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Gender equality in the intercultural youth activities of the Council of Europe and its partners

GUIDELINES

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Guidelines on integrating and mainstreaming gender equality into the intercultural youth activities of the Council of Europe and its partners

Introduction

The purpose of these guidelines is to support the organisers and educational teams of intercultural youth activities of the Council of Europe and its partners in ensuring gender equality in all phases of an activity/project.

These guidelines are the result of the seminar “Gender Equality Matters” (2016, EYCS) and of further consultation and work with stakeholders in the youth sector. They are an expression of the commitment of the Council of Europe and its youth sector to advance gender equality.

The guidelines are to be used by staff and educational teams involved in intercultural youth activities held in the European Youth Centres and in the member States, and promoted by the beneficiaries of the European Youth Foundation. They are to be used in conjunction with other documents (e.g. quality standards for educational activities held in the European Youth Centres of the Council of Europe) and should be reviewed regularly.

The guidelines cover the following aspects:

1. a human rights-based approach;
2. gender-balanced participation in youth activities and measures to ensure the participation of young parents;
3. language and representation in materials related to educational activities;
4. gender-sensitive educational approaches;
5. creating safe environments and practical concerns: accommodation, working facilities, access to toilets, etc.

1. A human rights based-approach to youth work and non-formal learning

Youth work and non-formal learning as practised and promoted by the Council of Europe are based on human rights values and principles. The human dignity of every person involved in activities is to be respected at all times. Human rights offer a framework where opinions, beliefs and cultural practices can be discussed while respecting differences. A human rights-based approach in youth work and non-formal learning recognises that achieving equal opportunities remains a common goal and that youth work should recognise inequalities and provide support to bridge the gaps.

Universal human rights provide also the ethical and normative frameworks to prevent, combat and overcome any form of discrimination grounded on sex, sexual orientation or gender identity. Achieving gender equality is not about “special rights” but about promoting everyone’s right to freedom and equality in dignity.

2. Gender-balanced participation in youth activities

Gender balance in intercultural youth activities should be considered at all stages and should concern:

- a. an inclusive approach to organisational and educational team selection (where a balance in the participation of all genders should be encouraged);
- b. an inclusive approach to participants' recruitment where equal participation of women and men should be ensured together with inclusion measures towards under-represented genders;
- c. the end of a binary system of reference (female/male) in application forms. The application form could either include information about:
 - o *sex*, with the inclusion of the option 'other' for those who do not fit the male/female categories;or
 - o *gender*, with an empty field allowing participants to define freely depending on how they identify themselves, rather than giving predefined options;

The organisation/team should reflect on the purpose this information serves in the selection process and composition of the group;

- d. the continuation of same-sex activities as these may still be important in limiting the gender equality gap. Same-sex activities should be clearly advertised as such;
- e. the inclusion of the following text in all calls for applications for activities carried out by the Youth Department (recommended for the Youth Department's partners when they recruit their own participants, e.g. study sessions):

"The Council of Europe (and partners) welcomes applications from all candidates who meet the above-mentioned profile, irrespective of gender, disability, marital or parental status, racial, ethnic or social origin, colour, religion, belief or sexual orientation".
- f. the omission of gender-normative titles, i.e. Ms/Mr, in invitation letters and other formal documents to participants.

3. Language and representation in materials related to educational activities

Language has immense power to replicate gender inequality by the use of general masculine forms. This includes all of the forms of visual representation, both on and offline, used in youth work activities, such as social media announcements, flyers, reports, or presentations during activities. It is important to reflect on the language and visual representations used at all stages of a youth activity:

- a. when referring to groups of people whose gender identities are varied or unknown, gender-neutral pronouns should be used, ie *they/them/themselves* instead of gendered versions. This should be valid for all communication from announcements of the activity, to reports, to welcome speeches, etc;

While this might be easier in English, it might not be so in other languages used in youth work activities. Languages are alive and constantly developing, however, and it is important that teams involved in multi-lingual activities research solutions for gender-neutral language;

- b. it is recommended to consult and apply the [Council of Europe instruction on the use of non-sexist language](#);
- c. in intercultural youth work, people come from different language backgrounds and these practices might not make sense to everyone (e.g. some languages have no gendered pronouns), therefore it is important to take time to explain the reasoning behind the use of a gender-neutral and gender-sensitive language;
- d. a consistent effort should be made to ensure a balanced and non-stereotypical representation of all genders regardless of the topic of the activity. This should also be reflected in communication and contractual agreements with third parties responsible for the production of certain deliverables (i.e. videographers);
- e. all of the above guidelines apply to verbal and written communication as well as pictures, illustrations, infographics, videos or any other medium that may convey or reinforce stereotypical or discriminatory views on gender.

4. Gender-sensitive educational approaches

As stated in the quality standards for educational activities of the Youth Department, an integrated approach to intercultural learning, participation and human rights education should be adopted in each activity and articulated according to its specificity. Educational teams should be ready to observe human rights at all times, and discriminatory attitudes should be dealt with even though the topic of the activity might not be gender related.

- a. trainers and organisers should be aware of the existence and functioning of discrimination and its possible expression among the participants, as well as how to deal with it. They should consistently value and take into account perspectives and points of view of minority or under-represented groups, participants' access needs and show commitment to gender equality;
- b. when preparing, running and evaluating an intercultural youth activity, teams should view their approaches with 'gender glasses'. For example, they should not make assumptions about the gender identity of participants. This practice should include informal times, and also the choice of activities which should allow everyone the space to express themselves while being aware that some young people may need longer to prepare and may require more support.

5. Creating safe environments and facilities

The creation of safe environments should be the cornerstone of all elements of a youth activity including the venue, the attitude and behaviour of all staff, and all practical considerations. Human rights education also entails learning *through* human rights.

- a. it is a good practice to train all staff involved in youth activities in gender equality, from restaurant personnel to administrative staff and educational teams. However, while this might be possible for the European Youth Centres, it might not be the case for activities held outside the EYCs. This should not prevent organisers from briefing and explaining to all those involved what gender equality standards require;

- b. concerns related to the comfort of participants should be reflected in choices of accommodation and participants' sharing of rooms (where necessary), toilet facilities (generally gendered), safety and security around venues where activities are held;
 - c. codes of conduct should be developed and discussed with participants in youth activities;
 - d. discriminatory attitudes by participants, trainers or organisers should be dealt with promptly, using a human rights approach and with regard to the specificity of the activity. It is important to bear in mind that such attitudes may be manifested during informal time, so it is important for there to be a clear procedure for participants to address this with the organisers;
 - e. a "trust" member of the educational team should be appointed from whom participants can seek advice. The "trust" person should protect the anonymity of any person complaining of discriminatory behaviour and make sure that appropriate measures are taken while considering the safety of the group and the specificity of the situation. Particular attention should be paid to situations that may require legal or judicial action;
 - f. a specific policy on sexual harassment should be in place in the European Youth Centres and information about it should be made available to everyone involved in the activities organised there.
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