

IS THERE A NORDIC WAY? A SWEDISH PERSPECTIVE ON ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROBLEMS WITH GENDER EQUALITY IN NEWSROOMS

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PREGLEDNI RAD / UDK 342.7-055.2(485), 305-055.2(485):316.77 / PRIMLJENO: 25.10.2011.

ABSTRACT *Over the last decades several achievements have emerged in Nordic state societies concerning gender equality, particularly with regard to political representation, salaries, and shared parental leave. In most newsrooms one may find a near equal distribution of women and men working alongside one another. Additionally, in the larger newsrooms of Sweden, there is a gender balance at the managerial level. Yet in terms of news content, women remain a minority. By using qualitative and quantitative data from two projects, The Global Media Monitoring Project and The Global Status of Women in the News Media, this article assesses some of the challenges and best practice solutions for gender equality in Scandinavian newsrooms. The major gender discrepancies between newsrooms can often be explained by the level of gender awareness at the societal-level. Further, capable leadership, policies, and gender monitoring seem to benefit a gender balance in the news. National legislation on parental leave and discrimination, additionally, appear to play a key role in creating gender equality in the newsroom.*

KEY WORDS

MEDIA, NEWS, GENDER EQUALITY

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INTRODUCTION

“Don’t let the media change you. Change them instead.” This slogan belongs to the Swedish media watch group, *Everything is Possible*. The group’s origination dates back to 1992, when a number of professionals (including the author of this article) felt that they had been contributing to the problem of male dominance in the media, namely by promoting stereotypical images of men and women. While fully aware of the problem, the group’s members had little idea of how to overcome it. As such, they began to educate themselves and others, and encouraged people to take action wherever and whenever stereotyped images occur. During those years *Everything is Possible* (EiP) began to address the global trends concerning the distortions of women in the media. EiP subsequently coordinated a data collection of Swedish media content within the framework of the global news study, Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) in 2000, 2005, and 2009. The GMMP is a simultaneous collection of stories during one day’s global news cycle, which results in the report *Who Makes The News*.¹ The results from the first GMMP in 1995 showed that only 17 percent of news subjects were women. Such figures soon fueled the United Nations Women’s Conference in Beijing, where the issue, “Women and the Media” become one of the twelve areas included in the Platform for Action signed in Beijing.² Over the years the GMMP reports have clearly shown that there are both qualitative and quantitative problems in news content, particularly in terms of gender, in every country where statistics are available.

The 2010 GMMP indicates that only 32 percent of the news subjects in the Swedish media are women; further, this percentage has remained almost the same since statistics were first gathered in Sweden for the GMMP 2000, (see table 1). Such paltry figures indicate the likelihood of a ‘glass ceiling’ for women as news subjects.

In 2009 the International Women’s Media Foundation, IWMF, enacted a comprehensive study to map the current situation found in the newsroom, which resulted in *The Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media*, published in 2011. Accordingly, this paper is written from the author’s experience contributing to these two different projects, and will highlight some of the responses from editors and managers in Sweden that are currently working to find strategies that will result in a fairer gender distribution within the content of news stories.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

The GMMP and IWMF studies are baseline studies, strictly formatted in order to function on a comparative level. Both studies have a qualitative and a quantitative usefulness. The last GMMP in 2009 was conducted in 108 nations and surveyed 16,734 news stories. This was the first time all five Nordic countries participated in the study. It is imperative

¹ For more on the Global Media Monitoring Project, see: www.whomakesthenews.org (20.10.2011).

² FN Beijing 1995 Platform for Action [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/Section J](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/SectionJ) in the platform is entitled Women and the Media. It has two goals: (J1) Increase the participation and access of women in both expression and decision-making in both media and new technologies of communication; (J2) Promote a balanced and *non-stereotyped* portrayal of women in the media.

to note that the actual data from one country on a given news day can only serve as an indicator of the national situation. On the other hand, the general pattern observed in the GMMP has been surprisingly accurate when compared to larger studies on the topic of Swedish news content (Edström, 2006, Löfgren Nilsson, 2010).

In the IWMF study, more than 522 newsrooms participated from 59 nations, and included a total of 170,000 employees. The study was coordinated by a principal investigator, Howard University's Carolyn M. Byerly (USA). From the Nordic region, 32 newsrooms (a total of 7,245 employees) participated from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The IWMF study collects data via a survey completed exclusively in the form of personal interviews with media managers, who provide data on their organization. The unit of analysis is the news company; the topic is the behavior of the news organizations with regard to gender equality in staffing, salaries, and policies.

The quantitative data and full description of the methods can be found in the reports and on the websites of the projects.³ In addition, the media watch group *Everything is Possible* provided complementary interviews with six Swedish newsrooms to follow up on the national results and the actions taken in the realm of gender sensitivity in the newsroom.

WHY GENDER & DIVERSITY MATTERS

In its essence, journalism is a matter of choice. One story is chosen ahead of another. Often the news stories are about men. Within global news content, men, as subjects of news stories, outnumber women by a margin of 3:1. In the Nordic news media, the female share is slightly higher, roughly one woman for every two men. The employment of more female journalists, however, does not rectify this problem, as the journalism culture seems to be stronger than the gender culture (Djerf-Pierre, 2007). A larger diversity in the news, both in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age, could make the news more interesting, as well as engage more people. In this regard, it is a question of *quality*. It is also a question of (1) democratic values; and (2) editorial/professional skills. Many news stories are missing from the agenda due to this gender bias. Additionally, it is a matter of finances, the so-called (3) business argument. How many readers/users are the media companies losing due to the narrowed selection of news?⁴

Of course, the issue of gender imbalance has grown in significance over the last several decades and, in this regard, it would not be overstating the fact to term it one of the greatest challenges in the world. In fact, most of the UN Millennium Goals endeavor to bridge this very gap.⁵ Many news media outlets, however, continue to ignore these issues. Sweden is no exception. It is important to note that several achievements concerning gender equality in Nordic societies have been made with regard to political representation (45 percent of Swedish MPS are female as of the 2010 election), salaries, and shared parental leave. Moreover, according to the Global Gender Gap Index, the Nordic countries

³ www.iwmf.org and www.whomakesthenews.org (20.10.2011)

⁴ For a further information, see Edstrom 2010.

⁵ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> (20.10.2011)

usually rank in the top ten. Sweden leads the entire world on press freedom, together with Norway, Finland, Denmark, and Ireland.⁶ In the newsrooms themselves, there is a near equal distribution of male and female employees. Gender balance may also be found at the managerial level of media outlets in Sweden. Yet with regard to news content, women remain a minority, as they do in every country surveyed around the world.

As such, there exists an inconsistency between the high level of gender equality in society and in the newsrooms, and the low level of representation in the actual news content. Perhaps a fundamental question concerning this issue is why journalists have yet to cover this story in a significant way.

The low global representation of women in news stories can be termed “gender-based censorship,” an expression attributed to Agnès Callamard, the executive director of the human rights organization, Article 19. Callamard claims that the news media outlets utilize their own logic and routines to exclude women. It is done by (1) silencing women simply because they are women; (2) defaming or vilifying women because they are women; (3) denying the validity of women’s leadership, authority, and expertise; (4) subjuga-ting gender-specific news or misrepresenting news that may have specific relevance to women (Callamard, 2006).

These claims may be true, yet most newsrooms in Sweden are fully aware of this problem and have taken measures to mitigate it, as this article shall discuss below. First, however, this paper shall present the relevant data obtained from the two studies in question.

HOW THE NEWS CONTENT IS MALE DOMINATED

While men dominate the news scene, the statistics suggests that more and more women have been given a voice in the news on a global scale. Globally, female representation in the news has increased. According to the GMMP reports, women as news subjects have increased from 17 percent in 1995 to 24 percent in 2010, a 7 percent change in 15 years. While female inclusion has trended upward internationally, the status quo persists in Sweden. The share of female news subjects has largely been the same for each of the three GMMP reports, hovering between 30 and 32 percent, and indicating the potential presence of a ‘glass ceiling.’ Sweden, it must be noted, still holds a top position in the global study (32 percent).

Table 1. Female news subjects. Sweden compared with the global mean

Female news subjects	1995	2000	2005	2010
Sweden		31	30	32
Global	17	18	21	24

Source: GMMP Report 1995, 2000, 2005 & 2010

⁶ According to Press Freedom Index from Reporters sans Frontiers 2009, Sweden ranks 4 in the Gender Gap Index 2010, closely following Iceland (1), Norway (2), and Finland (3). Denmark, ranked 7, can be more closely compared to nations like the USA (19), France (46), and Croatia (53). At the bottom are Pakistan (132), Chad, (133), and Yemen (134).

NORDIC COMPARISONS

In terms of global perceptions, the Nordic countries are often considered as one, especially when it pertains to gender equality. The GMMP and the IWMF studies, however, tell a different story, where relatively significant cleavages exist in terms of gender equality in news content. Sweden and Norway rank highly, 32 percent and 31 percent respectively; while Iceland (23 percent), Denmark (26 percent) and Finland (27 percent) rank lower. Conversely, however, Norway and Sweden have the lowest share of female experts in the news (see Table 2).

Though these figures are significant relative to the global share, there still exists a substantial male dominance in the news. This suggests a gap between the interests of the Nordic societies, which tend to value gender equality, and the interest in gender equality among news editors.

Table 2. Percentage of female news subjects and female experts in GMMP 2010

	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden	Global mean
Female news subjects	26	27	23	31	32	24
Female experts	28	29	29	19	24	20
Female reportees	30	40	33	30	52	37

Source: GMMP Report 2010

Even though the GMMP report does not investigate newsroom conditions, it does track who is producing the news. Trends in the field of journalism reveal a steady increase in gender equality at the international-level; 37 percent of all reporters are women. The GMMP report also indicates stark differences in terms of reporting in the Nordic countries. Sweden and Finland, namely, have the highest share of female news reporters.

The Swedish portion of the GMMP data report indicates that the presence of more female reporters does not equate to more gender equality in news content. Given that 52 percent of reporters in Sweden are female, the share of female news subjects should be higher, that is if one were to conclude that women are more likely to engage and interview women. According to the data, however, this does not seem to be the case. The presence of more female reporters does not automatically lead to more women in the news. These results are also supported by the IWMF study.

THE GENDERED NEWSROOMS

One of the key results obtained from the IWMF study is that while there are more female reporters in the media industry worldwide, men occupy the vast majority of management positions and news gathering occupations. Seventy-three percent of the top-level management positions belong to men. In terms of senior professionals (reporters and editors), the results are more balanced; 41 percent are women.

The IWMF study also shows that gender distributions in western European newsrooms are more or less equal. Further, Eastern Europe has a high level of gender equality in terms of access to jobs and salary compensation. The Nordic states, here, continue to be the “best in class” in terms of the near-equal parity between men and women when it comes to news reporting; however, men are much more likely to have higher salaries and hold full-time positions.

Similar to the results found in the GMMP study, Sweden scores the highest among the Nordic countries in terms of female representation, apart from governance positions, where Finland and Norway have more women.

Table 3. Percentage of women in different positions in the Nordic region

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	Global mean
Governance	-	37	37	34	26
Top-level management	-	35	33	39	27
Senior management	37	34	32	40	39
Middle management	36	44	34	49	29
Senior professionals (reporters & editors)	34	51	35	49	41
Junior professionals	38	59	-	-	36

Source: *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media (2011)*. Bold numbers are the highest share of women. Figures based on 32 newsrooms and 7,245 employees. Numbers taken from news organizations from the different countries: Denmark (7) Finland (9) Norway (7) Sweden (9).

Given the data obtained, these two studies could serve as a basis for opening discussions on the topic of why women are unable to make the news in countries that have long credited themselves as the vanguard for gender equality.

Nordic countries may be characterized by the diversities of their newsrooms. Some appear to suggest that their news content reflects societal realities, and therefore minimize the importance of gender balance in their output. On the other hand, there are examples of newsrooms that systematically target gender issues and gender representation as a means to overcome this imbalance. The following notes some of the more concrete examples of newsrooms that have augmented their attention towards gender equality.

When editorial routines makes a difference

The annual goal of the Swedish public service television (SVT) is to have a gender balance of 40/60 (women to men) in every program category. In several newsrooms, the editors categorize the various news story participants, including their gender, ethnicity, and location, etc. As mentioned above, the national newsrooms have difficulty in approaching a gender-equal standard. At the regional and local-levels, it appears easier for media outlets to work with gender issues. Already in 2003, it was clear that daily routines make a difference. The news broadcast *Västerbottensnytt* in Umeå, a city in northern Sweden, was then the only regional news program to reach the company goal of 40/60 news content

in SVT. Much of this success stems from the clear and systematic work of reporters and editors, who summarized their strategies in four short, colloquial points.

- 1. Have goals that are reachable.** Do not ask for the moon in the beginning. Raise the bar as you go along.
- 2. Do the monitoring every week.** Gender equality is boring day-to-day work. It is like doing the dishes. You have to wash up after every meal if you want to keep it clean. When you think you know how to do it and the work is done, it will all rise and overflow its banks.
- 3. Have ongoing discussions** on why or why not goals are reached. Analyze and give feedback. If you do not know what is stopping you, you will not know what it is that makes you succeed.
- 4. Active Leadership.** Gender equality is a management issue. You need to coach both the group and the individual. Clarify structures and communicate why gender equality is important. On a daily basis, remind everyone of the importance of finding women to interview. If you look for women every day you will actually reach a representation of 50/50 (The model of *Västerbottensnytt* from 2005, translated by Edstrom; the original document is in Swedish.)

The goal of the *Västerbottensnytt* newsroom is 50/50. Unfortunately, this goal is rarely reached. Over the last five years, however, news stories have contained, on average, 45 percent women in the main news broadcasts (this figure has been posted on their website where they report how and why they seek gender equality). They promote their gender equality work both within their organization and outwardly towards the broader Swedish society. As such, this makes for an interesting contrast to the newsrooms that do not manage to find women as news subjects.

The award-winning work of *Västerbottensnytt* has garnered national attention, namely from the largest national newscast *Rapport*, which now tracks data concerning gender, ethnicity, and location of all of its news subjects. *Västerbottensnytt* also participated in monthly cake-contests with two other regional television newsrooms; the newsroom with the lowest percentage of female representation in broadcasts has to buy the others a cake.

In the same city of Umeå, a local daily newspaper *Västerbottens-Kuriren*, decided in 2002 to investigate gender representation in their newspaper by taking part in a research project, "Editorial Balance Report." The project showed that men outnumbered women by a 3:1 margin in local news stories. Reports in the sports section were even more male dominated; only 18 percent of the main characters were women. This led to that a review of daily procedures and a monitoring of the news on a regular basis. After regularly counting the numbers of women and men in written texts and pictures, the paper processed their findings in a basic Microsoft Excel document. Between 2002 and 2010, the newspaper satisfactorily increased female representation in local news stories from 23 to 35 percent. Females found in the sports section, as well, increased from 18 to 26 percent (Juvel and Torstensson, 2010). It should be noted that this overhaul in sports coverage dramatically increased the readership of this section. The editor-in-chief, Gunnar Falck, argues that more women lead to better journalism and a more financial stability, stating

that, "If 51 percent of our readers are women and they are never shown in the paper, we are not useful for them and they will stop reading the paper." Moreover, the daily procedures of the newspaper have inspired other local papers to enact similar systematic changes towards the greater representation of not only gender, but gender issues, as well.

One structural problem concerning news content for a local newspaper is that the national news delivered by media agencies is overwhelmingly male dominated. Thus, even though this local newspaper is working consciously to impart more equal gender representation, the total image of the paper is still that men are more likely to be heard. (Juvel and Torstenson, 2010)

A third example from the very same city, Umeå, comes from the local public service radio station, *Sveriges Radio Västerbotten*. The radio station also tracks content diversity via a similar Excel spreadsheet. As such, they know that 43 percent of their news subjects were women in the year 2010. The head editor explained that it is not an easy task to motivate journalists to keep up with such statistics. She stated, "I have asked the journalists to connect at least one personal goal to the statistics that we make, to motivate them to include more women or people with origins from outside the Nordic countries." Further, the editor noted that even though they perform well on gender representation, it is not an area that is sufficiently recognized by senior management. The IWWMF study presents similar conclusions; namely, that there are managers who do not want to talk in terms of gender. "Gender equality is no longer on the agenda... Diversity is a hotter topic." There are also managers who recognize that the most common staffing issue concerning journalists in the newsroom is that there are too many young women and too many older men. "We need to employ young men."

Considering the examples from the city of Umeå, it is interesting that three news organizations in the same city have taken measures to ensure greater gender equality and diversity in the newsroom. Perhaps, one can conclude that their relative proximity and probable overlap inspired one another to take these measures seriously.

TRANSPARENCY AND DIALOGUE

Another trend in this field is that media outlets have begun to invite readers, viewers, and listeners to perform their own gender monitoring tasks. In the spring of 2011, the largest Swedish daily newspaper, DN, *Dagens Nyheter*, began to monitor diversity of their webpage, *dn.se*. During the monitoring campaign, journalists maintained a collective blog where readers could follow the progress.⁷ In June 2011, DN published the results of the monitoring campaign; 7 out of 10 main news subjects were men, and only 8 percent of the news subjects had a minority background.

The regional newspaper *Uppsala Nya Tidning* has also attempted to engage their audiences in a dialogue concerning gender representation. In 2009 they had a "50/50 week,"

⁷ <http://www.dn.se/blogg/mangfald/2011/04/06/dn-se-later-granska-dn-se/> (20.10.2011)

as part of an open discussion with readers. During that week they also managed to increase female readership. Since 2003 the newspaper has employed a gender monitoring group and the share of female news subjects is increasing, albeit slowly.⁸ Emphasizing the importance of leadership involvement in the process, a member of the gender monitoring group states, "It is important the management has sharp goals and follows up on those goals."

How to find the women

Given the figures obtained in these studies, it seems to be a global phenomenon that journalists cannot find female experts to complement news stories, even in times and places where they do exist. As such, the primary recommendation from the 2009-2010 Global Media Monitoring Report is the creation of regional directories of female experts. One such directory, SheSource, began operations in 2005 in the United States www.shesource.org. In Denmark, a similar resource has existed since 1996, the Kvinfo Expert Database www.kvinfo.dk. A popular argument among journalists is that women are not as eager to talk to the media as their male counterparts. Yet according to representatives at Kvinfo, those days and sentiments have long passed, as female experts themselves call Kvinfo to participate (Journalisten 2010).

Pressure on the media is also emanating from civil society groups, who push news outlets to become more aware of gender imbalances. In Sweden, Everything is Possible has helped to educate both journalists and the public on the topic of gender media literacy. Over the last few years, several newsrooms have voluntarily asked the group to perform independent monitoring projects on gender. Another example is the Equalisters, a Facebook-based equality project that works with crowd sourcing to create lists on the underrepresented groups that the media can not find.

Educating leaders

Many experts note the importance of conscious leadership – for both men and women. Findings indicate that the women who are hired in managerial positions at major news outlets and media organizations usually have strong networks and social support (Djerf-Pierre, 2007; Israelsson and Zadig, 2007) Since 1995 the University of Stockholm has offered a course on female leadership and investigative journalism. To date, 200 journalists have participated, primarily from Sweden, but also a number from Finland. By taking part in the course, these women have entered a network of leaders. Several of them now hold high positions within Nordic newsrooms. In fact, a survey in 2006 found that, of the first 147 participants, 84 held top positions within their organizations.

In addition, several media companies have in-house leadership programs. In earlier years, when there was a shortage of female managers, these programs were designed specifically for women. Yet as the IWMF study indicates, Swedish media companies now routinely target both men and women for these programs. One news organization in

⁸The representation of women in UNT has increased from 31 percent in 2004 to 35 percent in 2009.

particular mentioned their “rookie-program,” where anyone within the company could attempt to work as an apprentice-manager for three-months. If they liked it, they could apply for the next open position; likewise, if they did not, they could still use their achieved management skills to solve temporary problems within the organization.

NATIONAL LEGISLATIONS AND UNION WORK

Another dimension of gender in the newsrooms refers to the more classical societal problem concerning inequalities in pay for women and men. The former Gender Equality Act helped to bring these issues to the foreground. The new Discrimination Act of 2009 also requires companies to perform routine gender balance inquiries to ensure that salary differences are not the result of gender; however, to date there has been a lack of affirmative action. The unions, in turn, do their own balancing. Such analyses, regulated by the law, keep these issues apart of societal discourse. The shared parental leave system in Sweden, in addition to its developed pre-school system, also promotes gender equality and the possibility for women and men to combine work and family life, whether in the media sector or elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

The public sphere in Nordic countries is still more favorable for men, and as such newsroom culture continues to reflect and contribute to a gender imbalance. In other words, the media is not only a mirror; rather, it often seems to enforce male dominance in the public sphere. Both male and female journalists seem to be the carriers of news culture, which tends to magnify male actions. In order to combat this culture, work is not only required at the structural-level, but reporters must additionally accept an individual responsibility. Simply employing the same number of males and females in the newsroom will unfortunately do nothing to improve the gender balance in news content.

Is there a Nordic Way? Yes and no. The strong state regulations in Nordic societies, including parental leave for men and women, promotes gender equality and balance between work and private lives. Such measures more than likely contribute to the region’s relatively high grades of gender balance in news content when compared to other regions. Yet much more can be done. The complementary conclusions of the GMMP study, the IWMF study, and the work of *Everything is Possible* reveal that:

- > Gender sensitivity and awareness do not arrive automatically in the news – neither for female or male reporters and/or editors.
- > Gender sensitive leadership matters.
- > Regular monitoring and measurable goals improve the overall quality of gender representation.

Local and regional media seem better equipped to reach a gender balance in their content than their national counterparts. This can, in part, be explained by the fact that news of national interest tends to be more elite-focused, and therefore includes more men. In the Nordic countries, however, there is no shortage of female ministers, parliamentarians, and experts to interview. There are some indicators that commercial businesses can do more in terms of equalizing gender within their purviews. On the other hand, it has been the public services which have set gender standards and routines.

Equally, there are variations among the Nordic countries, which require further analysis. There are examples of Swedish newsrooms that consciously aim to increase female representation in the news overall, and maintain a better gender equality in specific reports. Yet there are also indicators that not all managers demonstrate an even perfunctory interest in the "old" issue of gender. In sum, leadership involvement, daily routines, and regular evaluations do seem to affect content. Without a conscientious interest in addressing gender disparities, the public sphere will remain dominated by males and the male interest for many years to come.

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- >Swedish Media Watch group "Everything is Possible", www.alltarmojligt.se (20.10.2011)
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Interviews

- >9 interviews with news managers within the framework of the IWMMF survey, conducted spring/summer 2009
- >6 interviews by *Everything is Possible* for the Swedish report on the GMMP, conducted spring 2011

POSTOJI LI NORDIJSKI PUT? O USPJESIMA I PROBLEMIMA RODNE RAVNOPRAVNOSTI U NOVINARSKIM REDAKCIJAMA IZ ŠVEDSKE PERSPEKTIVE

Maria Edström

SAŽETAK *U posljednjih nekoliko desetljeća u nordijskim zemljama postignuti su značajni uspjesi kada je riječ o rodnoj ravnopravnosti, posebno na području sudjelovanja žena u politici, plaća te dijeljenja roditeljskog dopusta. U većini redakcija možemo pronaći gotovo podjednak broj žena i muškaraca. Osim toga u većim novinarskim redakcijama u Švedskoj postoji rodna uravnoteženost i na upravljačkoj razini. Međutim kada je riječ o sadržaju vijesti, žene ostaju u manjini. Koristeći kvalitativne i kvantitativne podatke iz projekata The Global Media Monitoring Project i The Global Status of Women in the News Media, ovaj članak naznačuje neke od izazova i najboljih rješenja za rodnu ravnopravnost u skandinavskim novinarskim redakcijama. Različiti stupanj rodne ravnopravnosti u pojedinim redakcijama često se može objasniti razinom rodne osviještenosti u društvu. Nadalje rodnu ravnotežu u vijestima mogu unaprijediti i sposobno vodstvo, javne politike i monitoriranje rodnih pitanja. Čini se da zakoni o roditeljskom dopustu i diskriminaciji igraju ključnu ulogu u ostvarivanju rodne ravnopravnosti u redakcijama.*

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

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