Chapter 4

Gender inequalities in and through the media

Comparing gender inequalities in the media across countries

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Abstract

Issues of women's underrepresentation and invisibility in news content and limited access to managerial and decision-making positions, as well as a gendered division of labour in news covering, have been on the international agenda since the mid 1990s, raising concerns about news media diversity and accessibility. More recently, gender pay gaps, discrimination, and harassment in newsrooms and in the online environment – and the limited extent to which media policies and self-regulatory measures have addressed these issues – have also been highlighted, signalling that basic democratic principles of freedom of expression and participation are at stake if women's views and concerns are not acknowledged nor structural aspects of gender inequality addressed. Gender equality in and through the media is crucial for democracy. This chapter provides a gender-aware analysis of the democratic performance of leading news media using data from the 2021 Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM). Similarities and differences among the 18 participating countries are highlighted, and several dimensions of inequality are discussed. We call for sustained commitment to overcoming inequalities through gender-responsive research and media practices.

Keywords: media gender equality, gender-responsive media policies, gender pay gaps, women's underrepresentation in media content, gender inequality in media management

Introduction

The importance of gender equality in and through the news media is crucial for democracy. This has been restated by civic organisations and scholarly works as well as by international agencies over the past decades.[1] In 1995, the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women was held in Beijing and adopted a Platform for Action (BPfA) (United Nations, 1995), which included a dedicated section on "Women and Media" (Section J), which established two major

objectives: "Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication" (objective J.1); and "Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media" (objective J.2). Section J called upon governments, media industries, and the research community to take action to foster more gender-balanced media content and structures. Furthermore, it made explicit the nexus between communication, gender equality, and democracy, and it became a normative reference for the international community and all interested stakeholders.

Twenty-five years later – in a context profoundly transformed by digital developments that deeply affect news media's production and consumption (see Tomaz & Trappel, Chapter 1) and raise new challenges for gender equality across the media sector – it is both desirable and necessary to take stock of the progress made and deepen our understanding of the democratic wager brought by persisting inequalities, as reported by the 2021 Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) project (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021b, 2021c). Following this context, we explore several topics in this chapter in order to determine the overarching questions of the news media's contribution to democratic developments from a gender perspective. We explore the extent to which gender (in)equality issues in media and their contribution to democracy are recognised by media companies, journalists, and media professionals, as well as by institutional actors and policy-makers; and we consider the unequal presence of women and men as subjects in the news, as well as their limited roles as experts, spokespersons, and people with authority (GMMP, 2015, 2020). Furthermore, we look at the slow pace at which the media sector reflects – in content and practices – those social, economic, and political realities where progress *is* happening, and where women *do* enjoy better opportunities in education, leadership, and governance than in the past (Djerf-Pierre & Edström, 2020). We also discuss the role of public service media (PSM) with respect to issues of diversity and inclusion of different voices and perspectives, particularly those of women, given PSM's mandate to support democratic societies (EBU, 2020). Lastly, we explore the nexus between media, democracy, and gender after activist campaigns such as #metoo and #timesup brought the systematic abuse of women media workers to public attention (Castle et al., 2020; Pavan, 2020), in consideration of online abuses that disproportionately affect women – seldom addressed by newsrooms and not adequately dealt with by media companies (IFJ & INSI, 2019; IWMF & INSI, 2018; OCSE, 2018).

MDM Indicators and related research questions addressed in this chapter:

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality
To what extent do media outlets acknowledge and address challenges to gender equality in their own operations and internal functioning? (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 26)

(F9) Gender equality in media content

To what extent do media outlets acknowledge and address challenges to gender equality in media content and promote free expression and inclusion of diverse voices? (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 28)

Of gender, democracy, and the media

Addressing these issues through the analysis of the related MDM indicators, we acknowledge that gender equality – a multidimensional concept that includes equal opportunities, redistribution of benefits, women's participation in associative and political life, but also challenges to gendered power relations – is crucial for democracy (Beer, 2009; Inglehart et al., 2002; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Gender inequalities are still debated in relation to democratic advancements in many countries, as reported by the Varieties of Democracy Institute's 2019 report: "Exclusion is a challenge to democracy in many ways. […] When democracy is strong, inequality tends to be reduced and vice-versa" (Lührmann et al., 2019: 44).

Notwithstanding some achievements over the past years (see EIGE, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2021), gender equality is yet to be realised globally across societal domains and economic sectors, including the media. This would require recognition and formal adoption of fundamental principles of equality and non-discrimination, as well as political will and adequate policy measures to implement those principles. It would also require profound cultural change, educational efforts to train future generations of journalists and media professionals, and open societal debates. Since the media influence our perceptions of ourselves and our place in society, they thus have a crucial role to play in changing the stereotypes of gendered roles and in eliminating gender-based discrimination (Williams, 2000). On the one hand, "improving women's presence in media(ted) (political) discourse [has been indicated as a] means of strengthening women's symbolic and substantive [democratic] representation" (Adcock, 2010: 135; see also Ross, 2010). On the other hand, it is unlikely that the media can contribute to fostering gender equality, and therefore strengthen democratic practices, unless they assume gender equality as a guiding principle in their own functioning (Byerly, 2013). In the end, media and editorial freedom, media pluralism, and gender equality should be conceived of as intersecting principles and appreciated for their capacity to advance one another (Council of Europe, 2021).

We propose a gender-aware reading of the role of news media in democratic theory (see Tomaz & Trappel, Chapter 1), in order to gain a more articulated understanding of why, where, and how gendered relations and gender issues intersect and affect the democratic potential of the media.

Following McQuail (2009), news media has a monitorial role to provide information to the general public, but "when media outlets fail to represent

the diversity of their communities, [including gender diversity,] the chasm between journalist and reader widens" (Roy, 2019: para. 20), leading to the risk of amplifying popular distrust in the media.

According to the news media's facilitative role (McQuail, 2009), media are expected to provide a deliberative public space where citizens can participate. Yet, according to most scholarly works, the extent to which the experiences and voices of women, alongside minorities and marginalised groups, are actually reflected in and mediated by the media is insufficient and often stereotypical. A lack of platform for women to voice their concerns on their own terms is a threat to the full realisation of democratic life.

In the role of news media McQuail (2009) names radical, the media are supposed to expose abuses of power while raising popular consciousness of wrongdoings by those in power. But if media are not gender-sensitive, they are unlikely to expose gaps in the development of policy frameworks and in the implementation of policies that should support and promote diversity and equality in society and, as a result, strengthen democracy.

Finally, the news media's collaborative role (McQuail, 2009) "refers to the collaboration between the media and the state, for example during times of crisis or states of emergency" (Trappel et al., 2011: 20). The media's communication regarding the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted that a lot more could be done by the media in order to offer the general public a full understanding of implications of the current crises, and to integrate gender-aware perspectives in policies addressing such crises (GMMP, 2020).

In the end, the fundamental principles of democracy are freedom, participation, and transparency for all domains of society, including media and communication. Different stakeholders, including the media, should recognise and nurture diversity and contribute to overcoming inequality. A precondition for doing so is acknowledging how power is constituted, distributed, and practised. Therefore, when researching gender in its relation to media and democracy, we should keep in mind,

> researching gender is always political [… and] will often provoke criticism, as much for simply asking the question as for what it may reveal. […] Researching gender is inherently about understanding the axes of patriarchy, power, and privilege, who has it and who wields it. (Ross et al., 2020a: i)

Gender equality in the Media for Democracy Monitor framework

The MDM research project offers an unprecedented opportunity to take stock of the achievements with regards to gender equality across the news media and to focus on contemporary realities in a number of countries, thus asking, once more, the core question: What is the media's contribution to democracy from a gender perspective?

This question was addressed by explicitly mentioning gender equality amongst the criteria that characterise democratic media practices in the 2021 MDM project framework. Two new indicators were included which specifically reflect the rationale of the BPfA Section J and the intersecting dimensions of inequality at play in media content and operations. In addition, the MDM framework adopted a gender-mainstreaming transversal approach through the insertion of gender-sensitive criteria into other indicators.

The indicator for rules and practices on internal gender equality (F8) relates to BPfA strategic objective J.1 about women's participation in the news media. It assumes a positive relationship between a media organisation's institutional commitment to gender-responsive practices and their internal democratic organisation. This indicator has been elaborated in national reports by investigating and critically analysing elements such as employment conditions and benefits allocation to women and men; the existence of media companies' internal rules or guidelines to support and promote career advancement of women professionals and access to decision-making positions; and the existence of mechanisms aimed at removing obstacles to equal opportunities, such as a gender equality advisor or department dedicated to promoting gender equality and inclusion. Contextual factors have also been considered, such as the presence of a national legal framework regarding gender equality in the workplace, alongside the presence of journalist associations created by women in different countries to monitor media's commitment to gender equality and promote good practices.

The indicator for gender equality in media content (F9) links to BPfA strategic objective J.2 on gendered representation in media content, addressing the following question: "To what extent media outlets acknowledge and address challenges to gender equalities in media content and promote free expression and inclusion of diverse voices?" (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021a: 28). It assumes that diversity- and gender-aware editorial content is crucial in order to reflect the plurality of voices in society and to foster women's freedom to express their diverse knowledges and experiences. This indicator has thus been elaborated, taking into consideration a plurality of aspects related to gender equality, including media commitment in the selection of news sources that reflect societal diversity in terms of gender, age, and ethnicity; newsrooms' efforts to monitor the gender balance in news subjects and to cover gender- and diversity-related issues (Napoli 1999), particularly in relation to gender-based violence; and the existence of internal rules or guidelines regarding the promotion of gender equality in and through media content. Also in this case, contextual factors, such as national legal frameworks concerning gender-balanced and transformative media content and the presence of women's alternative media, both offline (such as feminist bulletins, zines, and flyers) and online (such as e-zines and blogs) have been taken into consideration.

In developing and analysing these indicators in the MDM participating countries, an effort was made to overcome limited approaches to gender inequalities in the media that tend to focus exclusively on numbers and counting (how many women and men work in a particular workplace, their position or type of content they produce) through a binary perspective that has been referred to as "add women and stir" (Noddings, 2001). Instead, the MDM looks more broadly at gendered relations. Furthermore, an attempt was made to move beyond a potentially misleading "fixing the women" perspective (as phrased by Londa Schiebinger in her work on gendered innovation), according to which solutions are offered by providing women professionals tools, knowledge, or training, rather than removing structural barriers to women professionals (Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Chant & Sweetman, 2012). Moreover, these gendered relations must be analysed with respect to an intersectional framework in order to gain insight into overlapping and different modes of discrimination and privilege. A critical diversity concept could be helpful when analysing configurations and representations in media content and encounters of diversity at the workplace (Horz, 2016).

The 2021 MDM project provides detailed accounts from 18 countries – all consolidated democracies according to international standards (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021b, 2021c). The country teams were provided with the research questions developed for both indicators addressed in this chapter. In the following paragraphs, we reflect upon the data of the country reports, as well as the considerations proposed by the respective authors. In the next section, we analyse similarities and differences among countries in due consideration of their geocultural and political differences. We also highlight several dimensions as thematic categories where inequality manifests itself by comparing countries' performance across representational as well as structural issues. In the concluding remarks, we reflect on the main findings and suggest directions to integrate into the next edition of the MDM research project, with particular attention to broadening the scope of (in)equality beyond gender and addressing issues of diversity, pluralism, and inclusion through an intersectional perspective.

Epistemological approach and caveats

In line with the tradition of feminist scholarship, we understand gendered relations in and through the media as a transversal element rather than a specific topic to be investigated in isolation (Ross et al. 2020b). Our goal is therefore to provide a critical picture of gender inequalities through a synthesis that bridges the 2021 MDM project's core dimensions: freedom, equality, and control. This requires a holistic understanding of the issues at stake at the intersection between journalists' freedom of expression and professionals' capacity to voice specific concerns; between equality of treatment and opportunities, and women's participation in

making media and creating meanings; and through the possibility of exercising control by fostering transparency and guaranteeing safety, and also through the adoption of adequate (self-)regulatory mechanisms and policy provisions.

What should be highlighted is that the 2021 MDM country reports, and indicators F8 and F9 therein, have been elaborated adopting different wordings and frames to deal with gender issues, and they suggest different priorities and paths for finding solutions. In this chapter, we attempt to make sense of such diverse elements while not superimposing interpretations onto the country teams' contributions. Whenever possible, we let the texts speak for themselves, while identifying trends in the ongoing struggle to achieve gender equality and make democracy thrive.

Dimensions of inequality in a quali-quantitative perspective

This section focuses on findings in the 2021 MDM related to how the leading news media of the 18 participating countries address challenges concerning gender equality (for an explanation of country selection and project rationale, see Tomaz & Trappel, Chapter 1). To this end, we implemented a correspondence analysis based on a wide range of data concerning each national media ecosystem separately. Correspondence analysis is a multivariate statistical technique that provides a means of displaying or summarising a set of data in two-dimensional graphical form (Hjellbrekke, 2019). It reveals the relative relationships between and within two groups of variables, based on data given in a contingency table. In this case, different gender inequality aspects are considered for each of the countries considered in the MDM research project. The data were derived from 2021 MDM indicator-based empirical evidence referring to the rules and practices of the media companies ensuring gender equality, either internally (Indicator F8) or within their content (Indicator F9).

The correspondence analysis reveals key differences and similarities between the countries, and the results provide useful insights about persisting gender inequalities in terms of employment conditions in the leading news media organisations and the extent to which good practices for combating gender gaps are in place.

The process of data selection and analysis was based on the scrutiny of the relevant indicators, leading to the definition of a number of thematic categories, that is, relevant issues that could be traced across all countries:

- the presence (or absence) of gender equality policies in the media sector
- the extent of unequal career opportunities to access managerial positions
- the degree of gender pay gaps
- the positive role of the public service media in serving gender equality

- women's mis- and underrepresentation in media content
- online media as gender-sensitive working environment

The categories refer to recurrent gender issues – known from the literature and made explicit in the relevant indicators of the 2021 MDM project framework – and, taken together, they provide an overview of major inequality trends. The core variables upon which the correspondence analysis was carried out emerged from the above categories. Furthermore, the correspondence analysis revealed some illuminating findings on gender (in)equality issues related either to specific clusters of countries or to individual countries.

Lack of significant gender equality policies in media organisations

The need to combat inequalities in the media sector through normative and regulatory tools has been addressed by various cross-country initiatives in the past (UNESCO/IAMCR, 2014). However, the research findings of the 2021 MDM project reveal that established policy measures aimed at safeguarding gender equality in workplaces are still rarely found within media organisations. This weakness had already been emphasised by previous research showing that gender equality issues are marginalised in media policy (Ross & Padovani, 2017), with many media organisations in Europe having neglected the development of gender equality policies or codes of conduct related to gender equality (EIGE, 2013).

According to the 2021 MDM findings, an explicit yet solitary example going against the above trend is that of the public broadcaster ORF in Austria. ORF has elaborated an articulated gender-balance plan based on specific legal provisions related to gender equality in employment conditions (Grünangerl et al., 2021). However, the existence of gender-related internal regulations does not ensure implementation in practice, as shown, for example, in Flanders, Belgium (Hendrickx et al., 2021). Even if gender equality is protected by law, as in Finland (Ala-Fossi et al., 2021), or gender-supportive policies and reforms have attempted to establish gender balance in terms of employment and career progress, as in Australia (Dwyer et al., 2021), stereotypes and patterns of discrimination may still persist in practice.

Media industries showing a lack of interest in or limited attention to the adoption of gender-sensitive rules at the organisational level can be found around the world – in Chile, Germany, Portugal, Switzerland, Italy (with the exception of the public service broadcaster RAI; Padovani et al., 2021), and Iceland (with the exception of public broadcaster RÚV and private organisation Sýn; Jóhannsdóttir et al., 2021). That the adoption of internal policies for gender equality is not regarded as a priority by most media organisations, confirms the results of previous international studies (IWMF, 2011; Padovani & Bozzon, 2020).

However, in some countries, even when rules and provisions are incomplete or non-existent, the overall situation has improved over the last few years, according to MDM data. This seems to be the case in Canada (Taylor & DeCillia, 2021), Denmark (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2021), Iceland (Jóhannsdóttir et al., 2021), and South Korea (Kim & Lee, 2021), though these positive trends do not entail the complete elimination of discrimination patterns in newsrooms. Some rules fostering gender equality have recently been adopted even in countries where gender inequality has characterised the media industry for years, signalling that positive change may be coming. This is the case of KBS in South Korea, which adopted rules to promote gender equality in 2019, supplementing its previous guidelines against sexual harassment in the workplace (Kim & Lee, 2021). The media industry in Hong Kong is also an interesting case, where, although there are no formal rules for equal standards between men and women in newsrooms, measures are in place to ensure women journalists have equal representation in leading positions within the legacy media companies (Lo & Wong, 2021).

Overall, despite signs of improvement – such as the public service media confirming a more explicit effort in the adoption of gender equality policies and an increase of women professionals in the media sector – gender inequality in media industries exists on a wide scale. This implies that media organisations' internal policies are still unable to decipher and solve unequal, gendered power relations (Byerly, 2013; Sarikakis & Shade, 2008). As has been observed, one reason for this may be the lack of suitable support measures, such as monitoring mechanisms, or ad hoc structures, such as dedicated departments or ombudspersons, within media companies (Ross & Padovani, 2017).

Internal gender imbalances in leading positions of media organisations

The gender inequality characterising most media industries was recently restated in a study focusing on the media and entertainment industry, conducted by McKinsey and Company. According to this study, the two biggest challenges are the lack of women in top-level positions and a culture of biased behaviour that impacts women's work environment (Beard et al., 2020).

According to the 2021 MDM findings, internal gender imbalances in leading positions are found in most media organisations, with some exceptions in public service media, both in European countries (like Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, and Denmark) and in non-European countries (such as South Korea and Chile). It can also be stressed that even where an overall gender balance has been achieved in media organisations in terms of professional staff, top-level managerial positions are rarely occupied by women (e.g., Austria and Switzerland).

Few media organisations can be considered best-practice models. Amongst these are Swedish media, where gender equality in the workplace is a highly

respected principle, and women have come to occupy high-ranking positions in media organisations. According to journalist respondents within the 2021 MDM project, special programmes to increase the number of women in high-ranking roles, run by the biggest news media organisations in the country, have contributed to amplifying this trend (Nord & von Krogh, 2021).

Gender pay gaps

In the last decades, the number of women employed in the media sector has increased in several countries, paving the way for an increasingly inclusive working environment. However, such development has not eliminated patterns of gender inequality. A typical unequal pattern remains, with a gender pay gap in several media markets (e.g., in Denmark, Portugal, Switzerland, South Korea, and Chile), a phenomenon perpetuated by the indifference of media organisations towards monitoring mechanisms in terms of equal opportunities, including equal pay.

Clear examples of this tendency are the public service television RTP and the news agency Lusa in Portugal, which pay female staff less than men (Fidalgo, 2021). Similarly, research shows a gender gap in Austria, particularly in the case of highly paid positions (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2020). The same goes for Switzerland: Women are paid less than men, and the higher the position, the wider the pay gap. According to journalists interviewed for the 2021 MDM, the gender pay gap remains, despite the fact that professional unions supposedly guarantee equal payment for all (Bonfadelli et al., 2021). In Italy, the gender pay gap in the media exists from the early stages of a media career (Padovani et al., 2021). And in Sweden, despite having more women in managerial positions than most other countries, there is still an imbalance in journalists' earnings (Nord & von Krogh, 2021). Worth mentioning is the BBC in the United Kingdom, that in 2017 was forced by a new law to publish the pay of senior professionals, creatives, and presenters. As the scrutiny revealed stark gender-based pay differentials, the BBC began to address them, though slowly (Moore & Ramsay, 2021).

There are, however, a few cases of large media organisations where progress has been made in reducing the pay gap (e.g., in Denmark and the Netherlands). Equal pay seems to be a practice in the Netherlands, although part-time work is more common among women than among men (Vandenberghe & d'Haenens, 2021). The situation also seems to be improving in Finland, where equal pay, working conditions, and opportunities for career progression can be found. However, representatives from trade unions, interviewed by 2021 MDM researchers, claim that women earn on average slightly less than men (Ala-Fossi et al., 2021).

The positive role of the public service media in serving gender equality

Public service media (PSM) have made several efforts to protect normative journalistic standards in media services, adapting the public service remit to the technological developments of the communication field (Hujanen & Ferrell Lowe, 2003). Their role in mitigating the internal gender imbalance has been meaningful both in European countries with a long tradition of public service broadcasting, such as the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany, and in countries beyond the European region. Hence, in media markets like Germany (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021) or Canada (Taylor & DeCillia, 2021), PSM have become more committed than in the past to ensuring gender equality in the composition of the media staff. As noticed above, gender balance in high-ranking positions remains a challenge also for PSM, but compared with commercial competitors, they often do better (see also Ross & Padovani, 2017).

A distinctive example is the Canadian broadcaster CBC, which is reported to achieve a higher level of gender equality than other media organisations in the country, with half of its staff consisting of women and being led by a female president (the first in CBC's history) (Taylor & DeCillia, 2021). In Iceland, both the public service broadcaster RÚV and the private media company Sýn showcase on their websites their internal rules for equal treatment of male and female employees. However, in the upper managerial positions – that is, the executive board – only RÚV lives up to the promise of equal representation of men and women (Jóhannsdóttir et al., 2021). Similarly, in Germany, the percentage of women working in leading positions in PSM is higher than the corresponding figures of commercial broadcasters (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021).

In Denmark, the public broadcaster DR has established a minimum quota of 40 per cent women in managerial positions. Additionally, both DR and the commercially funded broadcaster TV2 incorporate mechanisms for monitoring the internal gender distribution of working positions and payrolls in order to avoid gender pay gaps (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2021). In Flanders, Belgium, the public service broadcaster VRT committed to an equal gender representation in managerial positions and in the voices heard on air in order to counter male dominance (Hendrickx et al., 2021).

Promising steps to battle gender inequality in the media sector are being made by the public broadcaster RAI in Italy; its recent training project, titled "LeaderShe", aims to empower women media professionals and is accompanied by seminars focused on preventing harassment in the working environment, according to an interviewed editor-in-chief of RAI TG1. Similarly, the South Korean public broadcaster KBS adopted gender equality rules for the first time in 2019, introducing disciplinary measures for sexual misbehaviour (Kim & Lee, 2021).

Misrepresentation and underrepresentation
of women in media content

According to the 2021 MDM findings, women are still mis- or underrepresented in media content. Women are frequently excluded from "hard news" – those pertaining to economics and politics – and hardly feature as expert voices.

This general trend can be observed in most countries. In Portugal, the news media content is dominated by men, and a clear gender bias is observed (Fidalgo, 2021). In the Austrian news coverage, women are clearly underrepresented (Grünangerl et al., 2021). Research findings mentioned in the MDM country reports from Chile (Hudson, 2016, as cited in Núñez-Mussa, 2021) and Canada (Informed Opinions, 2021, as cited in Taylor & DeCillia, 2021) reveal the existence of unequal representation in these countries as well.

In some countries, monitoring mechanisms and projects are set in place to address the situation. For instance, the public service broadcaster RÚV in Iceland is the only media organisation in the country monitoring the level of gender balance in its content on a regular basis. Despite the fact that Icelandic media shows more gender-balanced content in general compared with other countries, it still demonstrates a certain degree of imbalance. The public service broadcaster VRT in Flanders, Belgium is the only news corporation in Belgium that adopts a gender quota to ensure equal representation (Hendrickx et al., 2021). In Switzerland, women are still underrepresented in news reporting, but gender balance in media coverage has improved over the last decade (Bonfadelli et al., 2021). Also, in Australia, the representation of women has improved over time, particularly in the sports sector. Nevertheless, women who belong to the minority groups remain strongly underrepresented in media content (Dwyer et al., 2021).

Turning to the United Kingdom (Moore & Ramsay, 2021), there are significant imbalances in the appearance of women's voices as experts in news coverage, and in the exposure of women generally in specific media organisations. Major broadcasters have made attempts to address the problem, including internal policy changes. The Royal Charter of the BBC, renewed in 2017, incorporates the need to better reflect the diversity of communities, and the BBC has developed initiatives like a Diversity Commissioning Code of Practice, articulating "the steps the BBC will take when commissioning content to ensure that such content accurately represents […] the diverse communities of the whole of the United Kingdom" (Ofcom, 2017: 24). Furthermore, the BBC has established 50:50 – The Equality Project, with the aim of creating journalism and media content that represents the world in a fairer manner (BBC, 2021). Also, a series of "Expert Women" events was part of a campaign intended to enhance the presence of women presenters and contributors. Moreover, all major British broadcasters (BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, and SKY) apply a monitoring process mapping diversity on programmes they

commission, through an online system. Although on a voluntary basis, these external evaluations of content diversity measures can be seen as important tools for establishing a sustainable change process for inclusive workplaces in the media sector. However, the prerequisite is that PSM become more open and share their internal data for further analysis and scientific research.

Online media as a favourable working environment for women?

A topic meriting discussion is whether online media constitute a potentially favourable sector for women's careers in the media. Such discussion should take into account that, as of today, online media represents a rather unstructured field, where the precariousness related to working conditions is often higher – and the earning less secure – compared with legacy media companies. The interviews conducted within the 2021 MDM project seem to confirm a dual gender discrimination effect when it comes to online media: On the one hand, women (and young women particularly) often occupy positions that are less appreciated by men, and on the other, men have more choices at their disposal and are less likely to accept the precarious role of online media work. This systemic bias risks intensifying as legacy media are expected to play a decreasingly crucial function in the information space going forward. In relation to precarious positions, an intersectional perspective emerges, raising a gender and generational clash in the media employment sector. (In no case did inequalities based on ethnicity become noticeable through the monitoring process; no MDM country teams reported inequalities related to ethnicity). It should also be restated that a major concern is the disproportionate manner in which women journalists are exposed to sexual assaults, harassment, and hate speech in an online environment, in a situation where no adequate safety and redress mechanisms have been put in place by media companies (see Baroni et al., Chapter 3).

## *Major cross-country trends from a correspondence analysis*

We now move beyond identifying gender inequalities in each country's context based on specific dimensions, and instead highlight similarities and differences amongst countries. We identify clusters of countries within the 2021 MDM sample based on their positioning in relation to the thematic categories described above.

Different variables related to the thematic categories, measured on an evaluation scale resulting from our analysis of the country reports, are incorporated in Figure 4.1. The analysis generates a general map that permits the assessment of the distance and proximity of different countries in relation to the qualitative data included in the national reports.

The use of correspondence analysis is appropriate, as it allows us to bring together the qualitative and quantitative dimensions of content analysis. Values for each country were inserted into a matrix by assigning the numerical value (elaborated with SPSS software) to each thematic category (variable). As the classification derived from qualitative indicators, it could only be based on the manifest content of the text in each country report (Altheide & Schneider, 2013; Berelson, 1952). After assigning each variable a simple scale, we estimated the variance using a three-dimensional range: low, medium, and high. The weight attribution was derived from the explicit elements of the text, and in cases where there was a lack of classification, we opted for the missing value. In this way, we managed to compare different situations combining the structural and cultural perspectives, as emerged from the 2021 MDM country reports.

The analysis of the gender equality indicators relating to rules and practices (F8) and media content (F9) shows some significant differences, but also points to some underlying trends common to all countries.

Figure 4.1 *Correspondence analysis of gender (in)equality issues in 2021 MDM countries*
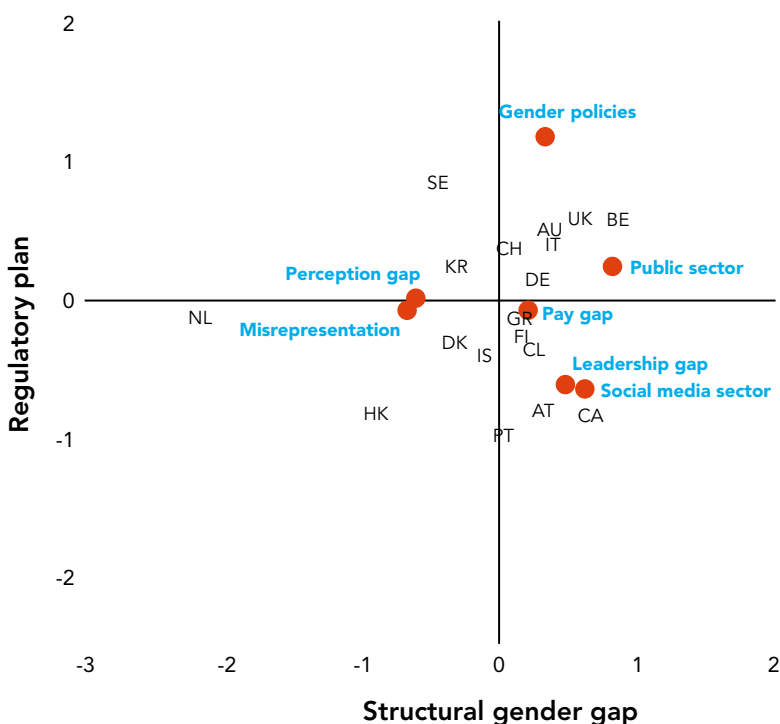
Comments: Symmetrical normalisation.

Source: Data are from an evaluation scale resulting from analysis of the 2021 MDM country reports (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021b, 2021c)

Three main findings emerge from the correspondence analysis: First, a regulatory approach that combines the awareness of the public service broadcasting sector with policy intervention by media organisations characterises a first cluster of countries (upper-right sector in Figure 4.1). This cluster includes Australia, Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Italy, South Korea, Switzerland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The data and interviews collected through the 2021 MDM research project seem to confirm that policy interventions and the commitment of public service broadcasters combined promote a set of good practices, even if this does not always translate into a fully balanced and more inclusive environment for women working in media organisations.

Second, the persistence of structural gender gaps, both in leadership positions and salary, alongside an enhanced presence of women producing online media content (mid- to lower-right sector in Figure 4.1), does not emerge as a clearly defined result. However, the combination of the two indicators supports the hypothesis that the social media environment may increase gender inequality: Growing job insecurity, particularly in the case of social media workers, implies the amplification of an already present structural vulnerability for women in the media sector (e.g., in Austria, Canada, Chile, Greece, and Portugal).

Third, gendered mis- and underrepresentation is generally a common aspect, as revealed by the data reported from most countries (in the centre of Figure 4.1). Yet, some of the interviewed journalists described the situation in their country in a more optimistic way. This may signal a lack of awareness about gender-unbalanced representations, especially among male senior journalists (as in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Hong Kong, and the Netherlands),

Our analysis confirms that it is relevant and productive to look at gender gaps through a holistic perspective, including regulatory, structural, and cultural elements, as they may either counterbalance or reinforce one another, either hindering or fostering gender equality.

Concluding remarks

The analysis based on the 2021 MDM indicators regarding rules and practices on internal gender equality (F8) and gender equality in media content (F9) clarifies and confirms the multiple dimensions of gender inequalities in the media across the participating countries. The findings invite further analyses, consideration of the persisting obstacles, and possibly actions towards overcoming such inequalities, in relation to regulatory, structural, and cultural conditions.

We can now go back to our initial question: What is the media's contribution to democracy from a gender perspective? We argue, on the basis of the presented findings, that all media roles as identified in the 2021 MDM research project – the monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative roles – are limited

and put at stake when the media do not formally commit to and implement fundamental principles of equality and participation; when they do not allow women and men, as well as the diverse voices that compose our societies, to contribute to content production and media operations equally; and when limited awareness and understanding of the multiple implications of inequality still characterise most media systems, institutions, and processes, as made evident by the MDM interviews.

Concerning the regulatory element, the research findings of the 2021 MDM project have shown that gender inequalities are scarcely addressed by media organisations through the adoption of internal rules or codes in most media markets. This is an evident weakness of news organisations which, if seen in conjunction with the finding that "women – at almost every level – leave their companies at higher rates than men" (Beard et al., 2020: 10), points to the limited capacity or will to address issues of gender inequality. In this context, it is problematic that in some countries (e.g., Germany and Italy), journalists' perceptions concerning the existence of internal rules promoting gender equality contrasts with a widespread reality of lacking provisions. There are signs of improving internal gender equality in some countries; however, there are also cases where the issue either remains overlooked (e.g., South Korea, Chile, and Greece) or depends mostly on the (limited) awareness of individual professionals (e.g., the Netherlands and Italy). Efforts to reverse the situation are likely to remain ineffective unless more emphasis is placed on the promotion of gender equality and, more broadly, diversity principles on a permanent basis. This requires formalised regulatory arrangements, both at the level of media organisations through the adoption of self-regulatory codes and guidelines, and at the national level through media policies that explicitly embed diversity and equality principles, as well as in the operations of media-independent authorities that are expected to provide oversight so as to guarantee that media systems respond to the public interest.

With respect to structural conditions, signs of improvement have been observed in some countries. In Australia – despite the fact that the media are still characterised by gender-based pay gaps and a lack of women in the upper positions of management, framed by phenomena of harassment or bullying (Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, 2019) – the government has promoted initiatives to address some of the vulnerabilities related to gender equality within the sector (Dwyer et al., 2021). Other examples are Canada (Taylor & DeCillia, 2021) and Germany (Horz-Ishak & Thomass, 2021), where most news organisations seem to have developed greater sensitivity for gender equality principles compared with the past, making efforts to reduce internal gender inequality. First steps to transforming the media sector and addressing structural constraints for women would be well-thought-out operational interventions (Gallagher, 2015), such as the adoption of supporting tools and

ongoing assessment processes to achieve gender equality. Interventions may also include the creation of specialised departments or the activation of training projects centred on the needs of women professionals, so as to make clear that pursuing a career in journalism on equal terms should be the norm – a move that would benefit the whole system. Finally, gender-transformative efforts in today's context ought to take into account the structural repercussions of digital technologies on the working environment of the media organisations, and on all those working therein (Padovani et al., 2019).

Finally, analysis shows that gender imbalances in media content remain overlooked in the newsmaking process in most countries, apart from the Nordics and, more recently, the United Kingdom and Germany. Where interventions are made, according to the interviews with journalists and editors-in-chief, issues of diversity in terms ethnicity or age at the intersection with gender are being discussed within newsrooms. It has also been noticed that, as institutionalised mechanisms to monitor the representation of diversity in media content are scarce, the gap seems to be mostly filled by private entities. In addition, relevant stakeholders – including policy-makers, media ownership, media professionals, and unions – must consider the relevance of the gender equality norms set out in Beijing 25 years ago and adapt them to the digitalised context of today. At the same time, it would be a fallacy to believe that gender equality in and through the news media is feasible unless a full understanding of media's contribution to democratic practices is achieved and shared. The cultural challenge remains crucial: It requires issues to be put and kept on the agenda, with public debates to facilitate the dialogue amongst interested actors, individuals, companies, and citizens. It also demands an explicit effort to integrate the findings from gendered critical analyses of the media sector into higher, as well as vocational, education. Such integration would cultivate a new generation of media professionals inspired by democratic principles of equality, pluralism, and participation and knowledgeable about the many ways in which those principles can be operationalised in and through the media.

Note

1. Scholarly reviews of the various dimensions of media inequality and their democratic implications can be found in Djerf-Pierre and Edström (2020); Byerly and McGraw (2020); Carter and colleagues (2019); Gallagher (1995, 2001); IFJ & UNESCO (2009); Macharia (2020); Made (2004); Montiel and Macharia (2018); Padovani and Pavan (2017); and Ross and Padovani (2017). Recent institutional contributions on the topic come from the *Gender Equality and Media – Analytical Report* (Council of Europe, 2020) and the *Gender Equality and Public Service Media* report (EBU, 2020).

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