



TERMS of REFERENCE (TOR)

WACC Research & Policy Brief on Gender & Communication Rights

Gender Inequalities in the contemporary News Media landscape– Representation, Decision-making and Participation as Subjects, Sources & Journalists

Summary: In the context of its Communication for All program (CAP), which provides technical and financial support to civil society organizations in DAC list countries working at the intersection of communication rights and sustainable development, WACC is inviting proposals to develop a research and policy brief on gender and communication rights. The brief will inform WACC’s programming and advocacy directions on this theme.

Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995 underscores the importance of media to the advancement of women. Agenda 2030 adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015 sets ambitious targets in its 17 goals, one of which is dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls (Goal 5). Gender equality is mainstreamed in all the other goals.

We understand that gender equality is not only a prerequisite for sustainable development, but its achievement is critical for sustainability. Media and communication are central for gender equality and women’s human rights. Inequalities in participation in and access to media limit their potential to become inclusive, democratic spaces. Biases, stereotyping and unbalanced reporting from a gender perspective normalize and entrench unequal gender power relations at the root of discriminatory attitudes and practices.

Background: WACC’s work on gender began in 1987 with a series of regional policy consultations on women and media, culminating in the global conference ‘Women Empowering Communication’ in 1994. The conference outcome – The Bangkok Declaration – updated in 2017 in the [New York Declaration](#) – sets out concerns, principles and a call to action for stakeholders in government, academia, the private sector, including the media industry.

In 1995, the global gender policy blueprint the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action established two strategic objectives for the “women and the media” thematic area: Objective J1. “Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication. Objective J2. Promote a balanced and nonstereotyped portrayal of women in the media” (United Nations, 1995).

In 1995 as well, WACC began operating a small projects fund to support initiatives by women’s grassroots and other civil society groups that address gender and media/communication issues. WACC’s focus on gender justice, media and communication continues, advocating and supporting initiatives for full and equal participation of women in public communication so that their multiple and complex interests, experiences and realities become part of the public agenda.



WACC's approach to enabling change is four-fold. First, WACC provides 12-month grants to civil society initiatives that generate research evidence and apply this to actions such as public awareness, critical media literacy, education, media professional development, and policy advocacy. Second, WACC mobilizes grassroots organisations, gender equality groups, women's rights organisations and researchers in academia to participate in the quinquennial GMMP media monitoring and post-research initiatives to advance gender equality in and through the news. Third, WACC participates in global policy spaces to lobby for and support enactment of policies that respond to a wide range of gender, media and women's communication rights concerns. Finally, WACC works in partnership with other international organisations and networks seeking to advance gender equality in and through media and communication, contributing to knowledge-building, training and implementation of collaborative projects.

WACC's draft Strategic Plan 2027-2031 articulates the following aim and activity areas for gender justice as one of our three priority issue areas for the organization:

Gender Justice

Our Aim: Women, girls, and gender-diverse people participate fully and safely in public life.

Gender equality in communication is essential to sustainable development, democratic participation, and the full realization of human rights. WACC works to ensure that women and gender-diverse people are not only present in public communication, but that they can participate fully and safely – free from harassment, exclusion, and misrepresentation. We recognize this not as a secondary concern but as a foundational condition for any just communication order.

In addition to working on gender justice-specific programming, WACC will embed gender justice in all priority issues, focusing particularly on:

- * Advancing women's digital rights through leadership and collaboration in key policy making spaces, including initiatives for digital infrastructure and platform governance.
- * Positioning WACC as a global thought leader on, and enabler of, critical digital literacy with a gender lens.
- * Combatting tech-facilitated gender-based violence through tools to build awareness, strengthen empirical data, and calls for platform accountability and regulatory reforms.
- * Strengthening feminist and feminist-informed communication networks through South-South exchanges and coalition-building initiatives.
- * Applying and strengthening the Global Media Monitoring Project's legacy of research, advocacy, and network-building to address new and continuing challenges to gender equality in the media.
- * Ensuring that all of WACC's programmes and projects apply a critical gender lens and centre the voices of women and gender-diverse people most affected by injustices and inequality.

Gender Inequalities in the contemporary News Media landscape – Representation, Decision-making and Participation as Subjects, Sources & Journalists: Empirical evidence gathered across a thirty-year span from 1995 to 2025 through WACC's flagship initiative the Global Media Monitoring

Project (GMMP) reveals slow advancement, some unravelling of progress and emerging complexities across the world's news media sector. The 2025 study found that the quality of journalism from a gender perspective remains abysmal in the bulk of the news. The proportion of news stories that clearly defy gender stereotypes was at 3% in 2005 and had stagnated at 3-4% since 2015. The challenges are systemic, deep-rooted, resistant to change and extend across the world. Following the evidence, past strategies worked for a while but halted a decade ago. The contemporary news world is predominantly digital, with old and new challenges flowing into the online space and facilitated by emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence. Regarding work in the news industry, women journalists face escalating violence and harassment. Online harassment is the most common form of violence against women journalists. Overall, patterns of exclusion, violence and underrepresentation constitute a systemic threat to democratic discourse and gender equality. Worldwide, sexist stereotypes, victimization and targeting of women in all media forms persist despite awareness, education, advocacy and regulation.

We are seeking to commission a high-quality, evidence-based research & policy brief that:

1. Provides a critical gender analysis of the status of gender equality in representation, decision-making and participation in the contemporary news media sector as subjects, sources and journalists.
2. Identifies policy gaps and opportunities for regulatory reform to address the range of gender issues in the news industry.
3. Offers actionable recommendations for policymakers in government, the news media sector, digital corporations, civil society and international bodies.
4. Propose adjustments to the GMMP participatory media monitoring methodology to retain its usefulness for gender analysis of current news media formats – beyond newspapers, broadcast news and news websites.
5. Identifies key global and regional policy-making spaces for advocacy.

Methodology

- Desk review of relevant academic literature, policy documents, legislation and reports from relevant organisations
- Systematic synthesis of the data
- Comparative analysis of policy and regulatory approaches, identifying good practice examples
- Policy analysis with a feminist lens.

NB: The target audiences are:

- Civil society groups engaged in advocacy in the respective thematic areas.



- WACC's Gender & Communication Programme
- Policy makers and regulators in media, digital corporations, government and international organizations.

Timeline: To be agreed, aiming for final paper by January 31, 2027

Application deadline: October 25, 2026

Budget: 3,500 EUR (including research, drafting and editing)

Payments:

- 40% upon signature of the agreement
- 60% upon receipt of the final version of the document

Language: Straightforward. Easy to understand for non-academic audiences.

About WACC: WACC (www.waccglobal.org) is an international organization that promotes communication as a basic human right, essential to people's dignity and community. WACC works with all those denied the right to communicate because of status, identity, or gender. It advocates full access to information and communication and promotes open and diverse media. WACC strengthens networks of communicators to advance peace, understanding and justice. To learn more about WACC's work on gender and communication, please visit www.whomakesthenews.org,

WACC has about 450 personal and institutional members, as well as partners in some 100 countries. Its registered offices are in Toronto and London. It is also a registered charity in both Canada and the UK.

About WACC's Communication for All Programme (CAP): Co-funded by Brot für die Welt- (Germany), the Communication for All Programme (CAP) constitutes the core programme work of WACC. The CAP's rationale stems from an understanding of communication rights as essential to sustainable development.

The CAP provides eligible selected civil society organizations in DAC-list countries with financial and technical support to address communication and information-related development issues. WACC has historically tended to direct its support towards grassroots-level civil society organizations carrying out high-impact initiatives and whose work is unlikely to receive funding and support from larger donors. Prior to being called CAP, this project was called the Development Initiatives Programme (DIP) and was in operation for more than 30 years. In 2018/2019, following an external consultancy, the project was rebranded as CAP to reflect a greater focus on the theory and practice of communication rights in relation to sustainable development, as well as to emphasize the intention to use the CAP not just to support small projects but also the wider communication rights movement.



Application Instructions: please send your CV and cover letter outlining your workplan, proposed methodology and structure to Lorenzo Vargas, WACC Director of Programmes, at LV@waccglobal.org by October 25.