilitate or legitimise the use of gender-based violence. As such, sexist stereotypes are a means of discrimination.
4. The media, a vital constituent of democracy, have a particular responsibility in this field to promote respect for human dignity, the fight against all forms of discrimination and equality between women and men. Sexism, like racism and other forms of discrimination, has no place in the media. The Assembly reasserts its commitment to upholding the principles of human dignity and non-discrimination guaranteed in the European Convention on Human Rights. It further highlights the positive role that the media can play in promoting gender equality, referring in this connection to Recommendation R(84)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on equality between women and men in the media.
5. Moreover, education and training are absolutely essential in order to learn how to recognise, be aware of and overcome stereotypes. It is therefore crucial to inform children, from an early age, about combating discrimination and promoting gender equality.
6. The Assembly calls on member states to strengthen training and education activities and to:
 - 6.1. promote and launch awareness-raising campaigns;
 - 6.2. include, in the gender equality legislation, provisions aimed at combating sexist stereotypes;
 - 6.3. promote the introduction and/or effective functioning of regulatory or self-regulatory media authorities to guarantee respect for human dignity, contribute to the fight against discrimination, including gender-based discrimination, and promote not only diversity but also equality between women and men;
 - 6.4. define, in dialogue and consultation with public and private partners in the profession, codes of good practice which proscribe sexist practices and images, promote the balanced presence of women and men in the media and include the gender perspective;
 - 6.5. introduce quotas or other positive measures in the public media together with objectives to improve the participation and representation of women;
 - 6.6. put in place structures to monitor and/or strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms for reporting on stereotyped portrayals, drawing, where such prove effective, on the mechanisms for denouncing sexist advertising;
 - 6.7. promote the introduction of a European system of monitoring and exchange of best practices;
 - 6.8. place an emphasis on programmes aimed at young people to combat the stereotyped images of women and men and the sexist attitudes found in society;

- 6.9. promote, in schools, the teaching of how to interpret the media and decode sexist stereotypes and learning about gender equality, in line with Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender mainstreaming in education, the Assembly's [Resolutions 1557](#) (2007) on the image of women in advertising and 1669 (2009) on the rights of today's girls – the rights of tomorrow's women.
7. The Assembly furthermore calls on national parliaments to:
- 7.1. combat sexist stereotypes in the media by adopting legal measures to penalise sexist remarks or insults, incitement to gender-based hatred or violence and defamation of an individual or group of individuals on the ground of their sex;
 - 7.2. enable individual victims of gender-based discrimination but also non-governmental organisations active in the field of gender-based violence and discrimination, to seize the courts or competent regulatory and self-regulatory authorities in order to challenge incitement to gender-based hatred or violence and defamation of an individual or group of individuals on the ground of their sex;
 - 7.3. enable the public prosecution service to take action, *ex officio*, against incitement to gender-based hatred or violence and defamation of an individual or group of individuals on the ground of their sex;
 - 7.4. encourage members of parliament to adopt non-sexist language and not to resort to sexist stereotypes in the course of their parliamentary activities;
 - 7.5. urge members of parliament to demand that female candidates and elected representatives have the same access to the media as their male counterparts.
8. The Assembly calls on member states to encourage measures to promote the visibility and importance of women in the media, including:
- 8.1. the systematic analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, of the status and role of women in the media;
 - 8.2. the establishment of lists of female experts and consultants who could be called on by the media;
 - 8.3. the creation of competitions and prizes to recompense those media which promote the balanced representation and participation of women and men;
 - 8.4. the setting up of think-tanks focusing on the promotion of equality between women and men, whose activities may be taken into account by media regulation bodies.
9. The Assembly calls on the media to:
- 9.1. raise journalists' awareness and train them to include the gender equality dimension in journalism and in the media;
 - 9.2. promote the gender equality dimension in regulatory and self-regulatory authorities and, where appropriate, implement the recommendations contained in codes of good practice;
 - 9.3. favour a more balanced representation of women in the media and a non-stereotyped representation of women and men, thereby helping to overcome obstacles to gender equality.

¹ *Assembly debate* on 25 June 2010 (27th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12267](#), report of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, rapporteur: Mrs Stump. *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 25 June 2010 (27th Sitting).