

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Conference

Warsaw, 23 September – 4 October 2013

Working session 3: Tolerance and non-discrimination II

Equality of opportunity for women and men

Contribution of the Council of Europe

Equality between women and men

Introduction

Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. It also means an equal access to, and distribution of resources between women and men.

It means accepting and valuing equally the differences of women and men and the diverse roles they play in society.

Although the legal status of women in Europe has undoubtedly improved during recent decades, effective equality is far from being a reality. Even if progress is visible (educational attainment, labour market participation, political representation), gender gaps persist in many areas, maintaining men in their traditional roles and constraining women's opportunities to affirm their fundamental rights and assert their agency¹.

Women are still marginalised in political and public life, suffer discrimination in employment or difficulties in reconciling private, family and professional life, are paid less for work of equal value and find themselves victims of poverty and unemployment more often than men.

The most pronounced expression of the uneven balance of power between women and men is violence against women, which is both a human rights violation and a major obstacle to gender equality.

A change in gender relations, women's empowerment and abolishing negative traditional gender stereotypes are key to achieving gender equality and would benefit entire societies. As extensive research has shown in a multitude of contexts, when women have equal chances with men to be socially and politically active, economies and societies thrive. Overall, women's more balanced participation in decision-making contributes to positive transformative processes for societies, such as changes in laws, policies, services, institutions, and social norms.

The Council of Europe and Gender Equality

Achieving gender equality is central to the protection of human rights, the functioning of democracy, respect for the rule of law and economic growth and competitiveness.

¹ Agency is understood as the ability to make choices and take actions related to oneself, one's situation in the household, and one's situation in the public sphere (World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development)

The Council of Europe's pioneering work in the fields of human rights and gender equality has resulted in a solid legal and policy framework which, if implemented, would considerably advance women's rights and bring member States closer to real gender equality.

The Council of Europe seeks to combat gender stereotypes, sexism and violence against women in its many forms. It aspires to change mentalities and attitudes, promote balanced participation of women and men in political and public life and encourage the integration of a gender perspective into all programmes and policies. From the 1980s onwards the Council of Europe had the task of putting forward European standards which resulted in a new approach to the issue of gender equality and has shaped its development in Europe over the past decades. Some of the milestone achievements in this respect include the drafting of two legal treaties: [the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings \(CETS No. 197\)](#) and the [Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence \(CETS No. 210\)](#)

These sound foundations enable the Council of Europe to explore other avenues, by deepening the reflection on the role of equality standards and mechanisms, and exploring the possibilities for more effective use of such strategies.

[The Council of Europe Transversal Programme on Gender Equality](#) launched in 2012 aims to increase the impact and visibility of gender equality standards, supporting their implementation in member States through a variety of measures, including gender mainstreaming and action in a number of priority areas. To achieve its aim, the Programme needs the continuous political and financial support which is essential to mobilise all Council of Europe decision-making, advisory and monitoring bodies, involving them in the development, implementation and evaluation of the gender equality agenda. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission is at the centre of this effort. A network of National Focal Points in each member state, the Gender Equality Rapporteurs appointed in the steering committees, advisory and monitoring bodies of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers Thematic Co-ordinator on Equality and Trafficking provide crucial support to the work and activities of the Gender Equality Commission.

Current priority areas include:

- Combating Gender Stereotypes and Sexism with particular focus on Media and the Image of Women;
- Guaranteeing Equal Access of Women to Justice with a focus on access to justice for women victims of violence, persistent barriers in achieving equal access for women to justice and tackling the gaps in research and lack of data disaggregated by sex;
- Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, with a focus on the ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention);
- Achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making with particular focus on monitoring the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making;
- Gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures in the Council of Europe;

In achieving its aims and objectives, the Council of Europe seeks to further develop and strengthen its co-operation with partner Organisations, in particular the EU, UN and its different agencies above all UN-Women, OSCE, OECD and the World Bank.

Some gender equality standards and mechanisms developed by the Council of Europe

[European Convention on Human Rights – Article 14 – Prohibition of discrimination](#)

[Protocol No. 7, Article 5 – Equality between spouses](#)

[Protocol No 12, Article 1 - General Prohibition of discrimination](#)

[The European Social Charter \(Revised\) of 1996](#)

[Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings \(CETS No. 197\)](#)

[Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence \(CETS No. 210\)](#)

Committee of Ministers Recommendations:

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2013\)1 on gender equality and media](#)

[Recommendation No. R\(98\)14 on gender mainstreaming](#)

[Recommendation No. R\(2000\)11 on action against trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation](#)

[Recommendation Rec\(2002\)5 on the protection of women against violence.](#)

[Recommendation Rec\(2003\)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making](#)

[Recommendation Rec\(2007\)13 on gender mainstreaming in education](#)

[Recommendation Rec\(2007\)17 on gender equality standards and mechanisms](#)

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2008\)1 on the inclusion of gender differences in health policy](#)

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2010\)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building](#)

For further information, you can consult our website: <http://www.coe.int/equality> or send an e-mail to the electronic address of the Secretariat of the Gender Equality and Violence against Women Division, Gender Equality and Human Dignity Department, DGI: dghl.equality@coe.int