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Equality of opportunity for women and men/ Role of women in conflict prevention and crisis management/ Prevention of violence against women

Contribution of the Council of Europe

EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. Gender equality is the opposite of gender inequality, not of gender difference.

Since the Council of Europe set up its first committee to promote equality between women and men in 1979, some major achievements have been made. The *Declaration of the Committee of Ministers on Equality of Women and Men* (16 November 1988) was a landmark. It affirms that equality between women and men is an integral part of human rights and that sex-related discrimination is an impediment to the recognition, enjoyment and exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

During the *4th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men* (Istanbul, 1997), the European Ministers adopted a Declaration on gender equality as a fundamental criterion of democracy.

During the *3rd Summit of the Council of Europe* (Warsaw, May 2005) the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe member States stressed that equal participation of both women and men is a crucial element of democracy and they confirmed their commitment to achieving real equality between women and men in all spheres of society.

On the occasion of the *6th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men* (Stockholm, 8-9 June 2006), the Ministers emphasised that the lack of gender equality implies personal, social and economic costs higher than the cost of those incurred in implementing gender equality and that there are social and economic benefits to be gained from its implementation.

Protocol No. 12 of the ECHR which entered into force in April 2005, represents an important step forward for building equality between women and men by securing a

general prohibition on discrimination by any public authority on *inter alia* the grounds of sex, regarding the enjoyment of any right set forth by law and not only rights and freedoms of the ECHR.

Equality of opportunity for women and men

The balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making is at the heart of the functioning of pluralist democracy. In 2003 the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation *Rec(2003)3* containing guidelines to assist member states in promoting an increased participation of women in decision-making. Progress in implementation of this Recommendation is monitored. Recent activities include examining the role and position of women in the diplomatic service. In addition a study on *Parental Leave in Council of Europe member States* has been prepared.

In 2004, a *Stocktaking study on the effective functioning of national gender equality mechanisms in Council of Europe member States* was published. In line with the Organisation's pioneering role of standard setting, a recommendation containing the European standards on equality between women and men, including national equality mechanisms is currently being prepared.

Role of women in conflict prevention and crisis management

The *5th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men* (Skopje, January 2003) focused its discussions on the roles of women and men in conflict prevention, peace-building and post-conflict democratic processes. The ministers adopted a resolution that, among other things, calls on governments to promote the full participation of women at all levels of decision-making and to encourage the integration of a gender perspective in all activities aimed at conflict prevention and resolution. They also adopted a Declaration and Programme of Action outlining Council of Europe priorities in the field of equality for the coming years.

As a follow up to this Conference, a recommendation containing guidelines for the development and implementation of strategies and mechanisms for increasing women's participation and strengthening their roles in these fields is currently being prepared.

Prevention of violence against women

Protecting and promoting women's human rights means taking measures to fight against interferences with their liberty and dignity. In 2002 the Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation *Rec(2002)5* containing guidelines to assist member states in the preparation and/or modification of legislation and policies to combat violence against women. Progress on implementation of this Recommendation is monitored. Such progress was evaluated for the first time in the recent publication *Combating violence against women – Stocktaking study on the measures and actions taken in Council of Europe member states*. Recent and forthcoming activities include examining the place and the role of men in relation to violence within the family and a study on *Forced marriages* has been published in 2005.

In 2005, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe member states reaffirmed their commitment to eradicating violence against women, including domestic

violence, during the 3rd Summit of the Organisation (Warsaw, May 2005) and they defined in their Action Plan the future activities of the Council of Europe in this field.

As indicated in the Warsaw Action Plan adopted during the 3rd Summit of the Council of Europe, a *Task Force to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence* was set up in 2006. This Task Force is composed of international experts in the field of preventing and combating violence against women and is in charge to evaluate progress at national level and to establish instruments for quantifying developments at pan-European level with a view to drawing up proposals for action.

As also indicated in the Warsaw Action Plan, a *Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence*, is currently prepared and will be conducted in close co-operation with other European and national actors, including NGOs. This campaign will be launched during a high level Conference to be held in Madrid (Spain), on 24 November 2006, and will end in 2008.

On the occasion of the 6th *European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men* (Stockholm, 8-9 June 2006), the Ministers adopted a Resolution in which, inter alia, member states were encouraged to support and participate in the work of the *Task Force to Combat Violence against Women* and the *Council of Europe Campaign* in this field. They were also encouraged to adopt and implement all the measures contained in *Recommendation Rec (2002)5 on the protection of women against violence*.