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GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)

Comments on Recommendation 2092 (2016)

“Fighting the over-sexualisation of children”

adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (21 June 2016)

The Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has transmitted to the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) the Recommendation 2092 (2016) – *“Fighting the over-sexualisation of children”*, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 21 June 2016 (see Appendix I), for information and possible comments.

1. The GEC welcomes the Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and shares the Assembly’s concern about the over-sexualisation of children, particularly girls, and the influence this has on their perception of society as well as of themselves. However, the GEC would like to ask for clarification of the expression “over-sexualisation of children”, as this could be read as implying that some “level” of sexualisation of children could be considered acceptable.
2. The GEC shares the view that measures at different levels must be taken to prevent the over-sexualisation of children, including by public authorities, parents and teachers, and the media and advertising sectors. In addition, all activities to prevent the over-sexualisation of children should include a gender perspective.
3. The GEC recalls that, in its 2009 Declaration on making gender equality a reality, the Committee of Ministers called for measures to encourage media professionals and the communication sector generally, to convey a non-stereotyped image of women and men, which is also applicable to girls and boys.
4. The GEC highlights the importance of implementing [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2013\)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender equality and media](#), including its call to adopt an appropriate legal framework to ensure respect for the principle of human dignity. Media organisations are also encouraged to adopt self-regulatory measures and internal supervision to promote gender equality and a non-stereotyped image, role and visibility of women and men, avoidance of sexist advertising, language and content which could lead to discrimination on grounds of sex, incitement to hatred and gender-based violence.
5. The GEC further encourages member states to promote gender sensitive media literacy for for girls and boys, young women and men in order to enable them to acquire a critical view of media representations of gender and to decode sexist stereotypes.
6. The GEC encourages member states to apply the recommendations put forward at the Council of Europe [conference on “Media and the image of women”\(Amsterdam, 3-4 July 2013\)](#) regarding media content, stereotypes, sexism and freedom of expression.
7. The GEC underlines the need to implement the measures included in [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2007\)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on gender mainstreaming in education](#), such as addressing the role which the media can play in teaching and helping girls and boys to develop critical attitudes to sexist representations of femininity, masculinity and gender relations in society.

8. The GEC recalls relevant publications prepared by the Council of Europe, including the [compilation of good practices from member states on gender equality and the media](#), and the [compilation of good practices to promote an education free from gender stereotypes](#).
9. The GEC is working in the preparation of a draft recommendation to combat sexism. This work will take into account the need to protect children from different manifestations of sexism.

APPENDIX I

Recommendation 2092 (2016)

“Fighting the over-sexualisation of children”

1. Referring to its Resolution 2119 (2016) on fighting the over-sexualisation of children, the Parliamentary Assembly calls on the Committee of Ministers to ensure that the issue is addressed within the programme “Building a Europe for and with Children” and in particular the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), as well as in the work programmes of other relevant Council of Europe bodies.
2. More specifically, the Assembly invites the Committee of Ministers to:
 - 2.1. transmit the said resolution to the governments of member States;
 - 2.2. invite the new Ad hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child (CAHENF) to take into account the recommendations presented in the said Resolution 2119 (2016), and to develop a specific activity aimed at fighting the over-sexualisation of children, as well as to support targeted activities carried out by other bodies of the Council of Europe in a transversal manner;
 - 2.3. as regards the activities of other Council of Europe bodies:
 - 2.3.1. ask the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) to develop new standards specifically aimed at fighting the over-sexualisation of children;
 - 2.3.2. ask the Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) to put a stronger emphasis on the protection of children, in the context of its activities on human rights for Internet users.

APPENDIX II

Resolution 2119 (2016)

“Fighting the over-sexualisation of children”

1. Mass media, marketing campaigns, television programmes and everyday products regularly “over-sexualise” children, particularly girls, by conveying images which portray women, men and in some cases even children, as sexual objects. Ease of access to unsuitable, pornographic, and even illegal content on the Internet threatens the innocence and privacy of children. The phenomenon of “sexting” (the sharing of sexually explicit images via mobile devices or other means on the Internet) has swept through Europe’s schools, often leading to significant psychological trauma. These are just a few examples of subtle and unsubtle sexual pressures that today’s children face in an over-sexualised environment.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly is very concerned about the over-sexualisation of children, which has a significant influence on their perception of society at large as well as on their own self-perception. The over-sexualisation of children can have a severe impact on their self-esteem, well-being, relationships, equal opportunities and achievements in school. In some cases, it can lead to sexual violence and be severely detrimental to their physical and mental health.
3. Action is needed urgently before these trends become further embedded in society and more children suffer from their detrimental consequences. Public authorities must develop effective legislation and implement policies and programmes to prevent the over-sexualisation of children; parents and teachers must be equipped to convey coherent messages to children to combat this phenomenon; the media and advertising sectors should be encouraged to change their approaches to marketing and to refrain from continually promoting gender stereotypes, and legal restrictions should be imposed if need be.
4. In the light of the above, the Parliamentary Assembly urges member States to:
 - 4.1. gather scientific evidence through longitudinal studies on the effects of the inappropriate over-sexualisation of children, and particularly girls, by collecting data, in order to help define appropriate legislative and political measures, and by carrying out a review of the existing international literature on the over-sexualisation of children, in order to better understand the gravity of the phenomenon and the current state of knowledge in the scientific community;
 - 4.2. take legislative action to put limits on the inappropriate sexualised depiction of children in the media and advertising sectors, based amongst others on the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, “Lanzarote Convention”) and the guidelines contained in Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media, whilst respecting the fundamental right to freedom of expression as guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5);

- 4.3. adopt policies and measures that seek to inform, educate and remind parents about the dangers that their children face in an over-sexualised environment (as well as to raise awareness of indicators of related distress or trauma), and equip parents to educate their children on these very sensitive issues in a constructive way;
- 4.4. adopt policies which develop sex and relationship education programmes in a school context, and provide support for educational staff responsible for giving such education, with the aim of informing children about the realities of everyday pressure they face in the media, at school and in other social contexts, and of protecting them from any unwanted sexual attention;
- 4.5. provide specific training to professionals who are engaged in educating and caring for children; enabling them to convey constructive messages to children and open up trustful dialogue with them;
- 4.6. encourage media and advertising supervisory bodies to ensure the safeguarding of human dignity, and in particular the rights of children; where such advisory bodies are not already in existence, encourage them to be set up; and ensure that accessible and effective complaints mechanisms are in place;
- 4.7. encourage the media and advertising sectors to safeguard the dignity and innocence of children in their productions, through self-regulatory mechanisms, internal codes of conduct and other voluntary action, and educate these sectors on the impact of overtly sexual content on children;
- 4.8. promote and support public policies, agencies, strategies and tools aimed at raising children's and young people's awareness of inappropriate over-sexualisation and empowering them to resist such trends by supporting approaches and structures (such as Safer Internet Centres and helplines) and involve children in the conception and design of tools and messages;
- 4.9. support the education children receive from their parents at home by promoting programmes for children that highlight the dangers of an over-sexualised society and that:
- 4.9.1. are provided at home and in schools (primary and secondary), but also via social networks, in an age-appropriate manner;
- 4.9.2. include information about respect for one's own privacy and respect for others;
- 4.9.3. empower children to develop critical attitudes towards media contents, and increase children's resilience to peer pressure, thus reducing the harmful consequences of sexualised images.