



Rijksoverheid



Gender Equality Conference

Theme: “Media and the Image of Women”

**With the participation of the Council of Europe
Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality**

Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 4-5 July 2013

**Organised by the
Council of Europe in partnership with
the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
of the Netherlands**

Concept Paper

1. Background of the Conference

Every day, and the world over, we are exposed to images and information from a wide array of sources. Such content plays a crucial role in shaping our opinions, values and ideas of what is a desired and acceptable behaviour for women and men. Unfortunately, the visibility given to women in mass media, whether in text, audio, or audio-visual form is more often than not based on stereotypical portrayals of what is feminine and masculine. Through the acceptance and imitation of these so-called “role models”, harmful gender stereotypes are perpetuated affecting every aspect of our lives.

For the Council of Europe, gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. Gender equality is the opposite of gender inequality, not of gender difference¹. Gender stereotyping presents a serious obstacle in the process of achieving real gender equality and feeds into gender discrimination, which not only limits the fulfilment of the full potential of women, but is also one of the root causes of violence against women and girls.

Despite progress achieved, the media continue to reproduce stereotypes of women, a fact that is often aggravated by a lack of women in leadership positions within the media industry. The advent of new technologies such as the internet or social networks has in no way changed this. Although new media technologies can potentially serve as a tool to empower women, they pose new challenges that have not been sufficiently tackled. The debate around new media content and regulation has often focused on concerns for freedom of expression and data protection, largely overlooking the effect, both positive and negative, that it can have on gender equality.

As an Organisation set up to protect and promote democracy and human rights, the Council of Europe has been active in the area of media and gender equality since the 1980s. Its recommendations and activities have focused on “*the important role that the media play in forming social attitudes and values and their potential as instruments of social change*”². In its 7th Ministerial Conference in Baku in 2010, Ministers responsible for equality between women and men emphasised that the media must recognise that they have a responsibility for upholding and applying the principle of equality between women and men as an integral part of human rights in the way they operate and in the content of their messages. The plan of action “*Taking up the challenge of the achievement of de jure and de facto gender equality*” adopted by the Conference, proposes that the Council of Europe should:

¹ Gender Mainstreaming - conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices. Council of Europe Publication: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/03themes/gender-mainstreaming/EG_S_MS_98_2_rev_en.pdf
² Recommendation No R (84) 17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on equality between women and men in the media

1. draft a handbook on strategies to combat gender stereotypes in the media;
2. identify and disseminate good practice in relation to codes of conduct adopted by the media to address gender stereotypes;

Within the transversal programme on gender equality set up in 2012 to support the implementation of the Council of Europe standards within the Organisation and in member states, a new structure was established - the [Gender Equality Commission \(GEC\)](#). One of the priorities identified by the GEC is to tackle the issue of "women and media" on the basis of the measures contained in *Recommendation No R (84) 17 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on equality between women and men in the media* and examine the follow-up to be given to these measures. Members of the GEC agreed that the first annual meeting of the network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality (NFP) (the Netherlands, 4-5 July 2013) should be devoted to this issue.

2. Aims of the Conference

The main aims of the Conference:

- Raise awareness of the media and the general public on gender equality issues in the media;
- Discuss the challenges posed by reconciling the media's freedom of expression and upholding the principle of gender equality;
- Encourage a gender sensitive approach in the media environment and industry;
- Promote leadership of women in the media;
- Discuss the challenges posed by new media, its impact on gender equality and how it can be used as a potential agent for positive change;
- Discuss and exchange good practices on effective strategies for combating gender stereotypes;
- Present to the participants the Council of Europe Handbook "Women and Journalists" and its toolkit on how to combat gender stereotypes in the media.

3. Participants

Targeted participants include:

- Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality;
- Representatives of gender equality mechanisms;
- Representatives of national media regulatory authorities in the Council of Europe member states;
- Representatives of media (press, radio, cinema, TV, ITC)
- Representatives of marketing and advertising companies;
- Journalists and representatives of their associations;
- Gender Equality Rapporteurs;
- Representatives of NGOs working in the field of women and the media;
- Representatives of the Committee of Ministers, including the Thematic Co-ordinator for gender equality and trafficking of the Committee of Ministers;
- the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;
- Representatives of the Office of the Commissioner of Human Rights;
- the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
- Representatives of the Conference of INGOs;
- International intergovernmental organisations, in particular UN Women, European Union and the OSCE.