

Gender Equality-Strategy: How to best integrate gender equality in the work of the Council of Europe's Conference of INGOs

Adopted by the General Assembly on 16 October 2024

Background

Gender equality is an integral part of human rights and a fundamental element of democracy. It is a transversal matter, touching all spheres of life. Gender equality is central to the protection of women's rights and an important policy goal of the Council of Europe.

With the 2021-2024 term and mandate of the GE-Committee "NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women's rights" having come to an end in Spring 2024, it was time to take stock and to evaluate how gender equality is being observed in the work of the Conference of INGOs. After three years in function and equipped with new Rules of Procedure, which came into force in December 2020, the CINGO has gained experience how the cross-cutting topic of gender equality should be or has been approached through its work and that of its committees.

The roundtable discussion with the various INGO Committees, organized and conducted by the Gender Equality- Committee during the Autumn Session in October 2023, was a meaningful way to exchange experiences and lessons learned from the past and to get ideas and suggestions for the future. The result of the discussion showed that gender equality as a transversal topic is in the Committees' deliberations and reflections and partly implemented in their work.

As a further step, the GE-Committee was asked to work on a gender equality strategy for the Conference of INGOs.

Based on the above experiences the GE-Committee came up with a catalogue of ten measures, presented at the GA in April 2024, 4 of which the Committee would like to propose for implementation in the routine of the Conference of INGOs.

Evaluation

Countering the backlash in women's rights and gender equality, exacerbated by global crisis, societal polarization and pandemic shocks in all CoE member states, a gender perspective lens on the work and outcome of the CINGO and its Committees is needed more than ever and calls for a stronger and more forceful integration of gender mainstreaming with consequent measures and means. A conceptual automatism should help to guarantee the implementation of gender equality as a cross cutting topic and to foster INGO Committees' co-operation with each other towards the common link of gender equality and human rights.

The GE-Committee comes to the conclusion that there is no single “best” measure for the implementation of gender equality, rather that the integration of gender equality as a transversal topic can be achieved most effectively through a variety of measures on different levels of the CINGO.

Objectives of the GE-Committee

The measures favored by the GE-Committee pursue the following objectives:

- The GE-Strategy should ensure that a gender equality perspective is a permanent fixture in all of the CINGO and its Committees’ work.
- The autonomy of the individual INGO Committees should not be restricted in any way by the proposed measures, on the contrary, the intension of the strategy is to motivate and encourage the Committees to work independently while sensitizing each of the Committees to the issue of gender equality.
- The GE-Strategy must further strengthen the Conference as a relevant and significant part of the Council of Europe by diligently observing gender mainstreaming as one of the overarching goals of the CoE.

Measures favored by the GE-Committee

- **Thematic Committee level:** To integrate “gender equality” explicitly in the framework of the Thematic Committees, as well as in the guidelines for Committees, as an obligatory task when approaching a topic and presenting the Committee’s purpose and objectives. Making sure gender mainstreaming is being observed in the outcome of the work.
- **General Assembly level/Standing Committee level:** To integrate different topics on gender equality and women’s rights as a “must do” in each of the General Assemblies as a detailed agenda item. To raise awareness and to report on specific topics by inviting a high-level gender equality-specialist from other CoE bodies, e.g. a representative of GEC, of the Committee of Equality and Non-discrimination and others. The objective is to keep CINGO members updated on the gender equality work at the intergovernmental CoE bodies.
- **CINGO/INGOs level:** To establish a discussion round once a year with the INGO Committees (chairs or members) in the format of a roundtable to exchange experiences, ideas and lessons learned pertaining to the thematic issues. To foster co-operation amongst INGO Committees, to support an open mind amongst INGO members to observe gender equality.

To the discretion of the INGO Standing Committee:

- **CINGO/Standing Committee level:** To make sure that a gender mainstreaming strategy progressively becomes an integral part of the work of the Conference and its Committees, a GER embedded in the Conference may be of great importance. The role and scope of a GER serving as a gender equality “ambassador”, as described in the Handbook for GERs, should be mandated and his/hers activities clearly defined and supported by the Standing Committee.