



# **EYF Report**

on the *Gender Equality Matters! Seminar*

held by the Youth Department

from 1 – 3 June, Strasbourg

# Overview

The seminar opened with a speech by **Rui Gomes**, Head of the Education and Training Division, who acknowledged the diversity of participants, stressed the importance of the topic and provided a quick overview of the Council of Europe's work in this field: Council of Europe Convention on



preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Unit, Gender Equality Strategy to achieve GE in all policies and measures, Gender Equality and Women's Rights. He then presented the activities of the youth sector, *at the forefront of gender mainstreaming since the 70s*. An overview of what would happen during the seminar was given right after and people had the opportunity to express, with post-its, their **expectations, fears and the added value** they would bring to the seminar.

Gender equality and how the concept has evolved from an academic viewpoint to culminate in today's policy-making strategies were analysed by the keynote speaker **Ana Sofia Fernandes**, Officer at the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).

Gender equality was initially conceptualised as a strategy to achieve equality as "sameness" (liberal traditional feminism) e.g. women were excluded from political practices → women are included (de jure equality). This position soon shifted into one which affirmed the differences from the male norm (radical and cultural feminism) and highlighted these differences rather than neutralised them → gender quotas are a tool used within this consideration.

Transforming all established norms and standards of what it is to be a man or a woman (transformation) is to move beyond the dilemma "equality as sameness v/s difference". This is where gender mainstreaming enters. The first two strategies imply concrete policy action; gender mainstreaming implies processes through training and changing attitudes.

The approaches conducive to gender mainstreaming are to:

- make **inequality visible**;
- use **positive wording**, e.g. over-representation of men in parliament rather than less women in political life;
- **use data**: de jure gender equality is achieved, but data provide the answer as to whether de facto gender equality has been achieved;

The theoretical overview was linked to youth work by **Sebnem Kenis' speech**, the Gender Equality Rapporteur of the Joint Council on Youth, who made the following key points:

- youth work provides an enormous space to make an impact;
- gender equality should be a prerequisite; NGOs should reflect on structures and norms in their organisations and work: division of tasks and positions, decision making (formal and informal), icebreakers and activities which do not perpetuate stereotypes and heteronormativity;
- sexual harassment and assault cases: to know what to do in such cases;
- cultural relativism; to question norms that help violate human rights.

Participants provided their own input to the discussion of the day through group work, personal experiences and examples from their work.

An important issue that became clear from that point on is that the approaches, level and angle of understanding of the main concepts of gender and equality vary greatly in youth work, depending on the scope of action (national or international, rural or urban, explicit focus on gender or not, explicit focus on women or on LGBTQI), geographical area, and personal experiences and motivations. This is also reflected in practices and impacts on the transferability of knowledge and experience.

Subsequently, the participants had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the practices of the different departments and units of the Council of Europe in the field of gender mainstreaming, namely the Gender Equality Unit and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Unit of the Equality Division, the Youth Department, including the European Youth Foundation. For the latter, emphasis was placed on the presentation of the newly established gender mainstreaming webpage of the EYF website.

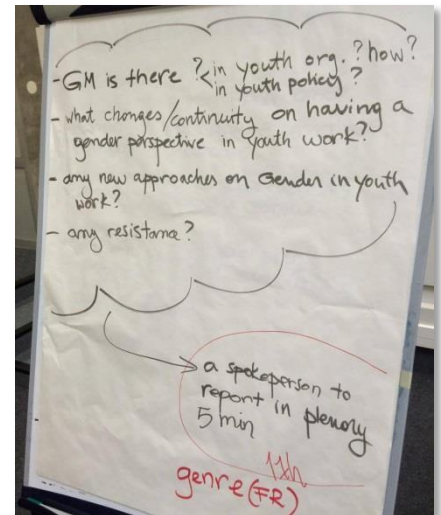
On the same day, participants also familiarised themselves with youth organisations' approaches to gender equality. In a round table, the representatives of the European Youth Forum (YFJ), the Austrian National Youth Council, IGLYO and European YWCA, introduced their work in this field and shared current endeavours and future prospects. Topics addressed were:

- **YFJ:** a new publication on gender equality; the challenge to bring together all ideas to be implemented by organisations at the local level;
- **ANYC:** a successful campaign that started with three training courses producing 70 multipliers who in turn implemented about 150 workshops involving more than 2,500 people in youth centres, youth organisations and schools to prevent violence against women and children. The new toolbox "manual for the promotion of gender mainstreaming in child and youth work" based on the notion that the younger the person, the more potential there is for shattering stereotypes.
- **IGLYO:** A video from a new campaign against homophobia in education ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQuNgw\\_294Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQuNgw_294Y)); presentation of its work on intersex children's rights.
- **YWCA Europe:** presentation of its work on issues like violence against women, trafficking, sexual and reproductive rights of women; the challenges to discuss women's rights in a faith-based organisation, as there are different levels of belief.

The focus later shifted to concrete experiences of implementing gender equality in youth work and youth policy with input from different participants in peer-learning workshops and through collective story harvesting. Points discussed include:

At the organisational level:

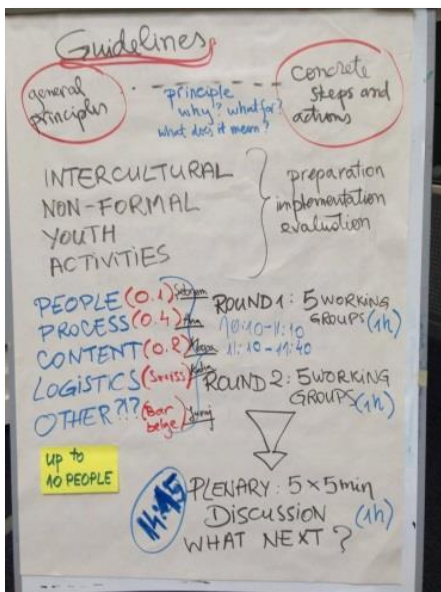
- the introduction of a gender-watch group/person within the organisation/activity to monitor all aspects through a gender lens;
- the use of inclusive language and the existence of safe spaces;



- gender blindness of youth organisations that do not specialise in gender issues - even NGOs not working explicitly on gender issues in order to take measures in this field;
- application of a gender quota in decision-making processes of the organisation.

Trends that influence youth work:

- there is more awareness on the topic but the rise in far-right tendencies and freedom of speech influence the promotion of gender equality;
- Internet is a powerful tool that should be seen as a positive thing;
- at policy level, there are positive examples despite an overall resistance in different countries;
- including governmental representatives in youth activities can be positive;



The seminar reached its peak with the participants' work on the development of concrete guidelines on integrating gender equality into intercultural youth activities, one of the main objectives of the seminar. The working approach included breaking down a youth activity into five main aspects: **people, process, content, logistics** and **other**, groups were created to work on each one.

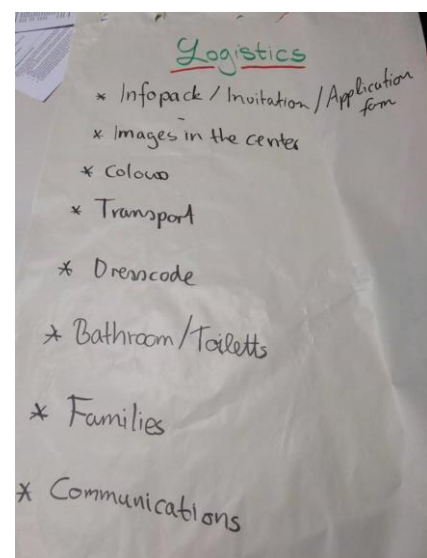
Each group received some guiding questions and worked for two sessions. One rapporteur was assigned per group and tasked with collecting the results. At the end of the exercise, there was a five-minute presentation by each group in plenary.

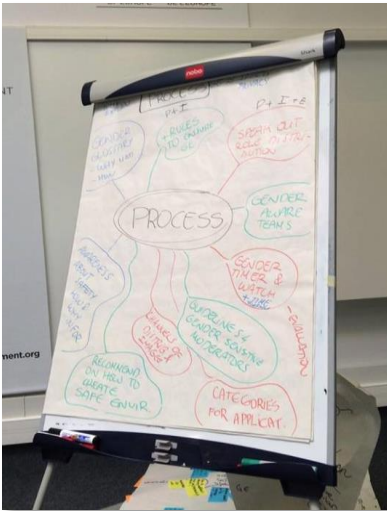
As all five aspects are interlinked, the different groups' proposals inevitably overlapped, however this was not problematic, on the contrary all ideas were appreciated.

Examples of the ideas proposed for the guidelines on intercultural youth activities include:

### Logistics:

- introducing inclusive language in the info pack/ invitation/ application form, e.g. using the terms men and women instead of male/female in application forms to emphasize the gender rather than the sex;
- accommodating parents with young children (space for breastfeeding/babysitting);
- avoiding the colours pink and blue;
- considering inclusive toilets/bathrooms for all genders;
- providing the option of single rooms;





**Process:**

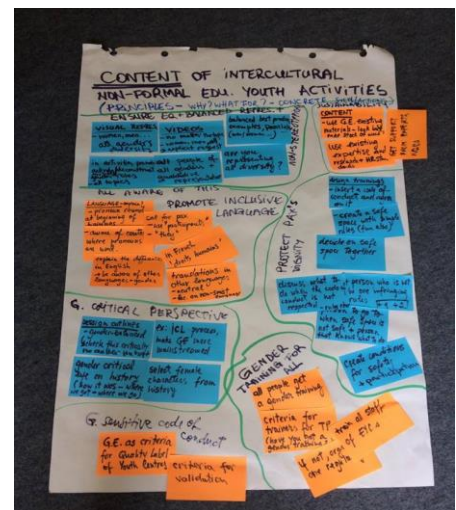
- use of a gender timer tool to calculate how much time the different genders occupy when talking in meetings and sessions;
- ensuring that the different roles are distributed equally among participants and team and do not reinforce gender stereotypes;
- selecting proper channels for communication e.g. for the call for participants;
- monitoring the occupation of space through a gender lens;
- ensuring safe spaces are available;
- evaluation forms with a gender perspective to help retrieve data with a gender perspective;
- training on gender for all youth workers;

**People:**

- introduction of a gender moderator/facilitator or assigning a gender watch throughout the activity;
- a prepared and gender-aware team;
- representation in the preparation team of all genders;
- representation of all genders in participants, gender quotas;

**Content:**

- establishing common guidelines/rules/goals with a gender approach within the activity: what is acceptable: language, jokes, safe space (in formal and non-formal moments);
- ensuring energisers, GTKEO, methodologies are reviewed so as not to reinforce gender-stereotypical perspectives;
- including a critical approach when showing historical pictures;
- challenging gender roles in sports;
- keeping an intersectional approach in visibility materials representing genders from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds ;
- avoiding words associating women with children;
- preparing “specific content on the aggressor/ harasser” within the activity not only as a sanction;



**Others:**

- gender-aware promotion of the activity internally (in the organisation) and externally;
- consideration of the role of social media and screen material through a gender lens before uploading it;
- Hashtag to include a gender perspective.

The seminar concluded with an input from Mara Georgescu, Educational Adviser of the Youth Department and trainer for the seminar, on what can be done by the Youth Department and with a recap of what had been discussed, that can be summed up in the following key points:

- equal balance and non-stereotypical representation of all genders;
- inclusive language: to put it in context, not to use women and children together, to set the boundaries between humour and sexist jokes and offensive language;
- to build upon what already exists and to contact NGOs with expertise;
- to ensure the dignity of the participants: code of conduct, safe spaces, simple understandable rules; mechanism to protect from harassment;
- gender training for staff, employees of the Youth Department, a criterion for the pool of trainers;
- critical thinking of the gender approach, heteronormativity, intersectionality, historical data (to always question the norms presented and one's own assumptions);
- Quality Label for Youth Centres: gender equality should be introduced;
- culture: cultural relativity issues, rape culture: a cross-border culture, not to assume that the occidental model is more inclusive;
- relationships among participants, among the preparation team: team should make time to develop links with participants;
- to break the association between women and gender, men should be part of the gender-mainstreaming process.

The closing remarks were made by Tegiye Birey, rapporteur of the seminar, by Sebnem Kenis, the Gender Equality Rapporteur of the Joint Council on Youth, and Markus Wolf, Chair of the European Steering Committee for Youth, Council of Europe.

The main messages included:

- the diversity of the group was beneficial; we shouldn't stay in our differences;
- the unspoken rules of how women and men should be affect our social relationships and how we socialise. How was that experienced during the informal times of the seminar?
- gender defines a lot of relations outside the individuals e.g. institutions and nations are attributed with gender characteristics;
- we cannot compromise on human rights. At policy level the process is long, and while a lot of things have been done, it is surprising how much still remains to be done;
- to advance policies on paper but also to make sure implementation is promoted;
- in the CoE, there is still a binary approach to gender; the Advisory Council on Youth is working towards a more inclusive approach;
- A new edition of *Gender Matters* is already on the agenda of the statutory bodies.

## **Key points of relevance to the EYF or EYF supported activities:**

### **For the youth sector and the EYF:**

- to include experience of gender issues as a criterion for the trainers' pool and to provide relevant training.
- to link the Quality Label for Youth Centres and gender equality;

- individual rooms to be considered in EYF supported activities for participants who do not feel comfortable sharing;
- recommendations are needed for States to adapt – resistance and delays are being encountered – to persist to overcome them;
- gender training for all staff and employees of the CoE Youth Department;
- review and amend as necessary *Gender Matters*.

### **Practices to consider for gender mainstreaming in youth work:**

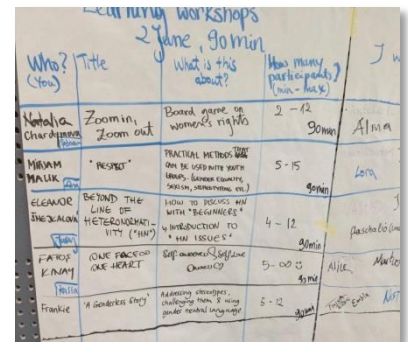
- make inequality visible through positive wording and the use of data;
- reflect on structures and norms within our organisations and our work: review the occupation of space and time, the division of positions, and the decision-making process (settings and ways decisions are taken, formal and Informal), the jokes (how jokes and comments impact and normalise certain issues);
- review icebreakers, GTKEO, ensuring they do not perpetuate stereotypes, heteronormativity; avoid words that associate women with children;
- inclusive language, used in context, e.g. when asking questions on gender, explain why you are asking; in the info pack/invitation/application form e.g. using the terms men and women instead of male/female;
- selecting proper channels for communication e.g. for the call for participants;
- even NGOs not exclusively working on gender should adopt measures on the topic;
- capacity building/training/seminar for the organisational staff;
- reaching out to other organisations with relevant experience;
- question cultural relativism: norms and traditions that help violate human rights should not be accepted;
- consider gender human safety: change in space and change in socialisation. Sexual harassment and assault cases, to know what to do in case it happens; existence of safe spaces in NGOs for vulnerable groups; safe space, what does it mean: being welcoming, not to have to explain your situation and not to be questioned on your experiences; having the right to “pass” on a difficult question;
- establish a gender code of conduct, safe spaces, simple understandable rules; a mechanism to protect from harassment;
- consider workshops on consent;
- appoint a gender watch group/gender moderator in the organisation or throughout the activity;
- when organising educational activities, include people with different gender realities in the preparation team and in administrative jobs, not only as participants;
- use evaluation forms and retrieve data on the activity or scope of action of the organisation with a gender perspective e.g. use an online quiz before the activity to explore the attitudes of the participants;
- keep intersectional approach in all materials;
- consider providing leadership training to young women as the environment outside youth NGOs is quite “unfriendly”.

# Interesting methodologies and tools:

## Peer learning workshops

Workshops (run by the participants in the seminar for the other participants) with a duration of 90 minutes and aimed at providing participants with relevant information on the subject matter of the seminar (gender equality) or useful insights or even the chance to experience activities that will help them gain new learning.

Participants were informed before the seminar of the possibility to run a learning workshop, and to sign up if interested by filling in the following table:



A title for your workshop	
10 lines about what this workshop is about	
What will happen in the workshop step by step (methodology)	
What results will the workshop achieve	
What will participants learn in your workshop	

The day before the workshops, those offering seminars worked with the trainers on the methodologies and implementation. The themes of the peer-learning workshops included **board games on women’s rights** (created in 2005 by the Russian NGO “Academy of Innovation”), practical methods than can be used with youth groups (gender equality, sexism, stereotypes, etc.), **introduction to heteronormativity** issues for beginners, addressing stereotypes, challenging them and using neutral language.

## Interesting viewings within the workshops:

TED talk - La amenaza del machismo by Mónica Zalaquett

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrO8n7H1ubY>

- Majorité Opprimée by Eleonore Pourriat

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4UWxIVVt1A>

## Story harvesting:

The story harvesting process was used as a method to discuss experiences in implementing gender equality in youth work. Participants with relevant experiences proposed to share and five *story tellers* where identified, five working groups were created around each story. Participants were nominated as *wisdom catchers* they were given a particular angle of the story to look at and to collect information: people and context, pivotal moments, emotions, process and learning moments. Once the storyteller had finished, the wisdom catchers within the same story exchanged with each other the key point they had retained from their assigned angle. Then participants formed new groups based on the same roles/angles and exchanged the key points from each story/experience. The “universal” conclusions relevant to the subject from the different aspects of the stories were collected and presented in plenary.