

Strasbourg, 24 October 2018

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GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION

**A gender equality event during the Finnish Chair of the
Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (November 2018-May 2019)**

“Tackling Gender Stereotypes and Sexism” (provisional title)

**House of Estates (Säätytalo),
Helsinki, Finland (28-29 March 2019)**

DRAFT Concept Paper

Gender stereotypes and sexism present a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality. Gender stereotypes both result from and are the cause of deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices. They are used to justify and maintain the (historical) power relations of men over women, as well as sexist attitudes which are holding back the advancement of gender equality. Gender stereotypes and patriarchy negatively affect men and boys too. Hegemonic masculinities are a contributing factor to maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes, which in turn contribute to sexism and sexist hate speech.

Sexism is rooted in the historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full autonomy and advancement of women. Gender-biased customs and traditions and the widespread sexualisation of women's bodies suggesting their sexual availability, contribute to treating women as subordinate members of the family or society and feed into violence against women. The occurrence and consequences of sexism and sexist behaviours impact disproportionately, but not exclusively, women and girls who experience them in different ways to men and boys.

Research and evidence show that sexism is rampant throughout Europe. Specific events or on-line social media movements and campaigns such as #MeToo, #EverydaySexism, #TimesUp, etc. and the series of actions and policy measures that they have triggered in different parts of the world, including in Council of Europe member states, have further contributed to shed light on the ubiquity of sexism and on the need for stronger measures to combat it.

Societal perceptions and media portrayal can feed into gender stereotypes. This includes perceptions about what both women and men should look like, how they should behave, what careers they should pursue and what roles and household tasks they should take on. The internet has provided a new dimension for the expression, transmission and audience of sexism and sexist hate speech – a dimension which has yet to be fully addressed by public policies, media, private sector and law enforcement.

Taking innovative and efficient measures to eliminate harmful gender stereotypes and sexism is therefore essential to achieving substantive gender equality. Committed to addressing the root causes of violence against women and to promoting greater equality between women and men, the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention links gender stereotypes and violence against women. It aims at changing attitudes and eliminating gender stereotypes not only at the level of individuals, but also at the level of institutions. The upcoming Council of Europe recommendation to prevent and combat sexism will be the first international legal reference document to address directly the need to prevent and combat sexism.

Aims of the conference:

The conference will:

- address both the positive and the negative impact of new media in tackling gender stereotypes and sexism (including sexist hate speech) on- and off-line;
- identify examples of good practices in tackling problems;
- highlight the standards, work and activities of the Council of Europe in combating gender stereotypes and sexism, in particular the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), the recommendations from the conferences “Combating Gender Stereotypes in and through Education” (Helsinki, 2014) and “Media and the image of women” (Amsterdam, 2013) and the forthcoming Committee of Ministers recommendation to prevent and combat sexism;
- take stock and gather evidence about policies and gaps in the member states and beyond;
- strengthen co-operation and synergies with action at national, regional and international level to address sexism, gender stereotypes and violence against women;
- facilitate and create networking opportunities;
- contribute to the implementation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023.

Targeted participants:

- high-level decision makers from Council of Europe member states, including future holders of the Chair of the Committee of Ministers;
- members of the Gender Equality Commission;
- Gender Equality Rapporteurs;
- representatives of relevant Council of Europe intergovernmental committees;
- high-level decision makers and policy makers/officials from international organisations;
- civil society organisations, equality bodies, women’s rights organisations and other relevant stakeholders.

Duration:

1.5 days

Programme:

Four sessions – one on the first day and three on the second day.