

ACTION PLAN FOR EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA OF THE WALLONIA-BRUSSELS FEDERATION

AN OVERVIEW

A task assigned by the Government to the CSA

The *Action plan for diversity and equality in the audiovisual media* was launched in March 2010 by the Minister for Culture, Audiovisual Media, Health and Equal Opportunities of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, Fadila Laanan. Funded over a period of three years, the plan entrusted the *Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel* (CSA), the regulatory authority for audiovisual media in French-speaking Belgium¹, with the task of implementing and co-ordinating the two lines of action on which it is based: the annual publication of a *Barometer of equality and diversity* and the annual publication of an *Inventory of good practices* in the audiovisual media of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. A steering committee composed of representatives of institutions and associations active on diversity issues was responsible for approving policy directions².

From 2011 to 2013, three *Barometers of diversity and equality* and three *Inventories of good practices for diversity and equality* in the audiovisual media of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation were published. The intention behind the *Barometers* was to provide a snapshot of how society is portrayed on television on the basis of five diversity indicators: gender, age, origin, occupation and disability. The *Inventories*, for their part, sought to identify good practices in the portrayal of diversity in the media, not only in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, but also in other countries. By compiling these good practices, the *Inventories* helped to raise awareness among professionals of the audiovisual sector about diversity issues in the media and the range of different methods for achieving a better understanding of them.

Background: the lack of objective data

The CSA's interest in diversity issues is not new. Already on 15 March 2006, the Government of the French Community of Belgium had sought the opinion of the CSA's Advisory Board³ on "*the presence and portrayal of persons of foreign origin in the media*"⁴ and on "*the presence and portrayal of women in broadcasting services*"⁵. The Advisory Board drew attention in its

¹ In 2011, the French Community of Belgium was renamed "Wallonia-Brussels Federation".

² In addition to the CSA, the following were represented on the Steering Committee: the Association of Professional Journalists, the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism, the King Baudouin Foundation, the Directorates-General of audiovisual media and equal opportunities of the Ministry of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, and the Institute for Gender Equality.

³ The Advisory Board gives opinions, on its own initiative or at the request of the Government or Parliament, on any issue relating to the audiovisual media. In addition to the Chair and three Deputy Chairs of the CSA, the Advisory Board consists of representatives of the different audiovisual sectors.

⁴ Opinion No. 07/2006 of the Advisory Board of the CSA: <http://www.csa.be/documents/show/552>

⁵ Opinion No. 5/2006 of the Advisory Board of the CSA: <http://www.csa.be/documents/show/441>

opinion to the importance of ensuring the presence of the different components of society in the audiovisual professions and in media portrayals.

The Advisory Board also emphasised the lack of empirical studies in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation that could be used to gain an objective view of the situation in the media with regard to these issues, as was already the case in several European countries. It therefore recommended launching research programmes on these issues and setting up programmes to monitor the diversity status and developments in the presence and portrayal of women in broadcasting in the French Community.

In 2010, the CSA was involved in two studies which paved the way for research programmes of this kind. On the one hand, a young researcher hosted at the CSA laid tentative foundations for monitoring "*the portrayal of diversity on French-language Belgian television programmes*"⁶. On the other, a multidisciplinary team co-ordinated by the Association of Professional Journalists, and which also included the CSA's research department, set out to study the portrayal of women in the news in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation⁷, as part of the *Global Media Monitoring Project*.

The results of the two studies, from which a very varied pattern emerged in terms of both equality and diversity, and the issues at stake subsequently prompted the Government to launch the *Action plan for equality and diversity in the audiovisual media* of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

From awareness-raising to incentives

The results of monitoring the portrayal of diversity and equality in media programmes in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation merely provide a snapshot of the general trends for all the Federation's television channels. However, being anxious to establish a constructive dialogue with media executives, the CSA informed them of their particular situation at awareness-raising sessions held in their editorial offices, by announcing the results specific to their channel or group of channels.

Through the dual process of presenting general and specific facts about the portrayal of diversity on screen and promoting good practices for improving that portrayal, media professionals were made aware of the efforts required and were prompted to consider ways of setting their own house in order. Over the three *Barometers*, relative but substantial improvements have been noticeable and certain changes in practices have been observed. The prospect of future evaluations and the desire to maintain a certain image of the channel among its audience can therefore be regarded as significant incentives to improve the results obtained, or at least keep them at the same level, and think about specific measures for remedying the shortcomings identified and publicly disclosed.

However, it would be wrong to believe that the *Action plan for equality and diversity in the audiovisual media of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation* has solved the problem of diversity and

⁶ C. BODSON, *Études de la représentation de la diversité au sein des programmes de la télévision belge francophone*, Brussels, CSA, 2009: <http://www.csa.be/documents/show/1207>

⁷ *Quel genre d'infos? Rapport final GMMP 2010. Communauté française de Belgique*, Brussels, AJP, 2010: <http://www.ajp.be/le-rapport-gmmp-2010-en-communaute-francaise-de-belgique/>

equality in the media and led to a fair portrayal of all society's components on screen. The constraints weighing on media stakeholders and the strategies and interests pursued require them to make choices which often restrict the possibilities for providing an optimum view of a diverse society which already suffers from its own shortcomings. Nevertheless, publication of the *Barometers* and *Inventories* has the advantage of putting diversity issues on the public policy and media regulation agenda, as well as on the agenda of the media themselves, and of making them more aware of their social responsibility with regard to the image which is given of diversity and equality on screen.

Analysis of specific social categories

The impetus provided by the three *Barometers* and *Inventories* of equality and diversity and the CSA's acknowledged expertise in this field have led the authorities to extend this approach to the media portrayal of two specific social categories: young people⁸ and homosexuals⁹.

As with equality and diversity, the study of the portrayal of young people in the media was presented in the dual form of a *Barometer* and a good practice guide¹⁰, both published in 2013. The study of the portrayal of homosexuality set out to analyse the models of homosexual social relations and interactions conveyed by the television and radio programmes popular with young people in the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.

All these studies are available (in French) at <http://www.csa.be/diversite> and at <http://www.csa.be/documents/categorie/42>

The following are available in English: presentation of the methodology (see <http://csa.be/documents/2431>), summary of the results of the 2013 *Barometers* 2013 (see <http://csa.be/documents/2436>) and overview of the *Inventories of good practices* (see <http://csa.be/documents/2432>)

⁸ *Image et représentations des enfants et des jeunes dans les médias télévisés de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, Brussels, CSA, 2013: <http://www.csa.be/diversite/ressources/2137>

⁹ S. DERINOZ, *La représentation de l'homosexualité dans les médias de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles*, Brussels, CSA, 2013: <http://www.csa.be/diversite/ressources/2045>

¹⁰ *Jeunes et médias. Guide des bonnes pratiques*, Brussels, CSA, 2013: <http://www.csa.be/diversite/ressources/2139>