



# CoE Recommendation on Preventing and Combating Sexism

**Carolina Lasén Diaz**  
**Gender Equality Division**  
**Directorate of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance**  
**DGII**

## Gender equality at the Council of Europe

- ✓ Equality between women and men has been an **important area** for the CoE for a long time
  - ✓ CM Recommendations since 1979
  - ✓ Conventions (VaW, THB)
  - ✓ Gender Equality Strategies: 2014-2017 and current one: 2018-2023
- ✓ **Legal status** of women in Europe has greatly **improved**, but **no de facto equality** between women and men (*no country on Earth*)



## • Key points for this webinar:

- “Cyberviolence against women”: **a reality in all societies**
- **Links** between cybercrime, online violence against women and girls (VaWG), sex-based discrimination and sexism
- **Root causes of violence against women and girls** : gender inequality (discrimination, gender stereotypes, sexism)
- **CoE tools** to prevent and combat violence against women and girls: CoE Conventions, Recommendations, courses, awareness-raising materials, co-operation activities, studies...
- **Opportunities and challenges** to make further progress (political will, legal commitments, social demand, CoE support vs. “backlash “, populism, misogyny, sexist hate speech and specific “online challenges”: from harmful to illegal, from prevention to detection, from enforcement to victims’ redress).
- Until/unless we have **gender equality**, we will have VaWG (online and offline)

# CoE Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023

## Five objectives :

1. Combat **gender stereotypes and sexism**;
2. Preventing and combating **violence against women**;
3. Guaranteeing **women's equal access to justice**;
4. Achieve balanced **participation in political and public decision-making**;
5. Protect the rights of **migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls**
6. Achieve **gender mainstreaming** in all policies and measures.

## Gender equality standards of the Council of Europe

- ✓ **European Convention on Human Rights:** Art. 1, 14 and Protocol 12 (no discrimination) + case-law of the Court
- ✓ **Istanbul Convention** to prevent+ combat **violence against women** and domestic violence
- ✓ **Convention on Action against Human Trafficking**
- ✓ **European Social Charter**
- ✓ **CM Recommendations** (adopted since 1979): many topics - education, media, sexist language, sport, education, political participation, audio-visual policy, health

## The 2019 Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism

- Stemmed from work under the first Gender Equality Strategy of the CoE (2014-2017)
- Adopted by the Committee of Ministers in **March 2019**
- Includes the **first ever internationally agreed definition of “sexism”**
- Recommends member states to:
  - **Take measures** to prevent and combat sexism and its manifestations in the public and private spheres
  - **Monitor progress in implementing its guidelines** and to inform the CoE’s Gender Equality Commission
  - **Ensure** that the Recommendation is **translated and disseminated**

# The 2019 Recommendation on sexism

- ✓ Puts forward a common understanding of concepts & helps to identify sexist behaviours
  - Ex: Mansplaining, silencing behaviour, « benevolent » sexism
- ✓ Proposes concrete measures to prevent and eliminate it (Guidelines in an Appendix)
- ✓ Larger and different impact on women than men
- ✓ Identification of particularly vulnerable groups of women
- ✓ Intersectional approach

## Prevent and combat sexism

- ✓ Movements such as **#metoo** have heightened the awareness on sexism
- ✓ The negative impact of **gender stereotypes**
- ✓ Widespread and prevalent in **all sectors** and **all societies**
- ✓ Feeds the **continuum** of violence





# Definitions

Sexism

#

Discrimination

#

Violence

## Discrimination

### European Convention on Human Rights

#### Article 14

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

## Violence against Women

- **Istanbul Convention** of the Council of Europe:
  - VaW is a **violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women**
  - All acts of **gender-based violence** resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women
  - **Including threats** of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty
  - Ocurring in **public or in private life** (online: stalking)

## Sexism

- ***“Any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of:***
  - *i. violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or*
  - *ii. resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons; or*
  - *iii. creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; or*
  - *iv. constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or a group of persons; or*
  - *v. maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes.”*

## Topics included in the CoE Recommendation:

- Language and communications
- Internet, social media and online sexist hate speech
- Media, advertising and other communication products and services
- Workplace
- Public sector (public services, elected assemblies)
- Justice sector
- Education
- Culture and sport
- Private sphere

## Internet, social media and online sexist hate speech

*(section II.B of the Guidelines included in the Appendix of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1)*

Women are disproportionately affected by this manifestation of sexism (in particular, young women and girls, women journalists, politicians, gamers, public figures, women's rights defenders)

- Attacks on men are mostly based on professional opinions or competence, while women are more likely to be subject to sexist/sexualised abuse
- Online attacks may « silence » women and girls, preventing them from being active online
- Sexist misuse of social media (eg. posting intimate images without the consent of those depicted) is a form of violence that should be addressed

- Recommended measures:

- Legal measures to define and criminalise incidents of SHS (applicable to all media)
- Procedures for reporting and removing harmful materials - and appropriate sanctions
- School programmes for children/youth on media literacy and appropriate digital behaviour
- Research and collect sex- and age-disaggregated data **on cybersexism and cyberviolence**
- Integrate a GE perspective in policies and research re. AI (to avoid perpetuating sexism and gender stereotypes) and potential positive role of AI

## CoE tools to prevent and combat sexism

### CoE campaign « *See it. Name it. Stop it* »

- An action page: [www.coe.int/stop-sexism](http://www.coe.int/stop-sexism) (*available in 20 languages*)
  - A video « *sexism exists everywhere* » (*in 20 languages, with subtitles and/or dubbed*)
  - A quiz – take it to check your level of awareness about sexism! ;-)
- A new brochure explaining the content of the 2019 Recommendation in accessible terms
- CoE webpage with info on combating sexism
- The CM Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism is now available in 25 languages



## Some conclusions

- ✓ **Progress remains slow**
  - *“sexism remains widespread and prevalent in all sectors and all societies”*
  - *“sexism and sexist behaviour are rooted in and reinforce gender stereotypes”*
  - *“sexism is linked to VaWG, acts of “everyday” sexism are part of a continuum of violence creating intimidation, fear..”*
- ✓ Gap between gender equality standards and their implementation in practice: **CoE can help!**
- ✓ Gender equality requires a **holistic approach**, addressing inter-connected issues/sectors: education/media/AI/law enforcement, justice...

## Some conclusions (cont.)

- ✓ Importance of training and awareness-raising to **prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism**
- ✓ **Some national-level initiatives against sexism** (but this remains limited)
- ✓ Growing **threats to women's human rights**: populist governments, extreme conservatism, attacks on women's rights defenders, all aimed at pushing an "anti-gender equality agenda" to backtrack on past achievements and existing rights
- ✓ We need to continue making progress, and **work together (more and better) to make gender equality a reality across Europe and beyond**

[gender.equality@coe.int](mailto:gender.equality@coe.int) - [carolina.lasen-diaz@coe.int](mailto:carolina.lasen-diaz@coe.int)

<https://www.coe.int/equality>

<https://www.coe.int/stop-sexism>

