



Strasbourg, 14 November 2022

**GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)**

**Annual Thematic Conference:
Men and boys as agents of change in gender equality policies
and in policies to combat violence against women
Strasbourg, 27-28 April 2023**

Draft Concept Note

The annual conference of the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) will be held in Strasbourg on 27 and 28 April 2023 in the framework of the Icelandic Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The conference will focus on **the role of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women**. The Icelandic Barbershop method, a tool to get men involved in the discussion about gender equality, is the proposed format for the first part of the event.

The Icelandic Barbershop concept looks at innovative ways for men to mobilise and motivate other men to address discriminatory stereotypes of masculinity. Barbershop events provide a setting to discuss and reflect about men's behaviours, privileges, and roles creating barriers for women's empowerment and how men can instead become agents of change in realising gender equality.

Gender equality is central to the fulfilment of the Council of Europe's mission: safeguarding human rights, upholding democracy, and preserving the rule of law. The Organisation's work has resulted in the development of standards that help to advance the discussion about the role of men and boys for achieving gender equality.

From mental health and well-being, achievement and education to equal participation in the family and gendered segregation in the labour market, the role of men and boys in issues relating to gender equality has long been a subject for debate. The conference will provide an opportunity to discuss and promote the need for strategies on the role and place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women.

Throughout education, the workplace, the wider economy, in the public space, in social media as well as in personal relationships, gender stereotypes are persistent. Male gender stereotypes need to be overcome to free men and boys from the pressures of stereotyped expectations they face.

The #MeToo movement has presented opportunities for men to acknowledge the prevalence of their unwanted advances. Taking stock of the movement's progress, the challenges ahead present an opportunity to look at activities, policies, and programs to combat sexual harassment and bullying.

Grounded in the need to address root causes of gender inequality, education is crucial for providing men with the knowledge and skills to challenge their peers safely and effectively. Education is imperative to increase the understanding of key issues related to consent and the sexual boundaries surrounding sexual assault, harassment, rape and abusive relationships.

Anti-rights movements together with regressive ideologies, that oppose or challenge gender equality, are a growing concern. Measures to counter this resistance and limit the impact of such reactionary movements will also be discussed during this event.

Violence against women is one of the most widespread human rights violations in European societies. Questioning harmful aspects of traditional norms of masculinity, while recognising that masculinity takes many forms, offers an opportunity to implement sustainable violence prevention initiatives and interventions.

The conference will therefore focus on the following themes:

- ✓ *Men and boys as agents of change*
- ✓ *Negative impacts of social norms and gender stereotypes*
- ✓ *Men and gender equality in care*
- ✓ *Role of men and boys in combating violence*

Targeted participants:

- Members of the Gender Equality Commission;
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE);
- High-level decision makers from Council of Europe member states;
- Representatives of relevant Council of Europe intergovernmental committees and other entities;
- 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

Format:

Four sessions: one on Day 1 (27 April 2023) encouraging PACE members' participation in the Barbershop event; three on Day 2 (28 April 2023).