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COMPACT: FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY THROUGH  
RAISING AWARENESS OF THE STATE OF THE ART ON  
SOCIAL MEDIA AND CONVERGENCE

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# COMPACT Gender REPORT Final Oct 2020





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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to summarize the basic gender issues in the age of convergence and to raise awareness among stakeholders about the regulatory frameworks applied by social media platforms. Gender issues also reveal how social media fulfill their obligations not only with regard to equality but with respect to other human rights as well being companies with unprecedented power over individuals in modern society. In our report we shall place focus not on the content moderated by social media but on another related matter. It is our opinion that the quality of the gender strategies adopted and applied by various social media are of no less importance than the content circulated via networks because these strategies underpin the overall governance of social media and have a bearing (though somehow indirect) on their attitude about content. The report will assess social media diversity policies from a human rights perspective by applying recognized international principles. The final part of the study will compare existing international indicators related to gender equality and media with the aim to select those that can be used by social media platforms to evaluate their frameworks in the age of convergence. The report consists of two parts: general and special. The general part covers the basic premises and notions related to gender balance in society. The special part is dedicated to the examination of specific gender topics in and through social media, the indicators through which gender inclusion and participation in media governance can be measured, as well as their possible deployment to social media. At the end of the report useful links are compiled for the readers.

#### Introduction

Technological advancement and convergence require a comprehensive exploration of how various dimensions of our life are affected by the new technologies, and by social media, in particular. Although this study is aimed at analyzing the gender aspects of the convergence phenomena, we are, above all, concerned about how social networks respond to the gender challenges in the digital environment.

Currently, the European Commission is funding 27 projects on media convergence and social media. The objective is to develop a new generation of media and Internet-based products and services by making use of innovative technical solutions.<sup>1</sup> Against this background, the main goal pursued by COMPACT project is to increase awareness among key stakeholders of the latest technological achievements in the context of social media and convergence, including scientific, political, cultural,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/programme-and-projects/eu-funded-projects-convergence-and-social-media>.



legal, economic and technical areas. Such an ambitious plan is instrumental to stimulate a debate among various stakeholders (public bodies, academia, business companies, the technical community, policy makers and the media themselves) on the current and the desirable future policies and frameworks that are required and lacking in the state of the art concerning media and content convergence.

Knowledge of the complex developments we witness and the novel solutions they demand comprise the basis on which specific strategies and practical approaches should be elaborated to serve best the empowering of communities and generations confident in their current and future role in society. Among these strategies gender policies at various levels merit a particular focus. Ensuring that women and men equally enjoy the right to access, participate in and contribute to the advancement of digital society will allow them to benefit also equally from new creative opportunities. Back in 2011 the World Bank (WB) report emphasizes that “countries that create better opportunities and conditions for women and girls can raise productivity, improve outcomes for children, make institutions more representative and advance development prospects for all.” Later in 2015 this idea is further developed and the WB Gender Strategy explicitly states that “no society can develop sustainably without transforming the distribution of opportunities, resources and choices for males and females so that they have equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to their families, communities, and countries. Promoting gender equality is smart development policy.” The problem is that such smart policy has many dimensions. With respect to social media platforms the policy pertains to their approach towards gender balance and inclusiveness in disseminated content as well as in their internal arrangements. In particular with respect to the latter, the policy relates to the practical realization of the general principles of gender balance into a specific working environment, organization and conditions governing platforms’ operation.

A broader gender analysis, delving not only in the content disseminated via social media and its impact, but in other gender issues will provide the real social picture and the position of groups and communities in the digital environment. First, it will delineate the social issues that may stem from the proliferation of the information and communication technologies (ICT) and their impact on men and women’s involvement in the information society. Second, we can get profound information about the role and contribution of the human factor in the age of convergence, including in social media activities as the most conspicuous consequence of the convergence process. In particular, such analysis will present how various groups and persons take part in the transformation of society and whether they perform as a real factor for technical and social changes. Third, it will enrich, in our view, the knowledge of the various forms of regulatory tools prepared and applied by social media platforms and of the special social media diversity policies. In addition, the study will come up with ideas concerning the necessary conditions that should be in place in order for social media to become a genuine factor for the full enjoyment of human rights, for diversity of participation and creation of equal opportunities. Conclusions may inform debate as to how better gender involvement can be accomplished in all areas and at all levels and how diversity policies can be properly assessed.

These are the main reasons why partners have agreed to include a separate gender report in their project proposal, prepared by M21F. The purpose of the report is to summarize the basic gender issues in the age of convergence (with respect to social media) and to raise awareness among stakeholders about the most urgent problems that require quick and efficient reaction. Communication via social networks is a dynamic area at the center of which is content exchange. Gender issues that stem from the publication of various materials online can affect human dignity and other human rights on a daily basis. Gender issues show how social media platforms fulfill their obligations with regard to freedom of expression and other human rights being companies with unprecedented power over individuals in modern society. In our report we shall place a particular focus on another related matter. It is our opinion that the quality of the gender strategies adopted and applied by various social media are of no less importance than the content circulated via networks because these strategies underpin the overall governance of social media. The report will assess social media diversity policies from a human rights



perspective by applying recognized international principles. The final part of the study will compare existing international indicators related to gender equality and media with the aim to select those that can be used by social media platforms to evaluate their frameworks.

The report consists of two parts: general and special. The general part covers the basic gender premises and notions related to gender balance in society. The special part is dedicated to the examination of specific gender topics in and through social media, the indicators through which men's and women's inclusion and participation in media governance can be measured, as well as their possible deployment to social media. At the end of the report useful links and sources are compiled to enrich further readers' knowledge.

Our study is based on a desktop research that includes analysis of the documents of international organizations like UN, UNESCO and ITU, internal diversity policies pursued by some of the biggest social media companies - Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn as well as the European policy in this area and academic sources. The aim of the manuscript is not to censure or disparage social media but to provide an independent opinion on issues concerning human capital that quite often are neglected. Though most of the international acts speak about inequality and discrimination, we prefer to speak about imbalances or discrepancies in gender matters. We agree in this respect with the renowned Professor Thomas Sowell from Stanford University who insists that when we seek answers for certain disparities "we need to be very clear about the words we use in asking the question."<sup>2</sup> Professor Sowell stresses that searching for answers to such questions "is more than an academic exercise, when the ultimate purpose is to enable more human beings to have better prospects of advancing themselves". In his latest book "Discrimination and Disparities" (2018) Prof. Sowell shares insights of how discrimination can be understood, depending on the basis for it and warns that "misdiagnosing the basis for discrimination produces more than a difference in words. It can produce policies less likely to achieve their goals, or even policies that make matters worse." (...) In the same vein, without categorical evidence proving discrimination that means "making decisions based on unsubstantiated motions or animosities", it will not be justified to suggest radical changes in social media operational frameworks. In this regard, we take a prudent stance presenting facts, raising arguments and stating observations that point to the existence of discrepancies and shortcomings in the convergent society and in social media gender strategies as part and parcel of their governance diversity strategies. In this respect our goal is to enable interested parties to gain understanding and make the appropriate conclusions about the level of gender involvement and equality of opportunities in social media companies in the fast developing digital world.

## **I. General part**

### **1. Basic premises and notions**

Gender issues are usually associated with the notion of equality among sexes. Human rights experts stress that gender equality comprises an important aspect of the general principle of equality in society. It is a fundamental human rights' principle that "women's human rights are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights."<sup>3</sup> Article 1 of the European Convention on human rights (ECHR) guarantees the rights and freedoms to everyone in the 47 member States of the Council of Europe. The principle of protection against non-discrimination on the basis of sex is assured by both Article 14 and Protocol 12 to the Convention. The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the European Convention on Human Rights shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

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<sup>2</sup> Sowell, T. (2018). *Discrimination and disparities*, Kindle edition.

<sup>3</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 November 2007 at the 1011th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies) - [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d4aa3](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d4aa3).



Similarly art.21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) declares that “any discrimination based on any ground including sex (such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation) shall be prohibited.” Further to this art. 23 states that “equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay” including a possibility for affirmative action. The European Union’s social policy is interrelated with the gender equality goals and the EU has a Treaty obligation to pursue gender equality. Article 119 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome (now Article 157 in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) mandates equal pay for equal work.

These norms derive from fundamental human values and from the core value of human dignity, enshrined both in the ECHR and the EU CFR, in particular. They stay at the heart of the European gender policy. These principles also underpin the social, political and economic framework within which gender equality can be accomplished.

Gender equality can be a value in itself enriching democracy and facilitating social progress. The Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms further states that gender equality is not a women’s issue only but it permeates the whole social texture and can be viewed as a “public good, providing social, political and economic benefits to the individuals in society and to society as a whole”.<sup>4</sup>

These fundamental prerequisites for democracy and social justice are further developed in a number of acts of the two European organizations (the Council of Europe and the EU) to distill more specific principles in the different social areas on which the elaboration of appropriate policies and legislation can be premised.<sup>5</sup> The new Council of Europe gender Equality Strategy (2018 – 2023)<sup>6</sup> builds upon the vast legal and policy body of the Council of Europe instruments, related to gender equality, as well as on the achievements of the first Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy (2014 - 2017). It links them to both the current economic context and the overarching priorities of the organization, such as human rights, rule of law and democracy. The Strategy recognizes the important contemporary goal to ensure that all women can benefit from gender equality policies and protection, including disadvantaged groups of women (such as Roma women, women with disabilities, migrant and refugee women). In order to provide more efficient protection the act pays due attention to the intersecting

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<sup>4</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 November 2007 at the 1011th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies) - [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d4aa3](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805d4aa3).

<sup>5</sup> See for instance, for the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Gender equality strategy 2018 – 2023 <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093618-gbr-gender-equality-strategy-2023-web-a5/16808b47e1>, the already cited Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality standards and mechanisms as well as CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality and media. - [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e). CM/Rec(2013)1 requires all addressees and particularly member states to promote active research related to: “media access, representation, participation (quantitative and qualitative profile) and working conditions in the media and the relationship between genders.” See also Recommendation No. R (98) 14 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender mainstreaming (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 October 1998 at the 643rd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies). - <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680595b37> and Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 March 2003 at the 831st meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies). - <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680595b37>. The latest document is Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)11 (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 March 2019 at the 1342nd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies) on combating sexism. - <https://rm.coe.int/prems-055519-gbr-2573-cmrec-2019-1-web-a5/168093e08c>. Regarding the European Commission see Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016 – 2019 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic\\_engagement\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic_engagement_en.pdf), European Parliament resolution of 28 April 2016 on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age (P8\_TA(2016)0204).

<sup>6</sup> <https://edoc.coe.int/en/gender-equality/5992-council-of-europe-gender-equality-strategy-2014-2017.html>.



grounds of discrimination that can generate multiple and disproportional risks and can marginalize particular groups of women.

The Council of Europe comprehensive and extensive body of instruments and experience provide important input towards the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)<sup>7</sup>, the objectives set in the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action.

With respect to the EU, since 1997, the gender equality issue has been more firmly embedded in the EU strategies (Lewis, 2006)<sup>8</sup>. The broadening of policy context also signals a more instrumental approach to gender problems: the EU policy-making shifted in such a manner that it “became an instrument of the wider agenda on employment and economic growth.” As a logical consequence of these steps the European commission (EC) strives to boost the role of women in the digital age through a variety of actions and initiatives. In particular, the Commission stresses the need of more active involvement of women in the structuring and functioning of the digital single market which in turn will bring more diversity, competition and innovation opportunities to every member of society.<sup>9</sup>

While digitization is permeating all areas of life, it has become clear that technological revolution is not just a purely technical (or economic) process, but also a social one and it is not gender-neutral. New information and communication technologies can help women and girls access new opportunities, means of expression and channels for participation. The convergence between traditional and online media, in particular, is blurring the boundaries between consumers and creators, and opening spaces for new voices, sharing and mobilization in a more democratic environment. On the other hand, with respect to gender, if access is unequal, if algorithms or content available online are gender biased or do not reflect women’s needs and cravings, or if women themselves are not involved in shaping that content, digitalization can merely reproduce existing gender inequalities. It can also generate new threats such as online spread of misogyny and cyber-violence. A study of the European Parliament underlines that “current policy priorities include addressing longstanding issues, such as the gender pay gap and gender-based discrimination in employment, but also finding workable solutions to relatively new problems, including how to respond to the dynamics of gender inequality within digital media platforms.”<sup>10</sup>

Debates nowadays are extended further to encompass artificial intelligence and its impact on social texture. Experts have repeatedly underlined that advanced automation technologies can bring about many opportunities but also risks. Emerging technologies, such as AI, are considered as digital technology equalizers rather than being used to create further digital divide. However, risks in contemporary reality can be compounded on the one hand, by the quick spread of the information and communication technologies and on the other, by the accelerated use of artificial intelligence without respecting such categories like gender, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. AI relies on algorithms that learn from real-world data and there is a fear that AI applications can inadvertently deepen the existing gender biases. A recent European Commission report concerning the future conditions of work and how artificial intelligence is transforming jobs and the labour market in general emphasizes “the growing anxiety across different parts of societies in European countries about the negative impact of the digital transformation. In some companies, there is a clear reluctance, even from management, to introduce artificial intelligence solutions based on the unfounded fear of the job losses that they may trigger.”<sup>11</sup> The challenges and the opportunities are not equally distributed in society or the economy,

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<sup>7</sup> Among these goals Gender Equality represents Goal N5.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, J. (2006). Work/family reconciliation, equal opportunities and social policies: the interpretation of policy trajectories at the EU level and the meaning of gender equality. In: *Journal of European Public Policy*, Volume 13, 2006 – Issue 3. - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13501760600560490>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/more-women-digital-sector-key-europes-successful-digital-future-international-womens-day-2018>.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596839/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)596839\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/596839/IPOL_STU(2018)596839_EN.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> [file:///D:/Downloads/AIFutureofWorkreport%20\(1\).pdf](file:///D:/Downloads/AIFutureofWorkreport%20(1).pdf).



or in each and every country and are rapidly changing. The report particularly points to the gender, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity that has to be preserved in order to stimulate meaningful contribution and participation by everyone. International bodies like the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization (CTO) for instance, raise the admonition that “transparency and accountability for the data behind AI is critical to reducing bias, but very difficult to govern or enforce.”<sup>12</sup> Other observations about possible inequalities in the AI sector pertain to the careers there – these jobs are well remunerated and generally it is an area of rapid growth. Continued dominance of these positions by already privileged groups in society is thus likely to exacerbate existing inequalities. A series of new metrics developed in collaboration between LinkedIn and the World Economic Forum managed to shed light on the gender dynamics in the new economy with respect to AI. According to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report (2018), only 22 percent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) professionals globally are female compared to 78 percent who are male. This accounts for the general gender gap of 72 percent. The Global Gender Gap Report for 2020, which poses the alarming statement that gender parity will be accomplished for 99,5 years, stresses in particular, that across the three technical frontier role clusters defined by LinkedIn, female workers make up an estimated 26% of workers in Data and AI roles (compared to 15% of workers in Engineering roles and 12% of workers in Cloud Computing roles).<sup>13</sup> These findings are not only worrying in itself, but serve as a reminder of the urgent action needed by all stakeholders to mitigate the threat posed by gender biased AI applications.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic brought about new challenges related also to gender. Digital technology makes it possible for people in countries with high connectivity to work and learn from home but it is a privilege not enjoyed by all. A quite disappointing example is that with less access to the Internet, women and girls especially, are disproportionately affected. Factually COVID-19 showed that societies are heavily dependent on the power of digital technologies. Therefore extra efforts should be put to make sure that all people regardless of gender, ability, age and location enjoy equal access to platforms and services and benefit from them.

## **2. Convergence and human resources**

Why these developments are distressing and what will be their consequences? In our view they may impair human capital and its role in the digital society. Human capital is one of the crucial determinants for economic expansion and prosperity. Human capital comprises the capacity of people (knowledge, talents, capabilities and professionalism) to accomplish the goals of a nation or a state. The OECD research came to the conclusion that “significant increases in the human capital of countries have (and will have in the future) positive impact on observed growth patterns.”<sup>14</sup>

Technology can considerably influence and create human capital of a new quality. The Internet, e-commerce, and global technological processes have opened up unprecedented avenues for fostering the function of all human resources and raising their potential. However, new technology brings new skills requirements and companies always have to be aware of the proficiencies and training needs of human resources and invest in their upgrading. It is not an end in and by itself but to improve human capital individually and collectively means to enable it to develop new ways of thinking and to acquire new capabilities. Having in mind such an optimistic perspective, the technological boom could be perceived as a powerful factor for bringing to the fore novel possibilities for the improvement of the capacity of all members of society. Thus members can be able to contribute adequately to the economic development making thorough use of their qualifications.

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<sup>12</sup> Koyabe, M. (2019). Gender bias is a threat to future Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications: Opinion. - <https://news.itu.int/gender-bias-is-a-threat-to-future-artificial-intelligence-ai-applications-opinion/>.

<sup>13</sup> [file:///D:/Downloads/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020%20\(2\).pdf](file:///D:/Downloads/WEF_GGGR_2020%20(2).pdf).

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/economy/growth/18450995.pdf>.



Convergent environment allows for cheaper and widespread technical implementation and the simplest concept of convergence implies the performance of multiple tasks on a single device. Under the new conditions the issue is not about compression and facilitation of various operations only but about the inculcation of new habits, expertise and culture of people that will lead to a new quality of life.

Though difficult to measure, quality of life and prosperity are intertwined. Prosperity in a complex knowledge driven society can be successfully achieved with the involvement of all persons and communities. Limited access to or exclusion from the benefits this development brings may put at stake its role for social progress as well as its innovative potential. This inference is particularly pertinent with respect to women's and girls' role in the digital environment. Women represent a resource that can have a positive effect on the expansion of the economy - "opening out whole new markets, revenue streams and offerings". (Podder, 2018) According to Podder (2018), who cites the "Women and the Web" report, the market opportunity in getting 150 million women and girls online is worth between US\$50-70 billion. This could contribute an estimated US\$13-18 billion annually to developing countries' GDPs. Accenture's report "How Digital is Helping Close the Gender Gap at Work" states that 100 million women can be added to the workforce by 2030 if they become digitally empowered. In addition to this Podder explicitly points out that improving women's participation in the economy is not just a women's task, or it is not only about ensuring gender justice, but has an overall positive impact on growing economies.<sup>15</sup> The S&P Global has collected data to prove that with an increase in American female labor force participation alone, the acceleration to American GDP growth could add \$5.87 trillion to global market capitalization over the next 10 years. Their conclusion is that "women are increasingly a market force with the power to shape economic trends worldwide."<sup>16</sup> The more thorough inclusion of women and girls, in particular, in the digital economy is not just a step to increasing quantitatively the work force in the convergent environment. It can also lend a new quality dimension rooted in the specific outlook and approach to problems. Despite the economic implications more active women's inclusion in the information society could have a beneficial influence on the quality of communication, the formation of a diverse and just public sphere and eventually on democracy. As Recommendation CM/Rec (2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on gender equality and media emphasizes: "...genuine democracy requires the equal participation of women and men in society. Democracy and gender equality are interdependent and mutually reinforcing."<sup>17</sup>

Convergent society cannot develop without human and social capital based on the accumulation of knowledge driven by the new information and communications technologies. All human beings will also need a variety of skills to be able to participate in the digital society and digital skills are not equally distributed. The ITU Measuring Information Society report, volume 1 for 2018, refers to Cruz-Jesus et al. (2017) and Van Deursen et al. (2017) and points to the fact that inequalities in digital skills might increase inequalities between developing and developed countries and between socio-economic and socio-cultural groups. A lack of a variety of digital skills is now widely viewed as an important barrier to participation in the public and private sphere.<sup>18</sup> What is necessary is to develop advanced skills and not rely on basic skills only.

The unequal access to novel opportunities by individuals and groups may result in digital gaps. If men and women do not enjoy equal chances to be a part of the technological processes and take part in innovation in all social spheres such gaps can jeopardize their full-fledged involvement in the convergent society. Some groups can appear to be better empowered than others to make use of the new technologies. However, the ICT empowerment is a process by means of which the ICT becomes a

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/blogs/blogs-sanjay-podder-equality-inclusion>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.spglobal.com/en/research-insights/featured/women-as-drivers-of-economic-growth>.

<sup>17</sup> [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e).

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/misr2018/MISR-2018-Vol-1-E.pdf>.



fundamental instrument to fight against the social inequalities and to support the participation of all the citizens in the democratic societies.

Digital gaps can be aggravated to result in a digital divide. In the information society the digital divide is a social problem and represents the difference between those who have access to the Internet (especially broadband access) and those who do not have access. From a broader perspective, the difference is not necessarily determined by the access to the Internet, but by access to ICT and to media. With regards to the Internet, the access is only one aspect, but other factors, such as the quality of connection and related services, including availability of the access at an affordable cost and quality, are also of importance.

The people being left behind are typically those who can least afford Internet. Digital divides reflect and amplify existing social, cultural and economic inequalities. The gender gap in global Internet use has been growing rather than narrowing, standing at 17 per cent in 2019, and was even larger in the least developed countries, at 43 per cent, the ITU reports.<sup>19</sup> Similar challenges affect other vulnerable groups such as migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, older persons, young people, children, persons with disabilities, rural populations and indigenous peoples.

The special term ‘gender digital divide’ is used to assess the difference between female and male participation in the information society, particularly access and use of ICTs and the Internet. Although this divide attracts increasing attention by stakeholders, it reproduces technological digital divide.

The COVID-19 pandemic stresses the urgency in bridging these divides. Without prompt action, there is a risk of raising barriers to digital inclusion and isolation under urgent circumstances like current health crisis. The efforts that Member States and stakeholders are already undertaking, including the forthcoming multi-stakeholders’ action coalition on innovation and technology for gender equality, are long awaited and much needed.<sup>20</sup>

Despite digital gaps and digital divides, in the modern technologically driven world there can appear a second-order digital divide which relates to the manner in which ICTs are used.<sup>21</sup> The term refers to a phenomenon that can be defined as the uneven use of the ICTs. To cope with this problem the level of literacy perceived also as advanced skills in ICT becomes a key factor in realizing the potential of the information technology and the Internet. With the expansion of the use of automated systems there is clearly a need to improve digital understanding and data literacy across society to cover also the knowledge about AI and its application.

All these challenges of the technological revolution demand their careful consideration as factors that may lead to deviations from the beneficial effects of the technological advancement in different spheres.<sup>22</sup> If the uneven distribution of access to and use of the ICT persist, this may result in the actual

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/bridging-the-gender-divide.aspx>.

<sup>20</sup> Action Coalitions are global, innovative, multi-stakeholder partnerships that will mobilize governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector to deliver concrete milestone results for girls and women within the period of 2021-2026. They are expected to deliver tangible impact on gender equality and girls’ and women’s human rights. The Generation Equality Forum is a vital moment in this mobilization. It is a civil society-centered, multi-stakeholder global gathering for gender equality, similar to the Beijing Platform for Action summoned under the aegis of UN Women. Technology and innovation for Gender Equality is one of these coalitions which will use the power of technology for achieving equality. - <https://forum.generationequality.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.ftu-namur.org/fichiers/FTU-Second\\_order\\_digital\\_divide-Synthesis.pdf](http://www.ftu-namur.org/fichiers/FTU-Second_order_digital_divide-Synthesis.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Bidshahri, <https://singularityhub.com/2018/07/29/how-technology-is-helping-close-the-gender-gap-and-empower-women/#sm.0005f4pln1btccrltiv1e7kclhizc>. The Global Gender Gap Index measures differences between men and women in four key areas: health, education, economics, and politics. According to the World Economic Forum’s analysis of 144 countries, women around the world experience a gap in pay, and with the current rate of progress, the United Nations estimates it will take another 100 years to close the gap. Also Kalmarova about the management of human resources - [https://frcatel.fri.uniza.sk/hrme/files/2012/2012\\_1\\_04.pdf](https://frcatel.fri.uniza.sk/hrme/files/2012/2012_1_04.pdf).



exclusion of some social groups from the technological process and eventually from the chances for meaningful social contribution and success of every person or community.

In Europe the digital gender gap persists and figures are worrying about the extent to which this gap can hamper the completion of the Digital Single Market. The underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship, economic leadership and the digital economy is a missed opportunity for Europe. The evidence provided by the Commissioner for the Digital Single Market in 2018 stresses the economic dimension of the digital gender inequality.<sup>23</sup> However, this dimension can have a considerable bearing on society potential to innovate and move forward. It can have a negative effect on any sector including the media.

In general, 40% of enterprises recruiting ICT specialists complain of difficulties in getting qualified people. In cybersecurity a shortage of up to 1.8 million people is expected globally by 2022 of which over 350,000 people in Europe. Only 17% of the 8 million digital technology experts in the EU are women in the labour market where there is a severe shortage of skilled ICT professionals.

The data serves as an admonition that there can be a significant loss of value for Europe on all fronts: economic, societal and human capital. A study on Women in the Digital Age that the Commission, published on 8 March 2018<sup>24</sup> shows that more women in digital jobs could create an annual €16 billion GDP boost in the EU and improve the start-up environment, as female owned start-ups are more likely to be successful. The real situation, however, is far from satisfactory. The authors of the same study conclude that “although women are underrepresented as entrepreneurs in all sectors, their low presence in the ICT entrepreneur ecosystem is particularly relevant since they represent less than a quarter of total entrepreneurs.” (p.73). Though satisfied, women earn less than their male counterparts. The cited data from Tech Crunch show reveal that during the period from 2010 - 2015, 12% of venture rounds and 10% of venture capital went to start-ups with at least one female founder. In Europe, the figures are still disappointing.“ In the UK, one of the largest start-up hubs, male entrepreneurs are 86% more likely to obtain venture capital funds than women” (p.77). Another fact that needs contemplation is that only 7.4% of investors, who have invested in one or more start-ups, are women (p.79). The proportion of women in leadership roles and executive positions, both in the private and public spheres, is still a long way from achieving full gender equality. In fact, gender inequality in leadership positions is almost twice that of the labour force shows a study done by Woetzel, et.al (2015) for MGI.<sup>25</sup> The Global Gender Gap Report (2020) of the World Economic Forum points to “the slow but positive progress in terms of leadership positions” but “only a handful of countries are approaching parity.”<sup>26</sup>

In the same vein the EIGE in its report “Advancing gender equality in decision-making in media organizations“ (2013) came to the conclusion that “the persistent inequalities in the form of underrepresentation, glass-ceiling barriers to advancement and low pay (compared to men) remain firmly embedded within the media sector. There is a large degree of vertical segregation within media organizations where women are vastly under-represented at higher levels.” (p.60) Media is not only a socio-cultural institution that facilitates the exercise of the right to freedom of expression; it also represents a powerful business closely related to the technological revolution. Content industries are

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<sup>23</sup> “While women account for 52% of the European population, only around 1 in 3 graduates in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is a woman. As we need to succeed together the process of digital transformation, it is very important for policymakers, educational institutions and industry to promote gender equality in the digital sector and further boost women’s participation.”(Maria Gabriel, ICT 2018, Vienna, - <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/combating-gender-stereotypes-commissioner-gabriel-meets-trailblazing-women-science>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/more-women-digital-sector-key-europes-successful-digital-future-international-womens-day-2018>.

<sup>25</sup> The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women’s Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth, 2015. - [file:///D:/Downloads/A201593092347\\_20.pdf](file:///D:/Downloads/A201593092347_20.pdf) .

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/reports>.

not only crucial to cultural diversity; they are also of paramount importance for the overall economy of the EU.

The reasons for the limited involvement of women and girls in the digital economy are complex. They also vary from country to country (as already mentioned in the WEF Gender Gap Report). These reasons can be related to culture, traditions, stage of development of society, adopted policies and frameworks but also to the practices established, the skewed perceptions, the stereotypes about women's social role and the absence of inspirational role models. Stereotypes and biases towards technical education and professions in particular exist even within the feminine part of society and they cannot be neglected. By and large women and girls show low interest in STEM studies and the ICT professions. Sometimes reasons are personal and are rooted in a long implemented tradition - often, women lack confidence to embark on STEM fields. This area in and by itself requires consistent efforts pertaining to awareness raising, education and teaching.

Another aspect of women's presence in the digital society relates to the attitude of women to Internet and how often they make use of the web. Within the EU this is not so much a question of women and girls lacking basic Internet access or skills, although there are gender differences, but that the number of women who have never used the Internet remains high (14 % of women compared to 12 % of men). The gender gaps are much wider in advanced IT skills, tertiary education, employment and decision-making in the digital sector and girls and women less likely to continue studying science and technology beyond the age of 15, enter or continue a career in ICT, reach specialist and managerial levels or start their own tech companies.<sup>27</sup>

According to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2019<sup>28</sup> 83 % of EU citizens go online at least weekly and 76 % do so every day. The gender gap persists here as well but it is narrowing.<sup>29</sup> Proportionately, men use the Internet more frequently than women (at least weekly: 84 % vs. 82 %; daily or almost: 75 % vs. 77). Despite the ongoing improvements, particularly in some Member States, the elderly and those with low educational levels or with low incomes continue to be at serious risk of digital exclusion. This jeopardy can lay a bearing on social communication, involvement and on professional realization of women in the digital society.

To be able to draw a broader picture of these problems we can state figures that illustrate that in 2017, 43 % of the EU population had an insufficient level of digital skills.<sup>30</sup> According to the Digital Skills Indicator (a composite indicator based on the Digital Competence Framework for Citizens), 17 % of the EU population had no digital skills in 2017, the main reason being that they did not use the Internet or did so only seldom. Again the figures imply grave risks of digital exclusion in the future in the context of rapid digitization. There are proportionally more men than women with at least basic digital skills (respectively, 60 % and 55 %) but now the problem is about upgrading basic skills and acquiring advanced skills.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> European parliament briefing  
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/614695/EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)614695\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/614695/EPRS_BRI(2018)614695_EN.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>.

<sup>29</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/newsroom/image/document/2018-20/2\\_desi\\_report\\_humancapital\\_B5DC055D-DD1E-51CD-229138BE55F9AE8A\\_52247.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/image/document/2018-20/2_desi_report_humancapital_B5DC055D-DD1E-51CD-229138BE55F9AE8A_52247.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> In 2019, the percentage of people that have at least basic digital skills reached 58% (up from 55% in 2015). A large part of the EU population, however, still lacks basic digital skills, even though most jobs require such skills. In 2018, some 9.1 million people worked as ICT specialists across the EU, 1.6 million more than 4 years earlier. Nevertheless, there remains a shortage of ICT specialists on the labour market: 64% of large enterprises and 56% of SMEs that recruited ICT specialists during 2018, reported that vacancies for ICT specialists are hard to fill. The problem is even more widespread in Romania and the Czech Republic, where at least 80% of enterprises that either recruited or tried to recruit ICT specialists reported such difficulties. There is also a gender balance issue as only one in six ICT specialists are female. Overall, in the Human capital dimension of DESI Finland, Sweden and Estonia are the most advanced.

<sup>31</sup> To counteract this deficit digital education for women should start at an early age and continue through life. The following measures can be outlined: (i) to combat stereotypes and promote role models in the digital economy; (2) to invest

This leads us to another important dimension of the gender issues in the era of convergence, which relates to the engagement of women in innovation activities. In this area, gender gaps can be identified in technology patenting, for instance.

E. Okoń-Horodyńska, A. Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, R. Wisła, T. Sierotowicz present facts from a pilot study in their interesting interdisciplinary publication “Gender, innovative capacity, and the process of innovation: a case of Poland”. On the basis of the data collected, the authors claim that innovation activities are not gender neutral and male and female participation demonstrate specific features. They argue that the examination of the current situation in the women’s and men’s contribution to the process of innovation development, is the first and necessary stage towards better understanding and use of women’s and men’s potential in innovation activities. Based on specific gender characteristics to boost innovations, Okoń-Horodyńska and others hold the opinion that the moment has come to build new synergies.<sup>32</sup> Exploring the same problem, Charles Kenny and Megan O'Donnell (2017) stress that “across the world, women accounted for about 10 percent of patent authorships”.<sup>33</sup> Still in this forward looking area of work women inventors are in a minority due to various reasons. Existing research on the topic provides that having industry contacts is a strong predictor of patenting involvement and women have fewer such contacts than men. Another reason for the lack of balance is that women usually do not apply for public funding, while private funding for innovation to a large degree goes to men (Milli et al., 2016).<sup>34</sup> In their book dedicated to this controversial issue Wadhwa and Chideya (2014) uncover different stories and make the observation that the long lasting stereotypes on women’s education discourage them from taking on hard mathematical tasks or doing world-changing innovation. As far as business approaches are concerned, women are more sensible and practical and value more their partners and networks. However, innovation is not only an inkling, it also encompasses a number of practical steps for its implementation. To accomplish such complex and costly process one needs capital and here gender balance is even more skewed. The optimistic stance is that under the conditions of paramount digitization and through personal success stories the group of women innovators will grow but this is still not the case on a large scale.

A similar conclusion is made by the EC. Though the EU has established the EU Horizon 2020 prize for women innovators, the Commission admits that there are still a handful of women that set up innovative enterprises. “Even though there are more women than men in Europe, female entrepreneurs represent only a third of self-employed people in the EU, and only 30% of start-up entrepreneurs. This means that female creativity and entrepreneurial potential are a hugely under-exploited source of jobs and economic growth” a statement explains why the prize is essential for the European society.<sup>35</sup>

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in and promote digital skills and education for women; and (3) to facilitate women's participation in digital entrepreneurship and innovation.

When it comes to challenge existing stereotypes we start from the premise that girls would be keener on taking up ICT related education if they had successful role models from the sector. However, the media often display an image of society that does not correspond to today's reality. This is not surprising if most of those that make the media content are men. That is why at an European level the platform of national audiovisual regulators (ERGA) has to assess the situation and collect best practices promoting gender equality in the audiovisual media. Tools like the MEDIA programme to track gender balance among applicants and film festivals promoting diversity in the film industry can be used in this respect. Another opportunity is to raise awareness about role models in the ICT sector through recognition and awards. The European Commission’s Women in Digital (WID) Scoreboard is another tool for monitoring women’s participation in the digital economy. The scoreboard assesses Member States’ performance in the areas of Internet use, Internet user skills as well as specialist skills and employment based on 13 indicators. Since 2019, the Women in Digital (WiD) scoreboard has become an integral part of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI).- <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/women-ict>.

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.economics-sociology.eu/files/21\\_230\\_Horodyska\\_Mazurkiewicz\\_Wisla\\_Sierotowicz.pdf](http://www.economics-sociology.eu/files/21_230_Horodyska_Mazurkiewicz_Wisla_Sierotowicz.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/expanding-womens-role-developing-technology>.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/expanding-womens-role-developing-technology>.

<sup>35</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/prizes/eu-prize-women-innovators\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/prizes/eu-prize-women-innovators_en).



Through this initiative the European Commission is working with the EU countries to overcome the barriers to women entrepreneurship and encourage more women to start their own companies. The award seeks to raise awareness of the need for more female entrepreneurs, and promote the best women and girls. In order to build a viable digital society the European policy aims to address all aspects of the gender gap and recognize European women to be at the forefront of innovation and entrepreneurship. These women can serve as role models to other potential innovators (women and men). Enhancing innovation by creating equal opportunities will help Europe stay competitive and find solutions to big societal challenges that require the efforts of all members of society.<sup>36</sup> In this respect entrepreneurial education for both sexes from an early age proves crucial and should also be pursued. In conclusion, technology can create conditions for a level playing field for all persons and groups but countries need to pay due attention to the specific digital gaps and various divides that are not once for all created but can be dynamic and elusive in the fast developing environment we are immersed in. This should be done not only because any social discrepancy or inequality is unfair but because greater involvement means more human calories, ideas and efforts for the benefit of society. Policy that provides for higher equality and justice with regard to any member, group and community lays the foundation for a better economic performance. In practice these steps lead to the creation of an effective human capital that can count on a diversity of qualities and skills. In 2020 the influential World Economic Forum Report based on the Global Gender Gap Index comes to the conclusion that “countries that want to remain competitive and inclusive will need to make gender equality a critical part of their nation’s human capital development. In particular, learning between countries and public-private cooperation within countries will be critical elements of closing the gender gap.”<sup>37</sup>

### **3. Regulating gender equality (mainstreaming)**

In the convergent environment gender balance is a global matter. According to the European Gender Equality Institute (EIGE) an essential concept related to the regulation of gender issues is gender mainstreaming, being an international “strategy towards realizing gender equality”. Mainstreaming means “the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination.”<sup>38</sup> As explained further “gender mainstreaming requires both integrating a gender perspective to the content of the different

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<sup>36</sup> Future of Work: a Lifecycle Approach STO 7267.EN18 Council Conclusions on Enhancing the Skills of Women and Men in the EU Labour Market (6889/17). Council Conclusions on Enhanced measures to reduce horizontal gender segregation in education and employment (15468/17)

European Commission:

Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men on how to overcome occupational segregation

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/genderequality/files/opinions\\_advisory\\_committee/151125\\_opinion\\_occ\\_segregation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/genderequality/files/opinions_advisory_committee/151125_opinion_occ_segregation_en.pdf)

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender\\_equality/files/opinions\\_advisory\\_committee/151125\\_opinion\\_occ\\_segregation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender_equality/files/opinions_advisory_committee/151125_opinion_occ_segregation_en.pdf)

Commission Staff Work Document "2017 Report on equality between women and men in the European Union" (SWD(2017) 108 final).

Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition

<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/european-commission-invites-organisations-attract-more-girls-and-women-digital>

European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion on the Future of work – acquiring of appropriate knowledge and skills to meet the needs of future jobs [Exploratory opinion requested by the Bulgarian Presidency]

EIGE Research Note on 'Women and men in ICT: a chance for better work-life balance' (2018)

OECD Publication on Future of work and skills - Presented at the 2nd Meeting of the G20 Employment Working Group (February 2017).

<sup>37</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>

<http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-institutional-transformation/step-5-establishing-gender-mainstreaming-support-structure>.



policies, and addressing the issue of representation of women and men in the given policy area. Both dimensions – gender representation and gender responsive content - need to be taken into consideration in all phases of the policy-making process.”

According to the mandatory EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 mainstreaming signifies a gender equality perspective that has to be incorporated into all policies at all levels and stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking.<sup>39</sup>

Gender mainstreaming can be considered a cross-cutting priority as gender equality underpins sustainable development and gender discrepancies should be mitigated in all areas and fields. Sustainable development is a process that meets the needs of current generations without affecting the ability of future ones to live and move further. It is a vast undertaking that can be achieved with the participation of all members of society regardless of any particular aspects of their identity such as gender, religion, race, class, age or nationality. Despite the progress, the pace towards the accomplishment of the sustainable development goals is rather slow especially in the political sphere and “women are still underrepresented in managerial positions. In the majority of the 67 countries with data from 2009 to 2015 fewer than a third of senior- and middle-management positions were held by women.”<sup>40</sup> This is a general inference but back in 2013 when evaluating the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the European media, EIGE found that “women occupy only 16 % of the highest level decision-making positions (level 1) within selected media organizations (both public and private) in the EU. The representation of women in decision-making posts increases at the lower levels: 26 % at level 2, 34 % at level 3 and 36 % at level 4. This tendency is common for both public and private service providers.”<sup>41</sup> Still there is not a representative study made concerning social media but we shall comment on some tendencies further in the report.

Women have always been active actors and change agents that ensure human security in their local communities as well as on national, regional and international level as a condition for normal work. Taking stock of the global trends, Lewis (2006) analyses the main trajectories of the European gender policy and underlines that mainstreaming carries the idea that policies in pursuit of gender equality will no longer be confined to an equal opportunities ‘ghetto’, but will rather be integrated across all fields of policy-making.” Building on Rees (1998), Lewis argues that mainstreaming could prove to be ‘transformative’ and change the gender hierarchy. Other authors are of the opinion that though participatory as a method allowing a women’s perspective to be considered in the course of policy-making, mainstreaming generally relies on technocratic data collection (Squires, 2007). Plomien (2018), referring to Lewis (2006), believes the shortcomings of the EU social and gender policies “stem from their uneven development in scope, content, visibility and impact” (Kantola (2010), Karamessini and Rubery (2014)).<sup>42</sup> Plomien also underlines “the EU has incorporated the social, but has cast it in a supportive role to the economic.” The general commitment to equality, together with the European Pillar of Social Rights content and format, is in itself advancement towards social and gender progress. However, the right balance between the economic and the social has to be struck to serve as a solid ground for more direct and effective specific gender policies in society. In addition in the convergent society studying social repercussions of the technological advancement is crucial. Despite its pitfalls, mainstreaming if consistently implemented, can pave the way to the application of a comprehensive and systematic approach to gender balance in all areas and at all levels.

At a global level the newly adopted OECD toolkit for mainstreaming and implementing gender equality endorses mainstreaming as an important pillar for the promotion of this goal because it helps

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<sup>39</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/staff-working-document-gender-2016-2020-20150922\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/staff-working-document-gender-2016-2020-20150922_en.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>.

<sup>41</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/node/352>.

<sup>42</sup> [https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/865AC533383CFFD66287FC800C77AC24/S1474746417000471a.pdf/eu\\_social\\_and\\_gender\\_policy\\_beyond\\_brexit\\_towards\\_the\\_european\\_pillar\\_of\\_social\\_rights.pdf](https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/865AC533383CFFD66287FC800C77AC24/S1474746417000471a.pdf/eu_social_and_gender_policy_beyond_brexit_towards_the_european_pillar_of_social_rights.pdf).



“consider every aspect of policy through a gender lens.”<sup>43</sup> The toolkit takes a wider multidisciplinary outlook and advises governments and organizations to pursue gender mainstreaming as an objective that can lead eventually to the accomplishment of good governance.<sup>44</sup> The steps recommended pass from the adoption of suitable mainstream strategies, to the building of available institutional framework and mechanisms for implementation and to the establishment of good practices which has to be consistently followed. Such a scheme can prove productive for the elaboration of an array of adequate measures to accomplish genuine and workable gender policy in various areas including the media.

### **Special part**

#### **4. Gender issues in and through the media**

Gender problems in and through social media relate to the women’s and men’s role in the building of an equal convergent environment. Social fabric is changing as social media, technology, content and search engine operations are converging, enabling new business models, professions and roles to emerge. The novel conditions in turn presuppose a comprehensive study of the unexplored areas of social activities, supported by the Internet such as social platforms, social networks and social media. This is also a COMPACT goal.

In the digital age, where the Internet generates opportunities for the full and equal enjoyment of human rights, gender balance is an essential issue for any media outlet. Its significance relates to the proper functioning of media organizations (legacy and new) and particularly to the processes of governance and decision-making, on the one hand, and to the quality of content, on the other. By and large the media comprises a cultural and business sector in which women and men should deploy their knowledge and skills on an equal footing and act as entrepreneurs, managers and employees. Equality of opportunities in and through the media has a bearing on such principles of democracy as equal participation, openness, transparency and trust without which the productive dialogue between the media and the public, representing a variety of users, communities and generations, will be hard to accomplish.

As a cherished goal, equality in society can be achieved through the media as well. The powerful presence of media outlets nowadays can be a factor for gender equality or inequality. Through its performance the media can either contribute to understanding and non-discrimination in society or stir conflicts and open divisions among different groups by the dissemination of content that may entrench prejudices and stereotypes.<sup>45</sup>

Though there is no universally accepted definition of social media their features of blending technology with the opportunities for immediacy and interactivity of communication are conspicuous. Today social media demonstrate a huge range of structures and fora. We can only try to forecast what will be the picture of tomorrow as the media landscape is rapidly changing.

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/oecd-launches-toolkit-to-help-governments-advance-on-gender-equality-goals.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> “To effectively implement a whole-of-government gender equality and mainstreaming strategy, a country needs a strong institutional framework and solid mechanisms whereby institutions are available and equipped for promoting gender equality in an effective and co-ordinated manner. When these institutions, policies and programmes fully integrate gender considerations into their work, they produce better and more equitable policies for men and women, therefore contributing to good governance.”(OECD)

<sup>45</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media: “The media can either hinder or hasten structural change towards gender equality. Inequalities in society are reproduced in the media. This is true in respect of women’s under-representation in media ownership, in information production and journalism, in newsrooms and management posts. It is even more blatant as regards women’s low visibility, both in terms of quality and quantity, in media content, the rare use of women as experts and the relative absence of women’s viewpoints and opinions in the media. Media coverage of political events and election campaigns is particularly telling in this respect, as are the persistence of sexist stereotypes and the scarcity of counter-stereotypes. Furthermore, women, as media professionals, often encounter pay inequalities, the “glass ceiling” and precarious conditions of employment”. [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e).



Social media radically impact public discourse and public life in general. Their influence is manifold and can easily go beyond active communication and sharing to redesign reality as they can prove to “predict real world outcomes.”<sup>46</sup> Social media platforms and social networks are different from legacy media and the term “media” should not mislead us. Tom Standage, deputy editor of “The Economist”, thinks two features of social media stand out - the shared social environment established on social media and the sense of membership in a distributed community in contrast to publishing.<sup>47</sup> At the OECD conference “The Power of Social Media” held in 2014 Remy-Boutang pointed to the shift of power that is no longer with the media but is now in the consumers’ hands.<sup>48</sup> These are correct observations, but they reveal separate traits of social media only. Generally speaking, social media do not represent media in the organizational and functional form we have experienced so far. They do not produce and disseminate their own content and can be viewed as intermediaries that facilitate debate. If they do not modify or edit the content they channel, they cannot be treated as media and be liable if the content affects human rights. However, social media are accountable for the quality of the communication environment they create. This environment should be enabling for freedom of expression. The Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4(1) of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors calls favourable or enabling freedom of expression such environment the features of which “collectively create the conditions in which freedom of expression and information and vigorous public debate can thrive”.<sup>49</sup> In another seminal instrument the Council of Europe makes another important statement that online intermediaries “may carry out an influential gate-keeping function in respect of public debate that is conducted via their private networks, such as social media. It must be recalled that online intermediaries are indirectly bound to respect their users’ right to freedom of expression and other human rights.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore the purpose here is not to devise a definition of social media but to stress that social media should abide by human rights principles and values, including gender balance and gender equality. On a global scale, the UN Guiding principles on business and human rights<sup>51</sup> declare that “the responsibility to respect human rights is a global standard of expected conduct for all business enterprises wherever they operate.” Though not legally binding, the guidelines oblige businesses to seek “to prevent or mitigate any adverse impacts related to their operations, products or services, even if these impacts have been carried out by suppliers or business partners.”<sup>52</sup> In this way the private sector as influential stakeholder should show that it also joins in the most fundamental global project - the consistent protection of human rights in the convergent world. On many occasions social media has demonstrated their potential for mobilizing public attention to women’s rights challenging discriminatory practices. In collaboration with traditional media and women advocacy organizations, social media can facilitate initiatives and strategies combating gender discrepancies. In terms of raising awareness and spreading campaigns on a variety of issues, social media can be very effective as a networking tool. On the one hand, social media “can engage women in economic and political life, and allow them to increase their self-expression thus promoting social

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<sup>46</sup> Asur, 2010 <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1003.5699.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/why-government-should-not-regulate-content-moderation-social-media#full>.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/social-media/HighlightsSocialMediaConf1.pdf>.

<sup>49</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4[1] of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 April 2016 at the 1253rd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies). [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016806415d9](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016806415d9).

<sup>50</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)2of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the roles and responsibilities of internet intermediaries (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 March 2018 at the 1309th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies). - [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680790e14](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680790e14).

<sup>51</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/GuidingprinciplesBusinesshr\\_eN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/GuidingprinciplesBusinesshr_eN.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> [https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/GuidingprinciplesBusinesshr\\_eN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/GuidingprinciplesBusinesshr_eN.pdf).



change”; but on the other, they “can damage the true image of women as well”. Ads, videos or images that go viral through social media and denigrate not only female but any sex, impair self-esteem and discourage professional and personal endeavours.

Sexist comments about women are among the top issues on social networks. Hate remarks are mostly directed at women and are meant to bully women. International organizations report “the nature of the comments when trolls attack is also kind of harassing. They are deeply sexist and targeted especially at a female gender.”<sup>53</sup>

We are far from the understanding that social media alone can settle all gender problems in the convergent environment. We stress again that this is a huge and challenging task that requires complex efforts from all stakeholders in the interconnected world we live in. However, social media possess immense power of impact over social processes. While it is true that perhaps not all social platforms have acquired the status of media, those that have this quality represent a new and different form from what we know already - a type of media that counts on the individual freedom of expression of their users, on imminence of exchange and interactivity.<sup>54</sup> Social media can act as a very progressive force to change gender stereotypes and promote best practices of gender involvement and empowerment, as well as counteract prejudices making their users abide by ethical codes, opening debates or promoting antidiscrimination content on a daily basis.

In a popular audiovisual talk, Johanna Blakley provocatively poses a point about “no gender social media”. She stresses the fact women are by far the largest global social media consumers, and this simple fact could vastly change the global media channels to be more female focused. Blakley then asks the audience to envisage a world where the media landscape is not dominated by “lame” demographics, such as age and gender. Instead, consumers’ click streams are monitored to discover what their interests and tastes are. This type of segmentation on the basis of social skills and preferences is being deemed as much more valuable than classic demographics and better serving current development. It is not only about communication, leisure and entertainment but also about business. Equalizing social media can encourage a new system of recruitment of staff and just evaluation of the contribution of everyone without concentrating on age and gender.<sup>55</sup>

Estelle Loiseau and Keiko Nowacka (2015) inform that the Wikigender online discussion emphasized the importance of social media in allowing gender activists to connect within and across borders at a low cost. Social platforms can make women’s voices stronger conveying equality causes been heard by the wide public. The increasing number of female bloggers is an example that women through blogging have significant impact on a younger generation activists who managed to break established stereotypes and support gender equality and involvement.<sup>56</sup>

In an interesting article dedicated to gender problems in Wikipedia, Marit Hinosaar (2018) highlights the importance of diversity of opinions in the debate, and underlines the fact that men and women contribute to different topics, which offers proof of possible equilibrium effects. Hinosaar concludes that “if a media channel covers fewer topics that women are interested in, then women use it less frequently and are less interested in contributing. On the other hand, those who contribute to Wikipedia may over time start to use Wikipedia even more and grow more confident about their ability to contribute”.<sup>57</sup> Further, the paper suggests that if editors are informed about gender inequality, they can alleviate the gender gap in contributions, although, it may come at the cost of decreasing the editorial input of men. These observations can be considered when intermediaries adopt a strategy to boost the involvement of women, either as editors and managers, or users and contributors online.

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<sup>53</sup> <https://women-s.net/social-media-and-womens-rights/>.

<sup>54</sup> Recommendation CM/Rec(2011)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on a new notion of media - [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cc2c0](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cc2c0).

<sup>55</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/johanna\\_blakley\\_social\\_media\\_and\\_the\\_end\\_of\\_gender/discussion](https://www.ted.com/talks/johanna_blakley_social_media_and_the_end_of_gender/discussion); <https://arxiv.org/abs/1710.03705>; <https://www.wpunj.edu/dotAsset/16731de2-f6a0-4bf6-b0bc-d021d8b12694.pdf>.

<sup>56</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/DEV\\_socialmedia-issuespaper-March2015.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-gender/DEV_socialmedia-issuespaper-March2015.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> <http://marit.hinosaar.net/wikipediagender.pdf>.



In the same vein, how female users make use of FB and what their role is with regard to spreading fake news is another issue that merits attention in the context of the recent proliferation of false information and the measures for counteracting it.<sup>58</sup>

In order to explore the contribution of female and male users, Facebook conducted an investigation and found that female users of their platform tend to share more personal issues (e.g. family matters, relationships). This conclusion may not be deemed laudable about women and their interests but surfaces probably inborn attitudes and characteristics related to the maternity role of women and the family activities, whereas men discuss more abstract topics (e.g. politics). These findings are close to the gender divisions in real life and require additional educational and policy efforts. Facebook's research team analyzed 1.5 million status updates published on the platform, categorizing them into topics. Each topic was then evaluated on the basis of both gender preferences and audience reactions. The results showed that men and women not only prefer certain topics, but distinct 'female' topics (e.g. birthdays, family fun) tend to receive more likes from other users, while clearly 'male' topics (e.g. sports, deep thoughts) elicit more comments.<sup>59</sup>

Men and women also demonstrate different preferences with respect to social media. According to a survey, done by the Pew Research Centre, Pinterest remains substantially more popular with women (41% of whom say they use the site) than with men (16%).<sup>60</sup> However, false information and especially fake news in politics are largely male dominated.<sup>61</sup>

### **5. Social media gender policies – an overview**

Gender and social media is an area of scant or almost no coherent study. Problems can be complex – gender issues combined with hate and libelous speech or false information. The theme can be complicated by the fact that social media represent multiplicity of platforms and services. Ideally any of them should adopt and apply a gender balance strategy.

Such a topic has at least two sides – on the one hand, the question is about social media organization and governance and how it can maintain the balance of its workforce. On the other, it is about the content circulated by social media and whether it corresponds to the human rights standards, such as equality, tolerance and non-discrimination. While the latter aspect relates to the ethical exercise of freedom of expression online, the former relates to the internal frameworks that govern social media companies. It is worth analyzing the first aspect because through the diversity of the staff members a culture of equality of opportunities can be enhanced and an attitude towards content based on equality of participation, pluralism, tolerance and respect for human rights can be promoted. Our particular interest here is **to present and discuss the diversity policy frameworks that govern social media, their effectiveness and how they can be assessed and improved**. We explore and compare the diversity strategies of some of the biggest and most influential social media that have financial and organizational resources to implement and improve such strategies.

#### **Facebook**

According to the Facebook Terms and Conditions, the Facebook service should outreach beyond geographic and national boundaries and be accessible to everyone around the globe. Facebook declares to be an Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action employer. “We do not discriminate based upon race, religion, color, national origin, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions), sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, status as a protected veteran, status as an individual with a disability, genetic information, or other applicable legally protected characteristics.”

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/do-men-use-facebook-differently-women>.

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>.

<sup>60</sup> <https://qz.com/490332/omg-the-social-media-gender-gap-is-narrowing/>.

<sup>61</sup> <http://ecil2017.ilconf.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/10/D332LesleyFarmer.pdf>  
<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680687d7c>.



Facebook also proclaims its service to unite various people around the world through communication and exchange, a feature that could be considered to bear the characteristics of a public service. The recently announced structure of the Oversight Board and its relationship to Facebook in the form of a charter to establish its membership, governance and decision-making authority to a certain extent reminds of the BBC mechanism.<sup>62</sup> Stating his commitment to the newly structured oversight Board Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook underlines the Facebook dedication to free expression as a fundamental value in “a free, inclusive and democratic society”. Zuckerberg expresses also his belief that the company’s products and policies should support more people to express themselves since only through their voices our society will make more progress.<sup>63</sup> Though we cannot claim FB is a public media or a media in principle, it obviously tries to subject its activities to commonly shared values. Consequently, if such rules of work are consistently implemented, the FB team should represent diversity of specialists with different backgrounds and views.

Facebook mentions specifically participation of women and the conditions for their involvement by stressing that its activities should be a tool for women’s empowerment, professional advancement and appreciation of their achievements: “Women@ ”We are committed to connecting and building a community of women who feel open and connected to each other. We empower women through professional development opportunities and engage with men as equal partners in advancing gender diversity and inclusion. We celebrate the unique contributions of women to Facebook.”

These are the Facebook statements of the principles on which its policy of equal opportunities are based, however, more important are the results achieved on the basis of such policy.

On July 12 2018 Facebook published its diversity report “Reflecting on our journey”.<sup>64</sup> Since 2014, the report has been regularly publicized and has been a tool for improving human diversity at the company. Diversity as claimed is understood as a must. Its objective is to help staff make better decisions and build better products for the communities that use FB services. FB claims that “recruiting, retaining and developing a diverse, inclusive workforce should be a priority from day one.” In the section “Attracting the best and the brightest“ the report points to the “effective recruiting (as) a key to building a diverse company.” In addition, the company report also stresses that its policy is “to build deep relationships with organizations that support people of color and women in computer science and engineering, some of which include Anita Borg/Grace Hopper, SHPE and NSBE, as well as many others that support a broad range of groups”.

The report underlines also the necessity to have women performing in technical activities in particular. The percentage of women globally at Facebook has increased from 31% in 2014 to 36, 3 % 2018.

- Women in technical roles have increased from 15% to 22%.
- Women in business and sales roles grew from 47% to 57%.
- Women in senior leadership expanded from 23% to 30%.

This is a small rise, but still it is a step forward.

The diversity report for 2019 is much self-critical. It has a new more concrete and goal oriented title – “Advancing diversity and inclusion”. The report declares that the company has made “some progress increasing the number of people from traditionally underrepresented groups employed at Facebook, but we recognize that we need to do more”.<sup>65</sup> The global gender ratio is still not satisfactory - 36.9% female to 63.1% male employees - it means almost double less. In technical staff it is 23% female to 77% male, in business and sales women outnumber men - 57.2% female to 42.8% male and in senior leadership roles again very low percentage of women’s involvement - 32.6% female to 67.4% male.

Over the last five years, the number of women at Facebook has increased 5X, and the number of women in technical roles has increased over 7X. FB also nearly doubled the number of women

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<sup>62</sup> <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/09/oversight-board-structure/>.

<sup>63</sup> <https://about.fb.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/letter-from-mark-zuckerberg-on-oversight-board-charter.pdf>.

<sup>64</sup> <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/07/diversity-report/>.

<sup>65</sup> <https://diversity.fb.com/read-report/>.



graduates hired in software engineering from 16% to 30%. This is despite the fact that the number of women undergraduates in the U.S. doing computer science has remained flat at 18%. Additionally, men and women at Facebook get equal pay for equal work.

FB claims it works for a broader diversity of social groups' representatives that make the company viable. Though limited by government reporting requirements in many of the countries, the percentage of the US employees who self-identify as LGBQA+ or Trans+ has moved from 7% to 8% over the past year. HRC has again recognised FB as one of the best places to work for LGBTQ equality with a 100% rating on their Corporate Equality Index. Moreover, FB was awarded a 100% rating on the USBLN Disability Index for 2018 - veterans now make up 2% of the employees. This is a small increase of the number of these persons as members of the FB staff, but it serves as a proof of a broader recruitment policy that is effectively implemented - at least at the moment.

Facebook 2020 Diversity Report: "Advancing Opportunity for all" stresses that FB has taken many steps to improve diversity and inclusion in its own workforce. Representation for women, Black and Hispanic people across every category has increased. Figures from 2014 are compared to 2020 to prove "US Black representation as a percentage of our workforce in non-technical roles grew from 2% to almost 9%. US Hispanic representation in similar roles grew from 6% to almost 11%. Women in leadership have grown similarly from 23% to 34.2%".<sup>66</sup> The importance of the diversity and inclusion policy has risen. The report stresses that the "Diversity and Inclusion function" has been elevated and reports are sent directly to COO. Inclusion has been moved to the front and center in every leadership decision. The comparison between 2014 and 2020 shows about 10 % increase of women hired in all jobs and in leadership positions. However, there is no big difference towards greater women's involvement between 2019 and 2020.<sup>67</sup>

What still remains unclear when reading these reports is how diversity of workforce through the years and the increase of the percentage of some groups at Facebook impact its performance. A special performance analysis is needed to study the relationship between the quality of workforce and company's outcomes. Such analysis presupposes the formulation and regular application of indicators for assessment as well as transparency of results. Only under these conditions the public can be aware of the diversity policy in action; how it develops through time; and whether tangible outcomes have been accomplished. Otherwise, all steps undertaken to greater diversity and inclusion may deem declarative.

FB establishes partnerships for the creation of an inclusive environment where people from all backgrounds can thrive. The company has invested in special programmes, some of which aim at setting gender issues generated by the fast developing convergent environment:

**The Align Program:** Investment in the program which increases the number of women and underrepresented people pursuing careers in computer science by providing students who did not study computer science with the opportunity to earn a master's degree in computer science.

**Research Operations & Academic Relations:** The Facebook Research's arm (ROAR) is used for recruiting, retaining and advancing diverse researchers and computer science professionals and developing inclusion programs across research areas. These partnerships target the most avangarde area of artificial intelligence in digital society and help empower workforce with various ethnicity and coming from underdeveloped countries. They comprise Black in AI, LatinX in AI, Women in Machine Learning, Data Science Africa, African Master's in Machine Intelligence, and AI4Good.

**Women LEAD and LEAP:** These internal programs help women who work at Facebook to gain knowledge and advance in leadership roles.

Facebook announced plans to double its number of female employees globally and black and Hispanic employees in the U.S. by 2024. It is an ambitious goal about which Maxine Williams, Facebook's global chief diversity officer thinks that Facebook might not succeed but "announcing the goal publicly

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<sup>66</sup> <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/07/facebook-2020-diversity-report/>.

<sup>67</sup> <https://diversity.fb.com/read-report/>.



was a necessary risk”.<sup>68</sup> More precisely in the 2020 report FB declares “50 in 5,” which means that “by 2024, at least 50% of our workforce will be underrepresented people”.

The practical realization of the FB diversity policy depends on answering the question “who makes the crucial decisions at the company and what is generally the role of women in decision making.” Decision-making is stressed to be an important indicator for gender equality both by EIGE and UNESCO. However, as Reuters (2016) explains “Facebook has often insisted that it is a technology company - not a media company (This could be true for the beginning but is debatable now.) but an elite group of at least five senior executives regularly directs content policy and makes editorial judgment calls, particularly in high-profile controversies, eight current and former Facebook executives.” Eventually, this group by membership, ideas and approaches should embody the principles underpinning the governance policy of the company, including its diversity principles. The response to such issues, however, is not in the diversity reports which are very brief and without much facts and examples.

The FB Corporate Governance Guidelines (2018) provide on paper for the Board Membership Criteria, which, among other conditions, include also diversity of race, ethnicity and gender:

“The Board’s policy is to encourage selection of directors who will contribute to Facebook’s success and its mission to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. Facebook is committed to a policy of inclusiveness and to pursuing diversity in terms of background and perspective. As such, when evaluating candidates for nomination as new directors, the Board shall:

- consider candidates with diverse backgrounds in terms of knowledge, experience, skills, and other characteristics; and
- ensure that the initial list of candidates from which new director nominees are chosen (the “Initial List”) by the Board includes (but need not be limited to) candidates with a diversity of race, ethnicity and gender (and any third-party consultant requested to furnish an Initial List will be asked to include such candidates).

In evaluating potential candidates for nomination, the Board shall consider the foregoing in light of the specific needs of the Board at that time and shall also consider advice and recommendations from the Compensation & Governance Committee and Facebook’s founder and controlling stockholder, Mark Zuckerberg. The Board shall periodically review its composition to ensure that it appropriately reflects the knowledge, experience, skills, diversity, and other characteristics required to fulfill its duties.”

Criticizing the slow progress of the FB diversity policy Glaser (2017) points out that “white men are most represented in the company’s executive leadership (72 % male, 3 % black, and 3 % Hispanic) and technical staff (81 % male, 1 % black, and 3 % Hispanic).”<sup>69</sup> Further, “Facebook has a lot of money, as do Google and Amazon and Apple and Microsoft. In fact, these are among the most valuable companies in the world. So it stands to reason that Silicon Valley could invest more, like a lot more, time and resources, into making their platforms more diverse centers of employment”, the author concludes (Glaser, 2017). The figures for 2019 and 2020 still show not adequate and balanced representation.

The facts cited raise again a broader concern about the proper practical implementation of the guidelines and the overall effectiveness of the company’s diversity policy.

Other aspects of the FB gender policy are also not indisputable. The organizational culture it inculcates, for instance. As such in 2017 the Guardian published an article about an internal conflict regarding the women engineers’ code. The reason behind the code was that Facebook had been under internal and external pressure to improve its gender and racial diversity for years. The lack of diversity is most acute in technical and engineering roles. According to its report for 2016, 17% of the technical

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<sup>68</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/01/30/facebook-has-a-diversity-problem.html>.

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[http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2017/08/facebook\\_s\\_employee\\_diversity\\_numbers\\_are\\_not\\_a\\_pipeline\\_problem.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2017/08/facebook_s_employee_diversity_numbers_are_not_a_pipeline_problem.html).



employees at Facebook are women, while just 3% are Hispanic and 1% is black. For the first time, FB announced hiring of LGBT. These matters are improving though very slowly. Discussions about gender in the tech industry often set on two questions: whether there are enough women in the engineering “pipeline” to jobs and whether women are actively or unconsciously discriminated against?

The bone of controversy within FB was that it had been found that a code written by women engineers was actually more likely to be approved by fellow coders than a code written by men – but only if the female coders hid their gender. Female coders with profiles that made their gender “identifiable” had their code rejected more often than male coders.<sup>70</sup>

Such instances serve as a proof that despite the existence of diversity strategy and recruitment approaches, oriented towards better balance of human resources, it is also necessary to improve the organizational culture within the company, considering a stronger gender perspective and the digital development tendencies for the successful implementation of the diversity policy.

Gassam (2019) stresses that “diversity and inclusion is not simply about the numbers”. What is necessary is an analysis of the diversity climate as well as both quantitative and qualitative feedback from employees and management.<sup>71</sup> We would add that the feedback should be regular and subject to public discussion. The same observations are valid about leadership and more precisely about the culture of diverse leadership. Embracing such culture relates to both staff and senior positions. The lack of diverse leadership from the top of the company may affect deleteriously all activities down to everyday work. Vice versa, if diverse leadership is in place it can provide plurality of viewpoints and ideas and serve best inclusion of talents from a variety of communities and backgrounds - inside the media and in its external performance.

Many complex efforts are needed to accomplish these goals – among them financial, organisational, managerial and educational. Glaser (2017) suggests that there’s even a better way that Facebook could put its money and improve the technical staff. Being a global giant and claiming to represent plurality of interests, the company can invest in more innovative tech education and in diversity of professions, gender and race - “The company - like others - goes to great efforts to stash billions offshore, thereby evading U.S. taxes that might be used to pay for better computer science education in public schools. Furthermore, smaller, far less wealthy tech companies are able to have more diverse representation among their employees. So it’s hard to applaud Facebook’s 1 or 2 percentage point year-over-year change in its diversity figures.”<sup>72</sup>

FB reports reveal that company’s pursuits for accomplishing workforce diversity are gradually expanding in different directions. However, the situation seems unpredictable due to the COVID 19 disease. For instance, a Glassdoor report that explores the job and hiring trends for 2020 expected that D&I (diversity and inclusion) would emerge as a top priority for companies that year. The publication underlines that “employers around the world are waking up to the need for robust diversity and inclusion efforts in today’s economy, and are investing in the top talent to deliver on these programs.”<sup>73</sup> According to the Glassdoor team that momentum will spill into 2020 and beyond. Now under the conditions of a wide-spread pandemic the end of which cannot be foreseen such tendency could be considered more at risk than ever.

### **Twitter**

If we turn to the diversity policies of Twitter, the picture can prove to be not that bright though the platform has embraced a diversity policy. Created in 2006, Twitter operates in 43 languages. Since

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/02/facebook-gender-bias-female-engineers-code>.

<sup>71</sup> Gassam, J (2019) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2019/07/11/facebooks-2019-diversity-report-reveals-theres-still-a-long-way-to-go/#402293133d1f>.

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[http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2017/08/facebook\\_s\\_employee\\_diversity\\_numbers\\_are\\_not\\_a\\_pipeline\\_problem.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2017/08/facebook_s_employee_diversity_numbers_are_not_a_pipeline_problem.html).

<sup>73</sup> [https://www.glassdoor.com/research/app/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/Job\\_Hiring\\_Trends\\_2020-FINAL-1-1.pdf](https://www.glassdoor.com/research/app/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/Job_Hiring_Trends_2020-FINAL-1-1.pdf).



then Twitter has turned into one of the most influential social media platforms with over 330 million monthly active users. It offers the opportunity to connect at an unprecedented speed to a variety of user groups - human rights' activists, marginalized communities and politicians. Women rely on social media platforms such as Twitter to gain visibility, communicate, access information, advocate and mobilize. People around the world come to Twitter to share ideas and have conversations. "Our company must reflect the people we serve – every community and all voices" reads the social network manifesto. The central organizing principle the company repeats in the 2020 Diversity and Inclusion report is: "purpose before profit," an acknowledgement that by focusing on our mission and our customers, we will unlock long-term durable impact and opportunity."<sup>74</sup>

According to the Twitter Inclusion and Diversity report since 2017 the media has pursued two year diversity targets, "prioritizing the populations that have historically been underrepresented in tech and at Twitter: Women (globally), Black and Latinx (US)".<sup>75</sup> The quarterly report highlights areas in which Twitter has made progress in "building a more diverse and inclusive Twitter, and where more focus is needed". In September 2019 the report states about progress in recruiting women, black and Latinx but in leadership representation the gap persists. The number of women working at Twitter has marked an increase from 38, 4% to 41, 3 % the target set at 43 % for 2019. Between 2017 and 2019 the number of women technical has risen from 17,3 % to 22, 2%. Women leadership representation in August 2019 reached 35,3 %. In the latest report from March 2020 reflecting on the staff diversity situation Twitter makes a pledge: "While women currently make up 42.5% of our workforce, we're committing that by 2025, at least half of our global workforce will be women. We want women to be represented across our global business, so we've also set targets for representation across technical roles (42%) and leadership (41%)."<sup>76</sup> In the process of reaching better diversity and inclusiveness Twitter wishes to engage everyone. The company promises to increase transparency, to double investments and launch an Inclusive Hiring Program to drive global progress in workforce representation.

Though these are good ideas, they are only promises and there is not much specific information about how diversity (and gender) policy pursued by Twitter is evaluated and how current figures have been accomplished. Initiatives for enhancing women's and underrepresented communities involvement are announced such as Diversifying Leadership - the program requires that at least one female (worldwide) and one black or Latinx (US) qualified candidate be considered by the interview panel and Recruiting Diverse Technical Talent which focuses on investing in next-generation technical leaders from nontraditional backgrounds and those underrepresented in tech (women, black, Latinx, Native American). Real outcomes in content are still not visible. In addition Twitter policy can prove controversial with respect to women.

A survey published by Amnesty International in 2018 calls Twitter "a toxic environment for women."<sup>77</sup> Offensive and abusive attacks have long been a problem on Twitter even compared with other social-media platforms. In particular, the report states that "despite all the possibilities and the positive ways in which the platform is used by women on a daily basis, Twitter remains fertile ground for reinforcing existing gender inequalities and discrimination against women online. Harmful and negative gender stereotypes of women offline, as well as widespread discrimination against women rooted in patriarchal structures, manifest as violent and abusive tweets against some women on Twitter."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2020/Inclusion-and-Diversity-Report-March-2020.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/Inclusion-and-Diversity-Report-March-2020.html).

<sup>75</sup> [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2019/ianddreport.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/ianddreport.html).

<sup>76</sup> [https://blog.twitter.com/en\\_us/topics/company/2020/Inclusion-and-Diversity-Report-March-2020.html](https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2020/Inclusion-and-Diversity-Report-March-2020.html).

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/>.

<sup>78</sup> Scottish Women's Rights Activist Talat Yaqoob explains how the sexist, racist and Islamophobic abuse she receives on Twitter is far worse than anything she has experienced offline. "I, 100%, don't experience the level of abuse offline that I do online. I experience it – but the frequency of it and the toxic nature of it is more online than what I experience in real life because people know they get away with it more. If people do it, it's behind an anonymous Twitter profile. Offline, you



Amnesty International conducted a qualitative and quantitative research about women's experiences on social media platforms, including the scale, nature and impact of violence and abuse directed towards women on Twitter, with a particular focus on the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) for 16 months. Abuses reported include direct or indirect threats of physical or sexual violence, discriminatory abuse targeting one or more aspects of a woman's identity, targeted harassment, and privacy violations such as doxing or sharing sexual or intimate images of a woman without her consent. Over the course of this research, Amnesty International interviewed 86 women both individually and in groups in the UK and USA and spoke to female politicians, journalists, activists, bloggers, writers, comedians, games developers as well as women who use the platform but do not have a large following. The research highlights, to expose the intersectional nature of abuse on the platform, the particular experiences of violence and abuse on Twitter against women of colour, women from ethnic or religious minorities, lesbian, bisexual or transgender women and women with disabilities. An alarming conclusion is that "violence and abuse against women on Twitter is not a new phenomenon, it is simply an extension of existing and systematic discrimination against women that has found its way into the digital sphere". This conclusion points not only to the lack of consistent diversity policy and internal organizational efforts in this direction but also to the failure of Twitter to be an instrument for the formation of a just and diverse public discussion. Another conclusion pertains to the obligations of the company to create an enabling environment where freedom of opinion and equality may flourish. Amnesty International stresses the fact that "as a company, Twitter is failing in its responsibility to respect women's rights online by inadequately investigating and responding to reports of violence and abuse in a transparent manner."

In 2019 former CEO Ev Williams, one of Twitter's founders, admitted the company would have prioritized removing abusive content earlier had the leadership team been more diverse.<sup>79</sup> Williams founded the company with three other white men, including current CEO Jack Dorsey. Dorsey also expressed his concerns by stating that his biggest worry was his ability to address the issue in "a systemic way". He recognized that Twitter has created a "pretty terrible situation" for women — and particularly women of color. His excuses were based on the fact that the company was relying more on machine learning to identify abusive tweets instead of tasking people to individually report them.<sup>80</sup>

Under the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights<sup>81</sup>, Twitter, as a company (and this is valid with respect to any business company – B.Z.), has a responsibility to respect all human rights – including the rights to non-discrimination and freedom of expression and opinion – and to take concrete steps to avoid causing or contributing to abuses of those rights. This includes taking action to identify, prevent, address and account for human rights abuses that are linked to its operations. More specifically, the platform has to provide for a mechanism for an effective remedy in case of abuse, and further to announce its policy and remedial measures widely in an open and transparent manner. As part of its human rights due diligence, Twitter should be assessing – on an ongoing and proactive basis – how its policies and practices impact on users' right to freedom of expression and opinion as well other rights, and take steps to mitigate or prevent any possible negative impacts.

The problem identified by Amnesty International was fixed through discussions, but the efficient settling of human rights, including gender, issues on social media remains. As a result of the critical comments and recommendations in a letter to Amnesty International dated 15 March 2018, Twitter reiterated that abuse and hateful conduct directed at women are prohibited on the platform, that the

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have to be physically in front of me. I don't think that people understand the consequences of what they say online."(Amnesty International Report)

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/twitter-co-founder-ev-williams-team-diversity-2019-5>.

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/jack-dorsey-twitter-abuse-ted-2019-4>.

<sup>81</sup> The Guiding Principles apply to all states and to all business enterprises, both transnational and others, regardless of their size, sector, location, ownership and structure-  
[https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf).



company had made changes to improve safety on the platform and had increased the number of actions taken against abusive accounts: “Abuse and hateful conduct directed at women, including direct threats of violence, and harassment, are prohibited on Twitter. We have made more than 30 individual changes to our product, policies and operations in the past 16 months, all with the goal of improving safety for everyone. We now take action on 10 times the number of abusive accounts as the same time last year.” These are only the first steps towards the creation of an open and participatory environment stimulating active debate and pluralism of views on this social network. However, according to Amnesty International the organization’s assessment and other measures “are not yet sufficient to adequately tackle the scale and nature of violence and abuse against women on Twitter”.

What Williams and Dorsey agree on (and this is our thesis as well – B.Z.) is that a diverse team is not only more productive but identifies issues more effectively. We could refer to a Harvard Business Review publication that deals with the topic of the benefits brought by diverse teams. The article uses data from various areas to prove that nonhomogenous teams are simply smarter. Working with people who are different from you may challenge your brain to overcome its stereotyped ways of thinking and sharpen its performance.<sup>82</sup> This is a relevant conclusion for any company and social platform.

With respect to Twitter one can get the impression that it has taken human rights’ abuses seriously and has started implementing a workable strategy supporting workforce diversity and wider women’s participation inside the social media. What is needed is a more consistent scheme of the implementation of such strategy and clear and regular information about how the improvement of internal gender policy impacts relationships with users. Getting back to the policies that guide the platform’s activities not only figures matter. There should be greater transparency about the real dynamics of the human force structure and decision-making processes.

### **Pinterest**

Pinterest is a social site for sharing photos like the Pinboard. The service allows users to share and manage thematic images. A spokesperson for Pinterest says the site has 100 million active monthly users, over half of whom now live outside the US and 4 million products are saved (or “pinned”) daily. The mission of the site is to connect all people around the world through interesting things. Through Pinterest, users can advertize and promote their business in an inventive way. The platform makes it possible to find people with similar interests and tastes by viewing the visually shared PINs. While the platform wasn’t set up having in mind women (its founders are all men), it quickly became apparent to those who used it that early community building was female-focused. The Pew Research Center’s last snapshot of social media use in 2015 showed a jump from 15 % of all adults online in the US using Pinterest in 2012, to 31 % by 2015.<sup>83</sup> The perception of it being largely used by women in America holds true, too: Pew breaks out Pinterest use as 44 % of American women online and just 16 percent % of American men. If we turn to the internal structure 40 % of the overall staff and 20 % of the technical staff are women.<sup>84</sup> However, female representation on the leadership of the company is not sufficient, and it is even not clear whether a structured gender policy is pursued. The company rather tried to find communities of interest, and reach a receptive audience in lifestyle bloggers, who started using Pinterest and spreading word among their soaring audiences. These bloggers and community members were mostly women. A paper by Amanda Friz and Robert Gehl in the July 2016 edition of the journal “Media, Culture & Society” examined Pinterest’s sign-up process (as of 2014) for signals that might encourage women and discourage men from joining. Authors noted: “Pinterest’s sign-up process displays a clear preference for users who curate over users who create.” That conclusion contrasts with

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<sup>82</sup> <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>.

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.theringer.com/2016/10/5/16045364/pinterest-doesnt-care-that-you-think-it-s-for-girls-1ed2fc03e220>.

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.recode.net/2015/5/27/11563054/pinterest-ceo-ben-silbermann-says-hes-focused-on-gender-diversity>. Pinterest CEO Ben Silbermann: “As we grow we want to make sure we’re looking wide and far for the best people from lots of different backgrounds.”



stereotypical notions of men as creators and “Pinterest thus privileges a ‘feminine’ performance among its users.”<sup>85</sup>

In 2012, the piece “Pinterest and feminism” analysed Pinterest’s success among women.<sup>86</sup> The author stressed that “while the female-centeredness of the site is sometimes overstated, it also should not be dismissed.” However, there is no one single feminist position on Pinterest or anything else. The popularity of Pinterest as a women’s bastion attracted the ridicule of the tech community, which is still a boys club, to write about how people, especially women, use Pinterest. The site has been used as an example to make fun of women, to stereotype women as shoppers (though the site as such does not offer purchases – B.Z.), to dismiss the site as overly gendered and to discard some of the feminist blogosphere. These are apparently covert attacks against women and their preferences on the web and thus “Pinterest” has become an object of hidden gender ridicule and hate. However, the overall tone of the quoted article is positive. The platform and its role are appraised objectively on the basis of its achievements and popularity. “The difference-feminist arguments ... had to remind the tech world that a site should not be dismissed because women are using it; rather, this is precisely what makes it important.” concludes the author.

In 2014 the company made some progress in diversifying the gender composition of its staff. Pinterest admitted then to become a global company it had to be a part of a ‘broader movement in the tech industry to make it a more diverse and inclusive place’. The ratio men - women within Pinterest was 60 % to 40% and in leadership 81% to 19 %. Data shows considerable imbalance in workforce and senior positions tipped towards male professionals and leaders. Based on the experience at Pinterest Morgan (2017) shares four key lessons about how to improve diversity from within a company: setting diversity goals isn’t enough, one needs to repeat explanations of why they matter, different groups have unique concerns that need to be addressed separately, diversity in recruiting actually makes the process more efficient and the path to diversity requires plenty of course correction.<sup>87</sup> Thus the article strives to persuade us that diversity of workforce is embraced as one of the main goals of the company. In 2019 a mission statement regarding diversity of employees was published such as “Building a more diverse Pinterest”.<sup>88</sup> The arguments supporting this decision are the following: “We want our employee base to understand and reflect the world we want to serve. We create better products whenever we bring together different talents and perspectives into a room.” However, such pronouncements sound very general and do not refer explicitly to gender equality within the company. The goal was to increase the hiring rates for full-time women engineers to 25%. The objective was reached without many details about approaches taken on board and the methodology of evaluation of staff membership. According to the diversity report 2019, representation of women increased in the company overall and in tech. Women now make up 47% of the company (up from 45% in 2018) and 30% of the people working in tech are women (up from 29% in 2018). In leadership the gender discrepancy remains featuring 72% male and 28% female.<sup>89</sup> These are statements only without clear backing and our conclusion can be that Pinterest diversity strategy is still at its initial phase and much more work for its development and transparency is needed.

### **LinkedIn**

Within the scope of our research, we also include LinkedIn as being a professional network expected to be neutral and to observe balance of participation of a variety of persons. Recent statistics provide information on the distribution of LinkedIn users worldwide (April 2019), sorted by gender. During the

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<sup>85</sup> Amanda Friz, and Robert Gehl (2016) Pinning the feminine user: gender scripts in Pinterest’s sign-up interface - <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0163443715620925>.

<sup>86</sup> <https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/author/nathanjurgenson>.

<sup>87</sup> <https://hbr.org/2017/07/what-we-learned-from-improving-diversity-rates-at-pinterest>.

<sup>88</sup> <https://newsroom.pinterest.com/en/post/building-a-more-diverse-pinterest>.

<sup>89</sup> <https://newsroom.pinterest.com/en/post/building-a-more-diverse-pinterest>.



survey period, 43 % of LinkedIn users were female and 57 % of users were male. Data may vary, but generally it shows a slight male domination of usage.

For the purpose of this study, we are going to discuss the network diversity policy and to compare it to other social networks' strategies. In its Gender Insights Report<sup>90</sup> LinkedIn emphasizes that it provides advice on gender inclusiveness “to shed light on how women and men engage with jobs differently on the LinkedIn platform” and “to help other companies to “create a more gender-balanced and inclusive talent pipeline”. It is worth considering more in depth the network’s approach to these issues and to look at the Workforce Diversity Report.<sup>91</sup> The report states “in 2018, we’ve focused on executing on a new strategy, which is anchored in a bold vision to create a thriving community of diverse professionals in tech. Our strategy is built on three core pillars that build upon our strengths and position us to turn challenges into opportunities: Hire & Grow, Invest and Culture”. LinkedIn puts a strong emphasis on retaining and growing people from all backgrounds with the company. It pursues this objective through professional development programs addressing the career paths of women globally and Black and Latino employees within the US. Three supporting initiatives operate within the company focusing on developing women leaders, achieving gender equality in technical roles at LinkedIn and inspiring other companies to do the same - attracting and engaging underrepresented ethnic groups internationally, i.e. managing the gender gaps inside. LinkedIn also supports eight Employee Resource Groups to bring the leadership and governance model of the company to a better level. All these efforts are quite inspiring, but results are not fully satisfactory, and accordingly, this is admitted by the representatives of the company as well.

The 2018 Workforce Report shows sustained progress, particularly in gender representation. Women now represent 39.1% of the company’s leadership, but male representation is much higher than this of 60.9 %. Gender diversity improves across technical roles globally; however, 78,2% male and 21,8% female is a sad ratio for the network.

“In other areas, including efforts to improve the representation of Black and Latino talent people in the US, we have not had the same kind of increases. The general inference is that while we’re seeing good strides there are leaps forward in certain areas, including early success from new hiring initiatives we’ve put in place, our representation numbers have increased only modestly” Workforce report states. Interesting facts and tips are published by LinkedIn in the Gender Insights Report about how men and women engage with searching of jobs and applying for positions. This helps users in their professional realization and other organizations in the best structuring of their recruitment policy. The report states: “For companies, understanding current gender-focused outreach methods LinkedIn can be a guiding factor to developing a data-driven sourcing strategy to increase the number of women in your pipeline. Whether that leads to strengthening your employer brand or changing the language in your job descriptions, we hope these insights lead to meaningful progress when it comes to gender balance in the workforce.”<sup>92</sup> The report shows that the network deals with gender issues comprehensively and on an expert level, not only with respect to the improvement of its governance policy but also to share best practices and experiences in this area with other interested companies.

Our conclusion is that social media differ in the diversity strategies and practices adopted. What merits a special focus is that all social media agree that in order for to be a global company diverse internal policies and an inclusive environment are needed. Some social media explicitly stress their diversity mission and diversity strategy (FB, LinkedIn), others, though declaring diversity to be a special goal, experience problems with the equal participation of men and women in governance, and gender discrepancies influence negatively content exchange practices (Twitter). Pinterest has evolved spontaneously through time as a ladies’ site, though it was founded by men. This proves that women and men can contribute equally according to their skills and talent in the convergent environment to

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<sup>90</sup> <https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/recruiting-tips/gender-balance-report#>.

<sup>91</sup> <https://careers.linkedin.com/diversity-and-inclusion/workforce-diversity-report#report>.

<sup>92</sup> <https://news.linkedin.com/2019/January/linkedin-releases-2019-gender-insights-report>.



produce popular products. The network has already started to develop its diversity policy demonstrating will for changes. There are steps forward for all social media in recent years and they have to continue at a higher speed in the dynamic environment we are immersed in. Against such encouraging background we could point out the fact that, even if a strategy aiming at developing staff diversity is in place, this does not necessarily presuppose the existence of a targeted gender policy. The methodology of collecting data and assessment remains obscure and can be an object of criticism. Without sufficient explanation reports sound declaratory and lack practical background. In addition there is no elucidation of how the implementation of diversity policies impact social media work (performance analysis). What also makes a strong impression is that deficits in men and women parity of representation on the governing bodies (leadership) persist. No data is available about gender participation in ownership and how jobs are distributed along gender lines. Attempts at accomplishing a better gender balance are obvious, but the process is slow and it cannot keep pace with the necessary changes that should be made with regard to the human capital in the convergent environment. The discrepancies in the gender representation to some extent reproduce the situation in the overall media sector.

What we consider to be a positive characteristic of social networks with respect to their governance is their agility, adaptability and dynamism that can be harnessed to mitigate gaps of any sort, including gender gaps, to achieve more just organization of human resources and managerial culture grounded on diversity. However, much more comparative research on social media gender strategies is needed globally, since the structure and role of social networks change in different periods and from society to society depending on technology, stage of development, culture and traditions. The scope of these media is also different: some are bigger and of global significance, they are more powerful and can afford pursuing structured diversity and gender policies; others are small and cannot put adequate efforts and means in such policies. However, gender equality requirements being part and parcel of human rights requirements in the digital age are of universal importance. Such research should also encompass the regular assessment of the situation within social media by using relevant indicators.

Transparency and openness of networks merits particular focus. Consistent implementation of these principles will strengthen the relationships of trust between social media and their users because such relationships are essential for the success of club like structures. Publication of reports on the progress of diversity of staff and gender balance should be on a regular basis. Networks should also announce their internal codes of conduct and methods for assessment of their policies. Diversity and gender balance strategies should be ensured by internal mechanisms, the decisions of which should also be regularly publicized. Through the coherent application of these measures which also illustrate the efficiency of self-regulation of social media, a human rights enabling environment can be created to bear socially relevant results. Another point we can put forward is that to the extent to which platforms and services are media (see already cited Council of Europe Recommendation on a new notion of media) they also perform a public function as any media subject and this function should be open and transparent.

The question we wish to tackle next concerns the indicators that are available and could be embraced by social media to assess and improve their gender policies. There is no conclusive evidence how effective these indicators are and how they relate to each other. Most of the indicators pertain to measuring gender equality and not specifically gender imbalances. The crucial question is which of them can be applicable to social media. In the next section, firstly we shall make a brief overview of the gender and media indicators that are established by international organizations and then we shall discuss to what extent these can be used by social media.

#### **6. Measuring gender balance: gender indicators as tools for future action**

The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) claims that “gender indicators have the function of pointing out gender-related changes in society over time, and therefore to measure whether or to what extent gender equality is being achieved. The compilation of gender equality indicators relies on international monitoring initiatives and takes into account the existing demand for statistical



information in this field at national and international levels.”<sup>93</sup> Not only coherent indicators should be devised but also standards of various activities should be amended applying a mainstreaming approach. All these efforts should create a solid ground for efficient diversity policies. In May 2019 UNECE and over 50 standardization bodies signed Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards. The objective is “to support more gender-balanced and inclusive standards development processes, and to strengthen the gender-responsiveness of standards themselves, including by conducting gender-based analysis for the development or revision of all standards.”

In the article “International Gender Differences and Gaps in Online Social Networks,” Magno and Weber (2014) claim that “as more and more economic activity, education, and political engagement happens online we are convinced that, ultimately, quantifying gender inequality has to crucially take into account online activity.” The main emphasis is on studying correlations between online indicators of discrepancies or inequality and existing offline indicators. The authors do this both for the purpose of validation, to be sure of what they measure is linked to phenomena in “the real world”, and for the purpose of devising new indicators.<sup>94</sup> Such conclusions are even more relevant in the COVID 19 pandemic and the new hybrid conditions for work that are established worldwide.

Social platforms’ specific functional characteristics can help us modify the existing indicators for gender equality in the media with the aim of measuring better the human capital balance they count on in the convergent environment. We could pinpoint some important global initiatives in this respect that can provoke further consideration and debate. Social media operate as private companies and it is up to them to introduce possible improvements in their diversity strategies.

#### UNESCO

UNESCO was the first organization to turn to the formulation of gender sensitive indicators with respect to the media (GSIM).<sup>95</sup> It comprises a complex set of criteria for the evaluation of the activities of various entities, including companies for providing equal opportunities to different groups of people, especially men and women.

The GSIM comprises a non-prescriptive set of indicators created for media in general and without any reference to specific media organizational forms. These indicators bear much relevance to a diversity of subjects, including main stakeholders and they aim at the accomplishment of the following goals:

- to encourage media organizations **of any type** to embrace gender equality issues;
- to make gender equality issues **transparent and comprehensible** to the public;
- to make media organizations **analyze regularly** their own internal policies and practices with a view to take necessary actions for change.

Indicators are divided into two interrelated categories, each addressing the two main pillars of gender and media: Category A – actions to settle problems and foster gender equality within media organizations and Category B – gender portrayal in media content.

From an implementation perspective indicators are formulated in such a manner as to help media organizations through their own internal and external mechanisms self-regulate, adapt and apply these indicators to enhance gender balanced media performance and quality journalism.

In 2019 the UNESCO Internet Universality ROAM-X Indicators were published. Over three years, UNESCO has developed this ambitious framework, using a global, open, inclusive and multistakeholder process. The result is a research instrument which contains 303 indicators (109 identified as core ones). The indicators cover the categories of R.O.A.M (Rights, Openness, Accessibility, Multi-stakeholder) as well as contextual and cross-cutting indicators to address gender equality and other needs - of children and young people, economic, trust and security, as well as legal

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<sup>93</sup> [https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2015/ECE\\_CES\\_37\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2015/ECE_CES_37_WEB.pdf).

<sup>94</sup> <https://ingmarweber.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/OnlineGenderGaps.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/gender-sensitive-indicators-for-media-framework-of-indicators-to-gauge-gender-sensitivity-in-media-operations-and-content/>.



and ethical aspects of the Internet. “The Internet is much more than digital technology; it is also a network of economic and social interactions and relationships”, UNESCO emphasizes.<sup>96</sup> Therefore Internet has to be understood and studied in a holistic manner.

Through the ROAM-X indicators UNESCO is predominantly addressing member-states providing a framework for the evaluation of their public policies, however, to the extent these indicators serve equality, diversity and pluralism in the convergent environment and adapted properly to the needs of other subjects they can also be used by them to assess their diversity and gender policies.

### **GAMAG**

The GAMAG project is connected to UNESCO’s gender activities. Its objectives are to pursue gender equality in media systems, structures and content by strengthening international, regional and national cooperation in which all stakeholders work together to drive change globally.<sup>97</sup> The GAMAG defines media as including all forms of digital and non-digital communication and platforms.

It acts more through special institutionalized tools and strives to create regional observatories to gather qualitative and quantitative information on how traditional and digital media are affecting women, and publish regular reports to inform decision-makers in the field of communication.

### **The Council of Europe**

The aforementioned Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on gender equality and media<sup>98</sup> follows a human rights based approach to tackle gender problems in traditional and new media. The recommendation draws attention to both organizational structure and decision-making of media organizations, as well as content disseminated and recommends the adoption and implementation of national indicators for gender equality in the media through a multistakeholders’ procedure. Gender equality indicators should be regularly up-dated.

The instrument, though soft and non-legally binding for the European states, requires all addressees (NGOs, media institutions and member states, in particular) to promote active research related to: “media access, representation, participation (quantitative and qualitative profile) and working conditions in the media and the relationship between genders.” This act was followed by the elaboration of a handbook on the implementation of the recommendation on gender equality and media providing guidance to the addressees and good national practices.

### **The European Union**

Gender equality in the EU and in member states is measured through the Gender Equality Index elaborated by EIGE. This is a composite indicator that measures the complex concept of gender equality in all social spheres and, based on the EU policy framework, assists in monitoring progress of gender equality across the EU over time. The Gender Equality Index consists of eight domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health represent six domains which are combined into a core Index that is complemented by two additional, equally important, domains of - violence and intersecting inequalities. They belong to the framework of the Gender Equality Index in all aspects, but do not impact the overall score. Each domain is further divided into sub-domains which cover the key issues within the respective thematic areas.

This system relates to the overall social life and does not explore gender balance within and through the media, in particular. However, as for 2017, it is explicitly mentioned that in the domain of power decision-making imbalances continue to be a problem in the areas of research, media and sports.<sup>99</sup> They demand more visibility and action, the report concludes. These issues also call for a more detailed examination of the prerequisites for such phenomena and a wider public debate. Media and

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<sup>96</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000367617>.

<sup>97</sup> [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/gamag\\_framework\\_and\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/gamag_framework_and_action_plan.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805c7c7e).

<sup>99</sup> <http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-equality-index-2017-measuring-gender-equality-european-union-2005-2015-report>.



especially social media can drive such discussion and publicize good practices. They could also benefit from such practices.

### **EIGE**

Together with its input to the elaboration and application of the Gender Equality Index across Europe, the EIGE conducts its own studies on gender issues resulting in a set of criteria and recommendations. In 2013, the EIGE carried out a seminal survey dedicated to the advancing of gender equality in decision-making in media organizations. It is the first publication to deliver quantitative and comparable data on the number of women in decision-making positions through major media organizations in the 27 EU Member States and Croatia (applying country at that time). A basic conclusion of the study is that, though a number of policies and actions have been developed on a European scale, the gender-mainstreaming approach is still not applied to a degree to ensure “a critical mass of women in decision-making in any sector on an EU-wide basis.”

The conclusions reached by the survey do not address legacy media only but media in general and they could be used for more thorough exploration of the gender policies social media pursue. Moreover, the survey itself determines online and digital media to be an area of future expanding research because “the ways in which new media, and digital technologies more generally, are structured, make them attractive to women as both consumers and producers of content”. In this pronouncement, however, future research is targeting content only. Internal strategies can be explored indirectly to the extent they impact content. The problem here is that Facebook and other social networks are transborder private companies and direct changes in their policies can be achieved from within. Mutual agreements as in the sphere of illegal content and fake news can be negotiated as a horizontal regulatory option.

On the other hand, the EIGE report formulates important recommendations that may serve as guidelines to all kinds of media for their gender policies. In addition, they espouse ideas about how gender balance at an organizational and functional level can be monitored (referring to UNESCO and Council of Europe instruments).

We have already presented arguments in our report that efforts directed at increasing the representation of women in decision-making positions in media organizations should be on-going. Research by the non-profit organization “Catalyst” found companies that reported the highest number of women in senior leadership roles financially outperformed those with lower rates of women, with a 35% higher return on equity. Similar data from McKinsey & Company showed that the 89 companies in Europe with the largest representation of women in senior roles came out with 10% higher return on equity and 48% higher earnings before interest and tax.<sup>100</sup>

## **7. Discussion and conclusions**

In the concluding section first we shall sum up the principles that could underpin gender policy in the convergent environment.

### **Cooperation and dialogue**

Policies aiming at avoiding gender disparities should strengthen focus on women’s senior and leadership roles within social media to complement initiatives supporting women in decision-making roles, while at the same time respecting the autonomy and the principle of freedom of speech of the media. At present, the proposed EU and national initiatives to improve the gender balance on corporate boards do not particularly target the media sector including social media the biggest ones being transborder corporations. However as already mentioned, these companies are not and should not stay isolated from the international system to entrench recognized norms and values reflected in the UN Guiding principles on business and human rights (2011).

Media professional organizations can be important actors in the promotion of the principle of gender equality in all types of media organizations and platforms. The process starts from the internal structures of these associations. They are expected to cooperate among themselves and with social media platforms as well. Social media platforms can adopt and promote these positive experiences. For

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<sup>100</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2016/jul/20/five-strategies-creating-gender-equality-media>.

this purpose, dialogue on the topic of gender representation and equality between social media and other stakeholders from the media sector and outside should be enhanced.

In addition, “The Guardian” proposes a journalistic perspective that can enrich the organizational approach to gender balance assessment.<sup>101</sup> Creating gender equality is more than fulfilling a quota or being politically correct – it’s actually good business, journalists say. It can bring not only financial benefits but make newsrooms more innovative and efficient and can contribute to social stability in surrounding communities. Five rules are formulated to help media organization improve their gender policies - they include news about and for women, a strong commitment from management to ensure physical balance in the newsroom by making sure women occupy all roles in the newsroom, including senior positions, to guarantee pay equality and to increase skills and leadership abilities through mentoring and development programmes. These guidelines can be of benefit to evolving social media gender practices, too.

#### **Unification of standards based on human rights**

At this stage each social media platform strives to follow its own diversity policy based on certain principles. These principles are not announced or explicitly pointed out. In some cases policies yield positive results, but the picture is fragmented and uneven and requires much more efforts to establish good and consistent models. What remains unclear is the connection between diversity policies and international principles because social media do not operate in a vacuum. Human rights can create the common basis to set up strategies based on shared values that nourish also freedom of speech. In addition human rights standards can help assess the efficiency of these policies. Though every year networks publish a diversity of workforce and related issues report, the methodology on the basis of which the evaluation has been done, remains dubious. It is also unclear whether and to what extent these internal policies impact content on social media, more precisely whether aggressive gender remarks and offending opinions persist despite them.

#### **Key indicators for assessing gender balance in social media**

Mechanisms for the regulation of gender issues should rely on the policy of mainstreaming. If we remember the OECD recommendations, such mechanism presupposes the adoption of gender balance frameworks, the provision of an appropriate institutional structure for implementation and the establishment of good practices. A gluing element is the system for evaluation that permeates the three building blocks of the mainstreaming mechanism (frameworks, structures and practices) since it adjusts and improves the process. Evaluation should be ongoing. The assessment done by deploying an array of indicators can be considered a part of self-regulation which is typical for the media sector and considered most effective for any media. Self-regulation strengthens media independence allowing the media to establish and comply with its own rules thus developing its own standards of behavior. The outcomes are definitely positive for the media - gaining higher reputation and trust among the public.

#### **Scheme of gender issues regulation**

##### **Frameworks – institutions – practices**

##### **Evaluation through indicators**

Within the assessment system we consider that it is fundamental to measure the involvement of men and women in ownership, governance and decision-making processes and to try to reach parity there. In this regard, the recommendations of UNESCO, Council of Europe and EIGE overlap and share a common position. Fostering the underrepresented sex participation in governance is a guarantee for effective operation on the basis of inclusiveness and diversity of input. Gender balance at a decision-making level is a particular area of concern in all social fields including media. It is a condition that is of paramount importance for structuring balanced relationships in governance and management to produce successful outcomes taking into account various perspectives. Not only this. Diaz-Garcia, Gonzales-Moreno and Saez-Martinez (2011) study the relationship between gender diversity and innovation of teams in Spain. Their findings support the assertion that gender diversity within R&D

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<sup>101</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2016/jul/20/five-strategies-creating-gender-equality-media>.

teams fosters novel solutions leading to radical innovation.<sup>102</sup> Nathan and Lee (2015) reach similar conclusions. They investigated about 7,600 firms to explore the links among cultural diversity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and sales strategies in London businesses between 2005 and 2007. The results prove that to some extent “diversity is an economic asset, as well as a social benefit.”<sup>103</sup> This research mandates companies to introduce viable gender strategies and to apply evaluation on a regular basis.

In our opinion, UNESCO gender sensitive indicators in the media are the most advanced and can be used by both legacy media and media platforms. They can be complemented with the Internet universality indicators, the so called ROAMX indicators. Indicators represent an array of criteria such as: proportion of women in ownership, business management and board positions and proportion of women holding leadership positions within media (editors-in-chief, editors, heads of department, heads of desks). Guarantees that assure the criteria comprise a complex of measures that combine policy making with institutional arrangements (“effective equal opportunity policies with comprehensive implementing measures”). The list provides diverse forms of measures, among which the company can choose the most suitable option: a cyclical review and reporting on actions to ensure gender balance at decision-making levels; establishing targets, timeline and monitoring mechanisms; measures/policies adopted for the removal of all obstacles to equal opportunities and for the enhancement of women’s work; existence of specific quota system for representation of women in decision-making; affirmative actions and affirmative action committees to increase female presence in media at all levels of the organizational structure (it is necessary the last two measures to be carefully considered in order to remove possibilities of producing counter results, see p.43 ). The basic question to which the indicators should respond should be: are the interests and needs of women and girls explicitly included in strategies and policies for Internet and media company development, and effectively monitored?

The newly adopted UNESCO ROAMX indicators for measuring Internet universality<sup>104</sup> can add a special Internet dimension to the gender sensitive media indicators such as proportion of women in STEM employment, by level of skill and proportion of women in senior management positions in Internet/communications businesses. Having in mind these requirements social media reports could become more detailed and elaborate to reflect the peculiarities of the digital society. More diversified data of female professional involvement is necessary to illustrate how digital development impacts gender balance in social activities and in social media especially. At present the general picture of male and female employees at social media is available without specific reference to Internet related jobs. As already stated some researchers point to the existing situation within social media under which women occupy routine jobs while future oriented creative jobs comprise a male priority. The general conclusion is that social media diversity reports should be more precise and respond adequately to the panoply of gender issues in the convergent environment. Now they look like press releases but not like in depth analytical pieces.

An essential condition in order for these reports to be seriously taken by the public and have real impact is the practical application of the principle of openness and transparency - within the media in the relationships with the staff and outside with the users: equal opportunity policies should be developed within media houses in a cooperative manner and with endorsement of staff; proportion of job announcements made in a transparent method, accessible to everyone in the workplace; publicity of policies on gender balance in decision-making (publishing and promotion); efforts to assess awareness of equal opportunities policies (inquiries); reporting of performance results in relation to implementation of equal opportunities policies. For carrying out such procedures there should be sufficient proof. For the implementation of the indicators a special budget should be allocated to support drafting, institutional arrangements, evaluation and awareness-raising of equal opportunity

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<sup>102</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.5172/impp.2013.15.2.149?needAccess=true>.

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ecge.12016>.

<sup>104</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-publishes-internet-universality-roam-x-indicators-framework-assessing-internet>.



policies. In our opinion, such budget should not be a problem for big social media companies if they fully embrace the gender equality cause. It should be repeated that social media gender reports should deal particularly with gender balance in decision-making and with the progress made there. Currently reports mention generally men and women's involvement in leadership without much precision about their particular involvement in ownership, in high management and in decision making which blurs the picture.

Another indicator, suggested by UNESCO, is gender equality in work and working conditions to evaluate the equal treatment and recognition of capacities for women and men in the work place. These conditions require organizational efforts at work place and for work force along the lines of gender balance principles. Specific criteria are the existence of gender desk or gender mainstreaming officer(s) for monitoring and evaluation of gender equality in the workplace, awareness among staff members that the gender desk or gender mainstreaming officer(s) exists to address concerns of both women and men, existence of systems for monitoring and evaluation of gender equality in the workplace, existence of media policies securing equal treatment with respect to general working conditions/environment and rights including wages and promotion opportunities, assured by cyclical reviews and reporting on equal wages and promotion rates of women and men, proportions of women and men promoted annually and offered wage increases as per established policies, equal conditions of employment and benefits, including pension schemes, etc. We do not have access to such data which can be collected on the basis of existing internal mechanisms for the evaluation of the general working conditions within social media. Therefore the whole system for establishing gender balance should become more elaborate in order to respond to the needs of an effective mainstreaming system.

A key indicator is also equal pay and it relies on the comparative wages of women and men media professionals for work of equal value. Guarantees are secured through evaluation and transparency - transparent pay scale within the media company, using the same criteria to determine pay structure for men and women, transparent pay audits on yearly basis, cyclical internal evaluation of wages and cyclical external evaluation of wages. Obviously these details of companies' internal organization of payment cannot be made public but at least public should know that such or a similar system that guarantees that equal salaries are in place.

Safe working environment for women and men means the existence and implementation of comprehensive prevention, complaints, support and redress system with regards to sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace. This indicator is more of legal complexion and gives liberty to media organizations to consider a variety of options what kind of correction mechanisms should be in place. Obviously, internal rectifying mechanisms were not adequate at some social media as these platforms were forced to change them. In 2018, after pressure from employees Google and FB put an end to mandatory internal arbitration for sexual harassment at workplace. Until then arbitration agreements limited employees' legal rights when they were the subject of workplace discrimination. After New York Times investigation of the company's lenient treatment of sexual harassers, Google sent a memo to employees saying arbitration would now be "optional" for individual claims of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Facebook announced a similar policy the next day.<sup>105</sup> This instance does not mean that arbitration should be totally excluded as an instrument for solving sexual harassment cases, having in mind its speediness, flexibility and lack of high costs. However, it has to be applied in an impartial manner and providing safeguards for the affected employees who are in a subordinate and weaker position than employers. Arbiters have to be renowned personalities with high reputation, the list of arbiters has to be publicly announced and the parties have to agree on the arbiter in advance. The annual statistics of sexual harassment cases should be publicized to become a part of the gender balance improvement efforts of the companies. In this respect what can be recommended is greater publicness and transparency of the whole internal safe working environment system which means publishing of both structural and functional information about rectifying mechanisms.

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<sup>105</sup> <https://theintercept.com/2018/11/21/google-sexual-harassment-arbitration/>.



With respect to the specific life styles of men and women work-life balance indicators should be included aiming at assessing the existence and implementation of flexible working arrangements for women and men, as well as specific policies on flexible working arrangements, HR records on uptake rates of flexible working arrangements, access to paid maternity and paternity leave for all media professionals for an adequate duration, etc.

UNESCO also proposes diverse means for verification of measures such as mapping of workplaces, highlighting women holding decision-making positions, either internally (including with unions) or by an external audit, internal policies, staff interviews, financial records, relevant HR records, external policies such as Employment Equity Act and affirmative action report.

In our view, in the digital age a special focus should be placed on two other indicators – promoting technical professions among women and encouraging women entrepreneurship and innovation. There are indications that looking at the future social media giants would invest in boosting computer education in USA preparing the ground for a new technically enlightened generation.<sup>106</sup> We have already presented figures proving that the number of women engineers at some social networks has also soared. At the same time, according to a study, published by Duffy and Schwartz who studied 150 job postings to determine how businesses recruit social media specialists, a job of social media manager is often overlooked and poorly paid but it falls predominantly to women. By contrast, the work of coding and building the networks relies on a set of specialized skills and is done by professionals, who are overwhelmingly white and male.<sup>107</sup> Such hidden discriminatory practices or approaches that might result in gender discrepancies should also be taken into account when assessing social media gender policies.

We would draw attention to two more comments within this context. Social networks, especially Facebook, are considered a useful tool for women entrepreneurs. “In terms of objectives, when using Facebook, they consider it important to share advice and experiences with other self-employed women, to make women’s entrepreneurship known and to meet other women entrepreneurs”, Constantinidis argues.<sup>108</sup> It is pertinent to know how networks encourage entrepreneurship of their staff and outside network and data in this regard is really needed. We know that Facebook is one of the most innovative companies for 2017 due to a lady - COO Sheryl Sandberg who has turned “Facebook into an advertising juggernaut by prioritizing creativity and real-world commerce”.<sup>109</sup> The question is whether boosting innovation activities among women is an entrenched goal for the social media companies and whether ambitions to achieving this goal of women working at the social media companies are supported by the companies’ policies. Otherwise it will look like an element of temporary advertising campaign.

Another point we wish to raise is about the establishment and promotion of good practices as a result of gender policies’ implementation - the LinkedIn experience of producing guidelines for equal gender representation in companies can be instructive in this respect (see p.28). The good practices should be regularly published and promoted by the social media platforms themselves. This can be done in cooperation with other media organizations and associations as well.

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<sup>106</sup> Amazon, Facebook and others in tech will commit \$300 million to the White House’s new computer science push <https://www.vox.com/2017/9/26/16364662/amazon-facebook-google-tech-300-million-donald-trump-ivanka-computer-science>

Amazon, Facebook, Microsoft, Salesforce and other top technology companies plan to commit a total of about \$300 million toward boosting computer-science education in the United States, as the White House seeks to prepare more students and workers for jobs of the future.

<sup>107</sup> How Social Media Became a Pink-Collar Job - <https://www.wired.com/story/how-social-media-became-a-pink-collar-job/>.

<sup>108</sup> Christina Constantinidis How do women entrepreneurs use the virtual network Facebook? - <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ceb0/4ce3ae79ff2d079cb4372dd41ace38f99a58.pdf>.

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.fastcompany.com/3067461/why-facebook-is-one-of-the-most-innovative-companies-of-2017>.



## 8. Summary of conclusions: Food for thought

Difficulties in gender inclusion in the digital age and cases of discrepancies in that process are not sufficient to justify a conclusion about strong persisting discrimination against women in the age of convergence. Discrepancies and divisions can lead to discrimination in the most serious cases. By and large gender issues should be properly resolved on the basis of democratic principles and values and publicized regularly to draw larger public and experts' attention. Human rights frameworks can underpin such decisions that pave the way to a more balanced and diverse converged society. Such issues should not be considered of no importance whatsoever.

More research is needed to evidence when and to what extent gaps and divides reach the level of dangerousness to become discriminatory abuses in the contemporary environment. Alongside a comparative research of social media gender policies, paying particular attention to prevention and protection of gender biases and deviations in social media governance should be a constant focus. Within this context it is worth discussing more profoundly the pros and cons of affirmative action as a possible approach for alleviating gender discrepancies. The EU policy recognizes "the possibility of affirmative action for the underrepresented sex" and this means to apply positive measures in support of the underrepresented sex. In the private sector it would be hard to implement both affirmative action and allow free initiative and competition to flourish. Preferential policies can be temporary tools for striking the appropriate balance between men and women involvement in different social areas. A point can be raised that the results of these policies should on their own merit be subject to assessment. It is neither always the case that affirmative action can be judged by the actually yielded outcomes, nor by the ideal causes behind them. The difficulties stem from the complexity of the environment in which affirmative action is applied and that this environment changes through time. "Any assessment of preferential policies must take account of pre-existing trends, rather than assume a static world to which change was added" is Prof. Sowell's advice. He has followed affirmative action in five countries for 30 years and then compared these practices with the US experience.<sup>110</sup> Though related to multiethnic groups some of Prof. Sowell's observations and conclusions are of general relevance. Gender affirmative action can be an object of independent comparative research to reveal how it works within the systems of different countries and to what degree it can be an effective tool for the reduction of gender discrepancies. In this regard specialists need empirical data with which to test policies about their consequences. In our view affirmative action is a provisional measure and sometimes it could bring more harm than good requiring preferential treatment of a whole social group. This cannot be a tool for encouraging the best and the brightest since it puts emphasis on the collective and not on the individual. In gender relationships in a converged environment in which evidence proves women possess less technical skills and lag behind in technical professions compared to men policies should pursue removal of these particular shortcomings through technical education and digital literacy before resorting on affirmative initiatives. However, in the already described policy of Twitter some elements of affirmative action can be discerned but the results of these efforts and their impact according to the 2020 Twitter diversity report set the horizon in 2025.

Social media could adopt a set of indicators rooted in human rights to evaluate regularly their diversity policies taking into account the general gender peculiarities of the convergent age and the specific features of the media. Results should be publicly available for comparison. We can confess that now such results are haphazard and without much explanation. If ratios of women's and men's involvement in the companies' activities are only announced and no reference to the method for getting the data is made, these policies remain declaratory and without much practical value.

If we accept that gender equality is fundamental in the digital environment and just and prosperous digital society can be built with the efforts of all groups and communities, we should demand greater openness and transparency of social media about the gender policies applied and their regular assessment. We repeat once again that diverse teams are more successful and if operating in the media

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<sup>110</sup> Sowell, T. (2004). *Affirmative action around the world*, Kindle edition. 242 – 245.



and social media they can influence positively the work of the media and platforms, the content disseminated as well as the whole communication and governance. The consistent implementation of policies and procedures can be monitored by an independent board the inferences of which should be made public (the introduction of a new oversight structure within FB can be an occasion for thinking about setting up such board as well). If good practices of social media gender policies are available that could well signify the genuine accomplishments of these policies.

### Useful information

1. ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY  
[https://www.bloomberg.com/women?gclid=CjwKCAjw0vTtBRBREiwA3URt7hLza0I6AzrezTtUDotLg0SUwj3F-rp7J3Jy6EZnM3413MPsXTcsMRoC2f8QAvD\\_BwE1](https://www.bloomberg.com/women?gclid=CjwKCAjw0vTtBRBREiwA3URt7hLza0I6AzrezTtUDotLg0SUwj3F-rp7J3Jy6EZnM3413MPsXTcsMRoC2f8QAvD_BwE1).
2. BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GENDER DIVIDE  
<http://www.oecd.org/internet/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf>
3. COUNCIL OF EUROPE WHAT IS GENDER MAINSTREAMING DIGITAL MEDIA INEQUALITIES  
  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>
4. DIGITAL MEDIA INEQUALITIES  
  
[https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sv/system/tdf/publikationer-hela-pdf/digital\\_media\\_inequalities\\_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=40258&force=0](https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sv/system/tdf/publikationer-hela-pdf/digital_media_inequalities_0.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=40258&force=0)
5. EC WOMEN IN DIGITAL AGE  
<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/women-ict>
6. EIGE GENDER EQUALITY INDEX  
<https://eige.europa.eu/news/gender-equality-index-2020-work-digital-world>  
<http://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index>
7. FEMFACTS  
<https://www.euromedwomen.foundation/pg/en/documents/all>
8. GENDER CHAMPION  
<https://genderchampions.com/>
9. GLOBAL GENDER GAP REPORT 2020  
<https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>
10. G20 OSAKA LEADERS' DECLARATION (Women's Empowerment)  
  
[https://www.g20.org/pdf/documents/FINAL\\_G20\\_Osaka\\_Leaders\\_Declaration.pdf](https://www.g20.org/pdf/documents/FINAL_G20_Osaka_Leaders_Declaration.pdf)
11. HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW (2016)  
<https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>
12. ITU.DIGITAL SKILLS INSIGHTS (2019)  
<https://academy.itu.int/sites/default/files/media2/file/Digital%20Skills%20Insights%202019%20ITU%20Academy.pdf8>.
13. MEASURING GENDER EQUALITY  
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>  
<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/255761492687073170/>
14. UNECE  
<http://www.unece.org/info/media/presscurrent-press-h/trade/2019/unece-and-over-50-standards-bodies-sign-declaration-on-gender-responsive-standards/doc.html>  
[https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2015/ECE\\_CES\\_37\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2015/ECE_CES_37_WEB.pdf)
15. UNESCO Internet Universality Indicators - Cross-Cutting Indicator: gender equality



<https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-publishes-internet-universality-roam-x-indicators-framework-assessing-internet>

