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Elements for a Council of Europe Definition of Sexism

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Sources of the elements for a definition (1)

Existing legal definitions and concepts:

- ✓ Violence against women: some forms already covered (Istanbul Convention)
- ✓ Concept of continuum of violence
- ✓ Indirect discrimination (UN and EU definitions) - point to practices which are apparently neutral/invisible
- ✓ Harassment based on sex (EU definition)



Sources of the elements for a definition (2)

Existing definitions of sexism in Council of Europe member states:

- ✓ 2014 Belgian legislation on combating sexism in the public space
- ✓ 2015 French legislation on sexist acts at work



Towards a Council of Europe definition (1)

a) Constitutive elements of sexism and its manifestations: beliefs as well as acts

= cover “any act, gesture or behaviour”

b) Material scope and circumstances:

- ✓ Qualify the harmful actions rather than list the potential material scope - any area of life
- ✓ Both in the public and in the private sphere
- ✓ With or without a witness
- ✓ Note that some areas are more prone to sexism
- ✓ Note that some circumstances can add to the seriousness or impact of the act or to the capacity of the victim to react



Towards a Council of Europe definition (2)

c) Motivation: the sex of the person-s or harmful gender stereotypes

- ✓ Link between the harmful actions and the sex of the person
- ✓ Link with non conforming with traditional gender norms or roles
- ✓ Related to beliefs regarding the inferiority of one sex (usually women) compared to the other (usually men)
- ✓ Women remain the main targets of sexism and experience it in a different way than men



Towards a Council of Europe definition (3)

d) Intention, target and impact:

- ✓ Sexism defined by the result rather than the intent
- ✓ Women and men (women disproportionately affected)
- ✓ Note that some groups of women more vulnerable or more targeted by different acts of sexism
- ✓ Impact: violation of a person's dignity and creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment
- ✓ Naming and addressing acts which can appear as less serious, but contribute to a general climate of perpetuation of gender inequalities



Possible definition (1)

Sexism can be understood to be:

- a) Any act, gesture or behaviour
 - i) Connected with the sex of a person or considering that person as inferior or essentially reduced to her or his sexual dimension or
 - ii) Connected to harmful gender stereotypes
- b) Committed in a public or private place



Possible definition (2)

- c) With the purpose or effect of:
 - i) Violating the dignity of a person, or of
 - ii) Creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Women and girls are exposed to a higher risk of sexism. Sexism is also closely related to prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men.



Thank you 😊

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