

Business association of the local independent media “Local Press”



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: RESEARCH ABOUT THE ROLE AND
THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN LOCAL MEDIA**

January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2021



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This is a summary in English of the report on research that was done in Serbian language and was financed from the budget of the Republic of Serbia – Ministry of Culture and Information. The views and interpretations expressed in the report are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Culture and Information.

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THE ROLE AND POSITION OF WOMEN WORKING IN LOCAL MEDIA

-EXECUTIVE SUMMARY-

1 OBJECTIVES, SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The Business Association of the Local Independent Media “Local Press” conducted this research to get deeper qualitative and quantitative insight into the position of women media professionals in their respective local media outlets and to identify pressures that they face. The research also focused on the perception of women media owners, editors and journalists about how women are presented in the media as well as usage of gender-sensitive language in reporting.

The main overall objectives of the research were:

- To inform the community about the position and the role women media professionals play in local communities, and the types and sources of pressures they were exposed to in the period between January 1, 2020, until December 31, 2021.
- To give guidelines to “Local Press” for further actions aimed at the promotion of women media professionals and protection of their interests.

The research was done from October the 1st until December 31st, 2021, with the financial support of the Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information.

1.2 SAMPLE

A total of 56 women media professionals from 53 local media (41 members of the Business Association “Local Press” and 12 non-members) **from the following 28 towns in Serbia participated in the research:** Aleksinac, Becej, Bor, Bujanovac, Cacak, Cuprija, Doljevac, Gornji Milanovac, Knjazevac, Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Krusevac, Leskovac, Loznica, Nis, Novi Knezevac, Novi Sad, Pancevo, Pirot, Pozarevac, Prijepolje, Sabac, Sremska Mitrovica, Trstenik, Uzice, Velika Plana, Zajecar and Belgrade.

Of the 56 respondents, 21 are owners and/or general managers, 18 are editors and 17 are journalists. Interestingly, out of the 21 owners and general managers, 12 are also working as editors and journalists.

When it comes to types of local media, the most represented in this research were women working in online media (33 media), followed by weeklies (20), local radio stations (9), other periodicals (5), local TV stations (4), production (2) and one news agency (1). Nineteen women media professionals are representatives of two media outlets as a consequence of the digitization process and the project co-financing that drove traditional media to register their online editions as separate outlets.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The surveying of respondents was done via e-mail questionnaires, focus groups and, in the final phase, through interviews held with 12 owners, editors and journalists.

The questionnaire contained:

- General questions about the respective local media that women media professionals are working for – town, region, type of media, type of distribution, total number of employees, total number of employed (full- and part-time) women editors and journalists.
- Three sets of specific questions designed for each of the three positions that were surveyed (owners, editors and journalists) aimed at obtaining more concrete information about their position in their media outlets, pressures and challenges they are facing at their positions and
- Questions about the perception of women media professionals about the portrayal of women in media and the use of gender sensitive language in reporting.

Using ZOOM, “Local Press” organized three focus groups with 18 respondents with a wide range of work experience. The structure of the focus groups was defined by the positions the respondents hold in their local media: owners, editors and journalists, grouped by same or similar experiences and types of pressures they had identified in the questionnaire.

Interviews were held with 12 women owners, editors and journalists during which the interviewees had the opportunity to share their experience in detail, give examples and describe in depth their positions in their media outlets and their local communities, sources and types of pressures they are exposed to.

2 KEY FINDINGS

In addition to the findings of the research about the role and position of women working in local media in Serbia and their perception about the presentation of women in media content and the usage of gender-sensitive language in media reporting, the report also contains recommendations of the Business Association of Independent Local Media “Local Press” (LP) for the relevant government institutions (State Ministry of Culture and Information, local government bodies, the judiciary, etc), media and the international community (*For Recommendations see chapter 3*).

Key findings of the research:

Process of feminization of the profession continued. Women comprise 57 percent of the total number of employees in local media outlets that participated in this research. When compared to 43 percent of women who were employed in local media in 2016, it is obvious that the process of the feminization of the profession continued to grow during the last five years.

Out of a total of 432 media professionals employed in 53 surveyed local media, 246 are women - 152 are full-time employees while 94 are part-time employees. Out of the 94 women media professionals who have part-time employment, 42 are with 14 commercial media and 52 are with civil society media. Worth noting is that 12 media (five commercial and seven civil society media) do not have any women with full-time employment on their teams.

The number of civil society local media is also on rise. Out of 53 surveyed local media, 30 are commercial and 23 are civil society media. When looking at the years these media were established, the trend shows that the growth of civil society media which started in 2005 has continued.

Out of the 56 women respondents from 53 local media who took part in this research, twenty earn the minimum wage of 32.000 dinars (ca. 270 Eur a month) – 9 women editors and 11 women journalists, whereas 14 earn 40,000 dinars per month (ca. 339 Eur) - two general managers, four editors and eight journalists. For women journalists, their already low monthly wages are further depreciated when we take into consideration that the majority have a wide range of responsibilities, reporting for all sections and formats of their local media outlet. Thirty percent of women editors and ten percent of women journalists claim that their male colleagues earn up to 25 percent higher wage than them.

High degree of involvement of local media women owners and executives in business and editorial policy of local media is primarily owing to a lack of financial resources for expansion of their teams and operations. It is a known fact that local media in Serbia have been in a difficult financial position for years, they operate in rather poor and limited markets with very low profits from sales and advertising. Unfortunately, most outlets did not benefit from the advent of digitization, as they didn't have the resources to hire additional staff to set up, maintain, and produce content for new platforms. For outlets which tried to adopt new platforms, the workload and work hours of women journalists increased while bringing in little in the way of additional income for the outlets.

Women media professionals are in an unfavorable position in comparison to their male colleagues, mainly because their decisions and actions are being judged from the gender perspective, because they are exposed to sexist and misogynist comments, as well as online violence and hate speech, whereas the needed support from the responsible state institutions (state and local) and existing mechanisms for protection of women, media freedoms and rights, are mostly lacking.

The research showed that **executive power bodies (state and local) are the worst offenders in exerting political pressures on women working in media,** along with ruling political parties in local communities, public enterprises, secret service bodies and ideological groups.

When it comes to the types of pressure exerted on women media professionals, the most reported were **unequal treatment from sources of information, verbal threats, harassment, sexism, vilification and chauvinism on social media platforms and restricted access to**

information of public importance.

Dominant gender bias and lack of gender awareness of the local officials, sources, interlocutors, and media professionals (men and women) in local media overall, significantly slows down the process of countering and breaking down gender stereotypes in local communities and the process of professionalization of the media sphere in general.

Long-term exposure to the pressure and violence, a high degree of gender bias and stereotypes, apathy or insufficient actions of responsible local and state bodies, lack of empathy and solidarity, low wages, fear of losing their jobs, unacceptable workloads and unregulated working hours make **local women journalists the most endangered category of all media professionals** (men and women).

When asked if they ever felt stress, depression or anxiety because of their work, 88 percent of women responded that they did, while 25 percent claimed that people close to them also experienced physical and/or online violence (threats on social media networks, warnings, and threats at their working places...)

Fifty two percent of respondents claim they apply affirmative action editorial policy in their respective media. They believe that there is sufficient media content about women, but even the most seasoned women editors and journalists admit that, when rushing to get the news out to the public, they sometimes forget to apply this important aspect of their editorial policy.

One third of women media professionals who participated in the research, **don't believe in power and efficiency of formal and informal types of networking** aimed at the promotion of gender equality, women human rights, security and safety of journalists.

The new tendency of informing citizens through placement of pre-packaged news created by PR services working for local governments, organisations and institutions devalues the position and work of professional local media.

Lack of recognition of gender-equality awareness topics as topics of public interest in local governments' calls for proposals for co-financing additionally hampers work of professional local media.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Business association of independent local media "Local Press" – future steps

To continue to actively contribute to the protecting the interests of women media professionals and their improving their position in local communities, "Local Press" will:

- Continue education of all media professionals on gender equality awareness.
- Send to all local media, members and non-members of the Association who expressed interest during the research, a list of all formal and informal existing networks and associations which aim to promote gender equality, eliminate violence against women and protect the rights and security of women media professionals.

- In co-operation with the *Feminist cultural centre BeFem*, LP will provide all its members, and interested non-members, *BeFem's* list of women experts in fields dominated by men.
- Share LP's "Codex on gender-sensitive reporting" with all local media non-members of the Association who participated in the research. (LP adopted this Codex in 2008 and is applying it ever since then.)
- In co-operation with members of the Coalition for Freedom of Media, LP will continue informing and educating women media professionals about their rights and safety.
- In the coming period, LP will pay special attention to the mental health of women media professionals and members of the association and investigate possibilities for introducing a program of psycho-social support for them .
- Help women media professionals in local communities establish direct contacts with the Office for Gender Equality.
- Organize specialized workshops for strengthening the managerial capacities of women media professionals aimed at improved sustainability of the media they are leading.
- Form a platform within the LP Association that will continuously analyze the position of local women media professionals and identify needs and initiatives for their improved status.
- With the Local Press Youth Club, form a platform that will continuously follow and analyze representation of women in the contents published by the LP members.
- In future projects, clearly define activities aimed at strengthening the position of women media professionals in local communities.

Advocacy:

- Upon the recommendation of women owners and editors, LP Secretariat will advocate for the introduction of a gender quota in the association's Managing Board that would secure permanent and active participation of women in the decision-making processes of the association.
- Will advocate for greater inclusion and participation of women in the processes of media laws changes and their improved implementation, with the aim of securing better protection of women media professionals in local communities.
- Will proactively work with local governments in advocating for recognition of the role and the position of women as topics of public interest.
- Will proactively work with local governments in advocating for budgeting gender equality and promotion of women's human rights contents.

Safety and security of women media professionals:

- Continue taking urgent actions in cases of breaches of freedoms and rights of local women media professionals.
- By offering legal counseling and representation, LP will continue providing additional legal security to its members.

3.2 Recommendations for the Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information:

Even though the majority of local women media professionals surveyed do not believe there is substantial political will of relevant state institutions to recognize gender equality as a top priority in media, nor for improving the position and safety of women media professionals, their recommendations to the Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information are:

- To introduce gender-budgeting as a regular component in their calls for proposals for project co-financing.
- To stimulate/enable increased media content about women and gender equality produced with the funds made available through the platform for production and monitoring of the media content about women and gender equality.
- To add lessons learned and the impact the projects had on gender equality to the project reporting forms.
- To work continuously on gender sensitization of the institutions and experts.
- To offer concrete support for strengthening position of women journalists in professional local media through clearly defined topics of public importance/interest.
- To advocate with other responsible state bodies to offer concrete support for the economic strengthening of women media professionals and women media entrepreneurs.

3.3 Recommendations for local governments:

- To be more independent in making decisions about the support to professional local media.
- To work on gender sensitization of the local institutions' officials and experts.
- To recognize the need for higher inclusion of women in media content production and placement in local media
- To recognize and promote women-related media content as content of public interest.
- To support local media initiatives aimed at removal of gender stereotypes in media content.
- To support local media initiatives for countering sensationalistic reporting about violence against women.

3.4 Recommendations for donors and international community:

- To introduce a gender budgeting component in their future calls for proposals and to assign a minimum of five percent of their development funds for integration of gender perspective in media content and projects.
- To support advocacy efforts and activities of “Local Press” aimed at improving the position and safety of women media professionals.

- Through mutual co-ordination, to enable better flow and exchange of information about local media activities aimed at improving the position of women in media and in local communities.
- To support projects that would deliver concrete results and would directly contribute to qualitative changes in society.