

Strasbourg, 28 September 2022

GEC (2022) Bureau 4

GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
14th Bureau meeting
Tuesday, 27 September 2022

Report

Caterina Bolognese introduced Natacha De Roeck, the newest member of the Gender Equality Team, to the members. She was recently appointed Head of the Policy Unit.

1. Preparation of the 22nd Gender Equality Commission (GEC) meeting (Strasbourg, 16-18 November 2022 – 3 days)

The Bureau had received the preliminary draft agenda of the meeting and the following agenda items, in particular, were discussed:

- Guidelines on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women

The Secretariat (Cécile Gréboval) informed the members about the preparation of the draft Guidelines on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women (Guidelines). Following the consultation procedure which had begun in July, a total of 14 sets of amendments had been received from member states and observers to the GEC. She said that the GEC members will receive a draft version of the Guidelines showing all the revisions and comments in the text for discussion and decision at the GEC meeting, as well as a separate compilation of all the amendments received.

The Secretariat (Caterina Bolognese) informed the members that legal advice received encourages intergovernmental committees to explore the possibility of aiming for texts to be adopted by the Committee of Ministers as recommendations rather than as guidelines. She explained that the difference between the two documents was that, whereas recommendations were a type of “soft law” foreseen in the Statute of the Council of Europe, guidelines have no formal status and are therefore of lesser significance.

She outlined the procedure for making this alternative proposal. Discussion by the Bureau would feature in the Bureau meeting report; colleagues from the Council of Europe’s Legal Advice Department would assist prior to and during the GEC meeting; in addition to the draft Guidelines in their current format, the Secretariat would prepare an additional document showing how the Guidelines would look if transformed into a draft Recommendation. Both versions would be sent to the GEC well in advance of the GEC meeting, to allow time for members to receive instructions on the issue from their authorities. The GEC will therefore have to discuss both the content of the text on men and boys and the issue whether to propose that the Committee of Ministers adopt

the text as Guidelines or as a recommendation. The ultimate decision would lie with the Committee of Ministers.

Mindful of possible problems that this change might cause, the Secretariat wished to prepare this alternative course of action in full transparency, well in advance of the Plenary meeting.

In answer to a question from Andreia Lourenço Marques (Chair) as to what happens if the Committee of Ministers does not accept the proposal, the Secretariat explained that, whereas the GEC could express a view about changing the format to a draft recommendation, it would be for the Committee of Ministers to decide. The options will be clearly set out in the draft annotated agenda of the GEC meeting, and together with the documents, which would be sent to GEC members as early as possible.

Andri Savva (Vice Chair) said that, in her experience, Recommendations are to be preferred, as they allow for implementation. She would therefore support the proposal to transform the Guidelines into a draft Recommendation.

- Event to launch the study on the impact of Covid-19 on access to justice (Thursday, 17 November 2022)

The Secretariat explained that the Study on the impact of Covid-19 on access to justice was currently being finalised and translated for the launch event on Thursday, 17 November 2022, during the GEC meeting. She recalled that the report originated from a Programme for Good Governance (PGG) Regional Project on “Women’s Access to Justice: delivering on the Istanbul Convention and other European gender equality standards in the Eastern Partnership countries” which is co-funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. However, as a report on the impact of Covid-19 is included in the GEC Terms of Reference for 2022, it was decided to join forces with the project team and to support the study with contributions from the GEC members. Advice and data from CEPEJ Secretariat was also taken into account. The result is a report to which both GEC members and CEPEJ Secretariat have contributed.

Separately to the launching of the report on 17 November, GEC members will be invited to decide, on Friday, 18 November 2022, whether the GEC endorses the study in compliance with its terms of reference.

- Intervention of Carlien Scheele, Director of EIGE

The Chair said that she supported the request from EIGE to have a short exchange of views between the GEC and the Director of EIGE, Carlien Scheele. The Bureau agreed. The Secretariat was therefore instructed to contact Carlien Scheele, reply positively to the request, and prepare the exchange.

- Election of Chair and two Vice-Chairs of the GEC

The Secretariat (Adrienne Looby) informed the Bureau that the elections for Chair and two Vice Chairs would take place electronically. Members would be informed in advance that they would need to vote via an electronic device (computer, tablet, telephone) capable of connecting to the KUDO system. More information would be sent to members prior to November's meeting.

2. Call for GEC members to take an active role in meetings and events

The Bureau was informed about the low number of replies received following the call to GEC members to inform the Secretariat whether they wished to play an active part in different subjects such as (i) women's access to justice, (ii) women and drugs or (iii) women migrants. The Chair said that she would raise this issue at the Plenary meeting.

3. Forthcoming events

12 October: Exchange of views between the GEC Chair and GREVIO, Strasbourg

The Secretariat (Caterina Bolognese) informed the Bureau about the invitation received from GREVIO for an exchange of views with the GEC Chair. This is the first time such an exchange will take place. The Bureau members were asked if they had anything in particular they wished to raise besides the subjects proposed by GREVIO, such as the place of men and boys in gender equality and violence against women policies, the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy, especially in relation to violence against women, and preparations for the new strategy. Kateryna Levchenko (Vice Chair) proposed the development of a model of communication procedures, as this would be very effective for new Parties to the Istanbul Convention, such as Ukraine for instance.

13 October: Network of Pilot Courts, European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ)

The Secretariat informed the members that colleagues in the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) had contributed data to the Study on the impact of Covid-19 on women's access to justice, and were considering revising their annual questionnaire with more questions related to gender equality and access to justice. The meeting of the Network of Pilot Courts on 13 October was another opportunity to raise the issue of women's access to justice so that it helps to enrich their next questionnaire. The Chair agreed to participate in this event and to present the GEC and its work on this Strategic Objective on ensuring women's access to justice.

24-25 October: EIGE Gender Equality Forum, Brussels

Several GEC Members and the Secretariat will participate either in person (Roberto Olla and Cécile Gréboval) or online in EIGE's Gender Equality Forum.

05-06 October: Annual European National Preventive Mechanisms Conference - Monitoring the rights of specific groups of people deprived of their liberty, Strasbourg

The Secretariat (Natacha De Roeck) will participate online in this meeting and make a presentation on women in prison, as well as on gender-based monitoring of specific groups of people deprived of their liberty, using her previous experience of working with the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). She will share her presentation following the event.

November: EC Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities, Brussels

The Chair said that she will attend this meeting in person.

15 November: 1st meeting of the IC Article 10 co-ordinating bodies, Helsinki

The Secretariat said that this meeting was confirmed for 15 November, but that it would be difficult for any GEC member to participate as it was the eve of the GEC Plenary meeting in *Strasbourg*.

22 November; side event on Gender during the Addiction Conference of the Pompidou Group in Lisbon

Caterina Bolognese informed the Bureau that no GEC members had so far volunteered interest in following the topic of women and drugs. Being based in Lisbon, the Chair could take part in the event, supported by a member of the Secretariat following this topic.

4. Any other business

The Secretariat informed the Bureau that the Council of Europe Secretary-General had appointed a high-level reflection group, chaired by Mary Robinson, to explore five key priority topics, including combating violence against women and domestic violence, in advance of a possible Council of Europe summit. The group's report would be available in October and would be shared with GEC members for information. It may provide guidance as regards the topic of violence against women under the future Gender Equality Strategy as of 2024.

5. Proposed date of next Bureau meeting

It was decided to use the opportunity of the Chair being in Strasbourg for the exchange of views with GREVIO on 12 October and the CEPEJ event on the Network of Pilot Courts on 13 October, to hold the next Bureau meeting on 12 October at 2:30 pm.

Participants

Bureau : Andreia Lourenço Marques (Chair), Kateryna Levchenko (Vice-Chair), Andri Savva (Vice-Chair)

Secretariat : Caterina Bolognese, Natacha De Roeck, Cécile Gréboval, Tryggvi Hallgrímsson, Christa Jakobsson, Adrienne Looby, Evrydiki Tseliou.