

BRIDGING THE GENDER GAP:

Strengthening Women's Representation in Political Advertising and Coverage on Internet Portals



POLICY DOCUMENT

1. BACKGROUND

This product is prepared within the Project "Money, Media, and Elections in North Macedonia" funded by the UK Government with the support of the British Embassy Skopje. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the UK Government

Skopje, December 2024

1. BACKGROUND

The representation of women in internet portals remains significantly limited. During the 2024 parliamentary elections campaign, there was a clear gender disparity in coverage, with male candidates—especially party leaders—dominating the media narrative. Female candidates, even those holding top candidate list positions, received far less attention. Gender equality issues were covered in just over 2% of monitored articles in internet portals, while women featured in about 20% of paid ads, purchased by just 4 out of the 11 political parties monitored.¹

This trend mirrors patterns in traditional media and reflects broader challenges in women’s political participation. Deeply rooted patriarchal views, societal stereotypes, and instances of misogyny contribute both to underrepresentation and negative portrayal, with women often facing online mocking or attacks. The limited visibility of women is also tied to insufficient internal support within political parties, which frequently fall short of proactively promoting gender equality in their media strategies, despite having full control of their campaign messaging.

Internet portals play an increasing role in media campaigns. In last elections, 251 portals registered with the State Election Commission (SEC) to provide paid ads, making up 74% of all media and information sources offering such advertising.² Of these, 150 (60%) were reported to have indeed provided paid ads.³ In total, portals absorbed estimated 811,013 EUR in public funds, accounting for 20% of total expenditure on paid political ads.⁴

These findings underscore the influential role played by parties and portals in shaping public perceptions of the electoral campaign and of the candidates, highlighting not only the need to enhance gender representation in their activities and relevant laws but also to increase media attention to gender equality issues. This dual focus would foster a more balanced portrayal of women in political discourse and encourage both female and male politicians to engage with gender equality topics, thus broadening public awareness and support for these critical issues.

¹ Findings are based on the results of [Monitoring of Online News Portals Coverage of 2024 Parliamentary Elections in North Macedonia](#) by Metamorphosis Foundation, and further analysis in IFES North Macedonia In-Depth Analysis of Paid Political Advertising During 2024 Parliamentary Elections.

² See the SEC [list](#) of media outlets that registered for paid ads during the 2024 parliamentary elections.

³ [Money for portals in an election campaign - you don't know who writes, but you know who pays](#), Meta.mk, November 2024.

⁴ Based on the information provided bilaterally by the SEC.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE



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This policy document builds on the findings of IFES North Macedonia in-depth study on paid political advertising during the 2024 parliamentary elections. It aims to identify sustainable, long-term solutions to improve the inclusion and representation of women and gender issues in internet portals. The in-depth study noted that in the short term some practical improvements can be made within the existing legal framework—through coordinated efforts by political parties, online portals, and state institutions:

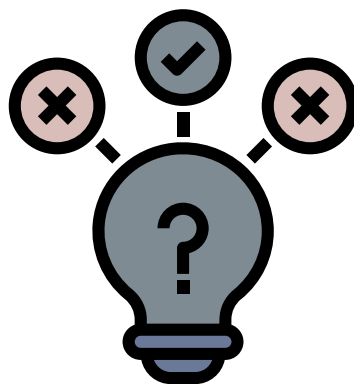
- For political parties, this could include adopting a gender perspective in media communications, ensuring equal gender representation in paid ad design, and allocating a portion of advertising funds specifically for women candidates as part of internal policies.
- Online portals are encouraged to adhere to existing ethical journalism standards and guidelines, formally endorse these instruments to demonstrate commitment, appoint accountable editors to ensure compliance and enhance the portrayal of women, and promote ownership by requiring author attribution and clear source citation.
- State institutions could consider developing guidance that integrates gender considerations in paid ads, leading by example with gender-sensitive materials, expanding reporting obligations to include gender mainstreaming efforts, and exploring institutional options for effectively monitoring gender representation in campaign coverage.

This policy document builds on and expands these recommendations, while also exploring solutions that may require legislative changes, should there be a supportive political consensus and commitment to advancing reforms in this critical area. In this context, addressing the inclusion and portrayal of women involves more than merely tackling the immediate issue of limited representation in coverage and paid ads. It requires examining the underlying factors and identifying changes across various areas that influence how gender equality and the role of women are reflected in campaigns and the activities of different actors.

With the above in mind, the brief focuses on three key areas where changes in laws and practice are believed to hold particular potential for impact: 1) media and internet portal regulations and self-regulation, 2) public financing provisions for political parties, and 3) gender-related legislation and guidelines.

The objective is to foster a regulatory environment that promotes balanced representation of women and gender equality topics in public discourse, particularly in internet portals, during election periods and beyond. Findings and proposals outlined in this policy document were discussed with and benefited from input of national stakeholders during informal consultations and roundtable discussions held in Skopje, Stip, and Tetovo in November 2024.

3. ASSUMPTIONS AND LIMITATIONS



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The current setup for subsidised paid ads is contentious, with key state institutions and oversight bodies, international and civil society organizations raising concerns about insufficient transparency, regulation, and oversight. Calls have been made to review existing provisions to address these shortcomings.⁵ This brief acknowledges the ongoing debate. While these aspects lie outside its immediate scope, refining the public funding model and establishing a robust regulatory framework for paid ads on internet portals, including oversight and accountability mechanisms, are key preconditions for improved effectiveness of possible additional measures, including to enhance gender inclusion, portrayal, and attention to equality topics.

Additionally, while this policy document focuses on internet portals/online media, the recommendations made herein could also be considered in conjunction with relevant regulations applicable to traditional media and how they may need to be streamlined to ensure a cohesive approach.

⁵ See [The Budget Funds for the Parties Are Divided Without Clear Criteria](#) (2021 local elections), State Audit Office, April 2023; [Preliminary Statement, Parliamentary Elections and Presidential Election Second Round](#), OSCE/ODIHR, May 2024; and [Media Freedom in the Western Balkans](#), Media Sector Hotspots in North Macedonia: Decisive Reforms Long Overdue, Snezana Trpevska, Igor Micevski, December 2021.

4. ANALYSIS



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4.1 REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO MEDIA AND INTERNET PORTALS AS PUBLIC INFORMATION SOURCES

At the outset, it needs to be recalled that most of the legal framework regulating traditional media does not apply to internet portals, which currently do not fall under the definition of "media services". However, some laws and obligations do extend to the online domain, including the Electoral Code, which requires all media, including internet portals, to provide fair and balanced election coverage. In addition, self-regulatory mechanisms for internet portals are in place. Despite these provisions, efforts by online media/internet portals to ensure balanced gender representation remain outside any formal monitoring, oversight or enforcement frameworks. Given this, it would be beneficial to explore potential improvements to both the media legal framework and self-regulatory mechanisms to identify opportunities for strengthening gender-related provisions and practice.

Self-Regulatory Mechanisms

Three key instruments—the Association of Journalists of Macedonia's (AJM) [Code of Journalists](#), the [Guidelines for Ethical Reporting for Online Media](#) developed by the Council for Ethics in the Media, and the [Code of Conduct in the Online Sphere during Electoral Processes and Referenda](#) developed under the auspices of the Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services—outline important guarantees of non-discrimination, including based on gender, in the creation and dissemination of information to the public.

Recommendation 1: To strengthen practice under the current legal framework, online portals are encouraged to adhere to the existing guidelines and codes—promoting journalistic ethics, non-discrimination, and avoiding hate speech and sensationalism. Formal endorsement of these principles and appointing accountable editors within online portals can further improve editorial responsibility and enhance the inclusion and portrayal of women in media campaigns.

The first two instruments relate exclusively to professional standards and ethics in media reporting and the work of journalists. Both address advertising only in terms of the requirement that commercial and political ads, as well as sponsored articles, should be clearly separated from editorial content. The AJM Code also states that advertising and other commercial motives must not be allowed to influence the freedom of information. Only the third code, which focuses on elections and referenda and covers internet portals and political parties, includes recommendations related to advertising in general (during elections) and paid political advertising. However, this instrument does not explicitly link non-discrimination requirements to advertising practices and does not offer guidance on how gender balance and inclusion could be ensured in political advertising, especially in cases where ads are produced externally, such as subsidized ads created by political parties.

Recommendation 2: The guidelines applicable to election processes and media campaigns during elections, such as the Code of Conduct in the Online Sphere during Electoral Processes and Referenda, could be enhanced by linking non-discrimination guarantees also to advertising and specifically encouraging the integration of gender considerations when purchasing, developing and placing paid ads.

A strong journalists' code is essential to advancing the principles and standards of professional journalism. This framework provides an important opportunity to integrate robust guarantees of inclusion and balanced gender representation.

Recommendation 3: Consideration could be given to incorporating the principles enshrined in the Guidelines for Ethical Reporting for Online Media into the scope of the journalists' code to ensure the coverage of specificities of the online domain.

Recommendation 4: The journalists' code should establish clear principles and standards that promote gender equality and encourage gender-sensitive reporting. Journalists need to ensure that women are fairly and equitably represented in their coverage, avoiding the reinforcement of gender stereotypes or biases. They should actively seek expert opinions from individuals of all genders and utilize gender-sensitive language. In reporting on gender-based violence, journalists should avoid sensationalism and victim-blaming.

Media Legislation

The core media legislation, including the [Law on Media](#) and the [Law on Audio and Audio-Visual Services](#), prohibit discrimination in the media based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or belonging to a marginalized group. In October 2024, the Ministry of Digital Transformation launched the process of [amending the media law](#), with two primary objectives: to align the legislation with EU regulations, including related to the protection of interests of special needs groups, and to broaden the law's scope to include internet portals/online media.

Recommendation 5: In developing media regulations, it is essential to ensure the inclusion of internet portals and clear definitions within its scope. Additionally, a comprehensive review should be conducted to harmonize the provisions with other legislative acts, particularly regarding their role in the provision of paid ads during elections campaigns.

Strengthened provisions on gender equality are crucial, particularly in safeguarding freedom of expression and promoting the public interest within the media sector. The law should protect human rights, freedoms, and dignity of all citizens by emphasizing the right to gender equality.

Recommendation 6: Strive to ensure that the media law enshrines stronger and more explicit protection of interests of vulnerable groups, especially minors, minorities, women, and girls, with a clear commitment to combating gender-based discrimination and stereotypes in media content.

One of the positive effects of possible legal recognition of internet portals as "media" would be the requirement for portals to register in the media service providers' registry under the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. The registry enables more effective supervision, ensuring that media, including the portals, comply with legal requirements and qualify for public funds, such as state subsidies for media, among others. By granting public access to media ownership and operations information, this registration also promotes transparency, facilitates equitable resource distribution and builds trust.

Recommendation 7: It is important to (re)open discussions on the criteria that media outlets, including internet portals, must meet to be included and kept in the registry. Ethical and professional standards should emphasize the promotion of gender inclusion and balanced representation as core principles of professional and responsible journalistic practice.

Possible future requirements for internet portals to be part of the 'club' of registered professional media service providers could also complement or serve as a stronger alternative to the current basic requirements for portals to register with the State Election Commission to provide paid ads as per the Electoral Code.

Recommendation 8: As a short-term objective, consider expanding the requirements for internet portals to register with the State Election Commission for providing paid ads by

introducing reasonable and proportionate criteria to demonstrate adherence to journalistic ethical and professional standards. This could include, among others, requirements to acknowledge and/or endorse voluntary codes of conduct, transparency regarding ownership, and a minimum number of years of operation.

As a long-term objective, consider making entry into the media service providers' registry, once or if established, as the qualifying requirement for the provision of paid ads during elections.

One effective method to support the production of media content that serves the public interest, especially content that encourages gender equality, social inclusion, and diversity, could be to establish a fund for pluralism and diversity. The establishment of such a fund was suggested as part of an expert proposal for a new media law developed in 2023.⁶ The fund could help create a more inclusive media environment and promote diversity in media representation. It is envisaged to provide independent and sustainable funding for media projects that represent various voices and viewpoints of the society, with funding coming from a state budget. Based on the proposal, the fund could be managed by the Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services, with the allocation of funds to be based on proposals of an independent commission composed of expert evaluators.

Recommendation 9: To ensure transparency and accountability, it is essential to establish clear, objective, and effective mechanisms to overview the fund's allocation process and the criteria for selecting eligible projects. If or once established, the fund could replace provisions for media advertising of public institutions, introduced in the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services with amendments adopted on February 28, 2024.⁷

The Law on Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services regulates audio and audio-visual commercial communications, including advertisements, teleshopping, sponsorships, and product placement. Among other provisions, the law states that these types of commercial communications must not include or promote any form of discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. This is quite generic and lacks specific provisions on important issues such as gender-balanced representation, avoidance of traditional gender stereotypes, and related considerations.

Recommendation 10: As a short-term objective, consider developing a self-regulatory framework within the industry to address more nuanced aspects of inclusion, representation and diversity in commercial communications.

In the longer-term, consider amending the Law on Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services to include more specific provisions on gender representation and the avoidance of traditional gender stereotypes in advertising.

4.2 GENDER-TARGETED PUBLIC FINANCING OF POLITICAL PARTIES

A growing body of international best practice sources underscores the link between public funding provisions for political parties and commitments to gender equality.⁸ They encourage integrating gender equality efforts into public financing as a way to enhance women's participation and representation in political and public life. The underlying principle is to condition public funding on

⁶ The proposal was developed under the auspices of the project EU for Freedom of Expression: Alignment of National Media Legislation with EU Acquis and European Media Standards.

⁷ In the past, several media associations [have called](#) for the abolishment of state advertising provisions.

⁸ [Gender-Targeted Public Funding for Political Parties](#), A Comparative Analysis, Magnus Ohman, 2018; ODIHR and Venice Commission [Guidelines on Political Party Regulation](#), para. 224, 2020.

recipients' commitment to publicly significant goals, such as promoting human rights, democratic values, and gender equality.

Resolution 2111 (2016) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (para. 15.3.4.), for instance, recommends that “part of the public funding of political parties, when applicable, is reserved for activities aimed at promoting women’s participation and political representation”. Based on Article 4 of the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, such “temporary special measures”—including policies related to the (re)allocation of resources—should not be regarded as discriminatory.

Various forms of gender-targeted financing measures are implemented in some 30 countries.⁹ Typically, these rules are designed to influence (increase or decrease) the amount of public funding a political party receives based on the number of women nominated or elected (*gender-targeted income*). For instance, in Moldova, 15% of public funding is allocated to eligible parties in proportion to the number of women elected in parliamentary and local elections. In France and Ireland, parties face reductions in their public funding if they do not meet the legal requirement of gender representation on candidate lists. In Brazil and Chile, parties receive greater reimbursements for votes obtained by women candidates compared to their male counterparts. Recommendations to link public funding allocations to some form of gender equality measures have previously been made in North Macedonia.¹⁰

Forms of Gender-Targeted Requirements Pertaining to Media

While less common, gender-targeted financing rules can also be designed to influence how parties use public funds to support the representation of women, including in media (*gender-targeted spending*). These requirements could take different forms:

1. **General requirement for gender-equal media representation:** For instance, in Portugal and Mexico, political parties are required to use the free or paid media time they are allocated—as part of their publicly funded campaign resources—in a way that promotes gender equality, ensuring balanced visibility for male and female candidates. Norway ensures gender-balanced political content in public-funded media programming during election campaigns. While any generic requirement lacks specific benchmarks or measurable targets, it serves as a normative standard by tying public funding to an expectation of gender-balanced media promotion. This approach reinforces that public resources should be used to foster equitable representation, prompting parties to consider gender balance as part of their media strategy. By establishing this principle, it also lays groundwork for potentially more specific requirements in the future.
2. **Reserved portion of parties' public funding and/or airtime for female candidates:** Latin American countries lead in implementing measures that guarantee women candidates' visibility in media.¹¹ For example, Brazil's Superior Electoral Court mandates a minimum of 30% of both financial resources and free electoral advertising time to female candidates

⁹ [Gender-Targeted Public Funding of Political Parties - Comparative Analysis](#), Parliament of North Macedonia, May 2020; [Achieving Gender Equality in Political Party Financing in Albania](#), WFD, March 2023, p. 8.

¹⁰ For instance, in [Models of Public Financing for Political Parties in Developed European Countries](#) (p. 10), IRI and the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” Skopje suggested that public funding should be one of the starting points for the inclusion and encouragement of marginalized groups in politics and underscored that the conditional allocation of public funds promotes greater involvement of marginalized groups (such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities) in party activities and society. See also IFES North Macedonia's [Women's Representation in Elections and Political Processes in North Macedonia - Lessons Learned and Recommendations for 2024 Parliamentary Elections](#) and [Women's Participation in Political Processes in North Macedonia: A Mixed Picture for Gender Equality in the Context of the 2021 Local Elections](#) for related findings and recommendations.

¹¹ Versions of such provisions are also used in other regions, including South Africa, where a portion of state-sponsored airtime is reserved specifically for promoting women's political initiatives and candidates.

([Resolution No. 23.609/2019](#)). Mexico's [National Electoral Institute Guidelines](#) require at least 40% of campaign financing for female candidates. Venezuela is currently discussing similar measures to ensure equitable media coverage for women. The emphasis of this set of measures is more focused on an electoral period and the visibility and inclusion of women candidates during campaigns.

3. **Incentives through additional airtime, public funds, or discounted advertising rates:** In some countries, political parties are incentivized to promote women's visibility in media through additional funding, airtime, or discounted advertising rates. For instance, in Italy and East Timor, parties receive rewards—either in the form of extra funding or airtime—based on their efforts to increase the media presence of women candidates and to meet gender representation benchmarks.¹² Additionally, an approach debated and tested in countries like Nepal suggests that media outlets could offer discounted advertising rates to women candidates, making it more affordable for parties and candidates to highlight women in paid political advertising. These incentives aim to ensure not only that a greater number of women are fielded as candidates but that they also receive equitable and prominent media coverage during campaigns.
4. **Earmarked public funding for gender equality:** This approach, seen in many countries, requires that a portion of public funding be allocated to gender equality initiatives.¹³ Funds may support activities such as raising awareness of gender issues, training women politicians, providing targeted campaign support, and increasing their media visibility. Funding structures may vary, including:
 - a) A dedicated shared fund at the state level for eligible parties,
 - b) Earmarked percentages within each party's funding allocation, or
 - c) Portions of allotments to parties for the establishment and running of their training and research centers or of their women's wings.

Such earmarked funding may range from more symbolic 2-5% (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Mexico, Italy, Serbia) to ambitious 25% (Slovenia) of party funding. The aim of this group of measures is to encourage parties' greater and more systematic integration of gender equality and inclusion considerations into a variety of activities and internal processes, and to thus effect sustained changes, also between elections.

All the above options, or combinations thereof, are implementable and recommendable in the North Macedonian context. Since a 40% quota is already in place for candidate lists, adding corresponding media visibility requirements aligns well with this policy. Such measures underscore that fair representation should extend beyond candidacies to include equitable media presence, reinforcing gender equality across all political activities. Moreover, since parties are already accountable for meeting candidate quotas, it's reasonable to hold them accountable for equitable representation in paid media placements. This consistency can encourage parties to prioritize gender equality in their entire campaign strategy and paid political ads, not just candidate selection. Finally, the candidacy quota also influences public expectations around gender representation. Adding a media visibility requirement can further normalize women's political presence and reinforce public support for women candidates by ensuring they receive equitable media coverage.

Recommendation 11: If immediate, comprehensive legal changes are not feasible, consider integrating gender equality as a general guiding principle for publicly funded media representation.

¹² [Gender Equality in Political Party Funding](#), Julie Ballington, December 2003.

¹³ Used in Costa Rica, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and others. For instance, in Colombia, [Law 1475 of 2011](#) mandates parties to allocate at least 15% of public funds to activities aimed at the effective inclusion of women, youth, and ethnic minorities, including communication strategies and publications that enhance women's visibility in politics.

As a more advanced and long-term approach, consider some form of gender-targeted requirements for how parties use their public funding—either by mandating that a specific percentage be dedicated to promoting women candidates, requiring that a portion of funds be broadly dedicated to advancing gender issues and equality, or providing for incentives.

Designing Rules for Increased Transparency and Accountability

The above options vary in regulatory implications. However, all would require amendments not only to the Law on the Financing of Political Parties and the Electoral Code to introduce new gender requirements but also to establish a robust accountability, monitoring, oversight, and enforcement framework. The ongoing debate regarding the appropriate regulatory and monitoring authority over paid ads and internet portals provides an opportunity to examine institutional responsibilities and regulatory possibilities for additional gender-related requirements within a cohesive system.

Recommendation 12: Whichever gender equality measures are chosen it is essential to develop a comprehensive regulatory framework for the use of public subsidies. This framework should incorporate robust oversight, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms and clearly define institutional responsibilities.

One key vulnerability in the current set up related to paid ads during elections is a disjuncture in accountability lines: parties are entitled to order paid ads from public funds within limits set by law, while internet portals are the ones that report on these expenses and receive reimbursement directly from the state. Adding gender equality requirements would create further oversight and compliance challenges, which the current system already struggles to meet. It is therefore crucial to explore adjusted or alternative accountability structures that would strengthen overall compliance and transparency, including with any new gender requirements. Three progressively expansive approaches are possible:

1) Add gender requirements and accountability elements to the existing framework:

This approach would aim to operationalize gender-related requirements and add accountability elements, while preserving the current set-up of parties being entitled to order ads and internet portals being reimbursed for them by the state. This could involve:

- Including gender inclusion and balanced representation as a guiding principle for parties and portals in ad development and placement;
- Requiring contracts between parties and portals to include commitments to gender-balanced advertising;
- Encouraging parties to adopt internal policies to allocate a certain proportion of funds available for paid ads to women candidates and to ensure equality and fairness in the allocation of the funds;
- Mandating that parties and portals report on their gender inclusion and balanced representation efforts.

This option promotes accountability without fundamentally altering the system. It is the least disruptive approach and requires minimal structural change, making it likely the most politically palatable initial step toward reform, which could be introduced prior to local elections 2025.

2) Shift Ad Funding Directly to Parties:

Another option could be to re-direct advertising funds from portals to parties directly, thus giving them full responsibility for gender representation in paid ads and enabling more straightforward accountability. This setup could simplify reporting and oversight, as party compliance would be controlled and enforced through existing mechanisms. However, this approach may be more difficult to implement as a short-term solution and encounter greater resistance due to disruptions in the party-portal dynamics, increased uncertainty for portals, and additional fiscal burdens for parties.

3) Shift Focus to Annual Funding with Gender Targets:

A further option would be to tie gender representation and visibility measures not (or not only) to paid ad subsidies, but to annual public funding that is allocated to parties based on votes received, representatives elected, as well as the allocations for research-analytical centers of political parties.¹⁴ Gender-related requirements could be integrated into these provisions, with funding levels adjusted accordingly, or a separate funding category could be created. This option requires more substantial structural and political adjustments, as it shifts focus away from campaign-specific spending. However, it also offers significant benefits. Firstly, it decouples gender representation from the controversies and existing shortcomings related to the paid ads. In addition, annual funding, as a stable and predictable source, would support ongoing gender equity initiatives beyond the campaign season, encouraging parties to invest in year-round gender-focused activities. Finally, annual public funding is generally subject to more rigorous financial reporting standards. Linking gender requirements to annual funding could thus make it easier to monitor and enforce compliance.

Recommendation 13: To ensure compliance with gender-related requirements, consider developing a robust accountability mechanism. In the short run, this could be achieved by enhancing oversight within the current framework, for instance by adding requirements for gender-balanced advertising to contracts between parties and media portals, as well as new reporting obligations on gender inclusion efforts. Alternatively, consider restructuring the system—for example, by directing ad funding directly to parties rather than portals.

A more complex but comprehensive longer-term measure would involve linking gender equality requirements, including those related to media representation, to annual public funding. This could be implemented through adding a gender-tied funds allocation requirement or by creating a separate "gender fund," drawing inspiration from the existing research center allocations. This approach supports year-round gender equity efforts and reinforces the expectation that public funds promote equal representation during and beyond elections.

4.3 GENDER EQUALITY LEGISLATION

North Macedonia has made formal commitments to gender equality, demonstrated by the adoption of its Gender Equality Strategy 2013-2020 and the current [Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027](#). These strategies, grounded in the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, establish a framework for promoting gender equality across various sectors. From the perspective of media and gender equality, it is also important to consider two additional documents: [the Handbook of the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services for Monitoring the Application of Standards for Reporting on Cases of Gender-Based Violence in the Media](#) and [the Handbook for Gender-Sensitive Reporting](#). However, despite these formal and voluntary frameworks, political will to advance gender equality has been inconsistent, and a more comprehensive legal foundation on gender equality remains a pending issue.¹⁵

Elements such as promoting equal access to resources, applying gender equality principles across all sectors, countering gender stereotypes, emphasizing gender-sensitive language, and specifying roles for media and political parties in promoting gender equality would constitute useful elaborations to the existing legal and policy provisions. These elements, if adopted, could provide more specific guidelines to strengthen the existing framework and practices.¹⁶

¹⁴ Annual financing of political parties amounts to 0.15% of the state budget. 30% are distributed equally among parties that received at least 1% of votes in the last parliamentary or local elections and the remaining 70% are allocated in proportion to the number of MPs or local councilors elected. In addition, annual financing is provided to parliamentary parties' research-analytical centers according to predetermined shares.

¹⁵ [Women Politicians and Media Bias](#), Institute of Communication Studies, 2024, p. 10.

¹⁶ The Draft Gender Equality Law (2021), while not yet finalized or adopted, includes several provisions that reflect these useful elements and thus merit further consideration. The draft law has received overall positive

Recommendation 14: Consider enhancing existing gender equality legislation, including by integrating commitments to gender-sensitive media practices and the clarification of roles for political parties and media in promoting gender inclusion and balanced representation. These additions could strengthen the foundation for ensuring women’s fair representation in public and political discourse within the scope of current laws and frameworks, while also providing a basis for any future legal developments in this area.

assessments from [OSCE/ODIHR](#) and its adoption was encouraged by several international organizations. See [Gender Matters! Manual for Members of Parliament and Parliamentary Staff on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#), OSCE Mission to Skopje, 2020; European Commission Staff Working Document, [North Macedonia 2023 Report](#), November 2023; [Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review for North Macedonia](#), United Nations, Human Rights Council, July 2024.

CONCLUSIONS



CONCLUSIONS

This policy document has highlighted three critical areas—media regulation and self-regulation, public financing of political parties, and gender equality legislation—as potential avenues for strengthening women’s representation in political discourse, particularly within internet portals. Each of these areas presents unique opportunities for enhancing the visibility of women and ensuring fair representation in both paid advertising and general media coverage.

Current debates and planned legislative initiatives—such as the ongoing discussion on the approach to paid political ads and initiated revisions to media laws and guidelines—provide a timely opportunity to integrate stronger guarantees of gender equality and representation. By addressing gaps in existing frameworks and promoting a cohesive approach across media and financing regulations, North Macedonia can create a more inclusive public sphere that reflects and supports gender equity.

The recommendations provided here aim to guide these reform efforts, emphasizing the need for enhanced accountability, effective oversight, and clear institutional responsibilities. Implementing these changes will require collaboration among policymakers, media bodies, political parties, and civil society, with the ultimate goal of fostering a balanced and representative portrayal of women in all aspects of public life.

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