

# MEDITERRANEAN NETWORK OF REGULATORY AUTHORITIES



## RECOMMENDATIONS ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF GENDER VIOLENCE

### Introduction

These *Recommendations on media coverage of gender violence* on audiovisual informative programmes are the outcome of joint work between the nine regulatory bodies of the Gender and Media Working Group of the Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities (MNRA).<sup>1</sup>

This working group has been involved in drafting the *Study on media coverage of gender violence in the Mediterranean audiovisual space*. The international report analyses news items about gender violence from March to May 2018 on 22 public and private television channels in 9 different regions.

As the summary of results shows, most channels devote 1-3% of news programme time to reporting gender violence, which make the headlines in 20-40% of cases. With regard to news sources, the main source on 10 channels from 8 different broadcasting regions are experts, while on 6 channels from 3 areas, they are people with some connection to those involved. Furthermore, most of the people interviewed for the news items are women. Using images, audio or language to sensationalise the information is a recurring phenomenon on all of the channels analysed, albeit in different percentages. Broadly, publicly-owned channels tend to focus more on social awareness and be less sensational than privately-owned channels.

In light of these findings, and with the aim of contributing to improving journalism on gender violence, the MNRA believes it is appropriate to issue these recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Agencija za elektroničke medije (AEM), Consejo Audiovisual de Andalucía (CAA), Consejo del Audiovisual de Cataluña (CAC), Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y la Competencia (CNMC), Conseil Supérieur del Audiovisuel (CSA), Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social (ERC), الهيئة العليا للاتصال السمعي البصري – Haute Autorité de la Communication Audiovisuelle (HACA), Εθνικό Συμβούλιο Ραδιοτηλεόρασης - National Council for Radio and Television (NCRTV), Regulatorno telo za elektronske medije (REMO).

Gender violence is a scourge in society and is found in all countries, regardless of their level of development. It is a universal and structural phenomenon that is not linked to any specific sociocultural background or financial status, but rather is rooted in financial and power inequalities between the sexes. Discrimination, domination/control and abuse of women by men is found in all swathes society and spans all generations, and has become even more sophisticated with the advent of the internet and social networks.

According to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted by the United Nations on 20 December 1993, "'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." It includes violence occurring in the family, sexual and emotional violence, psychological abuse, forced prostitution, exploitation and sexual harassment, traditional practices harmful to women (including 'honour' killings and infanticide), and other gender-based discriminatory practices.

The MNRA working group has therefore defined gender violence to mean physical, economic or psychological violence against women, including threats, intimidation and coercion and occurring in both the public and private sphere, as a manifestation of discrimination and inequality in gender power relations, which results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering.

The consequences of violence against women go beyond the victims and directly affect their surroundings, especially their dependent children and, more broadly, society as a whole. That is why international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union have adopted a raft of measures in the last few years to prevent gender-based violence, which their member states have transposed into their national law or ethical codes. However, in many countries gender violence is not a crime and legislation on abuse and harassment is weak or non-existent.

As the media is the main source of information about gender-based violence for most people, the public responsibility for raising awareness and combating this scourge lies with them putting it on the public agenda. Although the audiovisual regulatory bodies of the MNRA have issued recommendations on media coverage of violence against women, they have found that news reports are often sensational or out of context.

It is worth noting that numerous journalistic codes of ethics underscore the importance of improving the quality of information and the media's responsibility in working to eradicate gender violence. In addition to reporting on the issue in depth and with heightened sensitivity, the media must also adopt an internal culture of respect that contributes to eliminating all forms of sexual harassment and gender discrimination.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**1. Inform the public and raise awareness that combating gender violence is an issue of general interest and human rights.**

Gender violence is a general interest issue that the media should cover. It is a social problem entailing violation of human rights, stemming from discrimination against women and ancestral systems of male domination and power over women. The media plays a key role in prevention and awareness to contribute to eradicating gender violence.

**2. Gender-based violence is not only a problem for women but rather for society at large.**

News reports must avoid portraying this as a women's issue. Gender violence affects society as a whole - both men and women - and news must take an overall perspective on this issue if we are to achieve an egalitarian society free from gender violence.

**3. Respect the dignity and right to privacy of victims and their children.**

Those affected should remain anonymous and the media must always respect people's decisions on disclosing their identity. Names, images and other data revealing the identity of victims of gender violence or their children should never be broadcast.

Journalists must never harass the victim or anyone who knows her. The victim must be given time to recover before she is shown in the media. It is better to interview other women or experts to talk about their recovery and the damage reparation process.

**4. Select and diversify sources of information and interview experts.**

News reports should utilise the most appropriate qualified, specialised and proven sources of information for each case.

Witness accounts from neighbours and third parties who have only a circumstantial connection are discouraged.

**5. Contextualise information.**

Describe the relevant background and measures that the victim took (reporting to the police, obtaining a restraining order, etc.) before the incident. Data and context that help people understand and think about the problem should be provided.

**6. Exclude sensationalism, drama and morbidity from the form and content of information on gender violence.**

All images, texts and accounts must respect people's dignity. Therefore, detailed, lurid or upsetting descriptions should be avoided.

**7. Avoid suggesting a cause-effect relationship between the facts and the origin, sociocultural situation and/or personal circumstances of the people involved.**

It is counterproductive to indicate a higher frequency of gender-based violence among specific social groups, cultural backgrounds or individual situations since this is a universal and structural phenomenon.

**8. Help to shine a light on the consequences of gender violence.**

It is advisable to report and show that violence has negative consequences for the perpetrators also, as well as reporting on any public protests against gender violence.

News items should be followed up with information on action taken in response to the violence and, if applicable, the victim's recovery.

**9. Provide contact details for victim support and prevention services.**

News about gender-based violence should include mention of reports, current situations and statistics, in addition to providing information about resource networks and specific services, especially hotlines, for women concerned about or facing gender violence.

**10. Journalists and the media are recommended to draw up, monitor and/or update their codes of ethics and training of communications professionals.**

Media companies should foster and encourage training for anyone covering news related to gender violence. In terms of the profession, journalism should be underpinned by a sense of personal responsibility and respect for codes of ethics and conduct.