

CINGO Gender Equality-Committee “NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women’s rights”

Strategic Framework 2024-2027

Preamble

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.

Gender Equality entails equal rights for all and equal access to resources between women and men. It is central to the fulfilment of the Council of Europe’s mission: safeguarding human rights, upholding democracy and promoting the rule of law. Gender equality benefits a society as a whole.

In the 2021-2024 term the GE-Committee was focusing on strengthening the role of civil society organizations (NGOs) and to inform citizens about their rights by promoting the ground-breaking legally binding conventions like the Istanbul Convention, the Anti-Trafficking Convention and the European Social Charter, thus contributing to the substantial work of the CoE as advocates for human rights.

While the CoE’s solid legal and policy framework has contributed to advancing women’s rights in Europe, an effective gender equality is still far from being a reality. In contrary, setbacks on women’s rights and gender equality are increasing, exacerbated by global crisis, societal polarization and pandemic shocks.

Given that background, it is the GE-Committee’s goal for the term 2024-2027 to focus on specific areas of concern in women’s rights and gender equality and to define priority topics, the GE-Committee feels the Conference of INGOs should look more closely into it, to address gender inequalities in human, social and economic aspects.

The objective is to raise awareness on the CoE’s existing and strong instruments fighting drawbacks in women’s rights and gender equality, to highlight severe obstacles to achieve real gender equality and to detect gaps in the policy framework of the CoE.

The priority topics cover a variety of areas, all of which have an impact on the equality, wellbeing and advancement of women and their rights. :

1. Stereotypes and sexism: Root causes for gender inequality
2. Men and boys: Allies in the achievement of gender equality
3. Sexual and reproductive health and rights: A basic prerequisite for gender equality
4. Women in the workplace: “Maternal Mobbing” and other discriminatory practices that are obstacles to gender equality

Based on the Reykjavik Declaration, the GE-Committee recognizes the broad scope of gender equality in all spheres of life and its indispensable value to the rule of law, democracy and sustainable development.

The overall goal of the GE-Committee is to contribute to and advance the priorities and influence of CINGO and Civil Society within the CoE.

Working Plan of the Sub-Committees

1. Priority topic: Stereotypes and Sexism

Violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination.

In a multitude of contexts it has been proven, that uneven balance of power between women and men and negative traditional gender stereotypes are the key root causes for gender-based violence in all its manifestations. Gender stereotyping on the basis of sex is called sexism. Sexism is any expression (act, word, image, gesture) based on the idea that some persons, disproportionately women and girls, are inferior because of their sex.

Gender stereotyping and discrimination may occur in many forms, varying from latent to severe. Sometimes people don't even perceive it as such, because it is just "traditional standard". Exactly this makes it so dangerous.

Sexism is present in all areas of life: in the media, education, digital space, refugee- and marginalized women's rights, women in leadership, women in politics, women and health in an ageing society, women in AI, women in sport, etc. It is a transversal topic. Gender stereotyping feeds into discrimination and gender-based violence.

Stereotyping not only effects the abilities of women and girls but also of men and boys.

The Istanbul Convention makes it very clear: To combat violence against women and domestic violence, so called gender-based violence, the root causes have to be addressed.

With the CM/REC(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism, a first ever internationally agreed definition of sexism as "historically unequal power relations" has been launched. The recommendation is a strong and influential instrument in providing guidelines and clear instructions that the 46 member states ought to implement in their national law.

The relevance of eliminating stereotypes and sexism is also reflected in the new 2024-2029 Gender Equality Strategy of the CoE with the continuation of the Strategic Objective 1: preventing and combating stereotypes and sexism.

Measures for the sub-committee:

- Awareness raising and education of gender stereotypes and sexism as a transversal topic amongst NGOs and civil society, effecting our everyday life

- Awareness raising on CM/REC (2019)¹ which links concrete measures with the Istanbul Convention
- Awareness raising on the 2024-2029 Gender Equality Strategy of the CoE and its objective 1
- Joining forces with other Thematic INGO Committees to address stereotypes and sexism in the Committees' respective themes
- Promoting methods to combat sexism

2. Priority topic: Men & Boys

Since the Council of Europe has a "Working group on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and policies to combat violence against women", which has already produced some important documents, our Sub-Committee has decided to propose the following challenge to all its members "How can we work with all this information that already exists on the subject?"

Main documents already available on the Council of Europe website devoted to the Working Group on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women:

- Study on the places of men and boys in women's rights and gender equality policies, Gender Equality Commission, Council of Europe, 2021
- The 5th International Conference on Men and Equal Opportunities: Men Who Care, Report, Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonia, 2022
- Working with men and boys for gender equality: State of play and future directions, Policy brief, UN Women, 2021
- Review of promising practices and lessons learned, existing strategies, and United Nations and other initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality, in the context of eliminating violence against women, Report, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2018

It was then decided to divide these documents among the members of the sub-group, who will study a part of them at their own choice, to later present and discuss with the other members (an invitation will be sent to the other sub-groups that may be interested in taking part in the meetings to present the documents).

All members will also be able to suggest and present other documents of their knowledge for discussion, to broaden the collective study of the "state of the art" of the subgroup.

With this program, we intend to develop and deepen some knowledge among all members about the role of men and boys in promoting gender equality

Plans for the next semester (OKT24 till APR25)

- Organize webinar(s) to spread knowledge on specific aspects, inviting expert NGOs, both from our committee and from outside.

- To design a campaign (scope, modality, etc to be discussed) to bring men's and boys' attention to their role in advancing gender equality.
- Design simple informative materials to mainstream the topic among the CINGO members and Committees (e.g. distributing them during the networking sessions);
- Prepare a questionnaire to explore the stance of CINGO members on the topic of gender equality, disaggregating the answers by gender and age. The knowledge gathered this way might be useful to design more effective campaigning or other actions.
- Better understand how our subgroup, committee, and CINGO can push proposals to make real changes out of documents, and in this case how to propose the integration of concepts and/or perspectives that might be lacking (eg. the LGBT+ perspective).

3. Priority Topic: Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

SRHR concern every single person, but women in particular. The GE committee of the INGO Conference has observed that three topics among SRHR issues that deeply concern women elicit frequently vehement reactions, namely (i) abortion (ii) prostitution/sex work and (iii) surrogacy. Very contrasting attitudes and approaches can be observed by different European countries. There is no consensus about the best legal framework for these issues. Even within several of our feminist INGOs of the CoE, these topics tend to be avoided due to controversial opinions. The Council of Europe has not expressed itself explicitly.

The GE-committee intends to tackle those three topics exclusively from the point of view of the human rights of the women concerned. We won't take into consideration any cultural, ethical, moral or emotional aspects or propose legal measures, but we will explore the CoE's Conventions and standards in this field and how they serve the protection of women.

We feel that it is time that the Council of Europe pronounces itself on these three topics based on the human rights defined by its own Conventions and standards. Our study will hopefully become a kick-off document for an in-depth work on this important matter by the Council of Europe.

4. Priority topic: Women in the Workplace – “Maternal Mobbing”

“Maternal mobbing” describes health-harming abusive conducts at work targeting women wishing to have children, pregnant women and mothers. Mobbing directly impacts the capacity of women to conciliate their work and their motherhood or wish for motherhood. Indeed, motherhood changes the way in which women are viewed as workers in terms of expected work focus, proficiency and commitment, which creates a ground for discriminatory practices.

Within the **Council of Europe** there is already a **legal framework** protecting employed women, who are pregnant or have a family, providing them the right to appropriate social, legal and economic protection to ensure its full development and establishing appropriate work-life

balance measures. Here are some examples, but the aim of the working group would be to collect a full analysis of the legal framework and soft law of the Council of Europe.

- European Social Charter: Article 8; Article 16; Article 20; Article 27 etc.
- PACE Resolution 2167 (2017) “The employment rights of domestic workers, especially women, in Europe”
- PACE Resolution 2235 (2018) “Empowering women in the economy”

Within the working group, we have collected **several situations of maternal mobbing in the Workplace**: a) Discriminatory practices towards pregnant workers b) Refusal to recruit, changes of the contract, dismissals, no extension, harassment ... c) Difficult work-life balance measures d) No good position and support at the SMEs or companies e) No leadership position at the Armed Forces.

Some solutions we have pointed out are for example: the obligation to have a Kindergarten, and other accessible, affordable, quality childcare; to promote new forms of work for mothers through flexible working hours, teleworking; legal recognition of the unpaid care work of the Women; increase the access to Maternal leave and paternal leave, or fair Tax Justice: splitting; and implement training programs to put women in the Military hierarchy.

Now the question is how Member States implement the Resolutions and Recommendations of the Council of Europe and if there are some role model countries?

Next Action Points of this Working Group for 2025-2027

- (1) Awareness raising of ‘maternal mobbing’ within the CINGO
 - a. Document 1 – Framework of the legal basis on which we stand within the EU social charter about equality for single women and mothers at work.
- (2) Doing research and a questionnaire about the best practices of 10 Members States
 - a. Document 2a – Analysis of how Member States implement the recommendations of the Council of Europe regarding single women and mothers’ equality in the Workplace.
 - b. Document 2b – Role model of possibility how to support women equality in the workplace in leading positions in companies.
- (3) Send these documents to the Council of Europe/ Committee of Ministers/ Committee of Social Rights → recommend to the CoE to have some teaching materials about how women can use their rights for a fair maternity → inputs for the Committee of social rights in the place of national reports and collective complaints