



DDCP-YD/ ETD (2016) 67

Strasbourg, 6 June 2016

Gender Equality Matters!

Understanding and integrating gender equality in intercultural youth activities of the Council of Europe and its partners

1 – 3 June, Strasbourg

SEMINAR CONCLUSIONS

About the Seminar

The seminar was organised by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe with the objective of understanding and integrating gender equality in intercultural youth activities of the Council of Europe and its partners.

The seminar objectives are:

1. To explore the meanings of gender equality in intercultural non-formal education youth activities within the context of the Gender Equality policies of the Council of Europe.
2. To review how current practices from the activities of the Youth Department apply gender equality and gender mainstreaming concerns and identify possible gaps.
3. To propose guidelines for the conceptual, educational and practical implications of promoting gender equality in the activities of the Youth Department and its partners.
4. To identify additional measures for promoting gender equality in the policies and activities of the Youth Department and its partners.

The seminar attracted more than 500 applications, which indicates both the willingness of youth organisations to learn from and contribute to the gender related work of the Youth Department, and a clear demand from the partners for the Department to further work on the intersections of gender and youth work. The final selection of candidates has reflected the diversity of stakeholders: youth organisations working directly with gender issues and the ones that do not do so, youth organisations working on the issues of disability, sexuality, migration, diaspora and ethnicity, representatives of municipalities, state bodies, and national agencies focused together on how to take gender equality into consideration in regards to youth work.

Main Discussions

The seminar started with relevant discussions on what gender equality means, especially in an intercultural context. Keynote input by Ana Sofia Fernandes provided a theoretical framework on how the idea of gender equality has developed and evolved since it has been taken up as a field of inquiry in the academia, and shared her expertise on how these theoretical discussions have informed current trends in policy-making on gender equality.

This conceptual discussion was connected to the field of youth work by the speech of Sebnem Kenis, the Gender Equality Rapporteur of the Joint Council on Youth, who raised significant questions about the intersection of gender and youth work such as the use of gender neutral language, access of all genders to power positions, measures required to manage sexual harassment cases and need to attentively analyse whether any aspect of youth work (application forms, energizers, toilets..) reinforce traditional gender binaries and stereotypes.

As a follow up, participants discussed the how gender is perceived in their national contexts and how gender equality and youth work intersect at national and international levels. Main highlights of this discussion include:

- the concept of gender has varying meanings and connotations across Europe, including connotations that are perceived as a threat by conservative political forces;
- in organisations, the conceptualisation of sexuality and gender is not homogeneous, and some organisations tend to follow the idea of equality between men and women as a baseline for gender equality, while others address SOGI issues in particular, while others still tend to look at gender matters in terms of intersectionality;
- organisations that do not specifically work on gender issues are more reluctant to mainstream gender, and if they do, only one person works on the issue without an overarching effect on the work of the organisation;
- economic problems are used as an excuse not to mainstream gender, which is framed as a secondary concern for the youth;
- rising conservatism and far right in politics as well as the media can play a role in preventing efforts of promoting gender equality in youth work;
- many trainers working with the youth also lack understanding of gender and gender related considerations in educational youth work and training;
- there is a big gap between gender mainstreaming at the national and international levels, as well as between urban and rural settings;
- there are significant gender inequalities in women's representation at the boards of organisations;
- at the international level, a more intersectional approach is being employed such as looking at issues of disability and sexuality etc.;
- funding on gender equality from international bodies is helping gender to be included in projects at the national levels. However, funding usually does not suffice to ensure preventive measures, such as participants to have single bedrooms in trainings.

Work of the Council of Europe

The participants also had the opportunity to meet the representatives and hear about the work the European Youth Foundation, Gender Equality Unit and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Unit of the Equality Division, in addition to the Youth Department.

Discussions about the work of the Council of Europe focused on various conventions and recommendations of the Council of Europe on gender equality, which highlighted Organisation's long term commitment to gender equality. Good practices of the organs of the Council of Europe in regards to gender mainstreaming were also explained, such as the gender strategy of EURImages, which aims to provide increased opportunities to women film-makers and to increase women's representation in leading roles in film.

Participants then learnt more about how gender matters are reflected in the work of the Youth Department.

As the participants stated in their evaluation forms, they felt well-informed about the gender equality work of the Council of Europe and would like to pursue further opportunities to be able to network with these bodies.

Work of the Youth Organisations

Throughout the seminar, youth organisations had the chance to exchange good practices on gender mainstreaming through presentations, workshops and other activities.

Research, reporting, seminars, awareness-raising campaigns and panels were highlighted as part of the gender mainstreaming strategies the organisations used.

One distinctive example was the gender mainstreaming policy of the National Youth Council of Austria, which keeps data on gender regarding who talks the most and what they talk about during their events and currently runs a campaign on reproductive and sexual rights. IGLYO, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of intersectionality in youth work and the need to include people of all genders in youth work at the levels of participants, experts and trainers.

Having mechanisms in place to tackle sexual harassment in youth work was a reoccurring theme during the seminar, and the need to have a policy about sexual harassment and a 'trust team' to which participants can talk about their experience of sexual harassment were highlighted.

Creative means of introducing gender into youth work were also discussed, such as board games and linking gender equality to outdoor activities.

Guidelines on Integrating Gender Equality in Intercultural Youth Activities of the Council of Europe and Its Partners

The main output of the seminar were the guidelines on integrating gender equality in intercultural youth activities of the Council of Europe and its partners, that participants reflected upon during the seminar.

The guidelines will be further edited by the seminar rapporteur. Highlights of the guidelines include the following aspects:

- Ensure gender balance of participants, trainers, experts etc. involved, and concrete proposals on questions to ask in applications forms
- Equal, balanced and non-stereotypical representation of all genders in materials related to training and education activities
- Ensuring equal participation of all genders in discussions and meetings
- Developing explicit policies for tackling sexual harassment and gender-based violence
- Use of gender-neutral language
- Developing codes of conduct for youth work activities in relation to gender equality
- Gender training for all those involved in education and training activities
- Ensure that funding for youth organisations allows them for single bedrooms for participants
- Develop explicit policies to support the participation of mothers and fathers to activities
- Further reflect with "gender glasses" critically on the educational approaches proposed and activities.

Measures by the Youth Department

In addition to these aspects of the guidelines, participants also extracted proposals for the Youth Department's work, that can be summarised as follows:

- Offer training possibilities on gender equality for those involved in youth work
- Update the manual “Gender matters”
- Create a new publication looking at all aspects of gender equality in youth work (from ensuring balanced gender representation in the governance of youth organisations, to creating “trust teams” and “safe spaces” in training activities)
- Ensure that the trainers working with the Youth Department have been trained on gender, and include this as a soft criterion in the process of entering the Trainers Pool. In addition, the Youth Department should offer a gender training to those trainers that have not had a gender training.
- The Youth Department should develop a code of conduct for teams of its activities, that look at issues of appropriate behaviours from a gender perspective, as well as sanctions.
- All service staff of the Youth Department’s two European Youth Centres should go through a gender training.
- The Youth Department could include gender equality as a criterion for the project Quality Label for European Youth Centres and train the staff working in these centre on gender matters.
- The application forms should include a standard question “Which gender do you identify with?” and standard answers “Man / Woman / (open box where participants can write freely their choice)”.
- The Youth Department should develop a policy in relation to the support of mothers with very small babies and their participation, for example, by supporting them to travel to activities with baby-sitters and the baby.
- In the “Manual for facilitators”, the Youth Department should include advice for study session teams on tackling gender equality in their activity.