

Roundtable “Gender Equality is a Human Rights issue. How can we join forces to promote and protect it today”.

9 October 2023– 10.00-12.30 am

Minutes

Organizer: The INGO GE-Committee “NGOs as advocates for Gender Equality and Women’s Rights”

Objectives of the roundtable: Gender Equality is a human right. It is a transversal matter, touching all spheres in life. Gender Equality is central to the protection of women’s rights and an important policy goal of the Council of Europe. The roundtable seeks to highlight the relevance of gender equality and women’s rights as a cross cutting topic affecting all INGO Committees in the outcome of their work and to further strengthen the Conference as a significant part in the Council of Europe.

Roles of those on the podium:

- Gerhard Ermischer, President of the Conference of INGOs
- Bettina Hahne (SIE), Co-Chair GE-Committee
- Anita Schnetzer-Spranger (ZI), Co-Chair GE-Committee
- Cécile Gréboval, Senior Gender Equality Adviser, Gender Equality Division (CoE)
- INGO Committee-Chairs: 4 Committees (in person), 1 Committee (online)
 - Daniel Guéry (MIAMSI), Committee Rights of Persons who are migrants
 - Anne Marie Chavanon (IFHP), Committee Environmental and health crisis: governance and solidarity issues
 - Arja Krauchenberg (LLLP/IPA), Committee Education for democracy
 - Lilia Bensedrine Thabet (IRSE), Committee Interreligious and interconvictional dialogue
 - Michel Grangeat (EUROCEF), Committee for the Rights of the Child
- Herminio Correa (IPA), Task Force, GE-Committee

Rapporteurs: Sara Pilia (Eurodoc), GE-Committee Secretary, online, Pil Maria Saugmann (Eurodoc)

1. Introduction

In his introduction to the roundtable, **Gerhard Ermischer** highlights that the work of the Committee is meant to be continued in the future – especially in order to develop a strategy that incorporates an equality perspective in all of the CINGO and its Committees’ work.

The timing of this initiative is appropriate, as the Conference of INGOs is going to prepare its strategy for the upcoming three-year term in April 2024, and the entire General Assembly meeting is forward looking and focuses on the upcoming term.

In her welcoming speech, Committee co-chair **Bettina Hahne** illustrates with personal stories how women are unseen, devalued, and stripped of their rights starting from little, everyday gestures and habits. We all are so immersed in this cultural environment that we don’t even notice how much women are treated unequally. This treatment may look not important but it makes a huge difference, as it’s the root of other forms of violence.

In her introduction, Committee co-chair **Anita Schnetzer-Spranger** reflects on the current situation of gender equality, and highlights that with the current pace of change, it will take more than 100 years to

close the current gender gap and achieve gender equality. There is no country in the world that will have gender equality by 2030 or 2040. She stresses that the CINGO is the only non-governmental body that can actually impact the laws that will change the actual conditions of women and girls, and all of us have a duty to be aware of this issue and to work towards this goal, integrating this concept in all the outcomes of the CINGO work, through its Committees.

For this reason the aim of this roundtable is to provide a platform for discussion and exchange of competencies and to contribute to the overarching goal of gender mainstreaming at the work of the Council of Europe.

2. Keynote speech from Cécile Gréboval

Cécile Gréboval made clear how the unbalance in relation between women and men has severe impacts on women's rights in all spheres of their lives, and that de facto equality is still far from being achieved. (presentation attached)

3. Panel session with INGO Committee-Chairs

3a. Presentations from:

1. **Anne Marie Chavanon, Environmental and health crisis: governance and solidarity issues**
The importance of women in combination with the climate crisis: The role they already have, the role they should have and how to achieve it?
(presentation attached)
2. **Lilia Bensedrine Thabet, Committee Interreligious and interconvictional dialogue**
Human rights are women's rights – also in religions?
(presentation attached)
3. **Michel Grangeat, Committee on the Rights of the Child**
How can children be protected from gender stereotypes?
4. **Arja Krauchenberg, Committee Education for Democracy**
Looking at Europe, are we really getting what we want concerning gender equality in education? What can be improved?
(presentation attached)
5. **Daniel Guéry & Salomé Brun, Committee Rights of Persons who are migrants**
What are the data, what can be done to prevent trafficking and sexual assault of refugees and migrant women? How to urge member states to take stronger action against these severe gender-based violations?
(presentation attached)

3b. Panel session – Wrap up

The presentations from different INGO-Committees show how complex the Gender Equality issue is, and how it interacts with all other domains of human rights. As we find gender-based discrimination everywhere, it's important always to be gender-aware in our work. We could see that a considerable part of the Committees' work involves gender equality aspects.

4. Q&A Session

1. Anne Nègre (UWE) highlights some controversial elements related to gender equality and other aspects of human rights, such as complex relation between religious faiths and gender equality (a reference to the voices raised against the CoE campaign, 2021, on the freedom of girls and women to wear the hijab), or the complexity of the notion of "gender": if not managed and explained properly, it can lead to a simplification of the problem and invisibilization of women and their specific needs and rights as women.

The reply from the table supports the complexity of the concept of “gender”, that indicates both a part of an individual identity, and thus the rights to self-define, and a system based on social roles and unequal power balance between men and women, and thus the right to enjoy equal rights. In this context, the misuse of “gender” by anti-feminist and anti-LGBT+ movements creates confusion and contradictory narratives. However, we should be aware that LGBT+ people experience enormous violence, that we can’t accept.

A good approach would be to clarify the concept and its uses, and find common points to work together to protect human rights.

2. Henk Baars (European network church on the move): highlights that it is extremely difficult to deal with women victims of trafficking, as they are often ashamed of their conditions. The question is if the police has enough time to deal with these topics, and the speaker requires information on the awareness raising work done within the police ranks.
The reply supports the comment and adds that women are often also afraid, because the traffickers are dangerous people. The concern over police awareness and training is relevant and applies also to domestic violence, as it still happens that sometimes police re-victimise and lack sensible approach, thus police training is still highly needed, focusing on education. Another issue is the low quota of police-women, as culturally it is easier for women to open up and ask for help to other women.
3. Daniel Guéry (MIAMSI) also refers to the concept of “cumulative vulnerability”, and to the need to have more women everywhere, but not only in numbers but also in quality (including both gender awareness and specific skills) in order to allow women to decision making where they can contribute to shape the process.
4. Mariusz Granosik (EASSW) highlights the role played by women in disadvantaged neighborhood: women are leaders, and doing a lot of education work and in schools they really can play the change. He asks how to promote those local leaders, as we do a lot for middle class women, but not enough to support the empowerment of poorer women. Education is crucial because it allows them to get information and interpret it from their own perspective.
5. A concern was raised the concern about doctors becoming less and less, and the fact that in some cases the lack of women doctors it means that some people will not have access to health.
6. A proposal for the creation of a Committee on gender and sports and human rights was put forward.
7. How can we choose the most appropriate wording between “gender equality” and “gender equity”?
Reply: it is better to use gender equality, as we strive for recognition of equality before the law, as positive actions, gender mainstreaming.
Issue of representation: there’s an important difference between numbers and outcomes of women’s representation (representation vs tokenism), men can also do gender mainstreaming and work for greater gender equality!
8. Anne Kraus: It is all about attitude and perspective. We have to have a certain attitude and an open mind to observe gender equality.
9. Ruth Allen: Gender Equality should be explicitly integrated in the framework of the Committees, as part of our integrated discourse.
10. Herminio Correa: A need to bring more men into the discussion on gender equality. Without engaging men and boys we will not reach the goal.

11. Daniel Guéry: We can never be too careful to protect women.

The announcement of the Nobel Prize in Economics

[The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences](#) has decided to award the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2023 to Claudia Goldin
Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

[“for having advanced our understanding of women’s labour market outcomes”](#).

4. Final wrap up

The presentation of the Committees and the following discussion showed that gender equality is implemented in the work of the Committees, but there is still room for improvement.

The objective for the next half year is to come up with a strategy on how to best integrate gender equality in the work of the Committees and the INGO Conference, to start with fresh ideas in April 2024.