



Ministry of  
Education  
and Culture



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## **GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION (GEC)**

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### **GENDER EQUALITY CONFERENCE**

### **“COMBATING GENDER STEREOTYPES IN AND THROUGH EDUCATION”**

**WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
NETWORK OF NATIONAL FOCAL POINTS ON GENDER EQUALITY**

**HELSINKI, 9-10 OCTOBER 2014**

**ORGANISED BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE OF FINLAND**

### **CONCEPT NOTE**

## 1. Background of the Conference

Education is a basic human right recognised by international law, notably by the [European Convention on Human Rights](#). Through compulsory education, children and young people, whatever their gender, are prepared and empowered to fully participate in society. The education system sets the basis upon which countries preserve their heritage and contribute to their overall development and prosperity.

Progress witnessed in Europe in relation to gender equality has kept pace with the opportunities offered to girls through their educational experiences. However, even if progress is visible (educational attainment, labour market participation, political representation), gender gaps persist in many areas, maintaining women and men in their traditional roles.

A change in gender relations, women's empowerment and abolishing negative gender, sexist and sexual stereotypes are key to achieving gender equality and benefit entire societies. By shaping gender representations, attitudes and behaviours, education is an essential factor to combat stereotypes and bring about [social and cultural changes](#). The promotion of [gender equality in education](#) is a prerequisite to the achievement of *de facto* equality between women and men in all spheres of life in society.

Gender stereotypes are preconceived ideas whereby females and males are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. Sex stereotyping can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of girls and boys, women and men, their educational and professional experiences, as well as life opportunities in general.

Studies show that, schools being a microcosm of society, education play a major role in reinforcing and supporting these stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are reflected throughout the formal and informal school curricula in Europe. Stereotyping examples in the education system include lower professional positions of women in education - most of them being teachers in primary and secondary education, while most university posts and management posts are filled by men; gendering of curricula and prejudices in textbooks; and differences of expectations and behaviour towards female or male pupils.

Gender stereotypes have harmful consequences for the personal and professional development of girls and boys, in particular for those pertaining to disadvantaged groups. Although the education system should adequately prepare all girls and boys to participate fully in society, the persistence of stereotypes and prejudices in their respective roles results in the under-utilisation of competences of women and men by society. Indeed, in the majority of member states, the excellent school results of girls and high university qualifications of young women are not visible in the labour market. Furthermore, disciplines leading to higher earnings and more prestigious professions with significant career advancement potential remain male-oriented.

As an Organisation set up to protect and promote democracy and human rights, the Council of Europe has promoted gender equality education and non-stereotyped education at all levels of the education system, resulting in the adoption by the Committee of Ministers<sup>1</sup> in 2007 of the [Recommendation](#) on gender mainstreaming in education. The result of the first [monitoring](#) round of the Recommendation indicates that despite the inclusion of the principle of equality between women and men in the national laws on education by the vast majority of Council of Europe member states, the strategy of gender mainstreaming throughout their education systems has not been fully implemented in the best part of the member states. The analysis of European education systems carried out in this context, indicates that member states have not matched the pace of the recent societal transformation, notably with regard to gender roles and gender stereotypes.

Mainstreaming of gender in the education system is multi-fold. The school system needs to develop a critical spirit in children vis-à-vis the image of women and men in order to deconstruct gender stereotypes, build up new identities and achieve *de facto* equality between women and men.

The education system should implement the strategy of gender mainstreaming including through the introduction of gender sensitive teaching methods and learning content and contexts<sup>2</sup>, the revision of curricula and of teaching material, ensure the use of non-sexist and inclusive language, promote and ensure equal educational and training opportunities and full and equal participation of women and men in the different structures of the system: administration, policy making and decision taking. To that end, awareness-raising campaigns and training initiatives targeting relevant stakeholders in the school system are needed in order to reverse the trend and move towards *de facto* gender equality.

Against this background, the Gender Equality Commission has defined education as one of the key priorities and this issue has been taken on board by the Council of Europe in its [Strategy on Gender Equality](#). This decision was echoed by the National Focal Points at their 1<sup>st</sup> annual meeting (Amsterdam, 5 July 2013) at which they decided that the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual conference should focus on education.

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance the 4th Council of Europe Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men which took place in Istanbul in 1997 and the 7th Ministerial Conference which took place in Baku in 2010. The adopted [Resolution](#) and [Action Plan](#) called several stakeholders to taking the necessary measures to enhance the role of education in combating gender stereotypes and in promoting *de facto* gender equality and implementing the measures proposed in Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)13 on gender mainstreaming in education.

<sup>2</sup> Context is the set of circumstances that are relevant for the learner to build knowledge when referring to learning content. (Figueiredo & Afonso, 2005b) – for more info see: [http://www.ub.edu/multimedia/iem/down/c11/Learning\\_Contexts.pdf](http://www.ub.edu/multimedia/iem/down/c11/Learning_Contexts.pdf)

## 2. Aims of the Conference:

The Conference will seek to:

- Raise awareness among government officials and school professionals on persisting inequalities in education and how it affects girls and boys and their future;
- Present the findings of the first monitoring report of the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in education<sup>3</sup>;
- Exchange good practices to promote an education free from gender stereotypes and identify ways to implement the measures included in the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in education;
- Facilitate partnerships and networks among stakeholders including government officials, school management professionals, teachers, trainers and training institutions, parents, and civil society;
- Support member states in implementing existing standards, including the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in education<sup>2</sup>.

## 3. Targeted participants:

- Representatives of national and local authorities responsible for planning and implementing education policies;
- Representatives of school authorities and management bodies, from primary to third level education, as well as career advisors;
- Authors and publishers of textbooks and materials, independent researchers;
- Teacher training institutions (pre-service training and in-service training);
- Representatives of students' and parents' unions and associations;
- Representatives of pupils, pupil's unions;
- National gender equality mechanisms;
- Members of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission, National Focal Points and Gender Equality Rapporteurs;
- Representatives from other Council of Europe bodies, including the European Court of Human Rights, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress;
- Representatives of regional and international organisations (UN Women, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, EU, OSCE, OECD, World Bank);
- NGOs.

## 4. Expected outputs:

- Proposed measures and strategies to achieve an education system free from gender stereotypes including preparation of guidelines to facilitate the implementation of gender mainstreaming in education;
- Raise awareness on and disseminate pedagogical material for children about gender stereotypes;
- Good practices and experiences to promote education free from gender stereotypes;
- Increased networking and partnerships among relevant stakeholders;
- Proposed follow-up activities for the Council of Europe on gender equality in education and education on/for gender equality.

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<sup>3</sup> CM/Rec (2007)13.