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WOMEN IN MEDIA

THE UNHEARD HALF

Written by Margaret Ferns

The lack of female representation in Luxembourg media is "horrifying," says CNFL executive Anik Raskin. Gender stereotypes are being "reinforced," says the Minister for Equality between Men and Women. Nothing concrete is being done, say female journalists and media professionals.

Women and men are not equally represented in Luxembourg media, according to a recent media monitoring report. Considering that a vast majority of people receive their information and form opinions on (almost) everything based on what they see, read and hear in the media, this situation is unacceptable, even dangerous as will be explained more fully. How can anyone, even women themselves, fully comprehend the world and life as women experience it, if there are too few females reporting the news and telling their stories?

This edition of LUX WMN's cover story is dedicated to the women in Luxembourg media, to explaining why so few exist and to relating some of their experiences. It seeks to demonstrate why it is vital that women have greater representation across all forms of media. It does not seek to unfairly criticize the men working in Luxembourg media, but to present the facts as women have experienced them, as well as to ask one or two challenging questions.

The vital statistics

Launched in 1995, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) is the world's longest running and most in-depth research project into gender representation in the news media. It was designed to capture a 'snapshot' of an ordinary day's news in the world's media. The GMMP defines a day of ordinary news as one "... in which the agenda contains a mix of news reports, everyday articles on politics, economics, social issues, crime, and other issues."

To stress the importance of the GMMP to society, former United Nations official and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, has said, "The way women are portrayed in media has a profound effect on societal attitudes and reinforces traditional gender roles. Women and girls are half of humanity. Giving as much time and weight to their stories, presenting them as positive role models and not as victims, plays an underestimated role in creating a better and freer world for all of us." Who better to portray women in media than women themselves – so what is the state of play in Luxembourg?

Luxembourg first participated in the GMMP in 2010 on the initiative of CID|Fraen an Gender (the Luxembourg women's centre for information and documentation), which at that time chaired the CNFL (the National Council for Women of Luxembourg). Since then, these associations have been responsible for collecting the information necessary to produce this "snapshot" of an ordinary news day in Luxembourg.

A day in the life of Luxembourg media

The results of the GMMP 2020 edition were presented to the public in October 2021 by Taina Bofferding, Minister for Equality between Men and Women. They revealed that, in Luxembourg, "...women represented only a quarter of the people present in the survey's selected articles," and that, "...female representation has hardly advanced at all compared to previous editions."

The better participation rate of women in digital media is largely due to the internet
- 31% for internet,
26% for Twitter,
23% for television,
21% for radio,
and 20% for the traditional press.

Female representation across all Luxembourg media combined was 19.59% in 2010, 23.9% in 2015 and in 24.9% in 2020.

In a more recent exchange with LUX WMN about the report, Bofferding added, "The GMMP highlights, not only that women are largely under-represented in the Luxembourg written and audio-visual press as well as social media, but also that the roles attributed to men and women confirm gender stereotypes rather than deconstruct them."

Anik Raskin is Executive Officer of the CNFL, the non-partisan association of the Luxembourg groups that have been fighting for women's rights and gender equality for almost 50 years. In a recent interview with LUX WMN, she described the results as, "Horrorifying. The GMMP is designed to give us a view of 'a day in the life of Luxembourg media,' and to have only a quarter of the selected articles/posts written by women shows how little progress has been made since we joined the monitoring survey."

She reinforced the comments made by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka by adding, "The media have such an influential role in the creation and reinforcement of gender stereotypes. These stereotypes can guide private decision-making and actions, even inciting hatred and violence against girls and women."

This brings recent events in the US to mind. The overturning of Roe versus Wade by the United States senate was clearly as a result political machinations. However, would this decision to deprive women of their



Anik Raskin
CNFL



Melody Hanson
Editor-in-Chief,
Lëtzebuerg Journal

LGBTQ+ issues. Also, it can be hard to make your mark as a young woman in a male-dominated industry."

right to choose in many US states have turned out differently if the female gender had been truly and proportionately represented in the media? The answer to this question is beyond the scope of this article, but it is something to consider.

Luxembourg media experienced by female professionals

In an attempt to understand the challenges faced by women in Luxembourg media, LUX WMN invited some established female journalists



Jessica Baldry
Journalist

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and other media professionals to share their personal views and experiences. Journalist Jessica Baldry reported, "What I found most challenging is that multilingual newsrooms functioned largely with unappreciated, overworked female staff, while management and gatekeeper roles were occupied by men." Another major issue for Baldry is the exploitative culture of these newsrooms versus the expectations of journalists. She explained, "As an ambitious woman this was extremely frustrating because there was a disconnect between what I wanted to achieve and what I was able to achieve given the time and resource constraints."

Melody Hansen, Editor-in-Chief of Lëtzebuerg Journal (one of the youngest people to ever hold this position in Luxembourg media), was clear in her response to the question, "Have you ever experienced any particular challenges as a woman in Luxembourg media?"

"I did indeed. Before becoming Editor-in-Chief at Lëtzebuerg Journal I sometimes felt ridiculed at my former employer when I suggested topics that are perceived as women's issues or



Natalie Gerhardstein
Editor-in-Chief of Delano magazine

Natalie Gerhardstein, Editor-in-Chief of Delano magazine had a similar response to the question. "Not in my current role, but in former roles, yes, I felt like my gender was an issue. I've experienced casual sexism or challenges just to get a seat at the table and to be respected, as a woman but also later as a mother."

In contrast, Lisa MacLean, Managing Director of ARA City Radio has never found her gender to be an issue, "The challenges for me have never felt as if they are related to me being a woman, more that what we do as a community radio station is not recognised as valuable. In terms of being female, at ARA we are by far in the majority."



Lisa MacLean
Managing Director
of ARA City Radio

Mary Carey, Senior Manager Media Relations & Editorial, PwC Luxembourg and published author said, "I cannot really say that I have had particular challenges as a woman in Luxembourg media. I was a business and finance journalist and had the same opportunities as any other journalist and, as a media relations person, I have never suffered issues because of my sex."



Mary Carey
Senior Manager PwC
Luxembourg and published author

As an aside, Carey also reported that, "In professional communications, anywhere I have ever worked, the teams have had more women than men." This could be interpreted as a good sign, or as reinforcing the stereotype that communications is women's work. The purpose of communications is to

promote and support business leaders in their jobs – jobs that are still mostly held by men.

Sarah Pitt, Journalist and Social Media & Communications Officer at Luxembourg for Tourism told LUX WMN she has had, "...no particular confrontations or challenges and has been treated as an equal by all my colleagues in my first job as a young editor and journalist." However, on the job-hunting side, she said, "I'll never forget that in my first full-time job I was asked if I have a boyfriend abroad (I had just returned to Luxembourg from studies). The intention might have been innocent, but it didn't seem like an appropriate thing to ask at a job interview. Young men get asked these things too perhaps, but I have my doubts."

What can and is being done to encourage and enable women in the media?

If men remain in managerial roles and sometimes do not take female and LGBTQ+ subjects seriously, as well as asking for inappropriate personal information before hiring (as experienced by some of the journalists above), what can and is being done to improve the situation? Without any exaggeration, and as stated by the UN official and Anik Raskin, fair representation of women in the media is essential to the development of young minds, the safety of women and girls and to creating a more just society for everyone.

Taina Bofferding, Minister of Equality between Men and Woman in Luxembourg told LUX WMN that, "Working with professionals in the media is one of the measures provided for in the National Action Plan for Equality Between Women and Men." This is encouraging news, but what is actually being done to improve the current lack of parity, especially following the publication of the GMMP survey results?

Taina Bofferding
Minister of Equality
between Men and Woman



Bofferding explained, "...an exchange of views with representatives of the Luxembourg Press Council has taken place in order to explore ways to improve the ratio between women and men in the media. During this exchange, I stressed that the fight against gender stereotypes is one of the political priorities of the current government and invited the Press Council to actively join the government's objective to make equal rights between women and men a reality experienced on a daily basis, while respecting the principle of freedom of the press."

Are invitations and brainstorming sessions enough to begin to solve this problem effectively? Amanda Roberts, LUX WMN's managing editor has her doubts. "I applaud Luxembourg's participation in the Global Media Monitoring Project. However, as a woman in the media in Luxembourg who is denied government funding and support, it makes me wonder how seriously the government takes the problem."

"I have reached out to the Ministry of Equality and the Prime Minister in his role as Minister for Communication and Media to discuss the issue but have never received a positive reply. It's not enough to simply talk about the under-representation of women in media, active steps also need to be taken to create real change."

When challenged on Roberts' points, the Minister's reply was, "The Ministry cannot comment on this isolated case since it is not aware of all the information that would allow it to make a correct assessment." She also said that, as matters relating to the press fall within the remit of the Ministry of State, "...questions will be communicated to the responsible jurisdictions of that Ministry." In other words, she offered to do what Roberts has already done without success.

The Minister does agree that gender parity must be achieved for the good of the country. "Given that the press and the media have a substantial influence on the mentalities of the population, particularly the younger generation, it is important to include the 'fourth power' of the State in efforts aimed at achieving a better balance between women and men at all levels of society."

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The media have such an influential role in the creation and reinforcement of gender stereotypes. These stereotypes can guide private decision-making and actions, even inciting hatred and violence against girls and women.

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Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Definition:

The "Fourth Power" refers to all means of communication that can serve as a counterbalance to the three governing bodies of the state: executive, legislative and judicial. It upholds the principle of protecting journalists' sources of information.

What women want

While the government holds meetings and passes questions back and forth between ministries, LUX WMN put the same question to female professionals, asking for their ideas as to how this situation should be fixed.

Sarah Pitt suggests there should be, "Events to showcase women in media, allowing them to speak about the profession to inspire others. To show that women can make it in media and earn a reasonable living without excluding the possibility of having a personal life."

Melody Hansen agrees, "Role models are an important keyword. Showing other women that it is possible to be an editor-in-chief as a young woman."

Jessica Bauldry has several suggestions, "Slow down the pace of newsrooms: make them a place where women feel they can make a difference by giving them the time and space to work professionally. This could be achieved by establishing media houses as foundations or not-for-profits." She also listed practical steps that could be taken immediately, "More women gatekeepers, models and mentors; regular unconscious bias checks; specific training for recognising and managing misogyny in online comments; specific training for men to understand how they can better support female colleagues; and better support for on-boarding of journalists coming from abroad."

For Natalie Gerhardstein, "The overall profession needs to be re-evaluated. Over the past few years some journalists have legitimately been in

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Amanda Roberts

fear for their lives, even on European soil. In 2021, 45 journalists were either killed on assignment or lost their lives in connection with their professions. Journalism is and should be a respected profession—I see it as a pillar of democracy, which includes both men and women."

Perhaps women in Luxembourg media need to unite, form a lobbying association and become active members of CNFL.

The CNFL was established in 1975 to assist in the fight to obtain civil rights for women. Its presidency rotates between its members to ensure a fair voice for all. CNFL's member associations are:

- Action Catholique des Femmes du Luxembourg
- Association des Femmes Libérales
- CID | Femmes et Genre Femmes Socialistes
- Fédération des Femmes Cheffes d'Entreprise du Luxembourg
- Féminin Pluriel - Luxembourg
- Femmes en Détresse
- Femmes Chrétiennes Sociales
- Union des Dames Israélites
- Union des Femmes Luxembourgeoises
- Union Luxembourgeoise du Soroptimist International
- Zonta International – section luxembourgeoise

As of publication date of this article, Luxembourg Press Council (press.lu) membership comprised*:

197
female
journalists

335
male
journalists

*These figures do not include those of freelance journalists working in Luxembourg who do not have press accreditation for various reasons.

GMMP Luxembourg Methodology.

On 29 September 2020, monitors documented information from:

18 media

(4 newspapers, 4 radio channels, 1 television channel, 5 news sites, 4 Twitter accounts, all selected according to the GMMP methodology).

This data collection made it possible to establish a sample of **200** articles or reports composed of **53** press articles, **29** radio reports, **14** television reports, **62** articles on the Internet and **42** tweets.

The sample includes information on **372** people mentioned in the news and **152** journalists.