

## **REPORT**

### **Gender and Media Training Workshop for Journalists: Gender, Media and Justice**

**13 November 2009  
Journalists House, Nicosia**

The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, in collaboration with the Cyprus Journalists Union, organized a *Gender and Media Training Workshop* that took place at the Journalist House on 13 November 2009.

Conducting the workshop was Ms Garjan Sterk, researcher and consultant on media and diversity, Ms Marga Miltenburg, former journalist and Director of ZijSpreekt (SheSpeaks) in Holland, and Ms Maria Aggeli, Associate Researcher at the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS). The main aim of the workshop was to discuss how the media can contribute towards the realization of gender equality and promote the equal participation of women in public life. The workshop, that was attended by ten journalists from both the print and radio media, also aimed to explore ways in which journalists can incorporate a gender perspective in their work and promote non-biased and gender-balanced reporting through constructive dialogue.

The trainers began by presenting comprehensive statistical data and research on the representation of women in the media (worldwide, Holland and in Cyprus). In her analysis of the Cypriot press, Garjan Sterk noted that women are mostly represented either in their role as mothers, or in “light” news, focusing on the relationships of female celebrities, and their social lives. She also pointed out that women were often represented as victims of violence and less as examples of successful business women and/or professionals. Maria Aggeli supported this and gave examples of the stereotypical portrayals of women in the Cypriot press as revealed in the study conducted by the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies on the representation of women candidates in the printed press prior to the elections of the European Parliament in 2009. The study showed that women candidates were primarily represented in their role as mothers, and were generally characterized as vulnerable and sensitive. Furthermore, the press tended to focus on the physical appearance of women candidates rather than on their capabilities and views as politicians.

All participants agreed that gender representation in the media is still based on sexism and discrimination. They pointed out that media in general does not reflect the changing and multifaceted roles played by both women and men in society, often underestimating in this way women’s contributions. One of the conclusions drawn from the workshop is that given the vital role that women play in the formation and development of views, understandings, and perceptions of our social reality, the media should reflect this reality by portraying women in an equally representative manner.

Miltenburg stressed that in terms of women’s representation, the “world” we often see through the media is a “world” where women are virtually invisible. Women are under-represented in the news and a gender perspective is absent from the discussions that dominate the media agenda. For example, in Cyprus the media tend to filter current issues

through the prism of the Cyprus national problem, which as a consequence, obscures other issues affecting the lives of women such as gender violence. Miltenburg cited a number of research studies that have shown that women's underrepresentation can be attributed to existing social prejudices, and also reflects the social exclusion of women from all spheres of public life (social, political, economic). Women's underrepresentation also reveals a democratic deficit: although women constitute half of the world's population this is not reflected in the media which tend to ascribe a particular "identity" to women, implying that this identity represents all women. If journalists do not make more informed and balanced choices with regard to the presentation of events and issues, women's voices will continue to remain invisible and patriarchy will remain unchallenged.

For a more balanced gender representation in the media, one must take into account that journalistic practice is multifaceted. That is, a journalist must make a number of decisions starting from what angle he/she chooses for the story, to the selection of questions for the interviews, the use of language, as well as the selection of visuals - all these decisions directly affect the kind of messages that are propagated through the media and the popular press.

Thus, journalists are encouraged to make more informed choices as to how to provide more accurate information through objective, gender sensitive practices, and to pay closer attention to issues affecting both women and men, promoting in this way a more democratic representation of our social reality as well as a new and different public dialogue that includes all citizens. Journalists must go beyond the mere representation of facts, but aim to inform and educate citizens in a way that promotes a public benefits and provides a critical view towards existing social structures, institutions, systems and procedures.