



## **GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION**



**“Gender Equality: Paving the Way”  
(Copenhagen, 3-4 May 2018)**



**Report of the international conference to  
launch the Council of Europe  
Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023**



**Report prepared by Romain Sabathier,  
Independent consultant, France**

**The opinions expressed are those of the author  
and do not necessarily reflect the official policy  
of the Council of Europe**

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Please see [Council of Europe gender equality website](#) for all conference presentations.

## INTRODUCTION

*“Gender equality entails equal rights for women and men, girls and boys, as well as the same visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation, in all spheres of public and private life. It also implies equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men.”*

**Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023**

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 (the Strategy) on 7 March 2018.

This new strategy carries on from the 2014-2017 strategy, the first of its kind, and builds on the Council of Europe’s substantial gender equality work.

Gender equality is central to the Council of Europe’s missions: safeguarding human rights, upholding democracy and preserving the rule of law.

Even if progress is visible and the legal status of women in Europe has undoubtedly improved during recent decades, effective equality between women and men is far from being a reality. Gender gaps and structural barriers persist in many areas, constraining women’s opportunities to benefit from their fundamental rights.

Since the 1980s the Council of Europe has been playing a key role in developing authoritative policy guidance and legal instruments to promote gender equality.

Apart from the European Convention on Human Rights, signed by all Council of Europe member states, two Council of Europe conventions are particularly important for women’s rights and gender equality: the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005) and the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2011) (Istanbul Convention). The Council of Europe has also been involved in developing instruments and concepts such as parity democracy and gender mainstreaming. Fourteen recommendations from the Committee of Ministers to member states set out authoritative policy guidance and legal standards on gender equality in various fields: language, health, sport, the media, the audiovisual sector, etc. In addition, various parts of the Council of Europe are doing innovative work on gender mainstreaming that is fuelling the gender equality debate and development of gender equality policies in Europe.

The Gender Equality Commission (GEC) was established to help ensure gender mainstreaming in all Council of Europe policies and bridge the gap between commitments made at international level and the reality faced by women in Europe. The GEC, whose members are appointed by the member states, provides advice, guidance and support to other Council of Europe bodies and to member states. Following a long period of consultation and discussion, the GEC produced the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023.

The new Strategy outlines the goals and priorities of the Council of Europe for the next six years and identifies working methods and main partners as well as the measures needed to enhance the visibility of the results. Six priority areas have been determined:

1. Prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism.
2. Prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.
3. Ensure the equal access of women to justice.
4. Achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.
5. Protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls.
6. Achieve gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

The fifth objective, pertaining to the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, has been added to the five other strategic objectives laid down in the first strategy (2014-2017). Moreover, particular attention has been paid, in all six areas, to a life-cycle approach, intersectional discrimination and the role of men in gender equality.

An international conference was held in Copenhagen on 3 and 4 May 2018 to present, publicise and launch this strategy. Called “Gender Equality: Paving the Way”, it took place during the Danish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and was attended by over a hundred prominent figures from various backgrounds.

*“The Council of Europe’s new strategy sends a clear signal. We want to ensure equal opportunities for women and men and we want to ensure it now. Let this conference be an accelerator for all the 47 member states to join forces and to proceed to make real progress [...].”*  
Her Royal Highness the Crown Princess of Denmark

The opening session and the first two panel discussions focused on the general background and the prerequisites for implementing the Strategy. This initiative pursues a goal shared at a global level with the UN agenda for the sustainable development goals (SDGs): planet 50-50 by 2030, when gender equality should be achieved. Here the speakers were in agreement on the importance of reasserting an unwavering political commitment and ending impunity for violence against women (Part I). Throughout the two days of discussion and debate participants emphasised the Strategy’s role as a key tool for attaining this global goal and made general recommendations for ensuring that its implementation would be a success (Part II). Lastly, three thematic panel discussions considered three of the Strategy’s six objectives: equality in decision-making; combating gender stereotypes and sexism; and the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls. Conclusions and recommendations were also formulated for these areas and are presented in this report (Part III).

## PART I: A SHARED GOAL: PLANET 50-50 BY 2030

Discrimination (including violence) against women because they are women goes back a very long way and is ingrained in the history of humankind. Over the centuries this multifarious recurring discrimination has led to structural gender inequalities in all areas of social, economic, cultural and political life. No corner of the world has been immune.

This phenomenon of setting women apart from men and ranking men – and everything connected with them – above women, thus justifying their domination over women, has resulted in widespread violence and injustice across the globe. This mechanism for ranking, subjugating, exploiting and perpetrating violence to women has a deep-seated impact on democracy by undermining its promise of equality, freedom and justice.

This is why for centuries women and some men stood up against this state of affairs until they were able to bring the majority round to the idea that it ought to be possible to grow up in a society that would judge you on your personality rather than your gender – the idea of equality irrespective of gender.

In the wake of the Second World War this ambition was supported and taken further by the international organisations set up to learn the lessons of the horror and barbarity that had been inflicted on the world and particularly Europe. The principle of equality without distinction as to sex was enshrined in international instruments: at the United Nations (UN) with the 1945 Charter of the United Nations,<sup>1</sup> at the Council of Europe first in the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights<sup>2</sup> and then in the European Social Charter,<sup>3</sup> and at European Union level with the Treaty of Rome in 1957.<sup>4</sup> This resolve was also reflected by dedicated institutional mechanisms, including the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in the UN as early as 1946.

*“Gender equality is not just words,  
it’s actually a matter of real lives. Time’s up. It’s time for us to do something.”*

Kira Appel, member of the Council of Europe  
Gender Equality Commission, Denmark

Crucial progress has been made in terms of women’s rights in many countries across the globe, particularly concerning the right to education, the right to vote and to stand for election, sexual and reproductive rights, the right to equal pay for work of equal value, and the right to security and a life free from violence. But even where women are now legally the equals of men, their real-life situation has not changed as quickly and extensively as had been hoped.

Massive gender inequalities still exist and are taking on other forms. The key challenge today is therefore to make gender equality an everyday reality. There is a time-frame: 2030, the end date for the Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in September 2015 by the 193 UN member states. This agenda, which also commits all Council of Europe member states, comprises 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). These SDGs set out to tackle major global challenges such as eradicating poverty, reducing multiple and intersecting inequalities, addressing climate change, ending conflict and sustaining peace. The message is clear: “Development will only be sustainable if its benefits accrue equally to both women and men; and women’s rights will only become a reality if they are part of broader efforts to protect the planet and ensure that all people can live with dignity and respect.”<sup>5</sup> Achieving all the other SDGs therefore depends on achieving SDG 5 on gender equality. Thus the gender equality goal cuts across the other SDGs, particularly in the fields of access to justice, poverty, good health and well-being, education, and decent

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<sup>1</sup> See Charter of the United Nations, Article 1.

<sup>2</sup> See European Convention on Human Rights, Article 14 and Protocol No. 12.

<sup>3</sup> See 1961 European Social Charter, Article 20.

<sup>4</sup> See Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (known as the Treaty of Rome), Article 119.

<sup>5</sup> UN Women, summary, *Turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018, p. 1.

work and economic growth.<sup>6</sup> UN Women has sounded a call to action with its “Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality” campaign.

***Key figures showing persistent gender inequality in Europe***

- **1 woman in 3 has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence** after the age of 15 (*FRA, 2012*)
- **83% of top positions in politics are held by men** (heads of state and government, heads of regional government, mayors) (*Council of Europe, 2017*)
- **Gender pay gap: 16%** to the detriment of women (*Eurostat, 2016*)
- **Gender pension gap: 40%** to the detriment of women (*Eurostat, 2014*)
- **1 migrant woman in 2 has experienced discrimination** in the last 24 months (*Equinet*)

The participants in the Copenhagen conference endorsed this framework for mobilisation and action. They all concurred that it was possible to achieve gender equality by 2030 provided that, given the real threat of setbacks, there was faster change, with fresh political and financial commitment, starting with an end to the ongoing impunity for violence against women and girls.

***Planet 50-50 by 2030: Reality or utopia***

“We can do it”: a phrase encapsulating the clear-sighted enthusiasm of those attending the Copenhagen conference for the goal of planet 50-50 by 2030. There were five main reasons for this optimism:

1. The **overall trend is generally positive**, with progress recorded in most countries worldwide over recent decades.
2. There is a **universally agreed international framework** already, and regional and international organisations are on the same page.
3. **Social demand** is increasing, and **feminist alliances** are transcending borders.
4. **Sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis** are becoming more frequent.
5. The **human skills exist**: there are qualified women in every field, together with gender experts.

While there is still a long way to go, we should not forget how far we have come. In most of the world women now have access to primary and secondary education. In European countries today they are actually more likely to be in higher education than their male counterparts. Women have now entered the paid labour market in large numbers in virtually all fields, whereas the overwhelming majority used to be restricted to unpaid work before the Second World War. In politics, women’s representation has increased because of affirmative action in political parties or as a result of legal constraints, even if we are seeing stagnation in this field.

*“The degree of gender equality achieved in Denmark is positive and the overall trajectory is heading in the right direction. This is true for many other European countries too.”*  
Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General, Council of Europe

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 4 and 5.

There is strong pressure from civil society to step up these efforts and take a decisive step towards gender equality by 2030 as part of the Agenda for Sustainable Development committing the 193 UN member states. In recent years, groups and associations of women and, sometimes, men working for gender equality have been springing up in a large number of places and fields. In addition to major countrywide mobilisations – such as in Argentina, Ireland and Spain recently – feminist social movements encourage international alliances, as in the case of the Ni Una Menos (Not One Less) movement in the Spanish-speaking world, or the Women’s March, which started in the United States. The frequency, scale and impact of feminist campaigns on social media are also growing. A number of contributions to the conference underlined the progress achieved by the #MeToo movement in raising awareness of the extent of sexist and sexual violence: from so-called “everyday” sexism to sexual harassment to sexual assault or rape. The millions of testimonies made possible by this viral campaign, which spread over the entire planet, have made it easier to speak out and be heard in this respect. These movements have shown the general public the depressing banality of the sexism experienced daily by millions of women and girls across the globe in various spheres of society. The myth of “not here, not among us, not any more” has been shattered. The movement has also shone a light on the perpetrators of sexist and sexual violence and the considerable impunity that they still largely enjoy.

*“The #MeToo movement is a wake-up call for all of us.”*

Eva Kjer Hansen, Minister for Equal Opportunities, Denmark

Those attending the Copenhagen conference called for everyone to seize on the energy and power released by the #MeToo movement and to hear its message that time is of the essence. Deeper changes are urgently needed in the interests of women and girls, as well as society as a whole.

In addition to the crucial messages conveyed by women and girls, another positive underlying trend is the growing output of sex-disaggregated statistics and gender analysis and research. This is a vital enabler for highlighting gender inequalities using incontrovertible scientific evidence. The more accurate the assessments, the more likely it is that measures to achieve equality will have the expected outcomes. Here, the conference focused its attention on strategic resources provided by various regional and international organisations. For example, it stressed the importance of the data supplied by UNESCO on girls in science,<sup>7</sup> by the World Bank on women, business and the law in 189 countries,<sup>8</sup> and by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) with its gender equality index for European Union (EU) countries.<sup>9</sup> Through these data, regional and international organisations can provide important support for and monitoring of their member states’ efforts to achieve the sustainable development goals.

***When threats are looming and decisions have to be made: should we back-pedal or should we speed up the rate of change?***

Being able to rely on sound resources and alliances is all the more important, since there are serious obstacles and new threats looming on the road to gender equality. The Council of Europe Strategy and some of the contributions to the Copenhagen conference allude to a number of problems that should not be underestimated:

- growing economic difficulties and subsequent austerity policies and measures that have exacerbated inequalities,
- migration problems,
- political problems leading to a rise in nationalism and populism and ensuing attacks on women’s rights,
- financial problems for associations, politicians and institutional mechanisms for promoting women’s rights and gender equality, following a reduction in available resources.

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<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, *Cracking the code: girls' and women's education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)*, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law*, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2017: Measuring gender equality in the European Union 2005-2015*.



Societies are therefore now being pulled in two different directions: on one hand, there is a pro-equality movement based on human rights and calling for a rapid end to the massive structural inequalities preventing women and girls from enjoying these rights in practice; on the other, there is an anti-equality movement using the idea of gender to stoke misogynist and homophobic fears and maintain the culture of heterosexual male privilege unaltered. The myth of equality having been achieved and of a linear progression to greater respect for women's rights may have pulled the wool over our eyes, but history has shown that in this field if we are not going forward, we are going back.

*"We are living in a very exciting and crucial time.  
It could go in either direction: better or worse."*

Edith Schratzberger-Vécsei, President, European Women's Lobby

Against this mixed background, the participants all emphasised the dual obligation of all stakeholders attached to women's rights and gender equality, including regional, national and international authorities in particular: a duty to be vigilant and a duty to take action.

***Two pressing prerequisites: an end to impunity for violence against women, and political and financial commitment***

To meet this dual obligation of vigilance and action, two pressing prerequisites emerged from the discussions.

The first pressing need is to end impunity for violence against women and girls. It is pressing because at least one woman in three has reported that she has been a victim of physical and/or sexual violence.<sup>10</sup> It is pressing because gender equality is not just a matter of principle: it is also a matter of life or death for thousands of people facing gender-based violence as victims or co-victims every day. Lastly, it is pressing because this self-replicating violence is the primary obstacle to women and girls enjoying their rights to education, to work, to sport, to exercise responsibilities, etc. Securing the right to security and a life free from violence for women and girls not only changes things in practical terms by freeing them from violence and fear, but also changes attitudes by reversing the image of women as weak, inferior, submissive and dependent.

**TESTIMONY**

The Italian member of parliament Laura Boldrini was Spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and subsequently Speaker of the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 2013 to 2018. At the Copenhagen conference she bore witness to the sexist hate speech to which women participating in public debate could be subjected. When she held the office of Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies she wanted to be a role model for other women, and especially girls, and make progress with gender equality issues. Because of her situation as a woman occupying a position of power, and also a woman attached to gender equality and opposed to all forms of discrimination, it "cost me a lot", she said. One political leader for instance prompted a torrent of sexist insults and threats of sexist and sexual violence after asking on Facebook: "What would you do to Boldrini if you had her in your car?" Again on social media,

<sup>10</sup> WHO, 2013; Devries et al., 2013. Cited in the UN Women report *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016* and in *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey* published in 2014 by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. These reports concur as to the proportion of women declaring themselves to have suffered physical and/or sexual violence.

an Italian mayor incited sexual violence against her: “Let’s send the rapists to Boldrini’s house so she will smile again.” These violent attacks, together with the absence of a fitting public response, left a deep impression on her. Laura Boldrini called for solidarity and mobilisation in Europe against this type of intimidation of women involved in public life, whether as politicians, journalists, experts, well-known figures, etc.

The aim of the Istanbul Convention is clear and unambiguous: domestic violence and violence against women can no longer be considered a private matter, and states have a duty to prevent violence, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. Ratified by 33 states and signed by 13 more states as well as the EU,<sup>11</sup> this instrument has been described by the UN as a “gold standard”.

It is therefore crucial to end impunity for violence against women by ensuring full and effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

The second prerequisite consists in proclaiming clearly and at the highest level a political resolve to uphold women’s rights and promote gender equality and to translate this into financial terms. It is a necessary condition for ending impunity for violence against women and accelerating change towards gender equality. Participants in the Copenhagen conference – particularly Helena Dalli, Malta’s Minister for European Affairs and Equality, and Bassima Hakkaoui, Morocco’s Minister of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development – pointed out that progress in this area had never been achieved unhindered and therefore without a battle. It was also stressed that no steps could lead to improvement for women and girls without adequate financial resources.

*“Violence against women is structural and must be recognised for what it is: a social mechanism by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. It is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men which prevent the full advancement of women. It is both a cause for and a consequence of the inequality of women and this vicious circle must end.”*

Feride Acar, President, Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)

In addition to the fact that a lack of resources for specialist and dedicated support services for all women victims of violence has been clearly identified as a major impediment to implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the Strategy more generally links enforcement of gender equality laws and policies with the human and financial resources allocated to this end. The Strategy also emphasises that “[t]he strengthening of institutional mechanisms for gender equality, at the national and local level, and the availability of resources at all levels, are therefore critical and will determine future progress to improve gender equality on the ground”.

Those attending the Copenhagen conference drew attention to the urgent need to prevent the risk of insufficient political commitment, which would result in patchy implementation of existing instruments and inadequate human and financial resources. In addition, gender-responsive budgeting at the national and local levels should lead to better resource allocation across the board.

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<sup>11</sup> As at 31 January 2019.

In September 2015, the UN organised a “Global Leaders’ Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: A Commitment to Action”. In 2019, the Council of Europe will host an event on regional and international mechanisms for monitoring gender equality and action to combat violence against women. This event could ask politicians from Council of Europe member states and beyond to make new political and financial commitments on the basis of the Strategy in order to implement SDG 5 and all the sustainable development goals connected with gender equality.

Now more than ever, in the face of the threats, European politicians must show their determination to pursue and expand policies promoting women’s rights and genuine gender equality as long as violence and discrimination against women and girls endure.

*“The Council of Europe is ready to provide the initiatives, standards and laws that will give structure to that energy.*

*After all, we have a strong record in this area.”*

Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General, Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is determined to continue setting an example. Its renewed pro-active approach is reflected by the preparation of a draft recommendation to the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism, new co-operation projects in the field of women’s rights, and an ambitious programme for gender mainstreaming within the Organisation, among other actions.

## PART II: THE NEW COUNCIL OF EUROPE STRATEGY 2018-2023 A KEY TOOL: GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 has a number of strengths as a framework for re-engagement with women's rights and gender equality in Europe.

### ***Strengths of the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023***

At a time in Europe's history when there is a public desire for a strong, united voice to be heard in the face of global challenges, the Strategy's key strength lies in a shared vision and language, developed and adopted by 47 member states representing 820 million citizens.

*"We must be proud. Proud that we share a common vision on how to improve equality for the 820 million citizens of Europe.*

*This strategy is not just words on paper; this strategy has the potential to directly change lives."*

Eva Kjer Hansen, Minister for Equal Opportunities, Denmark

The participants in the Copenhagen conference also wished to commend the power and clarity of the text. In the first place, the Strategy identifies the problems. "To name is to unmask, and to unmask is to change," wrote the philosopher Simone de Beauvoir. The text of the Strategy does not evade any of the obstacles on the path to gender equality. For example, the text specifically refers to historical male domination whilst underlining the restrictiveness – for both women and men – of gender stereotypes.

Remaking this fundamental observation constitutes a reality check. A reality marked by persistent inequalities despite apparent progress. This is crucial at a time when, once again, discrimination against women may be minimised and disconnected from its systemic – and therefore political – nature. Ignoring the historically unequal power relations between the sexes reflects and feeds the refusal to engage dedicated resources and policies to reduce these inequalities. The conference participants underlined that recognition of the structural character of gender inequalities was a key prerequisite.

In the second place, the Strategy sets the priorities for accelerating progress towards planet 50-50 by 2030 and lays down a timetable and ways of implementation. When the road is long and full of pitfalls, it is essential to have a compass to stay on course. The following six strategic objectives constitute the course of action decided by the Council of Europe:

1. Prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism.
2. Prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.
3. Ensure the equal access of women to justice.
4. Achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.
5. Protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls.
6. Achieve gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

The new Objective 5 (which did not appear in the 2014-2017 strategy) shows that this framework for action is rooted in reality, present and future, and reflects a determination to take an approach that will not leave the most vulnerable by the wayside. Migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls experience intersecting forms of discrimination. The new Strategy is intended to take them into account with this specific objective, as well as by including intersectionality in all the other strategic objectives. Objectives 1, 4 and 5 were each the subject of a panel discussion at the Copenhagen conference. Objective 2 concerning violence against women was addressed throughout the event and identified as an urgent prerequisite for making progress towards genuine gender equality.

Although because of time constraints Objectives 3 and 6 were not dealt with directly during the conference, this does not in any way detract from their importance.

Equal access of women to justice (Objective 3) is indeed a priority to which the Council of Europe is particularly committed and on which it is undertaking pioneering work. This equal access is essential for upholding rights and obtaining redress for harm suffered. However, serious obstacles still exist both culturally and substantively. Having initiated a whole string of projects on this issue, the Council of Europe issued a number of recommendations to member states, including at the conference “Towards Guaranteeing Equal Access of Women to Justice” which took place in **Bern** (2015). The Council of Europe’s work has also made it possible to produce training materials, collate good practice and publicise other instruments and research so as to end the legal headache of a justice system that excludes women much more than men owing to the inequalities and prejudices with which they have to contend because of their gender.

Last but not least, gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures (Objective 6) is a permanent concern of the Council of Europe. The latter has provided a definition of this gender mainstreaming strategy, together with methodological tools and good practices.<sup>12</sup> The Organisation has also adopted a number of recommendations for implementing this approach in various fields such as education, sport, health, the media and the audiovisual sector.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a number of Council of Europe sectors are pursuing innovative work on gender mainstreaming in the fields of justice, drug abuse, corruption control and anti-terrorism, for example.

### ***Recommendations for implementing the Strategy***

The Copenhagen conference made the following recommendations, intended mainly for member states. Some of these recommendations are also aimed at international organisations, local authorities and any other interested parties working or wishing to work for gender equality:

- i. **Support and work closely with non-governmental organisations.**
- ii. **Remain vigilant, given the threats to women’s rights**, by strengthening networks and alliances for upholding women’s rights and promoting gender equality at the local, national, regional and international levels.
- iii. **Express solidarity with and support for women in public office who are victims of sexist attacks** and ensure judicial follow-up under a legal framework prohibiting sexist hate speech.
- iv. **Regularly reaffirm and explain the systemic nature of discrimination and inequality affecting women** because of male domination.
- v. **Accept the need for provisional positive discrimination measures** wherever forms of inequality affecting women still exist by supporting the adoption of quotas or parity measures based on authoritative international legal instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the Istanbul Convention and Council of Europe recommendations.
- vi. **Lead by example** by questioning in-house culture and unconscious bias, representations and practices so that work organisation, attitudes and decisions are free from sexism and underpinned by gender mainstreaming.

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<sup>12</sup> Council of Europe webpage on gender mainstreaming: <https://www.coe.int/gender-mainstreaming>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/council-of-europe-standards-and-institutional-setting>

- vii. **Involve men and boys** as part of the problem and part of the solution. In the field of gender equality it is time to encourage men and boys to confront their privileges and be more aware of the effects of what they do or do not do.
- viii. **Take account of the intersectionality of discrimination** by considering the whole range of experience and the parties concerned: between women and men, among women themselves, among men, between countries and between areas within countries.
- ix. **Allocate appropriate resources – including funding** – to policies, programmes and institutional mechanisms for upholding women’s rights and promoting gender equality. This is the sine qua non for implementing the Strategy successfully.
- x. **Adopt a national gender equality policy** in order to lay down the regulatory and conceptual framework, together with priorities and guidelines for implementing gender mainstreaming in the member state.

## PART III: KEY CHALLENGES FOR ACHIEVING GENDER EDQUALITY ON THE GROUND: THEMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

### ***Promoting women in decision-making: breaking the glass ceiling and wiping the sticky floor***

Fifteen years ago Council of Europe member states undertook to achieve a minimum representation of 40% of each sex in political and public life through legislative, administrative and support measures and to adopt indicators for measuring the progress made. This commitment resulted in the adoption by the Committee of Ministers, in 2003, of Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.

Three aspects of this issue were addressed by the Copenhagen conference: women in politics, the relationship between the media and gender equality in decision-making, and the question of women in academia and the civil service.

**The slow progress made towards balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making demonstrates the need for a sustained, enhanced effort to break the glass ceiling at long last.**

#### **Council of Europe data for 2016<sup>14</sup>**

- Only two out of the 46 countries surveyed reached the minimum threshold of 40% of women in lower or single houses of parliament (Finland and Sweden).
- Five countries had 38 to 39% of women in lower or single houses.
- The European average was 25.6% of women in lower or single houses.
- The average proportion of women heads of state or government, women heads of regional government and women mayors across Europe was below 17%.

To set an example, the Council of Europe intends to apply to itself what it is recommending for others. The Organisation has therefore included the goal of balanced participation of women and men in decision-making in its internal gender equality strategy. While both chambers of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions) had more than 40% of each sex in 2016, the Council of Europe intends to continue its efforts to attain the minimum threshold of 40% of women in the Parliamentary Assembly (35.7% of women members at present), the European Court of Human Rights (34.8% of women judges at present) and all executive positions.

**Quotas or parity measures are necessary steps.** When these measures are sufficiently strict, appropriate to the national legal framework and properly enforced, they can produce parity in decision-making. Although these measures are necessary, they are not, however, sufficient. To ensure that a balanced presence in decision-making positions is reflected in the balance of actual decision-making authority and in policy change, support measures are essential to remove the societal and structural obstacles that still exist.

**Only a holistic strategy can lastingly eliminate gender inequality in political and public decision-making.** This holistic strategy must include the adoption not only of strict quotas or parity measures, but also of measures for balanced participation of women and men in political parties and the media as well as measures to prevent and combat sexist and sexual violence in political and public life and, last but not least, measures enabling women and men in public life to balance their public, professional and family lives.

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<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe, [Analytical report on third round of monitoring on the implementation of CM Recommendation Rec\(2003\)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making](#), 2017.

*“Men want to keep women out of decision-making positions. The fact is that without integration in politics, women will always be left on the side-lines without being able to carry any real weight. The battle for women’s equality and empowerment is therefore strategic.”*

Bassima Hakkaoui, Minister of Family, Solidarity,  
Equality and Social Development, Morocco

**Sex-disaggregated data on the distribution of representative and decision-making positions at all levels of political and public life, and their publication at regular intervals, are a key tool** for progress towards power-sharing between women and men. The example of UNESCO was cited at the conference. Production of sex-disaggregated data has made it possible to monitor progress in implementing gender equality as an overarching UNESCO priority since 2008: women accounted for 9% of decision-making positions in 2006, 49% in 2015 and 53% in 2018. A monitoring report is sent to member states every six months.

**The burning issue is not so much establishing pools of women candidates as having the political resolve and the forethought required to engage women and change the culture of male privilege that prevails in seats of power.** This culture denies women their basic right to participate equally in the public, political, social, economic and cultural affairs of their regions or countries. At a time when women in Europe are on average better qualified than their male counterparts and are involved in all fields of activity, there are a large number of competent women candidates. What now remains to be done is really to open the door to them and ensure that they encounter a non-discriminatory reception and a sexism-free environment in seats of power, since these factors explain why some women are sometimes wary of accepting decision-making positions. It is the power structures – created by and for men – that must change rather than women having to adapt to a political culture imbued with male attitudes and to acquiesce tacitly in the male violence that still permeates seats of power.

**The media are both part of the problem and part of the solution.** They can either convey and reinforce gender stereotypes concerning women in positions of power or, conversely, help speed up change regarding how women are represented.

Apart from the question of women’s role in decision-making bodies, **the deeper issue is gender mainstreaming in policies and decisions.** To this end, public policy-makers need to receive training in gender equality and the challenges raised by individual sectors in order to ensure a genuine gender equality perspective in all fields.

*“Research shows that there is much more harassment of women in politics. It’s not just one woman they are trying to intimidate; it is all women who have political ambitions!”*

Renee Laiviera, member of the Gender Equality  
Commission of the Council of Europe, Malta



## ***Recommendations***

- I. **When passing legislation on the necessary quotas and/or systems of parity, make provision for a high minimum threshold, rank-order rules, strict penalties for non-compliance and mandatory replacement of a woman withdrawing from a list by another woman**, drawing on the comparative analysis of different national strategies.
- II. **Adopt a holistic multi-sector strategy specifically involving political parties, the media and the education sector.** The Copenhagen conference stressed that this was necessary to achieve outcomes with a significant and lasting impact. To this end, the Council of Europe renews the following recommendations, which continue to be relevant:
  - Include gender equality principles in legal frameworks for political parties and in laws on their public funding.
  - Train leaders and chairpersons of parties and bodies responsible for selecting candidates for election in gender equality issues and in combating sexist prejudices and sexism in the functioning of recruitment and selection practices, including by having political parties introduce strong voluntary quotas and transparent internal selection processes.
  - Adopt policies to ensure gender equality in media coverage of election campaigns, ensure a higher profile for women in these campaigns and improve their access to the media.
- III. **Ensure implementation of a holistic strategy for balanced participation of women and men in decision-making as part of the example to be set by every member state and international organisation.** This holistic strategy must make it possible to substitute a culture of gender equality for the current culture of male privilege. It must include a policy of zero tolerance of sexism in the national civil service and individual organisations, extending from so-called “everyday” sexism to sexual violence. Adoption of an internal protocol for preventing and dealing with sexist and sexual violence is recommended.
- IV. **Develop a scoreboard for monitoring member states' progress** towards balanced participation of women and men in political and public life based on key indicators recommended by the Council of Europe.<sup>15</sup>
- V. **Support activities and build partnerships between public authorities, the media and the education sector to raise the profile of women trailblazers in political and public life or those who were particularly involved in the decisions of a country or particular sector.** This would make it possible both to celebrate the memory of these women of power and to change the conceptions associating power and the public arena with men rather than women.

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<sup>15</sup> Council of Europe, [Analytical report on third round of monitoring on the implementation of CM Recommendation Rec\(2003\)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making](#), 2017.

## *Gender stereotypes and sexism: holding women and men back*

One session of the Copenhagen conference dealt with the impact of gender stereotypes and sexism from different perspectives: men and masculinity, the role of culture and education, and the situation online.

*“Women are often judged by their appearance and not their ideas and authenticity. This has always been a way to trivialise and divert attention from the important things women are saying.”*

Ioşifina Antoniou, Commissioner for Gender Equality, Cyprus

This session tied in with current events in two ways: firstly, with the #MeToo movement and its public revelations in various countries and fields (cinema, sport, politics) since October 2017, and secondly with the current work of the GEC of the Council of Europe. Since 2016, the GEC has been working on a draft recommendation to the Council of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism. This pioneering work aims to provide the first internationally approved definition of sexism, together with guidelines to support member states in combating sexism in various fields.

**The battle against gender stereotypes and sexism cannot be won without change and support on the part of men.** Gender equality is in the interests of society as a whole – both women and men. Women pay a higher price for sexism, but men are also imprisoned and restricted by gender stereotypes. As one of the speakers pointed out, the battle against sexism must also and, above all, be fought among men so that men for whom sexism is still a means of making themselves more powerful in the eyes of others become aware of this fact and reconsider this type of behaviour. Moreover, if sexism is not tackled online, it will become the norm, and sexism is in the process of becoming a social norm for young people.

**There is now a consensus that education systems are permeated by gender stereotypes and are replicating them and that education should be not an obstacle but a fundamental strategic enabler of gender equality.** In education, gender stereotypes create distinctions between girls and boys and give rise to gender bias, including in teaching and recreational activities and materials, in facilities, disciplinary treatment, marking and educational guidance and counselling.

**The internet and social media have opened up new – and often anonymous – avenues to sexism,** to so-called “everyday” sexism, sexist insults, sexual harassment and even hate speech as well as incitement to and threats of violence. There is nothing virtual about this phenomenon. Its impact is real enough, like the impact of violence against women and girls in general. **There is an urgent need to address this new challenge, since online sexism is in the process of being trivialised, is seen as “fun” and is becoming a social norm for the younger generation.** To deal with this problem effectively, **it is advisable not to overlook the diversity of the internet – which is far from homogenous – and allowance should also be made for the generation gap,** which may lead to misunderstandings between generations, particularly regarding language.

**The video and online game industry is a strategic sector for tackling the issue of sexism among young people.** Very popular with young people, the sector is not immune to sexism and is undergoing rapid expansion both economically and in terms of employment. It is seeing a growth in feminist groups, which ought to be supported.

Policy makers and professional decision makers, both women and men, are daily becoming more aware of gender stereotypes and sexism. They thus have the power to change things. **If nothing is done, the current generation will be responsible for the heritage of inequality handed down to our daughters/sons and grandchildren.**

## ***Recommendations***

- I. Define the concept of sexism.** Those attending the Copenhagen conference testified to the attention being paid to the work of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe and particularly the preparation of a draft recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism. There are high expectations that this work will lead to an approved definition of sexism, given that no authoritative international definition currently exists and this deficiency is a barrier to preventing and combating sexism.
- II. Adopt stricter and more specific standards, sector by sector, to prevent and combat sexism, particularly in education and the media.** These two fields must continue to be priority areas, as emphasised in the Council of Europe's work constituting the point of reference for greater action in these areas.
- III. Tackle online sexism and violence as a matter of urgency, based on a detailed assessment put together jointly with young users,** in order, inter alia, to describe internet and social media uses as accurately as possible, together with forms of sexism and the places where it is most in evidence. This would seem to be a prerequisite for practical and successful action strategies moving beyond a statement of principle ("sexism is all over the Web; let's take action everywhere"), which too often means no progress at all. In order to prevent sexism becoming the norm online, the recommendation is to listen to and work jointly with young people in order to use a common language. When talking to young people, an emotive or guilt-inducing approach appears neither suitable nor effective. Here it is better to employ the term "online violence" rather than "cyberviolence", since the "cyber" prefix may result in euphemising of violence considered to be merely "virtual".
- IV. Ensure equal access of girls and boys to video and online games.** It is also recommended to act in association with the gaming industry so as to vary violent, sexist and stereotyped representations in content and to support anti-sexism gamer groups in order to prevent and combat sexism in relations between gamers.
- V. Encourage communication with men and conversations between men on sexism and masculinity.** To reach men, it is important to recognise and use a number of outreach strategies concurrently. One strategy is to win men over to this battle by stressing that while gender stereotypes are restrictive first and foremost for women, they are also restrictive for men. Another strategy is to confront men with the privileges that they enjoy as men, bearing in mind that a privilege deriving from membership of a dominant category is usually imperceptible to the person benefiting from it.
- VI. Bolster support for and growth of feminist and gender studies, and consideration of the findings of such research when developing public policy – in particular through support for sharing of research and tools – so as to ensure a continuous and enduring link between discussion and action.**

### ***Protecting the fundamental rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls***

For the first time, the Gender Equality Strategy includes protection of the fundamental rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls as one of its six priorities for the period 2018-2023. This new priority rests on recognition of the fact that these women and girls are among the most vulnerable people in our continent and their numbers have increased considerably in recent times. Their situation is extremely insecure both prior to and during their journey to Europe, and upon arrival they also face many challenges in terms of integration, access to services, education and the labour market.

Patriarchal norms, sometimes called “traditional values”, can never justify violation of the fundamental rights of women and girls, whether in Europe or elsewhere. The Strategy clearly states that culture, custom, tradition or so-called “honour” cannot be considered a justification for acts of violence, negative social control or any violation of human rights, as enshrined in international conventions.

Women migrants, refugees and asylum seekers face a greater risk of gender-based violence in various forms: sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, forced labour, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, etc. This gender-based violence can occur within families as well. Serious violations of the human rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls in reception camps, and a significant number of disappearances of women and girls into trafficking and prostitution networks, have also been reported. Although instruments such as the Istanbul Convention exist to protect women’s rights – including special provisions relating to women migrants and asylum seekers – in many cases the laws, policies and services are not responsive to their situation and needs.

One crucial challenge is to listen to the voices of women migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and enable them to participate as agents of change in policies that affect them at all levels of society.

*“Migrant women are living at the margins of society. They are seen as ‘the other’, and are not engaged in areas of decision-making. Policies continue to be made about health, about their lives and their children without their involvement.”*

Salome Mbugua, President, European Network of Migrant Women

Women migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Europe are not a homogenous group. Another challenge is to remove the many forms of discrimination (sex, origin, race, etc.) with which migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women have to contend concerning access to the labour market, goods and services. The representative from Equinet stressed that capacity-building is a key enabler not only for migrant women themselves but also for professionals.

## TESTIMONY

Sodfa Daaji is a young feminist activist and co-ordinator of the Gender Equality Committee of the Afrika Youth Movement (AYM). Originally from Tunisia, she became an activist at the age of 16, in the wake of the Tunisian revolution of 2011, and was for several years sequestered in Italy, where she witnessed domestic violence and was herself sexually assaulted: “I grew up in fear, shame and silence. [...] And I just said ‘stop’. I didn’t want to be ashamed any more of being a woman and I wanted to write a better future for me. And that was when I started a blog and became an activist.” Describing herself as a survivor of gender-based violence and its long-term effects, Sodfa Daaji spoke up in defence of freedom of expression, the freedom to believe or not to believe, and in order to represent migrant women. She moved to Tunisia to confront what she had identified as the source of the violence that she had been facing: the lack of education and the use of “culture” and “tradition” as justifications for violence against women. “I have my culture and I am proud of being Tunisian, but I will not let any man justify his violence towards me by invoking culture, tradition or religion.” Sodfa Daaji also had to face institutional violence from a police officer who blamed her for an assault that she had come to report. After this she wanted to challenge men directly and ask them to put themselves in a woman’s place – in Tunisia, Italy and elsewhere – so that they would understand what it was like for many women every day when they took the bus, walked in the street or even spoke. Sodfa Daaji also said that her biggest fight and the one that had triggered the most violent backlash was when, at the age of 20, she claimed the freedom to believe or not to believe. She concluded: “I have faced a lot of violence, but I am still here and I feel strong. I feel strong because it’s my life. I prefer to die rather than follow patriarchal social norms or fear male authority; I am writing my future, and I am trying to write the future of young girls who are victims of men’s violence. I speak, in English, Arabic, French or Italian; I just try to speak. And I want young women’s voices to be heard more. Young people are seen as the ‘next generation’. But we are living now with you. You need to hear us here and now.”

## ***Recommendations***

- I. Use existing policies and instruments to uphold the fundamental human rights of women migrants, refugees and asylum seekers**, and particularly CEDAW and General Recommendation No. 32 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, the Istanbul Convention, the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (the Lanzarote Convention) and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.
- II. Encourage the signing, ratification and full implementation of the Istanbul Convention**, including by countries neighbouring Europe.
- III. Adopt gender mainstreaming at every stage of asylum procedures**. This should result, for example, in reasonable deadlines giving women asylum seekers, who are often vulnerable, time to submit their applications, and the implementation of **specific upkeep, support and accommodation measures**, particularly for unaccompanied women and women with children.
- IV. Recognise gender-based violence and persecution as grounds for asylum together with a commitment to promoting women's rights and opposing harmful practices** (rape as a weapon of war, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, etc.).
- V. Adopt gender mainstreaming in migration and integration policies** at all levels.
- VI. Support institutional mechanisms for gender equality so that they have the resources to bolster, support, monitor and assess gender mainstreaming** in migration, asylum and integration policies, particularly by producing **guidelines and tools to take account of intersecting forms of discrimination** (intersectionality) and the diversity of situations and needs.
- VII. Give migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women** (particularly younger women) a say in public debate and decision-making.
- VIII. Develop capacity-building for women migrants, refugees and asylum seekers** in order to empower them.
- IX. Ensure migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls receive systematic information on their rights and the services available that is appropriate (particularly to their language level)**, as required by international conventions.
- X. Ensure migrant women and girl's equal access to universal services**, including family planning, health, education, access to employment and accommodation.
- XI. Ensure that migrant women and men are, like the population as a whole, aware and able to claim ownership of the laws and policies relating to women's rights and gender equality** in force in the host country.
- XII. Provide support and resources for organisations** and networks of women migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.
- XIII. Train, and improve capacity-building for, professionals** whose work relates to migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls in order to give them a better understanding of the rights and realities of these women and girls.

*"When we free people from those stereotypes, when we remove the social, economic and political impediments to equality, people will be truly free and empowered to make their own choices and shape their own future. And what a future that could be!"*

Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General, Council of Europe