

GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION

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

“Tackling Gender Stereotypes and Sexism”

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

Concept Note

Gender stereotypes and sexism present a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality. Gender stereotypes both result from, and are the cause of, deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices. They are used to justify and maintain the (historical) power relations of men over women, as well as sexist attitudes which are holding back the advancement of gender equality and the full autonomy of women. Gender stereotypes and patriarchy negatively affect men and boys too. Hegemonic masculinities are a contributing factor to maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes, which in turn contribute to sexism and sexist hate speech. In addition, people may be confronted with different and intersecting forms of sexism, based on a range of other factors, such as ethnicity, age, social class, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation or sexuality.

Gender-biased customs and traditions and the widespread sexualisation of women's bodies suggesting their sexual availability, contribute to treating women as subordinate members of the family or society and feed into violence against women. The occurrence and consequences of sexism and sexist behaviours impact disproportionately, but not exclusively, women and girls who experience them in different ways to men and boys.

Sexism is widespread in all spheres of life. In relation to work, sexism takes many forms and is present in both the public and the private sectors. It manifests itself through sexist comments, in behaviour aimed at an employee or group of employees, or in sexist assumptions based on traditional gender roles. This contributes to the glass ceiling and to gender-based discrimination that limit women's access to certain jobs, to resources and to promotion opportunities. Such assumptions can also result in sexist behaviour and limitations towards men who take up caring responsibilities.

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

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

Taking innovative, efficient measures to eliminate harmful gender stereotypes and sexism is therefore essential to achieving substantive gender equality. Committed to addressing the root causes of violence against women and to promoting greater equality between women and men, the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention exposes the link between gender stereotypes and violence against women. It promotes a shift in attitudes to challenge gender stereotypes at the level of individuals as well as institutions. The upcoming [Council of Europe Recommendation to prevent and combat sexism](#) will be the first international legal reference document to address directly the need to prevent and combat sexism.

The conference aims to:

- highlight the standards, work and activities of the Council of Europe in combating gender stereotypes and sexism, with particular focus on the workplace, the media, and on violence against women and girls as the most severe manifestation of gender stereotypes and sexism;
- explore the impact of gender stereotypes, sexism and sexist behaviour in the workplace;
- address both the positive and the negative impact of new media in tackling gender stereotypes and sexism (including sexist hate speech);
- examine the interrelationship between gender stereotypes and violence against women and girls;
- identify examples of good practices in tackling problems and overcoming challenges posed by gender stereotypes and sexism, in particular in the workplace, the media and as evidenced in acts of violence, harassment and hate speech;
- highlight, in particular, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ([Istanbul Convention](#)), the recommendations from the [Amsterdam \(2013\)](#), [Bern \(2015\)](#) and [Tallinn \(2016\)](#) conferences¹ and the forthcoming Committee of Ministers recommendation to prevent and combat sexism;
- strengthen co-operation and synergies with action at international, national and regional level to address sexism, gender stereotypes and violence against women;
- facilitate networking opportunities;
- produce recommendations for specific action to implement the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 in the member States.

Targeted participants:

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

Duration:

1.5 days

Programme:

Three sessions: one on the first day and two on the second.

¹ "Media and the image of women" (Amsterdam, 2013); "Towards Guaranteeing Equal Access of Women to Justice" (Bern, 2015); "Are we there yet? Assessing progress: inspiring action: the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017" (Tallinn, 2016).