

Equality between women and men



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Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of women and men in all spheres of public and private life. It also means an equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men and valuing them equally.

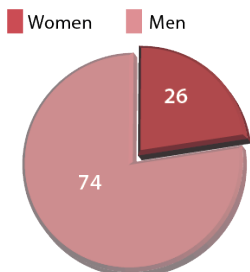
Gender equality aims to change the structures in society, which contribute to maintaining unequal power relationships between women and men. Achieving this aim is central to the protection of human rights, the functioning of democracy, respect for the rule of law, and economic growth and competitiveness. The realisation of *de facto* equality between women and men has been high on the agenda of the work of the Council of Europe for decades. This has resulted in the development of a comprehensive legal and policy framework.

However, despite the improvement of women's legal status in Europe, effective equality is far from being a reality. Violence and discrimination persist in many areas, maintaining women and men in their traditional roles and preventing the full realisation of women's human rights.

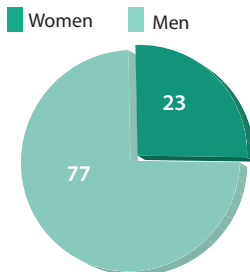
Facts and figures

With regard to the economic and social situation of women and men in Europe, while their secondary education attainment is getting closer (83% and 87% respectively), this does not translate proportionally into equality in other areas, notably decision-making and employment.

% of women and men in national parliaments in Council of Europe member states (2015)



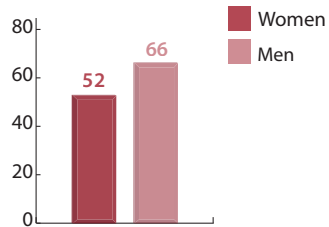
% of women and men in governments of Council of Europe member states (2015)





Women's economic independence is a crucial aspect for the realisation of gender equality. Although a significant body of legislation has been in force for several decades in this area in most countries, progress is extremely slow. Women have lesser access to economic assets in Europe: they own less property; they often occupy unsecure and lower-paid occupations, and remain disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination in employment. In most countries, women earn on average only 60 to 75% of men's wages, and the average gender pension gap in the 28 European Union (EU) member states is as high as 39%.

Women and men's labour force participation rate in 41 of the 47 Council of Europe member states (% , 2014)



Despite policy changes and the progress that individual women and girls have made, gender inequalities, traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes persist in all walks of life, notably at home, in education, in the media and in the justice system. Violence against women in its different forms, while better researched and addressed by legislation, remains the most widespread violation of women's human rights in Europe.

Women's labour market involvement has steadily increased in European countries in the last fifty years, but inequalities between women and men in relation to unpaid care work are a persisting feature of gender relations. Gender stereotypes continue to influence the sharing of household and care work between women and men, whereby women continue to perform the majority of unpaid work. This reduces the opportunities for them to engage in paid employment and results in lower visibility and participation in the social and public spheres.

Looking at the media, women's and men's images and the role that they play in the profession are heavily influenced by existing social and cultural norms. In 2015, women represented only 25% of news subjects and 17% of experts present in the media in Europe. Media are omnipresent in our lives and play a major role in shaping social perceptions; by becoming more gender-sensitive, they can be a powerful vehicle for progress towards gender equality.

Education, another area with a considerable potential to promote social change, also abounds with examples of negative gender stereotypes. They appear in the behaviour and teaching practice of education professionals, in career advice, and in school textbooks which continue to convey traditional cultural norms, failing to fully include women's contribution to science, history and the arts.

Such gender stereotypes, and the widespread objectification and sexualisation of women's bodies in and by the media and social culture, which suggest an inferior status and permanent sexual availability of women, as well as discriminatory customs and traditions, contribute to treating women as subordinate members of the family and of society.

This leads to a situation whereby also in courts, women's testimonies are frequently given less weight. Particularly in lawsuits relating to sexual violence or human trafficking, women face stigma, risk harassment and retaliation, and may be required to meet higher standards of proof. In Europe, only a minority of incidents of sexual violence is reported, and the majority of reported rapes do not end in a conviction. Although conviction rates vary significantly in our member states, in several countries they are as low as 5%.

The challenges that women face in accessing justice are serious obstacles to the elimination of violence against women. Violence against women, in its many forms, remains widespread throughout the 47 Council of Europe member states. For example, one out of three women in the EU has experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15. Progress with policy and legal reform to tackle violence against women and ensure their safety is slow. For example, only a minority of Council of Europe member states provides a sufficient number of shelter beds for survivors of gender-based violence, and many forms of violence are not criminalised in all 47 member states of the Council of Europe. The ratification of the Convention on preventing and combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) by a growing number of countries should accelerate change in this respect.

Tools for change: the road towards real gender equality

Laws, policies, institutional mechanisms, co-operation with civil society and adequate funding are all necessary tools on the road to achieving real gender equality. These policies should comply with international standards and benchmarks and adopt a double approach: (a) specific measures for the advancement of women, including positive action, and (b) the implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy in all policies and measures.

As extensive research has shown in a multitude of contexts, when women have equal chances with men to be socially and politically active, economies and societies thrive, and this benefits everyone, men and boys included.



Addressing the needs of *all* women

Women often face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence, because they are women while they also belong to a specific group. Young or elderly women, women with disabilities, lesbian/bisexual/transgender women, women survivors of violence, migrant women (including refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented women), women living in poverty, single mothers, women from minorities or from various religious or social origins, and living in different territories, are in different situations and have different needs.

For example, elderly women face higher risks of poverty due to the cumulative effect of gender inequalities throughout life (e.g. high involvement in unpaid care work, gender gaps in employment, low property rates and low pensions). Their situation may be even more precarious if they live in a rural area with lesser access to social services. Roma women face specific types of human rights violations, such as forced sterilisation, but also other forms of violence and injustices both within and outside their community. Women asylum seekers do not always fit into the conventional image of a political refugee fleeing persecution from the state. The gender-specific human rights violations they face, such as female genital mutilation, rape, domestic violence or forced marriage need to be fully recognised as grounds for receiving international protection.

Identifying the different situations and needs of women and girls is essential for the effectiveness of both gender equality policies and of “generic policies”, including those addressing the needs of specific groups.

The Council of Europe and Gender Equality

From the 1980s onwards, the Council of Europe has played a major role in the development of norms and concepts such as parity democracy, gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming, that have been providing a new approach to gender equality, shaping its development in Europe.

■ The Council of Europe Transversal Programme on Gender Equality, launched in 2012, aims to increase the impact and visibility of gender equality standards and to support their implementation in member states. To achieve its aim and advance the gender equality agenda, the Programme builds on the political and financial support of the member states, as well as and on the contribution of all Council of Europe decision-making, advisory and monitoring bodies. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission is at the centre of these efforts. Gender Equality Rapporteurs appointed in steering committees and monitoring bodies of the Council of Europe and working on different topics (e.g., education, media, sport, terrorism and corruption) provide standards, innovative policy recommendations and feed into the work and activities of the Gender Equality Commission.

Main focus of the Council of Europe activities in relation to gender equality:

- ▶ Combating gender stereotypes and sexism;
- ▶ Preventing and combating violence against women;
- ▶ Guaranteeing the equal access of women to justice;
- ▶ Achieving the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making;
- ▶ Promoting gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures in the Council of Europe.

■ The Council of Europe's pioneering work in the fields of human rights and gender equality has resulted in solid standards which, if fully implemented, would bring member states closer to real equality between women and men. Some of the milestone achievements in this respect include two legal treaties. The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings recognises that trafficking in human beings is a heavily gendered phenomenon and contains several strong references to gender equality and gender mainstreaming. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle violence against women and domestic violence. It aims at zero tolerance for such violence and is a major step forward in making Europe and beyond safer for women.

■ In addition, a number of recommendations adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe address gender equality issues in a broad range of areas notably violence against women, balanced participation in political and public decision-making, gender mainstreaming in the media, education, health and sport.

Key Council of Europe publications

- ▶ Brochure with the main Council of Europe Standards on Gender Equality and Women's Rights.
- ▶ Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media.
- ▶ Gender Equality and the Media at National Level: Compilation of good practices from member states.
- ▶ Compilation of good practices to promote an education free from gender stereotypes and identifying ways to implement the measures which are included in the Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in education.
- ▶ Compilation of good practices from member states to reduce existing obstacles and facilitate women's access to justice.
- ▶ Collection of papers to facilitate the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

■ In achieving its aims and objectives, the Council of Europe seeks to further develop and strengthen its co-operation with civil society and partner organisations, in particular the EU, the United Nations and its different agencies - above all UN Women - as well as the OSCE, the OECD and the World Bank.

Detailed sources for all data used (UNDP, World Bank, EU, Global Media Monitoring Project, WHO) available upon request.



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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