

# SEMINAR COMBATING SEXIST HATE SPEECH



**REPORT**  
**10-12 February 2016**  
**European Youth Centre, Strasbourg**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



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## Summary

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” Let’s be clear from the outset: sexist hate speech is a human rights violation. It is a form of violence against women and girls that feeds into gender-based discrimination. Sexist hate speech presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality. [...] There is no acceptable excuse for sexist hate speech, and action is necessary to counter its rise. [...] Free speech and free expression are not “free” if they are hijacked to intimidate, demean and – ultimately – to try to silence women, subjecting them to hate speech”.

*Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy, Council of Europe*

**T**he Council of Europe Seminar, Combating Sexist Hate Speech, brought together a group of around 60 participants, including human rights and women’s rights activists, youth leaders, journalists and policy makers to challenge sexist hate speech, its causes, forms and consequences, and to propose solutions to counter it.

■ The Seminar was organised jointly by the Youth Department and the Gender Equality Unit of the Council of Europe, in an effort to address an issue that touches upon core topics for both sectors. For the Youth Department, the Seminar represented an occasion to value and re-assess the role of youth work to consolidate the achievements in gender equality and, especially, to support young people in campaigning for human rights online. For the Gender

Equality Unit, the Seminar was an opportunity to explore a topic that is related to all themes of the Gender Equality Strategy.<sup>1</sup>

■ In a survey about young people and online hate speech carried out in 2015 by the Council of Europe Youth Department, women were identified as one of the top three target groups of hate speech. Yet, hate speech against women is often seen as acceptable and deemed less harmful than other forms of hate speech, such as those based on ethnic or religious grounds. Participants acknowledged sexist hate speech as a pervasive and widespread form of gender-based violence with roots in gender inequalities, which are still prevalent in our societies. Opposing gender equality to freedom of expression was seen as an impediment to accessing the full diversity of expressions, as gender equality and freedom of expression are mutually reinforcing. There cannot be freedom of expression if parts of the population are silenced and marginalised by hate speech.

■ Hate speech is an old phenomenon. Yet the Internet has facilitated its expansion in both the public and private domain, as anonymous and known perpetrators are granted almost boundless freedom to express themselves, and legislation has not yet been able to address the issue. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the Internet is an important vehicle for freedom of expression today. Seminar participants also recognised the crucial role of the Internet in helping to expose and denounce women human rights' violations. Dedicated websites and social media can be used to report sexist hate speech which would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

” If you wouldn't say it face to face, don't write it on the Internet”.

Marit Maij, Dutch member of parliament, rapporteur on 'Ending cyber-discrimination and online hate', Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

■ Women are confronted with violent and sexualised threats, and violence against women is even often glorified or rewarded online. Particular platforms were pointed out as conveyers of sexist hate speech, including social media or video games. Specific target groups among women were highlighted such

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1. 1) combating Gender Stereotypes and Sexism; 2) preventing and combating Violence against Women; 3) guaranteeing Equal Access of Women to Justice; 4) achieving Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision Making; 5) achieving Gender Mainstreaming in all policies and measures.



as young women, women human rights defenders, women in politics, female journalists and women in the media. Nevertheless, it was stressed that any woman can become a target of sexist hate speech, both online and offline.

■ Seminar participants stressed that sexist hate speech is also omnipresent offline. It can take the form of hate speech in the workplace, in school environments, in the media or in the public space. It takes many forms, from written or verbal insults to offensive images or slogans.

■ In the same way as with other forms of violence against women, sexist hate speech remains underreported but its impacts on women, whether emotional, psychological and/or physical can be devastating, especially for young women.

■ A wide range of proposals for actions by different stakeholders were made during the Seminar, highlighting the fact that sexist hate speech is an issue that should be addressed not only by the different sectors of the Council of Europe, but also by national governments, the media and civil society organisations. Specific activities were proposed, such as the creation of a logo and online stickers, the use of videos, the promotion of strategic litigation and the organisation of feminist camps for young women. Specific recommendations were also made regarding the role of the media sector, including platform providers and the need for codes of ethics to ensure more effective moderation in social media; and active gender equality policies regarding media content but also in the media sector.

■ A set of necessary policy actions to address sexist hate speech were also identified, including clarifying concepts and definitions, eliminating gaps in legislation, especially related to combating violence against women, eliminating sexism from the language and practice of all institutions, promoting gender equality and media literacy training, and promoting the integration of a gender equality perspective in all aspects of education. Specific actions were also defined in view of 8 March 2016, the European Action Day against Sexist Hate Speech organised within the framework of the No Hate Speech Movement Campaign (NHSM).

■ This report highlights the discussions that took place during the Seminar, including the resulting proposals and ideas suggested by participants. It follows a thematic approach based on the programme of the seminar.





## Introduction

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**T**he Seminar on sexist hate speech was co-organised by the Council of Europe’s Youth Department and the Gender Equality Unit. It took place from 10 to 12 February 2016 at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg (France). The Seminar gathered 56 participants comprising youth, women’s rights and human rights activists, experts, journalists and Council of Europe representatives from more than 30 countries. The active participation of youth leaders and campaign activists from Canada (Québec), Mexico and Morocco was very important in affirming the global human rights challenge of sexism and hate speech.

■ The aim of the Council of Europe’s youth policy is “to provide young people – girls and boys, young women and young men – with equal opportunities and experience which enable them to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to play a full part in all aspects of society”<sup>2</sup>. Removing all the barriers and obstacles to this equality of opportunities is central to any youth policy and must inform youth work and non-formal education. The Seminar represented an occasion to value and re-assess the role of youth work to consolidate the achievements in gender equality and, especially, to support young people in campaigning for human rights online.

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2. Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe.

■ Gender equality has long been a priority of the Council of Europe, which, over the years, has developed solid standards in this area, including a Gender Equality Strategy, and binding conventions and recommendations, which address gender equality issues in a broad range of areas, notably violence against women, balanced participation in political and public decision making, and gender mainstreaming in the media, education, health or sport.

■ To prepare for the Seminar, participants received a background note on sexist hate speech prepared by the Gender Equality Unit. At the venue, several other documents were made available for participants, such as the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017, a factsheet 'Combating gender stereotyping and sexism in the media', as well as 'Bookmarks – a manual for combating hate speech online through human rights education' (links to relevant documents can be found in Appendix II of this report).

■ Significant emphasis was placed on participants to engage as partners of the No Hate Speech Movement (NHSM) Campaign and take ownership of the Seminar's outcomes. The Seminar was made interactive with a balance between plenary sessions and working group sessions. Short videos on sexism and hate speech were screened and time was given to participants to become acquainted with one another. Plenary sessions provided time for information exchange and discussions with experts, while the working sessions enabled participants to deepen their engagement with topics among smaller groups. Participants also had the opportunity to present and discuss the work of their organisations in relation to sexist hate speech and gender equality during an open-space session.

## Aims and objectives of the Seminar

” This Seminar is not about setting one group against another. It is about working together: youth leaders working with government representatives, young people with older people, men working with women, women working with social media and the Internet. It is about joining our forces to achieve real gender equality. This is not an impossible goal. We can do it!”

Snežana Samardžić-Marković, Director General of Democracy,  
Council of Europe

■ The Seminar addressed the causes, extent, forms, targets and impacts of sexist hate speech online and offline, in particular on young people and especially on young women. While sexist hate speech can affect both women, men and others, women are the primary targets, therefore the focus of this report is on them. With a better understanding of the issue and through the exchange of good practices, participants identified measures to prevent, counter, report and remedy sexist hate speech. Participants identified gaps and made proposals for the Council of Europe's future work in combating sexist hate speech through the NHSM Campaign and the Action Day against sexist hate speech, the Gender Equality Strategy, youth policy measures and other relevant instruments in the Council of Europe's structures and within its member states.

## **Presentations of the No Hate Speech Movement Campaign and of the Gender Equality Strategy**

### **The Council of Europe Youth Department and the No Hate Speech Movement**

” Youth participation, social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, human rights education and anti-discrimination are the key areas of the work of the European Youth Centre”.

*Antje Rothmund, Head of the Youth Department,  
Council of Europe*

■ Through its Youth Department, the Council of Europe encourages youth participation in decision-making about the organisation's youth programmes, policies and priorities. Youth policy and youth work are inclusive and aim to provide equal opportunities to both young women and men. Gender equality is therefore mainstreamed in all activities and projects to promote inclusive and peaceful societies.

■ Initiated by youth representatives in the Advisory Council on Youth, the No Hate Speech Movement is the Council of Europe's youth Campaign for human rights, with a particular focus on hate speech online. It initially ran from 2013 to 2015 and has been extended to 2017. Based on the fact that women and girls are confronted with sexist hate speech on a daily basis, both online and offline, this phenomenon was chosen as one of the thematic focuses of the Campaign in 2016-2017. The Campaign aims at raising awareness of hate speech online as a cross-cutting issue, combating it with prevention, education

and alternative responses such as counter-narratives. It involves activists, organisations and public authorities and encourages youth participation. As a Europe-wide Campaign, the No Hate Speech Movement includes national campaigns in member states and beyond. Campaign tools are made available online and a study on national reporting structures is currently being prepared. Examples of hate speech on the Internet can be reported on the Hate Speech Watch page to spark discussions on ways to deal with hate speech and organise action.

■ The movement organises European Action Days focused on specific themes such as Homophobia, Transphobia, Romaphobia or Antisemitism, and organises support for these target groups through online and offline activities. As part of the activities on sexist hate speech within the Campaign, this year's International Women's Day – 8 March 2016 – has been designated European Action Day on Combating Sexist Hate Speech. It will mobilise 43 national campaigns and more than 60 partners of the movement to take action and raise awareness of the damages caused by sexist hate speech. A session of the Seminar was dedicated to the preparation of this Action Day, and sexism in hate speech will remain a focus throughout the movement's Campaign.

## The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy

Strategic Objective 1 – Combating gender stereotypes and sexism – Council of Europe action will focus on:

” Combating sexism as a form of hate speech and integrating this dimension into Council of Europe action aiming at combating hate speech and discrimination while actively promoting respect for both women and men”.

Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017

■ The first objective of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for 2014-2017 includes combating sexism as a form of hate speech. It aims at fighting gender stereotypes and sexism in order to achieve real gender equality. Previous work of the Council of Europe under this objective has focused on gender stereotypes in the media and in education.

■ Sexist hate speech is an issue that runs across all five topics of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy, making it all the more relevant to address. As a form of gender-based violence, combating sexist hate speech also

relates to the second objective of the Strategy (preventing and combating violence against women) and is linked to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Sexist hate speech also impedes the achievement of gender-balanced participation in political and public decision making (fourth objective) by targeting and potentially silencing an already under-represented part of the population. Finally, measures to provide redress and remedy to victims of sexist hate speech are linked to the third objective of the Strategy (women's equal access to justice) and gender mainstreaming (fifth objective) concerns all policies of the Council of Europe, including those on youth, media and Internet governance.

■ The Gender Equality Commission, for which the Gender Equality Unit is the Secretariat, is at the centre of efforts to ensure the implementation of the Strategy. Furthermore, Gender Equality Rapporteurs are appointed from among the members of the steering committees and other intergovernmental structures of the Council of Europe to facilitate the integration of a gender equality perspective in their work.







## Causes and forms of sexist hate speech

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” Sexist hate speech is a form of “social shaming” that aims to degrade women, instil fear and insecurity thus contributing towards maintaining and reinforcing a gender hierarchy and patriarchy in public places”.

Liri Kopaçi-Di Michele, Head of the Equality Division, Council of Europe

**S**exist hate speech is a complex issue in which women are overly targeted. Participants expressed the need to improve the definition of the term. It takes its roots in sexism, the supposition, belief or assertion that one sex is superior to the other. Sexism is often expressed within the context of traditional stereotyping of social roles on the basis of sex, and results in discrimination practised against members of the supposedly inferior sex. Hate speech towards women occurs worldwide, offline and online, in every sphere of daily life: at school, in the family and social circles, in the public space, at work, and in times of crisis and peace. Although it has taken a whole new dimension through the Internet, the root causes of sexist hate speech preceded the technology as it is fundamentally linked to unequal power relations between women and men and gender inequalities.

■ The true extent of sexist hate speech is partly hidden by the choice (or not) of targeted women to remain silent. It also takes many forms. It can be sexist hate speech (gender-motivated hate speech), sexualised hate speech, cyber-sexism or cyber-gender harassment. The aim is to humiliate or objectify women, to undervalue their skills and opinions, to destroy their reputation, to make them feel vulnerable and fearful, and to control and punish them for not following a certain behaviour.

” When I was writing anonymously, people assumed that I was a man, probably white and heterosexual, because in our society, male is the default. When I wrote as myself everything changed. [...] Comments quietly undermine and devalue you, your opinions and your skills”.

Erica Buist, Journalist for The Guardian, United Kingdom

■ Participants detailed several manifestations of sexist hate speech such as victim blaming and re-victimisation, slut-shaming, body-shaming, revenge porn, brutal and sexualised threats of death, rape and violence, offensive comments on appearance, sexuality, sexual orientation or gender roles, but also false compliments or supposed jokes, using humour to humiliate and ridicule the target. These are often treated as harmless and non-serious issues and women are told to “toughen up” or “get used to it”, but those are forms of violence and their impacts on women are real and severe (see Section II).

” As a society we have been able to understand very clearly the necessity of a balance of rights when it comes to hate speech and racism but the issue is debated when we talk about hate speech and sexism”.

Iris Luarasi, Lecturer, Department of Journalism and Communication, Tirana University, Albania

■ Multiple causes were put forward for sexist hate speech, including the hegemonic masculinity in our societies, the culture of sexism and rape, the existence of double standards, the normalisation of sexualised and violent language, and expectations of women and men's sexuality and roles in society. Education, via textbooks, stereotypical toys and video games, the family and the social circle, as well as art (cinema, songs, videos, books) all perpetuate gender stereotypes. A lack of awareness, an unwillingness to respond, the problem

of anonymity online, gaps in the law and policies, and lack of enforcement were also highlighted as contributing to a climate of impunity for abusers.

■ Moreover, ideology such as extreme nationalism and conservatism tend to be fertile grounds to spread hate towards women.<sup>3</sup> While sometimes the defence of “women’s well-being” is used to advance ultra-conservative or racist agendas, most of the time women become targets when they do not conform to traditional gender roles.<sup>4</sup> The same takes place when women stand against discriminatory, traditional or anti-feminist cultural and religious beliefs or customs.

■ Women in a position of power are particular targets of sexist hate speech. They sometimes adopt male characteristics to “blend in”. This is due in part to the deeply-rooted patriarchy in society, in which the default actor is a middle-aged, white, heterosexual man. Some activist men in masculinist movements, fearful of losing what they consider to be their privileges, are using the defence of “traditional masculinity” as an argument to attack women’s rights.

■ One of the causes of the current trend of sexist hate speech that was also mentioned is the fact that women’s roles in society have changed tremendously in the last decades. These changes and feminism have led to intensive questioning about what it means to be a woman. However, men have not gone through similar changes, for example, as regards their involvement in care work or their questioning of dominant masculinity. It was concluded that gender equality still has a long way to go to be mainstreamed effectively in society.

■ While the media sector was identified as part of the solution for social change, women’s participation and representation in the media was also pointed out as part of the problem. Indeed, the media dichotomises women and men and reinforces gender stereotypes, it proposes special “female rubrics”, and often comments on women for their looks while men are praised for their performances. The media industry is predominantly comprised of market-driven companies, mostly owned and controlled by men. The 2015 Global Media Monitoring Project report shows that “women make up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news” compared to 17% in 1995. Women also constitute only 26% of

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3. Example of Norwegian terrorist Anders Behring Breivik and his “fan club”.

4. Example of racist reactions after the attacks on women during the 2015-2016 New Year’s Eve events in several European cities. The anti-immigration group Pegida stated: “It is our God-given right and duty to protect our women. It’s what men do.”

people present in the new digital media in 2015 (Internet and Twitter news).<sup>5</sup> Women constitute half of the world's population, but if they are not equally part of the news, the media is failing to provide an accurate representation of the real situation. The advertising industry's representation of women is even worse in its objectification of women with an additional heavy emphasis on gender marketing.

” Gender equality cannot exist without freedom of expression but freedom of expression cannot exist without gender equality”.

Maria Edström, Senior Lecturer, Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

■ Online or offline, freedom of expression is often brandished as an ultimate right to counter calls for gender equality. In addition, social media have fewer obligations than traditional media in relation to the quality of their output and to respecting ethical standards. The new media industry sometimes uses these legal loopholes and abuses the freedom of expression argument in order to allow the spread of sexist hate speech.

■ Discussions on freedom of expression tend to catalyse tension. The conflict that appears between freedom of expression and gender equality seems to be a major obstacle in combating sexist hate speech. Even in Nordic countries, where those two rights are considered core principles, freedom of expression is sometimes more valued than gender equality, and legislative attempts to counter hate speech are perceived as censorship. In many countries, however, existing legislation can be used to prosecute sexist hate speech perpetrators (see Section III).

■ Gender equality and freedom of expression should be seen as intertwined rather than opposing rights. Indeed, the realisation of gender equality allows for the expansion of freedom of speech. Conversely, allowing sexist hate speech to thrive with impunity silences people, in particular women and girls, thus restraining their freedom of expression and depriving society of their voices. Once this is understood, a balance must be found in providing a platform for free speech without condoning sexist hate speech.

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5. Global Media Monitoring Project: [www.whomakesthenews.org](http://www.whomakesthenews.org). Direct reference: [http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/Imported/reports\\_2015/highlights/highlights\\_en.pdf](http://cdn.agilitycms.com/who-makes-the-news/Imported/reports_2015/highlights/highlights_en.pdf)



# Targets and impacts of sexist hate speech on women

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## Targeted groups

■ Women do not constitute a homogenous group and the targets of sexist hate speech can be diverse. Participants also expressed the need to think outside the gender binary and use an intersectional approach. Indeed, gender equality policies must take into account multiple discrimination on grounds such as sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, colour, ethnicity, language, disability, religion, age, class, political or other opinion or belief, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. For example, the discourse on the sterilisation of Roma women sparked both sexist and racist hate speech in Romania.

■ Young people are particularly active on the Internet and on social media. Yet in some member states, there is a gender disparity in the use of the Internet. The example of Albania was discussed. This country has 3 million inhabitants, 60% of whom use the Internet; around 1 million are aged between 18 and 34. On Facebook, there are almost twice as many men as women.

■ Participants highlighted young women as a vulnerable target group due to their sex and age. Young people in general lack media literacy and knowledge of their rights. In online and offline environments such as school, children and adolescents use violent and abusive derogatory language and expressions of sexism disguised as jokes. Girls have sometimes integrated this code and, as a result, some of them also use sexist hate speech or do not take a stand against it. Most young women participants, however, stressed that they had been confronted by sexist hate speech coming from young men countless times.

■ Women identifying themselves as feminist and women human rights defenders, especially young women, are even more at risk of being targeted by sexist hate speech. Hate is used as a defensive response to feminism, its achievements and claims. For example, both youth and girl's rights activist Malala Yousafzai and UN Women Goodwill Ambassador Emma Watson have been the targets of severe harassment.

■ Women visible in the media, such as journalists and politicians or other public figures, are often targeted. They face sexist hate speech from the public but also from colleagues and counterparts in their work environment. Examples were given of severe stalking and harassment of women politicians in several countries, including spreading private images, comments on their physical appearance and sexist insults.

” Journalists are targeted because they are trained to tell the truth”.  
Pamela Morinière, European Federation of Journalists

■ According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), in 2015, 109 journalists and media staff were killed and three died of accidental deaths. Both women and men journalists receive threats but the difference is one of nature as women receive sexualised threats. This might discourage employers from sending female journalists out into the field. Online, they receive insults, threats and harassment through emails and social media and can also be victims of impersonation when their name is used to spread false statements. While the media has a role in opening debate for democracy, reporting on gender equality issues, in traditional “male fields” or on “sensitive” issues such as migration, exposes women to even more violent harassment.

■ Article 7 of the IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists states that “The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins”.

■ In February 2013, a Swedish broadcaster exposed the online hate against women journalists in a programme on “Men who inter-hate women” (Surfing the web of hate). Known women media professionals stepped forward for the first time to denounce the hate they had received from abusers (‘trolls’). The latter were diverse men, young and old, professors and unemployed, Swedish and immigrants. Since then, the police have taken these cases more seriously and do investigate, but the sanctions that may follow vary greatly. While some perpetrators must pay small fines, in 2015 a 36-year-old man was sentenced to prison for harassing female politicians. Mainstreamed media are now talking about sexist hate speech in Sweden, there has been a shift in the focus from the women to the haters, and new programmes have started to chase the trolls, for example, *The Trollhunter*.

” Hate speech is not only a threat to people, it is a threat to democracy”.

Sergio Belfor, Advisory Council on Youth, Council of Europe

■ A global survey, ‘Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media’, was conducted by the International News Safety Institute (INSI) and the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) with the support of UNESCO and Austria. Out of 921 respondents, almost 65% experienced intimidation, threats or abuse in relation to their work. Predominantly, this occurs in an office setting. Online, sexual harassment is highlighted as the most common way to target women.<sup>6</sup>

” We believe it is strange that the authorities can take someone to court for making a joke about a bomb in an airport on twitter but the same can’t be done in cases where women journalists and commentators have received abuse which details, for example, which parts of a woman’s body should be raped, how she should be violently murdered and/or at what time a bomb will go off outside her house”.

National Union of Journalists, United Kingdom, 2013

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6. International Women Media Foundation & International News Safety Institute, ‘Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture’, 2014: [www.iwmf.org/our-research/journalist-safety/violence-and-harassment-against-women-in-the-news-media-a-global-picture/flipbook](http://www.iwmf.org/our-research/journalist-safety/violence-and-harassment-against-women-in-the-news-media-a-global-picture/flipbook)

■ Female politicians are attacked by members of opposing parties but also by members of their own party. They receive sexualised messages, which are not sent to male colleagues. When they defend gender equality, sexual rights and LGBTIQ rights they may be even more targeted. Participants gave examples of women politicians being targeted in different countries including Albania, France, Italy, Romania and the United Kingdom. Shared experiences suggested that being the perpetrators of sexist hate speech did not impede male candidates from being elected (e.g. Romania), and hate speech in general can be used to actively generate electorate support. In Albania, newspapers questioned female politicians' capacities based on their physical appearance, and attacked them with derogatory sexualised headlines.<sup>7</sup>

■ While participants mentioned other targeted groups, such as women in gaming, they also talked about their own personal experience and stressed that any woman, publically known or not, is a potential target of sexist hate speech.

## Impacts of sexist hate speech on women

■ Online or offline, the impacts of sexist hate speech on women are real and multiple. Whether they are emotional, psychological and/or physical, they undermine their right to live free from violence and abuse. It is therefore also a health and safety issue. Young women are particularly vulnerable due to their young age and their lack of knowledge about remedies, the latter being shared by most people in society.

■ Firstly, targeted women can feel intimidated, fearful for their own and their family's safety, fall into a state of anxiety, depression, shame or lack of self-esteem and in some cases commit suicide.<sup>8</sup> Depending on the context of the harassment, women may withdraw from the Internet, limit their career opportunities or feel less satisfaction in doing their jobs, which can result in sick-leave or loss of financial resources. Talking about sexist hate speech can be difficult and women use different coping mechanisms. Such mechanisms include talking about it privately or publicly, silencing themselves, reaching and responding to the haters, exposing them, asking them to apologise, calling the police, filing a complaint and trying to bring the matter before a court.

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7. Examples include lecturer and politician Grida Duma, Rilindja Demokratike, who was appointed director of tax by the Prime Minister, and a policewoman considered 'too pretty for the job' (a 'waste' of her appearance).

8. In 2012, Amanda Todd committed suicide at the age of 15 after being harassed online for three years.



In any case, denouncing or responding to the attacks can be emotionally demanding and difficult, especially as a legal remedy is not always available.

■ Although not direct targets, witnesses of sexist hate speech can also be affected, and some women may feel forced to waive the opportunity to take on certain careers, express themselves or use the full possibilities of the Internet for fear of being confronted with the phenomena. For both targets and witnesses, sexist hate speech undermines freedom of speech and freedom of choice. When journalists cannot do their jobs, the public's right to be informed is also infringed. When women at large restrain their freedom of expression, of political social or artistic involvement, society as a whole loses a diversity of voices, widening the democratic gap.





# Combating sexist hate speech

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**A**fter a presentation of legal and policy frameworks to combat sexist hate speech and provide redress for victims, participants discussed existing and potential initiatives from institutions and civil society.

## Legal and policy frameworks to combating sexist hate speech and providing redress for victims

### Relevant Council of Europe Standards

#### European Convention on Human Rights 1950

Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) provides that “Everyone has a right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers” (Article 10(1)). However, the right to freedom of expression is not an absolute right. Its exercise carries “duties and responsibilities” and might be subject to restrictions prescribed by law, concerning, for example, the protection of the reputation or rights of others (Article 10(2)). Article 10 is often read in conjunction with Article 17, which prohibits the abuse of rights, as follows: “Nothing in this Convention may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein or at their limitation to a greater extent than is provided for in the Convention”.

Article 14 of the ECHR contains a non-discrimination provision: “The enjoyment of 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”.

**Protocol No. 12 the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms** includes a general prohibition of discrimination. The current non-discrimination provision of the ECHR (Article 14) has a limited scope as it only prohibits discrimination in the enjoyment of the rights guaranteed by the Convention. Protocol No. 12 removes this limitation by guaranteeing that no-one shall be discriminated against on any ground or by any public authority.

### **Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), 2011**

Article 3(c) of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) includes the first legally binding definition of gender: “Gender shall mean the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men”.

The Convention condemns all forms of violence against women and has four articles that are particularly relevant to the issue of sexist hate speech.

Article 12 (1) – General obligations

“Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating 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.”

Article 17 – Participation of the private sector and the media in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence

“1. Parties shall encourage the private sector, the information and communication technology sector and the media, with due respect for freedom of expression and their independence, to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies and to set guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women and to enhance respect for their dignity.

2. Parties shall develop and promote, in co-operation with private sector actors, skills among children, parents and educators on how to deal with the information and communications environment that provides access to degrading content of a sexual or violent nature which might be harmful.”

## Article 34 – Stalking

“Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person, causing her or him to fear for her or his safety, is criminalised.”

## Article 40 – Sexual harassment

“Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, is subject to criminal or other legal sanction.”

### **Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers on Gender Equality and Media.**

Addressed to member states and media organisations, this Recommendation includes guidelines and suggested actions to fight gender stereotypes in the media.

A Handbook on the recommendation’s implementation was published in 2015.

### **Recommendation No. R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers on Hate Speech (1997)**

Recommendation No. R (97) 20 on Hate Speech (1997) does not include sexism as a prohibited ground. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance’s (ECRI) General Policy Recommendation (GPR) No. 15 on combating hate speech includes, for the first time in an ECRI instrument, the grounds of sex and gender alongside those of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion and belief. However, ECRI will not monitor hate speech based on the grounds of sex and gender.

GPR No. 15 calls for civil and administrative measures, stressing the importance to use criminal law only as the last resort.

ECRI’s recommendations are used by several organisations, the European Court of Human Rights, the European Union, public authorities, equality bodies and NGOs.

■ Participants pointed out a lack of awareness of the general public on the issue of sexist hate speech, both at the national and international levels. This lack of awareness has dramatic consequences, especially when it affects law enforcement authorities, including the police, public prosecutors and judges. Police may fail to investigate when they do not consider a stalking case to be threatening or when they consider the issue of sexist hate speech not to be

serious. This contributes to a climate of impunity for perpetrators and calls for the proper training of relevant actors.

■ In 2015 in Montreal (Canada), a pro-rape and masculinist activist could not be prevented from delivering his speeches promoting sexist hate. Legislation often needs to be updated to include and explicitly add gender and sex as prohibited grounds for hate speech, but many states can already use and implement existing legislation to prosecute sexist hate speech, including some laws regarding offline activities. The threshold for being able to use existing laws to combat sexist hate speech is however more or less dependent on the offence. Relevant legislative instruments include criminal legislation related to incitement to hatred on the protected grounds of sex or sexual orientation (the Netherlands), harassment laws, cyberstalking laws (Germany, Malta, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom), revenge porn laws (France, the United Kingdom, 36 states in the United States), cyberbullying legislation (Canada).<sup>9</sup> Administrative and civil measures can also be used to counter sexist hate speech. In addition, the EU Audiovisual Media Services Directive provides since 1989 that audiovisual media services should not contain any incitement to hatred based on sex, but this provision, which should have been implemented in all EU member states, seems to have had little effect so far.<sup>10</sup>

■ While “traditional” media have stronger legal obligations and are supposed to follow codes of ethics, social media platforms and intermediaries are less subject to all these rules. They are often reluctant to set up comprehensive and inclusive set of standards and remedies so as to avoid any action which could be seen as “restraining freedom of speech”. With this behaviour, they avoid taking any form of responsibility for the content hosted on their platforms. Aside from freedom of expression, another argument put forward is the complexity of the task, due to both anonymity and the sheer volume of content shared online daily. However, freedom of expression can be waived in cases of hate speech, while still protecting other users from revealing their identities. The second argument can be dealt with by hiring more moderators and using technological tools to identify hate speech. Participants in the seminar stressed the responsibility of platform providers, especially those making big profits through the Internet and social media, to implement stronger policies in combating (sexist) hate speech and to support media literacy.

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9. Countries are mentioned as examples; the list is not exhaustive.

10. European Union Directive 2010/13/EU on the co-ordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in member states concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (codified version), (Article 3 (a)(i) 6 and 9).

On this issue, the Council of Europe has set up a new Committee of Experts on Internet Intermediaries, tasked with preparing a draft recommendation by the Committee of Ministers on the roles and responsibilities of Internet intermediaries.

■ As a result of successful women’s rights activists’ campaigns, policies have been more effective in some countries. Targeted people can now use a report button on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube to report hate speech. Moderators will analyse complaints and decide whether the content should be removed and the abuser warned or expelled and his/her identity revealed to law enforcement authorities. For example, Youtube closed channels set up by users being considered abusers, Facebook reviewed its guidelines after a campaign from the Everyday Sexism Project, and Women, Action & the Media (WAM!), and the latter also worked with Twitter on its reporting mechanism. Youtube appointed activists as liaison people to flag videos on the platform; their flags are receiving greater attention.

■ However, the different policies that apply in different countries and for different providers, as well as everyday examples, reveal the gaps and failure of these reporting systems, including their lack of responsiveness, the impossibility of accessing redress, and the lack of transparency of practices. In addition, with most social media companies being American, their threshold for challenging abuse is very high, with freedom of expression considered nearly limitless under US law.

” There is a broad agreement that criminalisation of blasphemy and defamation is an unacceptable infringement on freedom of expression”

Carly Nyst, human rights lawyer and advocate

■ Freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 10 of the ECHR and other international instruments, as the right “to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers”. It is not an absolute right and restrictions can apply in order to protect the rights of others, such as the right to be free from discrimination (ECHR Article 14). The definition of hate speech used by the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights (the Court) encompasses expressions that spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance. To be considered hate speech under human rights law, the expression

of hate must reach a high threshold and be aimed at an individual or a group from a protected ground.

■ While the Court has dealt with homophobic hate speech and Antisemitic hate speech, it has not yet looked at sexist hate speech. In existing cases, the Court uses Article 10 in combination with Article 17, which states that no-one has a right to express oneself in a manner which would infringe someone else's right. The Court recently dealt with Internet intermediaries' liability in the case of *Delfi v. Estonia* (2015), where it stated that a news portal had a duty to remove clearly unlawful comments without delay.<sup>11</sup>

## Initiatives and projects to combat sexist hate speech

■ Institutional initiatives on sexist hate speech include a recent expert seminar on online hate speech and sexism hosted by the Nordic Council of Ministers in Denmark in November 2015. Issues discussed included intersectionality, revenge porn, training on Internet rights, sexual education and the review of legislation.

■ The Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) mandated Marit Maij, Dutch Member of Parliament, to draft a report on ending cyber-discrimination and online hate, which will include all forms of hate speech online. In 2014, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights called for hate speech against women to be specifically tackled.<sup>12</sup>

■ At the United Nations (UN) level, the Working Group on Broadband and Gender of the UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development recently released a report on cyber violence, showing that 73% of women

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11. The company had been found liable by the national court for comments posted in response to an article. The Grand Chamber recognised the necessity to be cautious as there is a "possibility that information once made public will remain public and circulate forever". Freedom of expression, offline and online cannot be used to incite or spread hatred or violence. Amongst others, the seriousness of the comments and the "insufficiency of the measures taken to avoid damage being caused to other parties' reputations" were two key elements highlighted by the Court when it ruled that there was no violation of the company's right to freedom of expression.

12. Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Hate speech against women should be specifically tackled', 2014:  
[www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/hate-speech-against-women-should-be-specifically-tackl-1](http://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/hate-speech-against-women-should-be-specifically-tackl-1)



have experienced online abuse. Women are 27 times more likely to be abused online than men, and young women (18-24) are highlighted as the most at-risk group.<sup>13</sup>

■ In media organisations, the National Union of Journalists (United Kingdom) released guidance on online abuse including support and advice in 2013.<sup>14</sup>

■ It must be noted, however, that social media and the Internet do not only create challenges to combating sexist hate speech; they also offer unique dynamics and new possibilities of mobilisation, and such initiatives are numerous in Europe; some of them were presented during the seminar. (Other initiatives and projects presented can be found in Appendix I.)

” We need to talk about Internet rights, women’s rights, technology, privacy and sexual rights”.

Valentina Pellizzer, President of One World Platform

■ Linking technology and women’s rights, Valentina Pellizzer, President of One World Platform, presented several initiatives, including Take Back The Tech (TBTT), a campaign started in 2006 to denounce technology-related violence against women and to use technology as a tool to prevent violence against women. In October 2015, #TakeBackTheTech and #ImagineAFeministInternet were attacked by Gamergate.<sup>15</sup> As a response to thousands of hateful and misogynist comments written only in English, the TBTT network bombed their abusers with non-English messages. All Twitter responses were proposing counter-narrative content focusing on solidarity among activists and women.

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13. UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development Working Group on Broadband and Gender, ‘Cyber violence against women and girls – a World-Wide Wake-up Call’ [www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber\\_violence\\_gender%20report.pdf](http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/cyber_violence_gender%20report.pdf)

14. National Union of Journalists Guidance on online abuse, 2013: [www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-guidance-online-abuse](http://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-guidance-online-abuse)

15. ‘Gamergate’ is the term used to identify a reactionary and virulently misogynistic subculture in the video gaming community. The movement has its roots in anti-feminist attacks directed at media critic Anita Sarkeesian beginning in 2012, and in 2014 became a hate campaign against independent game developer Zoë Quinn over allegations made by her ex-boyfriend, Eron Gjoni.

■ The Peng Collective sends humorous lessons to abusers on how to stop being a sexist troll. One of their 'Zero Trollerance' videos was screened during the seminar.<sup>16</sup>

■ After the release of her documentary about obsession for youth and beauty "Beauté Fatale", Léa Clermont-Dion received sexist insults, death and rape threats, which were not taken seriously by the police. Subsequently, she drafted and signed a public letter on "misogyny 2.0" with 47 other feminists who experienced cyberviolence. The letter was published in a national newspaper and initiated a debate in Québec (Canada). As a PhD student, her thesis is focusing on sexism on the web (Le sexisme sur le web, un espace de reconduction des inégalités de genre).

” He is acting like such a girl! Stop acting like such a woman! We call men women as an insult. What's the message we are sending to our children?

National Youth Council of Ireland

■ The National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI) and NHSM Ireland were presented by Stephanie Hanlon and Fionn Scott. The NYCI represents and supports the interests of around 50 national voluntary youth organisations, using its collective experience to act on issues that impact on young people. The NYCI Annual Conference in 2014 focused on gender equality in youth work and the youth work sector and was entitled, "Been there, done that. Where's the T-shirt?"

■ The Irish branch of the NHSM adapted the definition of hate speech to include gender and sexual orientation, religious and cultural backgrounds, disability and health, and stands for an inclusive and intersectional approach to gender equality, including all forms of oppression and discrimination. The NHSM's team of youth ambassadors receive and deliver training courses focused on identity and empathy building, and on how to challenge online and offline discrimination and hate speech. They have engaged and supported the work of multiple programmes, one of which resulted in a photo campaign challenging the stereotype that young Muslim women cannot practise sports.

■ Two videos are currently being developed by the NYCI: one on identity intersectionality, called *Don't judge a woman by her cover*, and the other called

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16. More information: <https://zerotrollerance.guru>

*Defining Sexist Hate Speech: The message we receive.* The Marriage Equality Bill and the Gender Recognition Bill, adopted in 2015 in Ireland, presented facilitators and activists with the social context to further challenge attitudes towards sexism, transphobia and homophobia.

Presented by Thibault Di Maria, Stop Cyber-Sexism! is a campaign from the Centre Hubertine Auclert (Paris, France) to raise awareness about sexism online. A second campaign will be launched in 2016, as well as the first study in France about cyber-sexism among teenagers, in order to obtain precise figures about the prevalence of the phenomenon. In April 2015, posters were displayed in metro stations and a website was created including humorous gifs and advice on how to react to cyber-sexism. Awareness-raising kits were distributed to middle schools, high schools and apprenticeship training centres. The campaign was awarded the 2015 Crime Prevention Prize by the French Inter-ministerial Committee on Crime Prevention and the French Forum for Urban Safety.

Michaela Moricka presented the project “And What about Women in Media?” funded by Norway Grants in the Czech Republic. Three organisations specialised in gender equality partnered from April 2015 to March 2016 to implement a project dealing with the underrepresentation and objectification of women in media. Activities included mentoring for young journalists and students, coaching in media for women currently on parental leave not to drop out of their careers, coaching specialised in leadership skills and building self-esteem as well as research on the topic. On 8 March 2016, a ceremony attributed an anti-award to a public figure for his sexist speech. The aim is to engage with the “winner”. After winning the award and reflecting on their statements, some former winners have become feminists. An award is also given to reward someone for his/her work on gender equality.

The work of FILIA Centre, a Romanian feminist research, activist and advocacy organisation was presented by Miruna Pantel. After participating in a workshop on the topic, volunteers organised a flashmob in the biggest park of Bucharest against sexist hate speech. They linked democracy to sexist hate speech and engaged young people to act as agents of change. FILIA also launched a humorous blog to denounce sexist and offensive ads against women. In 2010, several NGOs filed a complaint to Romania’s National Council for Combating Discrimination against Tudorel Butoi, university professor and criminal expert who stated that “most assaulted women had a provocative attitude”. The Romanian National Council recognised his statement as being discriminatory, and fined him.

■ Inspired by the Everyday Sexism Project, Daria Manshina launched the “Shut Your Sexist Mouth Up” online platform in the Russian Federation in February 2014. The platform is a safe place for people to share anonymously their experiences of sexism and other gender-based violence, as well as to find psychological help if needed. The community consists of 26,000 members, and almost 10,000 stories were gathered. Two self-defence training courses were also organised. The project has recently received the support of the Norwegian Consulate and of FRIDA – Young Feminist Fund.

■ After mapping out and discussing existing initiatives and projects in different countries, participants worked in groups to identify possible actions and measures to address sexist hate speech.



## Moving forward in combating sexist hate speech

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■ The brainstorming sessions resulted in a set of proposals for actions to combat sexist hate speech through different contexts. The first set focuses on the No Hate Speech Movement, in particular the European Action Day on 8 March 2016, and the second concerns other Council of Europe activities and sectors. The third aims at integrating the fight against sexist hate speech in national institutions and policies, and the fourth in activities of partners, including media, non-governmental and youth organisations.

” It is not about creating a hashtag, it is about getting it viral”.  
Sergio Belfor, Advisory Council on Youth, Council of Europe

### **Proposed activities for the No Hate Speech Movement, including the European Action Day against Sexist Hate Speech on 8 March 2016:**

#### Objectives

■ The objectives of the No Hate Speech Movement (NHSM) Campaign are to raise awareness and fight sexist hate speech, including sexism and subtle sexism, and to encourage people to break the silence and report sexist hate speech, in particular through the Hate Speech Watch page. It will map out the phenomenon and collect examples of different expressions of sexist hate speech online.

■ By sharing expertise and good practices through the online platform, educational tools should be developed to recognise sexist hate speech, that can help us learn how to react to it. The Campaign must remain aware of the intersectional approach and be inclusive in its messages.

## Tools

- ▶ Create a focus group on sexist hate speech under the NHSM Campaign.
- ▶ Adapt and revise the modules from *Bookmarks*, *Compass* and *Gender Matters*.
- ▶ Develop guidelines on how to organise a CineForum on the topic of gender equality and sexism.
- ▶ Develop “memes”, quotes, slogans, infographics, flyers, counter-narratives, photos and videos.
- ▶ Produce a video showing young women reading a sexist hate speech message out loud in their own language, or changing the perspective by having men reading the hateful messages or reading them while changing the gender of the targets.
- ▶ Ask activists to release a 10-second video in their own language with a video-maker app.
- ▶ Share photos online of targeted people holding a sign with the comment they received (possibility to make a book as an educational tool).
- ▶ Create a hashtag to talk about the issue, flag sexist content and run a “Tweetathlon” on 8 March 2016.
- ▶ Design a logo “no sexist hate speech”.
- ▶ Design a sticker with the message “this is sexist, now you know” or featuring the hashtag to bridge online and offline actions.
- ▶ Make a giant art installation with chalk on a huge board or on a blackboard.
- ▶ Write blogs for 8 March.
- ▶ Organise a debate on the topic as well as street actions (e.g. a flashmob).
- ▶ Identify female and male role models who can support the action.
- ▶ Cover cities with messages and “lovebombing” on social media, including towards men’s groups.
- ▶ Name and shame people who spread hate speech (e.g. by writing their comments on a billboard near their house while hiding their identity).

## Throughout the 2016-2017 Campaign

- ▶ Denounce sexist song lyrics, films, games, commercials and websites (e.g. . create a “Wall of Shame”).
- ▶ Organise media and information literacy training, including non-violent communication training.
- ▶ Organise artistic, cultural and sports activities with key messages for each month.
- ▶ Reach out to social media platforms to push for a report button “This is sexist hate speech”, and take a stand against sexist hate speech.
- ▶ Create a phone application for Hate Speech Watch.

## Proposed activities for other Council of Europe activities and sectors

### Committee of Ministers

- ▶ Update the Recommendation on hate speech to include the grounds of sex and gender and include non-binary identities.
- ▶ Adopt a recommendation on combating sexism.
- ▶ Push for national laws addressing all forms of violence against women and their effective implementation.
- ▶ Push for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention.
- ▶ Support NGOs and facilitate their networking for sharing good practices and knowledge.
- ▶ Strengthen the overall support to the NHSM.
- ▶ Use non-sexist language during meetings and in documents by minding the terminology and the connotation of words in all languages (e.g. ‘*droits humains*’ as opposed to ‘*droits de l’homme*’).
- ▶ Propose gender equality training to all officials.
- ▶ Continue to integrate a gender-equality perspective in all Council of Europe activities inside the Council of Europe, and in the member states, and involve the Gender Equality Unit and the Youth Department.
- ▶ Reinforce the intersectional approach in the work of the Council of Europe.
- ▶ Appoint Gender Equality Ambassadors.
- ▶ Collaborate with other regional and international organisations (UN Women, UNESCO-GAMAG<sup>17</sup> (Global Alliance for Media and Gender) , EU).

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17. Global Alliance for Media and Gender: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/crosscutting-priorities/gender-and-media/global-alliance-on-media-and-gender/about-gamag/>

## Gender Equality Unit

- ▶ Ensure follow-up to the Seminar.
- ▶ Draft a factsheet on sexist hate speech and compile good practices.
- ▶ Raise awareness on sexism inside the Council of Europe.
- ▶ Strengthen the role of the Gender Equality Rapporteurs.
- ▶ Further disseminate the Handbook on the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on gender equality and media.
- ▶ Support independent studies challenging national data.

## All structures of the Council of Europe

- ▶ Develop tools for teachers (e.g. posters, flyers, videos, a simplified version of *Bookmarks*).
- ▶ Develop and disseminate guidelines on gender-sensitivity/ethical reporting for journalists in co-operation with media organisations.
- ▶ Organise a seminar with the Youth Department, other departments and Internet providers' representatives.
- ▶ Organise cultural events in collaboration with national institutes.
- ▶ In March, begin meetings by taking a stand against sexism, "This is a sexism-free space".

## Proposed activities for national institutions and policies

### Objectives

■ All member states are encouraged to join the NHSM. States must take a clear stand against all forms of violence against women, clearly define sexist hate speech, identify and adopt effective remedies and raise awareness on the issue including its impacts, as well as undertake studies and collect data. Leaders shall act as role models and call out and challenge sexist behaviours.

### Legislative and judicial measures

- ▶ Address gaps in existing legislation by including the prohibition of hate speech on the grounds of sex and gender and the fight against all forms of violence against women.
- ▶ Monitor sexist hate speech and collect data.



- ▶ Effectively implement administrative and civil measures. (Criminal measures must be the last resort.)
- ▶ Train law enforcement officials (e.g. police, judges, lawyers) for them to be able to take the issue seriously, using existing policies to track down perpetrators as well as offering redress to targeted people.
- ▶ Push for the implementation of a code of ethics by Internet platforms.
- ▶ Involve young people in policy making.
- ▶ Close the gender digital divide.

## Formal and non-formal education for social change

- ▶ Train trainers and educators on gender equality and sexism.
- ▶ Revise text books, teaching methods and curricula, in order for them to contribute to gender equality and to the fight against gender stereotypes.
- ▶ Include gender-sensitive sex education, women’s rights and tolerance education in schools, and promote non-violent communication and media literacy.
- ▶ Include information about sexist hate speech and media literacy courses in school curricula.
- ▶ Use and promote non-sexist language in national documents.
- ▶ Include self-defence classes in schools, particularly for girls.
- ▶ Encourage universities to convey positive messages, such as “This is a sexism-free space”, and “We encourage freedom of expression for all genders”.
- ▶ Involve men and boys in the fight against sexist hate speech.
- ▶ Facilitate peer-to-peer education.
- ▶ Take responsibility for taking down sexist graffiti.
- ▶ Organise feminist camps for girls and young women.

## Collaboration with civil society

- ▶ Recognise NGOs as partners and ensure their independence and the safety of their members.
- ▶ Support and fund women’s rights organisations.
- ▶ Support women in technology (training, measures, events, hackathlons).

## Proposed activities for partners of the Council of Europe, including non-governmental and youth organisations, media organisations, platform providers and intermediaries

- ▶ Establish, disseminate and ensure the implementation of codes of conduct with standards of ethics and self-regulatory measures for online and offline media regarding hate speech and gender equality, including violence against women, and disseminate them to members.
- ▶ Take a stand against sexist hate speech and denounce it when it happens and help prosecute the authors without victimising the victims.
- ▶ Inform internet users about potential sanctions for writing hate comments and ensure serious moderating of comments.
- ▶ Promote safe reporting mechanisms that lead to redress and remedy.
- ▶ Support targeted people including staff members.
- ▶ Train a group of journalists to tackle sexist hate speech and act as ambassadors.
- ▶ Report also on positive narratives.
- ▶ Empower bystanders/witnesses.
- ▶ Improve the quality of the media by being inclusive and including all voices, in terms of gender balance in the media profession, including women in news and programmes, and in terms of gender-sensitive reporting.
- ▶ Portray women in a realistic and non-stereotypical way and challenge gender stereotypes and women and men's traditional representation in media and society.
- ▶ Include gender equality training for media professionals and staff.
- ▶ Engage editors with good practices to influence others.
- ▶ Organise competitions for journalists to cover equality-related topics.
- ▶ Support feminist media and independent media.
- ▶ Promote a gender-balanced representation of women and men in decision making in media organisations.
- ▶ Monitor sexist hate speech in media and advertising.

” This [seminar] should really be a starting point to working together in the future on combating sexist hate speech.

Antje Rothemund, Head of the Youth Department, Council of Europe

## Proposed activities for Civil Society

- ▶ Join the NHSM Campaign, organise debates, petition to push for change, and launch local campaigns against sexist hate speech in the media.
- ▶ Include the Campaign content in activities in order to challenge gender stereotypes.
- ▶ Support the Action Days with the organisation of offline events, produce content, open discussions, and promote these on social media.
- ▶ Advise the Campaign (e.g. in the follow-up group).
- ▶ Raise awareness with artistic tools: videos, songs, theatre plays, campaigns, board games, online games, or a painting competition.
- ▶ Organise a competition with NHSM shirts / pins as prizes.
- ▶ Raise awareness on, and advocate for, the implementation of legal instruments.
- ▶ Develop educational tools and materials (e.g. board games and quizzes).
- ▶ Develop and use counter-narratives.
- ▶ Organise training courses on gender equality and gender stereotypes.
- ▶ Build alliances amongst youth and feminist organisations and share good practices.
- ▶ Create a collaborative platform where skills to help other NGOs can be offered.
- ▶ Create an army of bots against trolls.
- ▶ Use strategic litigation / create strategies to bring cases before national courts and the European Court of Human Rights.
- ▶ Identify national courts issuing sexist judgments which reinforce gender stereotypes.
- ▶ Advocate for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention and alert the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)<sup>18</sup> about urgent situations.
- ▶ Collect data and draft shadow reports to push for policy changes.

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18. GREVIO is the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) by the parties. More information: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>



# Appendix I – Presentation of initiatives on gender equality

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Giolanta Androutsou presented a two-year initiative co-ordinated by the organisation Antirropon to empower Roma women from Aspropyrgos (Greece), funded by the Ministry of Interior and implemented in collaboration with the General Secretariat for Gender Equality. The project, which ended in October 2015, included, amongst others, experiential workshops co-ordinated by a psychologist-psychotherapist, the training of women on the basic principles of social mediation (in collaboration with the ROMED programme of the Council of Europe and the European Commission) and summer camps for Roma and non-Roma youth. It helped women recognise and name abuses and gain self-esteem.

■ Another project, linked to the previous one, focuses more on youngsters. Fryktozia, Paving the Way for the Citizens of Tomorrow, was launched in April 2015 with workshops on human rights delivered in schools. The project aims to enhance active citizenship and school mediation. In February 2016, a workshop organised in collaboration with UNESCO was implemented regarding deontology and the ethics of public speech with a focus on social media. The Project is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway under the EEA Grants Greet NGO Programme, We are All Citizens.

Antirropon: <http://antirropon.eu>

Fryktozia: [www.facebook.com/fryktozia](http://www.facebook.com/fryktozia)

■ Gina Babinec presented “Be the Change”, a project of the organisation MAG LGBTIQ Youth (France) to empower LGBTIQ youth and organisations in partnership with the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Unit of the Council of Europe (SOGI) and the International Gay Lesbian Youth Organisation (IGLYO). The Be the Change Conference will take place in June 2016 at the European Youth Centre Strasbourg.

MAG: [www.mag-paris.fr](http://www.mag-paris.fr)

■ Evgenia Giakoumopoulou (Europe) presented ACCESS, the Advocacy Centre on Council of Europe Standards, which seeks to facilitate the access of grass-roots NGOs to the Council of Europe human rights monitoring mechanisms. In this context, the presentation aimed to raise awareness and provide information on the Istanbul Convention, its monitoring mechanism (the GREVIO) and the critical role of NGOs in this process.

ACCESS: <http://accessrights.org>

■ Dardan Isufi (Quebec, Canada) presented the work of Amnistie internationale Canada francophone (Canadian French speaking Amnesty International), and of the Dawson Student Union in relation to gender equality. The Dawson Student Union projects concern the safety and defence of all students, regardless of their gender, gender identity and ethnicity. This includes an anti-sexual violence campaign launched in partnership with the Dawson’s Gender Advocacy Centre and a proposal for gender-neutral washrooms, which resulted in many bathrooms being made gender-neutral.

Amnistie Internationale: <http://amnistie.ca>

Dawson Student Union: <http://dawsonstudentunion.ca>

■ Ivana Jelaca presented the Media Diversity Institute Western Balkans (MDI WB), a sister organisation of the London-based Media Diversity Institute, which works to contribute to the inclusion and participation of youth, as well as the improvement of inter-community relations, the promotion of tolerance, and encouraging dialogue among individuals and groups coming from different backgrounds. MDI WB’s guiding value is freedom of expression, which should be enjoyed by all citizens regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, physical or mental abilities, social status, political affiliation or sexual orientation. MDI WB has focused on combating hate speech online and uses a Media Information Literacy (MIL) mechanism in order to build more tolerant and inclusive societies and foster respect for human rights online as well as offline.

■ Unrelated to MDI WB, Ivana Jelaca also presented a music video from a popular band in Serbia showing practical advice to women on how to defend themselves from violent partners. The videoclip was shared on social media and has received more than 1 million views.

Media Diversity Institute: [www.media-diversity.org/en/](http://www.media-diversity.org/en/)

S.A.R.S. – Praktična žena: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nx4uYI7FpGo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nx4uYI7FpGo)

■ Irene Roseles Jimenez and Emily Usher Shrair presented the European Women's Lobby (EWL) – the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union, and its new Strategic Framework 2016-2020 'Together for a Feminist Europe'. They briefly presented the EWL campaigns to promote women's rights and equality between women and men in three main policy areas: women in decision making, socio-economics and violence against women. Irene Roseles Jimenez presented the EWL Observatory on violence against women and mentioned the EWL advocacy actions to push for the signature, ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the member states and the European Union. An EWL video was screened: *I am a feminist but...* calling on the European Commission to adopt a new EU Strategy on equality between women and men for 2016-2020. Finally, Emily Usher Shrair informed participants about 'Agora', the EWL young feminist summer school that in 2015 provided a creative space for 50 young feminist activists to exchange, inspire and reinforce each other. After its success last year, Agora will take place again in 2016.

European's Women Lobby: [www.womenlobby.org](http://www.womenlobby.org)

European Women's Lobby video *I am a feminist but...*:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUw5tUX8bTA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUw5tUX8bTA)

■ Ismail Sehic presented the Hate Fighters programme from KOM 018 (Niš, Serbia), which gathered more than 2,000 people and is part of the project "Combat against Hate Speech through European Perspective." The first programme started in 2013 in Serbia, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Turkey. The programme was continued in 2014 in Serbia and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", and in 2015, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Denmark, Poland, Romania, Serbia and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Financed by the European Commission and supported by the Council of Europe, the programme aims at training members to combat hate speech through creative actions such as dance, music, photography and debates.

Hate Fighters:

<https://m.facebook.com/Hate-Fighters-Bosnia-and-Herzegovina-816578085099677>





# Appendix II – References

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*Gender Matters: Manual on gender based violence affecting young people*, available at: [www.eycb.coe.int/gendermatters](http://www.eycb.coe.int/gendermatters)

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While the impact of new information technologies on all aspects of modern societies and human life has been very positive, new vulnerabilities of our societies have emerged through the growth of the Internet and social media. The No Hate Speech Movement campaign was set up to mobilise young people for human rights online and countering hate speech.

In a survey carried out in 2015, women were one of the top three target groups of online hate speech encountered by the respondents. One thematic focus of the campaign is therefore sexist hate speech. Sexist hate speech is still too often seen as “acceptable”, while in fact it is one of the most widespread and systemic forms of hate.

Women and girls receive threats and insults of a sexual character on a daily basis via emails, websites or social media, including threats of publishing personal photos and information. The aims are to humiliate and objectify women, to destroy their reputation and to make them vulnerable and fearful.

Sexist hate speech has devastating effects, especially on young women, and affects society’s quest to achieve gender equality. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy has the overall goal of achieving the advancement and empowering of women and the realisation of gender equality in member states. One of its five objectives is “combating gender stereotypes and sexism”, including “combating sexism as a form of hate speech and integrating this dimension into Council of Europe action aiming at combating hate speech and discrimination (...)”.

This report provides information about the extension of the problem, examples of action and priorities for educational and political action to seriously address and stop sexist hate speech.

[www.coe.int/equality](http://www.coe.int/equality)  
[gender.equality@coe.int](mailto:gender.equality@coe.int)

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

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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