



16 November 2012

GEC(2012) RAP 2

**GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)**

2ND MEETING

STRASBOURG, 14-16 NOVEMBER 2012

REPORT

I. Opening of the meeting and Adoption of the agenda

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the participants. She introduced the new GEC elected member from the Czech Republic, Mr Radan Šafařík, who replaced the Norwegian member who has resigned since the last meeting. She also welcomed the new members of the Secretariat team: Edo Korljan and Adrienne Ingledow.

The Agenda was adopted by the GEC as set out in Appendix I to this report. The list of participants is attached in Appendix II.

II. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair

The GEC proceeded with the election, by acclamation, of the Chair and Vice-Chair in accordance with Article 12 of Resolution CM/RES(2011)24 of the Committee of Ministers on intergovernmental committees and subordinate bodies, their terms of reference and working methods.

- Ms Carlien Scheele (Netherlands) and Mr Sergyi Kyslytsya (Ukraine) were respectively re-elected as Chair and Vice-Chair from 1 January 2013 until 31 December 2013. The Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) will be invited to confirm the election of the Chair.

III. Possibility of setting up a GEC Bureau

The GEC discussed the possibility of the setting up of a Bureau. The members did not consider it necessary at this stage and agreed to resume consideration of this or other possibilities if the evolution of the Commission's work so request. The Secretariat underlined that the setting up of any new structure would have to be neutral from the budgetary point of view. Participants were reluctant to reduce the length of the plenary sessions to finance the Bureau.

- The GEC agreed to resume consideration of this point at a future meeting if and as needed.

IV. Transversal Programme for Gender Equality

Nomination of National Focal Points (NFP)

The GEC discussed the nomination of National Focal Points (NFP) and noted that some nominations had not yet been received. Some members stated that there was perhaps a misunderstanding on the part of authorities as to the requirement of an NFP from every member state. It was noted that there was a lack of information regarding the NFP and contacts with them, what was required of them, and what was required as far as co-operation between the GEC and the NFP. It was explained that a letter had been sent by

the Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law to all Permanent Representatives to the Council of Europe outlining the role of the NFP and asking for one to be appointed for each member state.

- The GEC requested the Chair to send a letter to all the nominated NFP, including a description of their role, and providing them with information about the members of the GEC, a list of the Gender Equality Rapporteurs (GER) and NFP, including their contact details, as well as information regarding forthcoming meetings and asking them for their ideas regarding co-operation. A reminder would also be sent to those Permanent Representatives who have not yet appointed a NFP asking them to do so.

Gender Equality Mainstreaming Team / Gender Mainstreaming – training of the Secretariat Members / Preliminary elements of the COE Gender Equality Strategy

The Secretariat reported on activities related to various components of the Gender Equality Transversal Programme. Progress achieved included work to further consolidate the network of NFP, to support the role of the GER, and to set up the Inter Secretariat Gender Mainstreaming Team (GMT).

The Inter Secretariat Gender Mainstreaming Team had been established, its 25 members comprising representatives from all sectors of the Secretariat and some of whom holding managerial positions. The first meeting was opened by the Deputy Secretary General and clearly showed the motivation of its members and the potential of the group which started by brainstorming on clarification of roles and concepts, possible initiatives, needs and working methods. The GMT members have been invited to complete a questionnaire identifying opportunities and needs (many expressed the wish to be trained in key concepts, such as gender mainstreaming). The result of this survey will serve as a basis for the first outline of the draft Gender Equality Strategy to be presented at the next GEC meeting.

The Secretariat also reported that training had been first of all provided to staff working with the various Steering Committees and that further training would be offered taking into account the needs expressed and the feedback received from various sessions. It was also agreed that regular training offered to staff should incorporate a gender equality dimension.

The discussion that followed showed both the potential and the limits of training as a tool to foster gender equality and achieve gender mainstreaming.

Building bridges between the various elements of the transversal programme was considered a key to its success, and the exchange of views with the GER was a step in that direction. Other communication tools should be used to provide regular updates on progress and facilitate access to information and interaction. The current Gender Equality website would be improved while waiting for the overall update of all Council of Europe websites. More thematic information would be made available – Access to Justice, Women in Media, Istanbul Convention – with information about the NFP, GEC members, GER, as well as regular updates on documents adopted, initiatives, events and forthcoming meetings.

A discussion on gender mainstreaming in member states took place. A document had been prepared by the Secretariat compiling texts which had been submitted previously. Following various interventions by the members, it was proposed that the document be updated continually and enriched with the many different examples available throughout the member states. The document would be made available on the website and regularly updated. The GEC members were invited to contribute to the document and to encourage the NFP to provide input. It would be useful to include in the contributions, contact information for the relevant sectors so interested parties could contact the authorities directly.

- The Secretariat will forward to the GEC the electronic version of the document about examples and practices of gender mainstreaming in the member states for updating by GEC members. It will then be published on the website.
- The GEC looks forward to the first outline of the draft Gender Equality Strategy for discussion at their next meeting.
- The GEC welcomed the Secretariat's intention to review the Equality website and improve communication with the different components of the Gender Equality Transversal Programme.
- The Secretariat will follow up the preparation of a leaflet on Gender Mainstreaming: concepts and examples.

Reports of events attended by GEC members

The GEC took note of written reports and heard oral presentations from members who had attended events since its last meeting.

- The GEC agreed that the practice of attending different events should be encouraged within the limits of financial resources.

Co-operation with other sectors of the Council of Europe

The Thematic Co-ordinator on Equality and Trafficking (TC-ET), Ambassador Tatiana Pâravu, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova, informed the GEC that the Committee of Ministers was paying particular attention to gender equality issues and continued to promote it at its level.

The GEC held an exchange of views with the Gender Rapporteur from the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), Ms Helena Lišuchová, who spoke about the activities of GRECO in particular with regard to gender and corruption. Possibilities for co-operation with both the GEC members as well as the network of NFP were discussed.

The GEC also had an exchange with the First Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly, Mr Mendes Bota, who is also the General Rapporteur on Violence against Women. Mr Bota presented the structures and activities of the Committee, as well as the work being carried out in connection with promoting the signature and ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention). He stressed the importance of the co-operation with parliamentarians because of their position in influencing decisions taken at national level.

- The GEC agreed that the practice of exchange with representatives from other entities and Steering Committees of the Council of Europe and external speakers should be encouraged. GEC members will put forward suggestions with regard to invited speakers.

Meeting with the Gender Equality Rapporteurs (GER)

The GEC held an exchange of views with the GER from the different Steering Committees. The Chair gave some background about the Gender Equality Commission, and the place of the GEC and the GER in the overall Gender Equality Transversal Programme of the Council of Europe. The first part of the exchange consisted of presentations by two experts on gender mainstreaming, which was then followed by a question and answer session.

In the second part of the exchange, the GEC and the GER looked for ways of working together. The GER were asked to describe the work of their Committees, their experiences with regard to gender equality, how they thought the GEC could be helpful to them, what sort of information or co-operation they would like and what they expected from the GEC.

Interventions were made by the majority of those GER present and members of the GEC. There was a lively exchange among the participants on topics such as education, media, number of women mayors, cultural and landscape heritage, terminology, standardised language and the possibility of training. Questions were raised as to how gender equality and gender mainstreaming could be incorporated into the work of the committees and into the committees themselves. Some examples of how this was being done were put forward and information was shared as to where reference documents could be found. Many participants expressed their appreciation for holding the exchange and looked forward to increased co-operation among the two groups, as well as with the NFP.

- The Secretariat will look into possibility of training - in particular for the GER.
- Co-operation between the GEC and GER will be increased through future exchanges, invitations to GER to attend GEC meetings, and invitations by the Steering Committees to GEC members to attend their meetings.
- It was noted that the GER will suggest the involvement of GEC members in conferences and events organised by their Steering Committees and vice versa.
- In order to facilitate direct contacts between GEC, GER and NFP, contact information would be made available to the different groups.
- The Secretariat will make available to GER information and documents relevant to their areas of work and responsibility.
- With a view to the forthcoming Women and Media Conference in 2013, it was agreed that contact would be made with the GER and Secretariat of the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI).

V. Update on activities in the field of gender equality

Violence against Women

An oral presentation was made by the Secretariat giving an overview of the activities regarding the promotion of the Istanbul Convention as well as a compilation of national legislation on the provision of shelters for victims of violence against women in member states. To date 24 countries have signed the Istanbul Convention and one has ratified it. The GEC members were asked for their continued support in encouraging signature and ratification of the Convention by their authorities. As the Convention was being translated into several languages, assistance from the GEC would also be sought with regard to verifying texts as some sensitive terms were not always translated correctly. The text of the presentation can be found at Appendix III to this report.

- The GEC were requested to continue encouraging the authorities to sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention and to assist with translation of sensitive terms in the Convention.
- The Secretariat will forward to the GEC the overview of national legislation on the provision of shelters for victims of violence against women in member states which it has prepared asking for them to verify the texts.

Women and Media

The GEC discussed the preparation of the thematic conference on women and media for the NFP. The Netherlands offered to host the Conference on 4-5 July 2013. The themes of the conference should include women and leadership and the role of the new media. The presence of the NFP was felt to be an opportunity to discuss their role in the context of the transversal programme.

- The GEC members welcomed the Netherlands invitation to hold the thematic conference on Women and the Media on 4-5 July. The concept paper and agenda will be developed with contributions and proposals regarding speakers and agenda items from the GEC.
- The Conference should reserve a half day for a meeting devoted to the role and working methods of the NFP, using it as an opportunity to reinforce communication and co-operation between NFP and the GEC.
- It was agreed that the outcome of the Conference could be reflected in a document including findings and recommendations from the participants. These conclusions could help the GEC and other stakeholders to guide their respective future actions.
- The GEC agreed to continue discussion about the Conference by telephone and email among the members prior to its next meeting.

Equal Access for Women to Justice

The Secretariat informed the GEC members about the current state of preparation of the feasibility study on Equal Access for Women to Justice. Following a meeting of the group of experts in Paris in November, a draft report would be submitted by the end of the year. A final report will be submitted to the GEC at their next meeting (April 2013) following which a Conference could be organised on the subject in autumn 2013.

- The GEC requested regular updates on the progress of the study and agreed to consider the proposal for a conference on this subject at their next meeting (April 2013) on receipt of the results of the feasibility study.

Co-operation with international organisations

The participants from UN Women, EIGE, FRA and OSCE-ODIHR, made presentations about their activities, including the ways in which they co-operate with the Council of Europe and offered ideas for further co-operation.

The Secretariat also informed GEC about on-going activities with UN Women and CEDAW, in particular with regard to the promotion of the Istanbul Convention and informed GEC members about the organisation of a side-event during the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The Council of Europe has an important role to play, in particular in view of the priority theme of the 57th Session of the CSW (Elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls). GEC members were encouraged to support the Council of Europe in its efforts to play a key role during the CSW in view of the priority theme and the contribution the Council of Europe can bring to the Session, in particular the Istanbul Convention.

- It was agreed to keep GEC members informed about progress with the organisation of the side event during the 57th Session of the CSW.

VI. Other business

GEC members asked about the work programme for the Commission for the next year. The Secretariat explained that now that each component of the Gender Mainstreaming Transversal Programme had been put in place, the process of building a strategy around their work was being further developed and would be available for the GEC at its next meeting. The three current priorities – access for women to justice, women and media and violence against women - as well as activities and events related to these three priorities constitute the backbone of the work of GEC for 2013.

The issue of co-operation activities with member states was raised. As no requests that were considered suitable had been received, this item had been removed from the agenda of this meeting. GEC members were encouraged to submit any feasible proposals through the correct channels and they would be discussed at future meetings.

VIII. Date and place of next meeting

The dates proposed for the next meetings of the GEC to be held in Strasbourg are:

3rd meeting: 10-12 April 2013

4th meeting: 13-15 November 2013

APPENDIX I

14 November 2012

GEC(2012)OJ 2

**GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)**

2nd meeting

9.30 am – 6.00 pm, 14-16 November 2012
Strasbourg, Agora, Meeting Room G06

AGENDA

VII. Opening of the meeting and Adoption of the agenda

- Draft agenda

GEC (2012) OJ 2 prov rev 4

VIII. Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair

IX. Possibility of setting up of a GEC Bureau

- Information note on the possible setting up of a Bureau of the Gender Equality Commission (GEC)

GEC (2012) 11 bil

X. Transversal Programme for Gender Equality

- Meeting with the Gender Equality Rapporteurs, Strasbourg, 16 November 2012
- Nomination of National Focal Points
- Gender Equality Mainstreaming Team (CoE Secretariat)
- Gender Mainstreaming – training of the Secretariat members
- Co-operation with the other sectors of the Council of Europe
 - *Exchange of views with the First Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of PACE – General Rapporteur on violence against women*
 - *Exchange of Views with GRECO Gender Equality Rapporteur*

GEC (2012) 12 rev 1

GEC (2012) 6 bil rev 2

Oral presentation

GEC (2012) 13

- Reports of events attended by Gender Equality Commission members GEC (2012) 9
 - *Meetings organised by the North-South centre of the Council of Europe - Tetouan and Rabat, Morocco (5-7 July 2012)*
 - *Preparation Conference on Roma Women - Bucharest, Romania (3-4 October 2012)*
 - *2nd Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion - Istanbul, Turkey (11-12 October 2012)*
 - *Conference on the Political and Socio-Economical Empowerment of women based on women's stories - Istanbul, Turkey (4-6 November 2012)*

XI. Update on activities in the field of gender equality

- Equal access for Women and Men to Justice GEC (2012) 4 rev
GEC(2012)14
- Women and Media GEC (2012)10
 - Preliminary draft conceptual framework for the 2013 conference of national focal points*
 - Handbook "women and journalists first!"* Draft « toolkit »
- Violence against women Oral presentation

XII. Co-operation with international organisations

- UN Women
- EIGE
- Organisation of *La Francophonie*
- FRA

XIII. Other business

XIV. Date and place of next meeting

The exchange of views of the GEC with the Gender Equality Rapporteurs on Friday 16 November in Room G01 will be covered by a separate agenda

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Meeting on 16 November (morning) / réunion du 16 novembre (matin)

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Appendix III

Presentation by Johanna Nelles, Head of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence Unit,
Council of Europe

Update on activities in promotion of the Istanbul Convention
Gender Equality Commission Meeting 14-16 November 2012

I. Current status of signature and ratification:

As of 15 November 2012, the Istanbul Convention has been [signed by 24 member states](#). These are: Albania, Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", Ukraine and United Kingdom. This means that more than half of the EU member states have signed the Istanbul Convention. It is hoped that many of them will follow suit and quickly ratify.

One country has ratified the Convention: Turkey. In addition, the Parliament of Albania has recently approved the ratification bill and the Council of Europe is expecting to receive soon the instrument of ratification from Albania.

The Convention is not only open to member states of the Council of Europe. Non-member states are able to accede to it once it has entered into force. If non-member states participated in the drafting process, as most Council of Europe observer states have, it is even easier: they can simply sign and ratify even before the Convention enters into force. This would be the case of Canada, Mexico and the Holy See. In addition, the European Union itself, in addition to its individual member states, can also sign and ratify the Convention.

Progress with signatures is steady but we need to accelerate the rate of ratifications. In some of our member states such as France, Portugal and Spain, preparations for ratification are about to be concluded, and others such as Austria, Finland and Germany are actively working on ratification. In many other countries, the issue of signature and ratification is under consideration, but it is often difficult to obtain information about any obstacles and/or technical difficulties which may exist.

All members of the GEC are invited to inform the Secretariat of any issues that may be blocking developments with regard to signature/ratification to enable the Secretariat to offer support. GEC members are also invited to make use of their channels at national level to move the issue of ratification along. Violence against women was chosen as one of the priority activities of the GEC, which means promoting ratification of the Istanbul Convention should be a core aspect of the work of the GEC, nationally, and at Council of Europe level.

II. Promotional activities since the opening of signature:

Regional seminars and conferences:

The Gender Equality and Violence against Women Division has organised four regional seminars and conferences in our member states and in the South Mediterranean, with a fifth conference planned for January 2013 in Finland. The five events will have brought together close to 50 countries from our member states and neighbouring countries. The aim of these seminars is to bring government and NGO representatives as well as parliamentarians together to discuss challenges they might be facing in signing and ratifying the Convention, but also to allow them to learn more about the requirements of the Convention in detail. For more information about promotional and other events please visit: [www.coe.int/conventionviolence \(Events\)](http://www.coe.int/conventionviolence (Events)).

Strategic partnerships and joint activities with other international organisations:

➤ United Nations:

In February this year, *UN Women* and the Council of Europe exchanged letters of intent stating their mutual interest in increasing co-operation on promoting the Istanbul Convention, but also to join forces on legal reforms in the area of gender equality and to cooperate when it comes to implementing gender equality commitments in our member states.

Two of the five regional seminars on the Istanbul Convention were organised in co-operation with UN Women, who helped cover the costs of these activities.

In addition, the two organisations will be jointly carrying out a study to map services for victims of violence against women in three Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”). By identifying the gaps in service provision in these countries, the study will provide important groundwork for implementing the provisions of the Convention that require specialist and general services for victims. It will geographically complement the EIGE study on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action on violence against women, which looks at victim support in 27 EU member states plus Croatia. The questionnaire developed for the EIGE study will be used as a model.

As the *Commission on the Status of Women* in 2013 will be dedicated to violence against women, we are working with UN partners to not only host a side event as usual (currently planned for 4 March 2013 in co-operation with the Permanent Representation of France to the UN), but also to be given a speaking slot during the Plenary. The Istanbul Convention is the newest and the most detailed set of legally-binding standards at regional level, and we are doing everything we can to highlight it as a model.

Thanks to our close ties with three well-known CEDAW Committee members, we are pleased to note that the CEDAW Committee systematically calls for swift ratification of the Istanbul Convention in its concluding comments which concern states parties that are Council of Europe member states.

In October during the session of the Parliamentary Assembly, the *Secretary General of the United Nations* “highlighted the pioneering role played by the Council of Europe [...] in combating violence against women, including domestic violence. Also, he said “he was confident that thanks to the legal framework created by the Council of Europe, there would be rapid progress in this area”.

➤ **European Union:**

We have reinforced our co-operation with several EU institutions and the European Parliament. For example, just last week, the Council of Europe was invited to present the Istanbul Convention as an example of European policies at the Conference on combating domestic violence against women in the EU, organised by the Cypriot EU Presidency.

We have also stepped up co-operation with the EU parliamentarians both through formal (exchange of views with the FEMM Committee) and informal meetings (a working lunch in spring here in Strasbourg). MEPs are very supportive of signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the EU and its member states. There is strong support for the Istanbul Convention also by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) which has also called for signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the EU and its member states.

➤ **OSCE:**

We are also working closely with the OSCE to co-operate and co-ordinate action and activities in areas of common interest. To make the standards of the Istanbul Convention more widely known among the different parts of the OSCE structures, we co-organised a side event at the last OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting at the end of September and briefly introduced the Istanbul Convention to the Plenary as well. As a result, the Consolidated Summary includes a recommendation to all OSCE participating states to sign and ratify the Convention. Another briefing for OSCE delegations at ambassadorial level is foreseen for 10 December 2012.

Strategic partnerships with NGOs:

Effective partnerships have been established with leading international NGOs such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the WAVE Network. In addition, we supported the Global Fund for Women’s online petition for ratification of the Istanbul Convention and organised the handover of the petition to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for transmission to the Committee of Ministers.

Introducing the Istanbul Convention as a standard reference in the work of other international organisations:

Promoting the Istanbul Convention also means making sure it is regarded as the main reference for policies, programmes, and legally-binding standards set by other international organisations, in particular the EU. One example is the EU Directive establishing minimum standards on the rights of victims of crime (replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA), which refers to the Istanbul Convention as existing international regulation on violence against women and the rights of victims. In addition, the Draft European Union handbook of best police practices on overcoming attrition in domestic violence cases which is currently being prepared under the Cyprus EU Presidency contains a reference to a particular provision of the Convention. More examples are the Opinion on “Eradicating domestic violence against women” of the EESC which calls on all EU member states and the EU itself to ratify the Convention and the annual report of the European Union on Human Rights and Democracy in the World: Report on EU Action in 2011.

Communication:

To reach the widest possible audiences, the Gender Equality and Violence against Women Division has set up a website entirely dedicated to the Istanbul Convention (www.coe.int/conventionviolence). It contains information on the status of signature and ratification, but also on activities in promotion of the Convention, as well as speeches and further resources on violence against women.

In addition, we have developed leaflets and factsheets that explain different parts of the Convention and have made the text of the Convention available in 23 languages. In the context of translating the Convention, we have encountered a problem with terminology. The term “domestic violence” is often translated as “family violence”, because that is the concept that is more widely known, and as a result, there is no other accepted terminology. The Istanbul Convention, however, does not address “family violence” but goes beyond it to also include violence that takes place between two people in a relationship who have never lived together. In some languages, a similar problem seems to exist with the term “domestic unit” contained in Article 3 of the Convention.

A revision of all translations is currently underway. All GEC members and National Focal Points are invited to help identify a more appropriate translation of “domestic violence”.

Studies and research:

In order to elucidate some of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention and possible ways for their implementation, two studies have been commissioned to external experts: one on the obligation of States Parties to recognise, encourage and support NGOs and civil society in combating violence against women and domestic violence as laid out in Articles 8 and 9 of the Istanbul Convention and the other study on the obligation of States Parties to involve the private sector and the media in combating violence against women and domestic violence as laid out in Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention.

In addition, we have carried out research of our own and have prepared a compilation of existing studies on the cost of domestic violence to help us and others make the cost argument: investing in reducing violence against women is less expensive than having to respond to it.

Furthermore, we have collected national legislation on the provision of shelters for victims of violence against women and domestic violence in our member states. The aim of this research is to identify how many member states actually have legal standards on shelters, whether they create the obligation to set up shelters, to fund existing shelters, or whether they set out qualitative and quantitative standards. We wanted to look into this issue to be able to guide future states parties of the Istanbul Convention as to how to implement the obligation to provide services for victims. The first step in this is to see what the current legal practice is and to identify if this is an area that needs to be governed by legislation at all. On the basis of our research, we have identified four types of approaches: (1) creating the obligation to provide shelters through national legislation, (2) regulating certain aspects of organising or running shelters through national legislation, (3) legislation adopted at regional level and (4), no legislation at all on any issues related to shelters.

This piece of research is work in progress and all GEC members and National Focal Points will be invited to verify the information contained therein.

Conclusion:

The Istanbul Convention is being recognised as an important contribution to combating violence against women by all our partners and is becoming more and more widely known. Just last month, the Spanish Observatory on Gender Violence awarded its annual prize for outstanding work against gender-based violence to the Council of Europe for its extensive work on violence against women and the Istanbul Convention.