

**Proven
Solution**

New Cultural Norms



HeForShe

Koç Holding **Mainstreaming** **diversity and gender** **equality in marketing** **communications**

Global Context

Media and mass communications are very powerful in influencing gender stereotypes in society. Gender stereotypes are at the root of most barriers including occupational segregation, unpaid care work, lack of access to technology and gender-based violence which are holding women back. Brands play a critical role in addressing gender stereotypes and mainstreaming gender equality and diversity in their marketing and advertising efforts.

According to research among Effie Award winning commercials in Turkey, representation of women changes drastically based on sector and job category. The lowest female representation in lead roles is in banking and finance with 14%, whereas it rises to 86% in the domestic cleaning sector. Voiceovers are dominated by male characters (86%) and even in those commercials, where the main character is female, the voice over is mostly male (67%). Characters are portrayed in traditional roles with only 6% of female main characters in non-traditional roles.

As Koç Group, we acknowledged the potential of change through mass communications and to that end we have introduced standards to our brand communications and advocate role models through mass media to transform our brand communications and thereby scale our impact.

“Addressing gender stereotypes lies at the core of gender equality. As Koç Holding, our experience in the past five years proved that the role of business in tackling gender stereotypes is not limited to the workplace.

Corporate and brand communications offer a crucial platform for overcoming traditional stereotypes and promoting diverse and inclusive gender roles. I invite all business leaders to contribute to positive social change by applying a gender equality filter to their communications.”

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Chair of the Board, Koç Holding



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Key Stages of Implementation

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Step 1 Understanding the problem and developing a theory of change

First, we conducted face-to-face interviews with representatives working in brand communications at different levels to deep-dive into their processes and decision-making mechanisms.

Simultaneously, we conducted quantitative research to measure the level of diversity and positioning of gender roles in current brand communications. As a result of qualitative and quantitative research, we determined the bottlenecks and points of intervention during the production of advertising material.

We then discussed what we wanted to achieve, how we define success and our principles for gender-sensitive communications. We also outlined the expectations of internal and external stakeholders to make sure that our principles are embraced at all levels and by all parties.

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Step 2 Creating a Guidebook

We developed the Guide to Gender Equality in Communications, which

offers principles of gender sensitive communications, a methodology and a checklist. The methodology was adapted from the 4R method developed by the Swedish Gender Mainstreaming Support Committee (JämStöd):

- **Who:** Ratio of representation in terms of roles, physical characteristics, age, etc
- **What:** Which decisions, resources, dialogues, etc do we attribute to these characters
- **Why:** What is the root cause of the gender stereotypes
- **How:** How can we make change possible?

In order to ease the use of the Guidebook, we developed a Checklist for gender-sensitive communications under three focus areas:

- **Positioning:** their absence from public places (streets, banks, stadiums, workplaces, and so on) contributes to deep-rooted stereotypes. A change here will lead to the transformation of the most common stereotype: "A woman's place is in the home."
- **Visual Aspects:** An individual's unique aspects can be appreciated without the standardization of physical characteristics. This diversity also helps to prevent the commodification of male and female body.

- **Use of Language:** Language indicates a particular way of thinking and can reveal unconscious gender bias. Some expressions, idioms, and proverbs carry gender roles from generation to generation. These patterns, which are integrated into the way we use language, are often too difficult to recognize and constitute one of the most fundamental obstacles to gender equality. However, it is possible to question the concepts, expressions, idioms, and proverbs embedded in language and adapt them to reflect current values.

Applying this method gave us a framework to represent diverse gender roles, distribute resources equally and identify and eliminate gender stereotypes at an early phase in production.

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Step 3 Conducting workshops and standardizing the approach

Decisions need to be made at several stages of communications campaigns by teams at different levels and functions, including brand managers, communications managers, project managers and creative teams both at company and agency positions.

In this complex environment, a guide was not enough to develop a systems thinking approach among the teams. Therefore we designed and organized interactive workshops tailored to initiate questioning and find solutions to eliminate gender-based biases in communications.

The content of the workshops included:

- Definition of key terminology related to gender equality
- Interactive games to face our unconscious biases
- Introduction of 4R method and discussions on real-life examples
- Individual manifestos to change the status quo.

Once the teams had been engaged in the process through workshops, the gender-sensitive communications guidebook became a communications standard throughout Koç Group companies, making compliance a necessity. The requirements in the guidebook were included in the performance objectives of the relevant marketing and communications teams.

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Step 4 Applying a monitoring and evaluation mechanism

We developed a digital monitoring mechanism to evaluate the efficiency of the guidebook and workshops, and to enable mass communication materials to promote diversity and inclusion in a sustainable manner.

We first asked marketing and communications representatives from Koç Group companies to evaluate the TV commercials of another brand within the Group based on the checklist criteria introduced in the Guidebook. This enabled them to exercise the methodology for gender-sensitive communications, as well as realize how stereotypes can be embedded into communications materials.

Based on the evaluations on the digital monitoring platform, we convened a jury of experts, representing UN Women, UNFPA, local NGOs and opinion leaders working on gender equality and asked them to rate the Koç Group brand commercials.

As a last step, we gave awards to the commercials best reflecting gender equality at a high-level event including all senior level executives of Koç Group.

Broad-based evaluation helps to test the methodology, extend its use and demonstrate commitment to change.

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Step 5: Mainstreaming among stakeholders

In order to mainstream the approach introduced by the Guide, we partnered with the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD), which represents 50% of Turkey's total private sector output. The Guide's content was revisited in line with the needs of member companies and revised as a TUSIAD publication. All the major sector associations also became implementation partners of the Guide. These organizations now circulate the Guide among their members and implement the workshops to their teams and stakeholders.

Involving all stakeholders throughout the industry helps to ensure that gender awareness is a part of every piece of work, from start to finish. Wide use of the Guide changes daily practices, encourages creativity and brings partners together.

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Resources

Guide on Gender Equality in Communications:

<https://www.koc.com.tr/en-us/koc-agenda/Documents/A-Guide-to-Gender-Equality-in-Communications.pdf>

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