

COUNCIL OF EUROPE GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY 2024-2029



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COUNCIL OF EUROPE GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY 2024-2029

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pour l'égalité de genre 2024-2029*

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Introduction: The Council of Europe and gender equality

” We recall that gender equality and the full, equal and effective participation of women in public and private decision-making processes are essential to the rule of law, democracy and sustainable development. We underline the pioneering role of the Council of Europe, including through the Istanbul Convention, in the fight against violence against women and domestic violence.

Reykjavik Declaration¹

1. Gender equality is a prerequisite for a functioning democracy, in which all women and men, all girls and boys, in all their diversity, enjoy their human rights in law and in practice. Gender equality entails equal rights for all, as well as the same representation, visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation, in all spheres of public and private life. It also implies equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men. Achieving 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.
2. While progress has been made in a number of areas, and the legal status of women in Europe has undoubtedly improved over recent decades, effective gender equality is still far from being a reality. As the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General stated at the opening of the 67th Commission on the Status

1. Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values.

of Women (CSW): “Gender equality is growing more distant. On the current track, UN Women puts it 300 years away.”² Gender gaps and structural barriers to gender equality do indeed persist in many areas, often restricting women and men to their traditional gendered roles and limiting their opportunities to fully enjoy their human rights or to live up to their full potential and capabilities. Regular monitoring and research show that progress is very slow as regards women’s participation in politics and business, access to justice and the elimination of gender stereotypes and sexism. Violence against women and girls remains one of the most pronounced expressions of the unequal power relations between women and men. It is a violation of the human rights of women and girls, and it is both caused by, and an effect of, gender inequality.

” Violence against women and girls remains one of the most pronounced expressions of the unequal power relations between women and men.

3. Acquired rights cannot be taken for granted. This is confirmed by backsliding on gender equality policies and the rise of anti-gender movements which weaken existing *acquis* and seek to limit – among other things – women’s access to health services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, and protections for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons and women who use drugs. Anti-gender and gender-critical narratives are often used as a tool to promote a broader agenda of opposing gender equality and women’s rights. They undermine the understanding of gender as a social construct. These narratives seek to justify discriminatory practices and policies against individuals who challenge traditional gender roles and norms. The fight for gender equality must challenge this anti-gender trend as such, but this can only be achieved by using an intersectional approach and correctly situating the phenomenon in the broader context of the backlash against human rights, including women’s rights, the rights of LGBTI persons and the rights of persons from communities subject to marginalisation. Anti-rights movements seek to roll back progress on human rights and maintain the status quo of discrimination and inequality. They use various tactics to undermine rights, including spreading misinformation and disinformation, promoting hateful rhetoric and pushing for regressive policies. This backsliding is reflected in the intensification of sexist hate speech in Europe, especially online. Discrimination and sexist hate speech provide fertile ground for

2. United Nations Secretary-General’s remarks to the Commission on the Status of Women, 6 March 2023.

violence against women and girls, which is one of the most serious human rights violations suffered by women and girls. Women also face more restrictions and harassment aiming to silence women human rights defenders and persons who defend women's rights. The response of national authorities, including the police, prosecutors and judges, as well as health personnel, is often inadequate in cases of violence against women and girls and must be strengthened.

Box 1 – A gender-equal Europe for everyone

Equality, including gender equality, diversity and respect are fundamental to democracy and the enjoyment of human rights. However, inequality and discrimination persist in European societies and beyond. The Council of Europe takes a holistic approach in upholding equality and combating discrimination.

In this Gender Equality Strategy, certain terms and expressions are used as follows.

Discrimination can be based on a variety of grounds, such as sex, gender, "race",³ colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or other status.

An **intersectional approach** can allow for insight into the more complex forms of discrimination, exclusion and violence to which individuals may be exposed. Various grounds on which such discrimination is based may intersect, leading to unique lived experiences and vulnerabilities. In the context of gender equality policies, an intersectional approach can be used to understand, take into account and address the interactions between gender and sex and other personal characteristics/statuses as listed above and the resulting compounded forms of discrimination. Anyone can be vulnerable to these forms of discrimination, but certain groups of women and girls are particularly exposed to them and thus stand to benefit in particular from an intersectional approach to gender equality policies.

The expression "**all women and men, girls and boys**" includes persons in all their diversity, with their different characteristics/statuses as listed above. This affirms the commitment to leave no one behind and to achieve a gender-equal Europe for everyone.

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3. Since all human beings belong to the same species, the Committee of Ministers rejects, as does the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), theories based on the existence of different "races". However, in this document, the term "race" is used in order to ensure that those persons who are generally and erroneously perceived as "belonging to another race" are not excluded from the protection provided for by the legislation and the implementation of policies to promote gender equality.

4. Against this common backdrop, ensuring gender equality must be understood as a key component of a larger struggle to safeguard human rights and ensure social justice. It is essential to recognise the interdependence of these issues and work together to build a more equal, inclusive and sustainable society. This strategy will aim to support member States in understanding the impact, particularly on women and girls, that these anti-rights trends have around Europe, and to limit that impact and trigger action to meaningfully address its causes. There is a need to invest in countering misinformation, disinformation and anti-gender narratives, by combining evidence from data and studies, factual explanatory messages and positive examples to present a coherent and vivid description of how implementing Council of Europe standards on gender equality and women's rights and how the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, Istanbul Convention), improves the lives of all women, men, girls and boys. One approach could be to frame the issue of defending human rights in a way that is relatable to people of diverse backgrounds or experiences. For example, emphasising the importance of creating a safe and just society can be a powerful way to engage people, including men and boys, in the fight against gender-based inequalities and violence.

5. Because achieving gender equality is an objective that concerns all women and men, boys and girls, the involvement of men and boys is critical to its realisation. This means acknowledging men and boys as agents and beneficiaries of change, and strategic partners and allies in the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, including in challenging gender stereotypes, negative and discriminatory social norms, attitudes and behaviours that underlie, perpetuate and reinforce violence and discrimination against women and girls. Gender equality benefits society as a whole. Men and boys can also be subject to gender inequalities.

” Ensuring gender equality must be understood as a key component of a larger struggle to safeguard human rights and ensure social justice.

6. In a context of growing economic difficulties following the Covid-19 pandemic,⁴ Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss, certain negative effects

4. www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/themes/global-economy.

of technological and digital developments, austerity policies and measures, political uncertainties and rising inequalities at all levels of society, it is crucial to address the human, social and economic⁵ aspects of gender inequality. In addition, attacks on women's rights, including women from marginalised communities such as Roma and Travellers,⁶ and gender equality, in particular women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, the decrease in resources for gender equality mechanisms and policies, the failure to implement agreed standards and negative narratives about migration have exacerbated some of the problems that persist in society's journey towards gender equality and the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine also demonstrates dramatically that conflict-related sexual violence, such as rape, is still used as a tactic of war that needs robust intervention, prosecution of the perpetrators and protection of victims and survivors. Due attention must also be paid to securing or improving women's economic independence, including by redressing the gender pay gap, and striving for equality between women and men in relation to unpaid care and domestic work.

7. The Council of Europe's pioneering work in the field of human rights and gender equality has resulted in a solid legal and policy framework at both European and national levels. Gender equality is one of the priorities of the Organisation, which remains fully committed to addressing both current and emerging challenges and to removing barriers to the achievement of substantive and full gender equality.

8. In order to implement the strategy, the Council of Europe will adopt a comprehensive approach, including intergovernmental work and co-operation projects, building on the results of relevant monitoring work.

In doing so, the Council of Europe will adopt a dual-track approach including:

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5. In complementarity with the European Union's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which strives for a gender-equal economy: "Women and men in all their diversity should have equal opportunities to thrive and be economically independent, be paid equally for their work of equal value, have equal access to finance and receive fair pensions. Women and men should equally share caring and financial responsibilities."
 6. The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Bo-yash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies.

- ▶ specific policies and action, including positive action where appropriate, in areas critical for the advancement of women in order to realise *de facto* gender equality, and
- ▶ the promotion, monitoring, co-ordination and evaluation of the process of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes, whereby gender mainstreaming refers to the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making. Where boys and girls are concerned, a child-rights approach will be incorporated together with a gender equality perspective.

9. The Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029 provides a framework for the Council of Europe's work on gender equality and women's rights and sets out strategic policy and operational objectives and key actions for the period spanning from 2024 to 2029.

Paving the way towards the new strategy on gender equality

Council of Europe legal instruments

10. The Council of Europe's work in the fields of human rights and gender equality has resulted in a rich body of legal instruments and policy guidance aimed at achieving the advancement and empowerment of women and the effective realisation of gender equality in member States and beyond. An impressive range of conventions, recommendations and resolutions have been adopted by the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, guiding and influencing gender equality developments in Europe⁷ and worldwide.

11. The European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, the Convention) is Europe's core human rights treaty: Article 1 specifies that the rights and freedoms the Convention includes are guaranteed to everyone within the jurisdiction of the States parties, namely the 46 member States of the Council of Europe. The principle of non-discrimination is guaranteed by Article 14 and reinforced by Protocol 12 to the Convention, as interpreted by the European Court of Human Rights. In addition, the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35) establishes the enjoyment of economic and social rights without discrimination. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, Istanbul Convention) is widely recognised as the most comprehensive international instrument to tackle violence against women and domestic violence in its many forms. Furthermore, the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197, Anti-trafficking Convention) is aimed at preventing and combating trafficking in women, men and children for the purpose of sexual, labour or other types of exploitation, and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CETS No. 201, Lanzarote Convention) is the first treaty to criminalise all forms of sexual offences against children.

7. See at: www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/standards-and-mechanisms.

12. The Committee of Ministers recommendations and guidelines and Parliamentary Assembly resolutions⁸ related to gender equality cover a variety of issues: combating gender-based discrimination, preventing and eliminating sexism, protecting women against violence, achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, mainstreaming gender in various sectors, establishing and implementing gender equality standards and mechanisms, protecting and promoting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, ensuring the involvement of men and boys in gender equality policies, digital violence and the impact of new technologies and artificial intelligence on gender equality, combating discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, etc. These instruments provide member States with crucial standards, benchmarks and guidance to develop legislation and put in place policies at the national level that comply with internationally agreed standards in the area of gender equality.

Council of Europe gender equality strategies for 2014-2017 and 2018-2023

13. Over the past 10 years, the Council of Europe has successfully invested time and energy in increasing the impact and visibility of gender equality instruments and supporting their implementation in member States and within the Organisation's structures. Mobilising all of the Council of Europe's institutions, sectors, intergovernmental structures, monitoring mechanisms and partial agreements as well as its external partners, the Transversal Programme on Gender Equality brings resources together for greater impact, energy and focus. The Council of Europe's pan-European steering body on gender equality, the Gender Equality Commission (GEC), is at the centre of this effort.



8. See at: <https://rm.coe.int/texts-adopted-by-the-assembly-since-1986-textes-adoptes-par-l-assemble/1680aa0de2>.

14. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 was unanimously adopted by the Committee of Ministers in November 2013. This first strategy built on the strengths, specificities and added value of the Council of Europe and established the vision and a framework for the Organisation's role and action in the area of gender equality.

15. The Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 set five priority areas, namely: combating gender stereotypes and sexism; preventing and combating violence against women; guaranteeing equal access of women to justice; achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making; and achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.



16. The second strategy for 2018-2023 built on the achievements of the first strategy, extending the strategic life cycle to six years, and integrating the challenges and economic context of the time and the Organisation's overarching priorities. The main novelty of the second strategy was the addition of a priority area focusing on the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls. The strategy for 2018-2023 also addressed the implications of equality between women and men as regards dignity and rights in public, private and family life, placing greater emphasis on women's economic independence, and on the equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men, as key factors to breaking down gender stereotypes, ensuring work-life balance⁹ for both women and men and moving closer to *de facto* gender equality. The second strategy also addressed intersectionality as a transversal issue throughout the priority objectives and focused more sharply on the critical role of men's and boys' participation and responsibility as actors of change for gender equality.

9. See also the report of the High-Level Conference of the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe "Work-life balance as a leverage for women's empowerment and promoting gender equality", which took place in Rome in April 2022.

The new Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029: emerging challenges

17. The challenges faced by Council of Europe member States in the implementation of the strategies for 2014-2017 and 2018-2023 were mainly related to developments in the wider global and regional context, including an observed backlash against the human rights of women and girls, unequal power structures, the persistence of violence against women and girls, threats to women human rights defenders, limited participation of women in political and decision-making processes, gender bias and stereotypes, sexism and discrimination against women including sexist hate speech online and offline and in the political discourse, barriers linked to access to quality employment and financial resources, lack of social and economic infrastructure for the exercise of equal rights by men and women (available childcare facilities, sufficiently paid parental leave, parental payments, etc.).¹⁰ Implementation of the second strategy, in particular, was adapted as a result of major upheavals, such as the rise in anti-gender movements, the Covid-19 pandemic, the devastating impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the economic consequences of such crises. Budgetary cuts, austerity measures and financial priorities that are not gender responsive continued to beset gender equality authorities and bodies as well as feminist civil society organisations, hampering the implementation of gender equality laws and policies.

18. Annual reports by the GEC to the Committee of Ministers on the implementation of the two previous strategies have confirmed the leading role of the Council of Europe in the area of gender equality and its increasing authority both at European and global levels. Gender equality has remained a priority area for successive presidencies of the Committee of Ministers. Regular reporting and monitoring have also confirmed that member States engage proactively on all strategic objectives, and that national efforts have benefited from the initiatives and tools developed under the guidance of the GEC. Co-operation with member States is vital and has enabled the strategy to combine the Council of Europe standards with innovative initiatives and lessons learned from experience at local, regional and national levels.

10. Reference is also made to the Guidelines on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women, as well as to Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2480 (2023) "The role and responsibility of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls".

” Ensure that gender equality policies and relevant instruments benefit in particular disadvantaged groups of women but also persons facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

19. Women and men are often subjected to discrimination on several of the grounds listed in Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights which have been expanded and elaborated on through relevant case law of the European Court of Human Rights. All forms of discrimination need to be taken into account so that equality policies are fully effective. The strategy for 2024-2029 highlights the need to ensure that gender equality policies and relevant instruments benefit in particular disadvantaged groups of women but also persons facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. To that end, and in line with the Reykjavik Declaration, greater emphasis has been placed on an intersectional approach to ensuring an inclusive Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029 for the Council of Europe, and ultimately in each of the 46 member States. This implies integrating the needs and situations of all women and men, girls and boys in gender equality policies, in accordance with Council of Europe standards.

20. Discrimination has a structural and horizontal character that pervades all cultures and communities, at all levels. Gender inequalities accumulate over time, compounding and resulting in difficulties later in life. A life-course approach to gender equality policies is therefore necessary to take into account this reality.



21. As always, the strengthening of institutional mechanisms for gender equality, at the international, national and local level, and the availability of resources at all levels, are critical and will determine future progress to improve gender equality and women's rights on the ground.

22. Addressing persistent gender gaps in employment, pay, poverty and pensions, gender segregation in education and on the labour market and unbalanced sharing of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities between women and men is, once again, recognised as a key factor in moving towards women's economic independence in the new strategy. Sustainable policies and political commitment are crucial to ensuring the realisation of women's economic and social rights and to promoting women's economic independence in accordance with the European Social Charter, and in alignment and complementarity with the European Union's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the European Care Strategy for caregivers and care receivers and other relevant European Union action.

23. The growing impact and use of information technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), in all areas can offer opportunities but also pose new challenges in terms of gender equality and women's rights. The new strategy will address such challenges by setting up standards addressing gender bias and discrimination in AI, the lack of diversity, the potential disproportionate impact on women, etc.¹¹

” We acknowledge the positive impact and opportunities created by new and emerging digital technologies while recognising the need to mitigate risks of negative consequences of their use on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, including new forms of violence against women and vulnerable groups generated and amplified by modern technologies.

Reykjavik Declaration¹²

11. This work will be done in close co-operation with the Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI), set up in 2022, which drafted a framework convention on artificial intelligence, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

12. Reykjavik Declaration – United around our values

24. The role of men and boys, in both the public and private spheres, remains critical for progress towards substantive gender equality. As underlined by the relevant Council of Europe guidelines, men's and boys' participation and responsibility as agents and beneficiaries of change are very important given that gender equality benefits society as a whole. Gender stereotypes need to be overcome in order to support men and boys in challenging the stereotyped expectations they face. These expectations can limit women's and men's choices and opportunities and can negatively affect their mental and physical health. Overcoming gender stereotypes benefits all men and women. It allows men to express themselves more freely, to pursue their interests and goals without fear of judgment and to build healthier and more fulfilling relationships with others. Moving towards real gender equality also requires a change in attitudes towards what are considered acceptable roles for both women and men, including equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities. As gender stereotypes are pervasive and operate throughout time, a life-course approach is needed to address the socialisation of men and boys in a wide range of contexts: at home, throughout the education system, in the workplace and the wider economy, in the public space including the judiciary, in social media and networks, as well as in personal relationships. Men's engagement is needed as they can and should be active partners in combating violence against women and girls, and in promoting the human rights of women and girls. Men and boys also stand to benefit from gender equality policies. The new strategy addresses the involvement of men and boys from a horizontal perspective, under each strategic objective.

” Men's and boys' participation and responsibility as agents and beneficiaries of change are very important.

25. Implementation of the new strategy will be co-ordinated alongside that of other Council of Europe strategies and action plans. To date, these concern children's rights;¹³ youth;¹⁴ drug policy, including prevention, treatment and criminal justice;¹⁵ rights of persons with disabilities;¹⁶ the inclusion of Roma and Travellers¹⁷ and the protection of vulnerable persons in the context of

13. Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027).

14. Council of Europe Youth Sector Strategy 2030.

15. See the publication, *Implementing a gender approach in drug policies: prevention, treatment and criminal justice – A handbook for practitioners and decision makers*, Council of Europe Publishing, April 2022.

16. Council of Europe Disability Strategy (2017-2023).

17. Council of Europe Strategic Action for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025).

migration and asylum.¹⁸ The findings and recommendations of the Council of Europe's independent monitoring bodies will also be taken into account.

26. A quadrennial table indicating current, future and proposed activities (in line with the budget cycle of the Council of Europe) will accompany the new strategy to show the immediate link between the strategic objectives and the specific measures and means used to achieve them.

The Council of Europe in the global context: the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

27. The Council of Europe's comprehensive and extensive body of instruments and work provides important input towards the efforts of the member States to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Council of Europe contributes to achieving the goals set in relevant international instruments, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Beijing Platform for Action and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

28. Three ground-breaking, unique and comprehensive Council of Europe conventions in the area of human dignity are of special relevance to the SDGs:

- ▶ the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention);
- ▶ the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (Anti-Trafficking Convention);
- ▶ the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention).

29. These conventions have a global outreach. They were drafted with the understanding that measures to address the global problems related to gender-based violence, trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation and abuse of children should not be limited to a particular geographic area. The conventions' provisions inspire normative and policy changes in all regions of the world and all States can become parties to them. For non-State parties, they provide a comprehensive blueprint for action at both global and national levels. They can be used as reference frameworks and provide platforms for international co-operation, review of implementation and sharing of experiences that offer unique guidance in the design of national policies

18. Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Vulnerable Persons in the Context of Migration and Asylum in Europe (2021-2025).

and legislation. Through them, the Council of Europe and its member States can support and contribute to the implementation of SDG No. 5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”) and SDG No. 16 (“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”).

30. The 14 indicators, agreed upon at the United Nations level, to measure the implementation of the nine targets included in SDG No. 5 cover priority areas of the Council of Europe’s work to achieve gender equality. As with the previous two strategies, the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029 directly addresses many of the targets of SDG No. 5, including human dignity and the fight against gender inequality, the promotion of the full participation of women in society, the need to guarantee access to fair justice systems for all and the need to work in partnerships.

31. SDG No. 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) is also relevant to the Council of Europe’s work on gender equality as it refers to providing “access to justice for all”. The Council of Europe addresses this through its work to ensure women’s equal access to justice and through the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights. Furthermore, SDG No. 16 includes targets to significantly reduce physical, psychological and sexual violence and related deaths, and to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against girls and boys – areas covered by Council of Europe conventions and addressed through activities and co-operation with the 46 member States and the southern Mediterranean countries.

32. Lastly, gender equality-related targets under other SDGs are also relevant for the new strategy.

The new Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029: its mission and strategic and operational objectives

33. The new strategy outlines the goals and priorities of the Council of Europe on gender equality for the years 2024 to 2029, identifying working methods and main partners, as well as the measures required to increase the visibility of results.

34. The overall goal of the new strategy is to achieve the effective realisation of gender equality and to empower women and men in the Council of Europe member States, by supporting the implementation of existing standards and strengthening the Council of Europe *acquis* in the field of gender equality, under the guidance of the Gender Equality Commission. The focus for the period 2024-2029 will be on six strategic areas:

- ▶ preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism;
- ▶ preventing and combating violence against women and girls and domestic violence;
- ▶ ensuring equal access to justice for women and girls;
- ▶ achieving balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social and economic life;
- ▶ ensuring women's empowerment and gender equality in relation to global and geopolitical challenges;
- ▶ achieving gender mainstreaming and including an intersectional approach in all policies and measures.

35. These priority areas build on and further develop the existing body of work carried out by the Council of Europe and the member States, bringing added value to actions taken by other regional and international organisations. In addition, they will support Council of Europe and member States' activities in the field of gender equality, with a view to achieving tangible results during the period covered by the new strategy.

36. The beneficiaries of the new strategy are women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, who live in the 46 Council of Europe member States, as well as society as a whole. The governments of member States drive the implementation of the new strategy at national and local levels, in close co-operation with gender equality institutions, equality bodies, parliaments and civil society.

37. In line with the findings of the Council of Europe's evaluation on the sub-programme "Violence against women and domestic violence",¹⁹ this strategy should also be a way to reinvigorate internal consultation and co-ordination mechanisms, including at the technical level and in all administrative entities of the Council of Europe, in order to bring together the actors relevant to the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention and other standards (political dialogue, promotion of the Istanbul Convention, recommendations to ratify made by various Council of Europe bodies, including the Gender Equality Commission and the Commissioner for Human Rights), monitoring and co-operation.

19. Evaluation of the Council of Europe's work under the sub-programme "Violence against women and domestic violence 2016-2020" (2022).

Strategic Objective 1 – Preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism



38. Gender stereotypes are preconceived social and cultural patterns or ideas whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. Gender stereotyping presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality and feeds into gender-based discrimination. Such stereotyping can limit, in all aspects and at all stages of their lives, the development of the talents and abilities of girls and boys, women and men, their educational and professional preferences and experiences, and life expectations, preventing them from achieving their full potential and limiting their life opportunities in general.

” Gender stereotyping presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality and feeds into gender-based discrimination.

39. Gender stereotypes both result from and are the cause of deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices. They are used to justify and maintain the historical power of men over women, as well as sexist attitudes which are holding back the advancement of gender equality.

40. Violent and degrading online content, including in pornography, and the normalisation of sexual violence, including rape, reinforce the stereotype of women's submissive role and contribute to the treatment of women as subordinate members in relationships, the family and society at large. They feed into violence and sexist hate speech targeting women and girls, particularly women human rights defenders, feminist groups and women's rights organisations, and contribute to maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes and sexism.

41. Gender stereotypes and patriarchy also negatively affect men and boys. Stereotypes about men and boys also result from, and are the cause of, deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices. Hegemonic harmful masculinities are a contributing factor in maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes, which in turn contribute to sexist hate speech, prejudice and gender-based violence against men and boys who deviate from predominant forms of masculinity, including but not limited to gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GBTI) men. Societal perceptions and media portrayal can feed into gender stereotypes. This includes perceptions about what they should look like, how they should behave, what careers they should pursue and what unpaid care and domestic tasks they should perform.

42. Structural inequalities and enduring gender stereotypes affecting women and men, girls and boys, also continue to be present in the childcare and education systems, extending to the labour market. Horizontal segregation persists in certain sectors with a predominantly male or female workforce, the latter often with lower pay,²⁰ less prestige and more precarious working conditions. This situation does not appear to be changing significantly. Women's occupational choices, often an extension of their traditional role as caregivers, can be influenced through positive policy and legislative measures, such as paternity or parental leave, creating opportunities and incentives for men to be (come) role models for other men to engage in occupations stereotypically regarded as female. Vertical segregation in the labour market also persists. Within the same sector, even one dominated by women, usually the higher positions in terms of salary and hierarchy are occupied by men, whereas lower jobs on the hierarchical and salary scale are mostly filled by women (such as education or the retail industry). This is largely due to the combined effects of the disproportionate burden of care and domestic responsibilities placed on women, and of gender biases and stereotypes about education, career choices and opportunities, affecting both women and men.

20. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), women are paid less than men, with the gender pay gap estimated at around 20% globally (2023).



43. The media and social media play an important role in our lives, particularly when used to share information and expand awareness of a wide range of issues. However, evidence also shows that social media in particular enables abuses, and that women and girls are often harassed and subjected to violence, threats and sexualised threats online. Examples of platforms that act as conveyers of sexism and sexist hate speech include social media, pornography and video games. Freedom of expression is often abused as the pretext put forward to avoid accountability for unacceptable and offensive behaviour. In the same way as with other forms of violence against women and girls, sexist hate speech remains underreported, but its impact, especially on girls and young women, be it emotional, psychological and/or physical, is devastating.

44. The adoption by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe of the recommendation to prevent and combat sexism²¹ in 2019 was crucial, as it provided the first internationally agreed definition of sexism, helping to identify it and addressing its effects in all areas, especially in those where it is more prevalent. Additionally, the recommendation on combating hate speech²² distinguishes between different categories of hate speech, including sexist hate speech. It encourages member States to ensure that a comprehensive and effective legal framework is in place to prevent and combat hate speech in offline and online environments.

21. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism.

22. Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 of the Committee of Ministers on combating hate speech.

45. This new strategy also strives to integrate the specific impact of AI on gender equality and women's rights. Often acclaimed for its ability to reduce and simplify previously manual and time-consuming processes, AI is pervasive and continues to develop, hurtling down the scientific highway, crossing frontiers and changing the way people live their lives. Its advantages have been somewhat overshadowed by the growing awareness of a downside: the potential for the "softwariation"²³ of existing discrimination and gender inequality. There are different types of biases, including the historical bias describing how social hierarchies and institutionalised disadvantage shape data. Data are therefore not neutral, because they are a mirror of existing structural inequalities in society. Algorithms, if not transparent and robust enough, are highly likely to repeat, amplify or contribute to gender biases and sex discrimination that programmers may not be aware of, or that are the result of specific data selection and of the serious underrepresentation of women in the workforce dealing with information technologies.

46. This first strategic objective to address gender stereotypes and sexism is divided into four major operational objectives:

- ▶ that member States and the Council of Europe as a whole promote and implement Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism;
- ▶ that member States and the Council of Europe implement policies and measures to prevent and combat gender stereotypes, including their impact on the gendered division of tasks and roles in the public and private sphere;
- ▶ that member States address algorithmic gender-based and intersectional discrimination through human rights-based and multifaceted gender equality and non-discrimination strategies; that they also implement newly developed standards in the area of artificial intelligence and gender equality;
- ▶ that member States and relevant civil society organisations collect sex-disaggregated data and conduct research in the area of preventing and combating sexism and gender stereotypes.

47. With a view to achieving such operational objectives, the Council of Europe will develop and carry out various types of action, such as:

- ▶ promoting, disseminating and following up on the implementation by member States of Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1, including by making it available in a variety of languages;

23. The "softwariation" of bias means that existing inequalities end up coded, and perpetuated, in obscure and Internet Protocol (IP) protected machines.

- ▶ supporting member States in implementing campaigns on preventing and combating sexism; these are aimed at tackling sexist hate speech online and offline and at contributing to ending sexism across all public sector areas, from education to justice, culture and sport, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), as well as in the private sector, including social media and social network services companies;
- ▶ promoting the implementation of other Council of Europe instruments that address human rights violations, which, *inter alia*, seek to sustain and/or are rooted in prejudices, customs and traditions based on stereotyped gender roles, including the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on combating hate speech, which targets the eradication of prejudices, customs and traditions based on stereotyped gender roles;
- ▶ developing tools and targeted assistance (projects) to support member States in implementing relevant standards, including those in the Istanbul Convention as they aim to prevent and combat sexism and gender stereotypes in co-operation with feminist civil society organisations where relevant;
- ▶ identifying, compiling and disseminating good practices to eradicate gender stereotypes for girls and boys, women and men in the education and professional/vocational training systems, the labour market where relevant, family life – including the equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men – leave schemes and all areas in which women or men are underrepresented, including in the area of artificial intelligence/information technologies and in STEM, and paying special attention to gender equality and the protection of women and girls' rights;
- ▶ preparing a draft recommendation on artificial intelligence, gender equality and non-discrimination, through a human rights and multifaceted approach, jointly with the Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI);
- ▶ supporting data collection and research on sexism, gender stereotypes and sex- and gender-based discrimination, developing guidelines on data collection disaggregated by sex and integrating an intersectional approach;
- ▶ developing guidance and tools in specific sectors (media, education, the judiciary, the private sector, information technologies) to address gender stereotypes and engage men and boys, including through co-operation with relevant organisations, and by addressing discrimination and sexism against particular groups of men and boys, women and girls using an intersectional approach;

- ▶ following up and implementing the 2023 Council of Europe Guidelines on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women;
- ▶ co-operating with relevant sectors and organisations to remove discrimination, sexism and gender stereotypes affecting one or more particular group(s) of women (such as lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LBTI) women; Roma and Traveller women; women belonging to national, ethnic or religious minorities; women with disabilities; migrant and refugee women; older women).

Strategic Objective 2 – Preventing and combating violence against women and girls and domestic violence

48. Violence against women and girls and domestic violence remain widespread in all member States of the Council of Europe, with very harmful consequences for women, societies and economies. One in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence during their lifetime,²⁴ often perpetrated by an intimate partner. Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation and negatively affects women's well-being, hindering their full participation in society.

Violence has devastating short- and long-term mental and physical health consequences, at times persisting across generations. Applying an intersectional approach in conjunction with a human rights-based and transformative approach that addresses the root causes of gender inequalities is integral to understanding and addressing violence against women and girls and domestic violence. Varying discrimination grounds,



in addition to sex and gender, may intersect and increase the risks for this type of violence, whether during peacetime, global crises or in times of armed conflict. It is crucial to examine the impact of intersecting forms of discrimination to ensure the ability of victims and survivors to escape gender-based violence, access protection and support services and obtain justice. In the same way,

24. <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/data-stories/overview-of-gender-based-violence/>.

women with a high public profile, such as politicians, journalists or women human rights defenders, are more exposed to certain forms of violence against women, offline and online.

” Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation and negatively affects women’s well-being, hindering their full participation in society.

49. The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) is widely recognised as the most comprehensive international treaty to tackle this serious violation of the human rights of women. Important safeguards are also set out in the European Convention on Human Rights and related case law, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

50. The Istanbul Convention has led to positive changes in legislation and in the development of strategies to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence in many member States. However, a number of significant challenges persist in developing policies and action to address violence against women and girls, including the limited resources available to provide specialist and dedicated support services to all women victims of violence, low levels of reporting of domestic violence and potential structural bias against women and child victims of domestic violence.²⁵ Other challenges are related to the strong focus on domestic violence, with few holistic measures in relation to other forms of violence against women and girls, low levels of prosecution and conviction, as well as insufficient initial and in-service training for relevant professionals, including in regional or minority languages.

51. While the focus of the Istanbul Convention is on all forms of violence against women and girls, which includes domestic violence, the convention also recognises that men and boys can be victims of domestic violence. Parties are encouraged to apply the Istanbul Convention to all victims of domestic violence, however they are requested to pay particular attention to women victims of gender-based violence and to ensure a gendered understanding of violence against women and girls.

25. See “Mid-term Horizontal Review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports” by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence February 2022.

52. Violence against girls and boys constitutes a violation of their human rights in itself, including when they are witnesses of domestic violence, and it also negatively affects the enjoyment of their other rights. Ending violence against children is therefore a legal, ethical and economic imperative. The gender-based vulnerability among girls and boys at risk of violence needs to be acknowledged and the particular needs and situations of girls need to be addressed.²⁶

53. Sexual harassment and violence against women and girls in public spaces must be criminalised, as required by the Istanbul Convention. Besides violence against women who are public figures, or human rights defenders, violence in public spaces represents another dimension of violence against all women and is a widespread problem. The feeling of fear and insecurity experienced by women in public places and public transport has a severe impact on their daily lives, and this may be exacerbated in the case of women in vulnerable situations, such as women from groups which are marginalised in society. Often women do not dare to lodge a complaint for fear of the incident being trivialised. The normalisation of sexual violence and harassment of women in public spaces restricts women's freedom and plays a part in perpetuating impunity for perpetrators. Attacks on women in public spaces therefore call for a firm response in terms of information, awareness and prevention, and at the legal level. These attacks should be reported and the perpetrators prosecuted.

” The digital dimension of violence against women and girls manifests itself as part of a continuum of violence.

54. Technology-facilitated violence is a growing global problem which affects women and girls disproportionately.²⁷ Although cyberviolence is not a new phenomenon, it has rapidly escalated since the Covid-19 pandemic, as our lives have shifted online for work, education and social activities. Significant gaps in data persist, but one global report suggests that the prevalence of violence against women and girls in digital contexts ranges from 16% to 58%.²⁸

The digital dimension of violence against women and girls manifests itself as part of a continuum of violence, which is connected to violence offline. It

26. Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) and Council of Europe policy guidelines on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence (Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10).

27. See GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women, October 2021 and the Commissioner for Human Rights Comment “No space for violence against women and girls in the digital world”, March 2022.

28. Jacqueline Hicks, “Global evidence on the prevalence and impact of online gender-based violence”, Institute of Development Studies, October 2021.



represents yet another form of abuse and silencing embedded within existing gender-based power structures. Violent acts that rely on and are facilitated by technology are an integral part of the same violence that women and girls experience in the offline world on the basis of their sex and intersecting identities. Those acts can take many, constantly evolving forms, such as online sexual harassment; doxing; trolling; image-based sexual harassment including creepshots, upskirting, non-consensual image or video sharing, “revenge porn”, deepfakes, recorded sexual assault and rape; threats and coercion such as forced sexting, sextortion, rape threats and incitement to commit rape; forms of online stalking, surveilling or spying on social media or messaging, password stealing, cracking or hacking devices, spyware installation; and forms of psychological violence such as online sexist hate speech and incitement to self-harm or suicide, verbal attacks, insults and death threats.²⁹ Violence and abuse online can limit women’s right to express themselves equally, freely and without fear, including in political and public life.

55. Integrating a gender dimension into international relations is essential for promoting gender equality, advancing peace and security, enhancing development outcomes and strengthening democracy and human rights. Armed conflict-related sexual violence is a form of deliberate gender-based violence intended to punish and humiliate individuals and their communities

29. Adriane van der Wilk, Council of Europe study “Protecting women and girls from violence in the digital age – The relevance of the Istanbul Convention and the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime in addressing online and technology-facilitated violence against women”, December 2021.

as recognised in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security and subsequent resolutions.³⁰ It is a tactic of war, an abusive expression of power and a violent means of conveying dominance over the victims and the communities to which the victims belong. Significant numbers of cases of sexual violence have been reported and documented as a consequence of the war of aggression waged by the Russian Federation against Ukraine since February 2014, which it relaunched on 24 February 2022 with a massive invasion of Ukraine. The Istanbul Convention applies both in peacetime and during armed conflict.³¹ Moreover, States parties cannot suspend or modify their obligations under the Istanbul Convention, even in exceptional circumstances such as war or national emergency.³²

56. Femicide, defined as the intentional killing of women and girls because of their sex, often in the context of domestic or intimate partner violence, is another major concern to be addressed.³³ The most extreme form of violence against women, femicides are also the culmination of many forms of gender-based violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual violence, physical violence, crimes committed in the name of so-called “honour” and other types of violence motivated by gender-based discrimination. Femicides have devastating effects on families and communities, and they are the result of systemic inequality and discrimination against women. There has been growing recognition and awareness of femicides as a global issue in recent years, and efforts are being made to prevent and address this form of violence against women.³⁴

30. See also Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2476 (2023) “Conflict-related sexual violence”.

31. Article 2 of the Istanbul Convention states that the provisions of the convention apply in peacetime and during times of armed conflict, whether international or non-international.

32. Article 2 of the Istanbul Convention specifies that no derogation from its provisions is allowed, even in situations of emergency or armed conflict.

33. According to UN Women, globally 81 000 women and girls were killed in 2021, and around 45 000 of them (56%) died at the hands of an intimate partner or a family member.

34. See the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) report “Improving legal responses to counter femicide in the European Union: Perspectives from victims and professionals”, February 2023. The report states that “femicide is not recognised as a specific criminal offence in any European country”.

“ The identification of needs has been refined through collaboration with practitioners, experts and civil society actors at national and international levels, to form the basis of a coherent theory of change. This theory of change rests on the Istanbul Convention, which is a seminal document embodying a vision and an illustration of the Council of Europe’s role in legal innovation through standard setting³⁵.”

57. This second strategic objective is divided into three major operational objectives:

- ▶ member States take stock of, and implement, the recommendations stemming from the monitoring of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention (by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) and the Committee of the Parties);
- ▶ member States analyse and develop policy measures to address emerging forms of violence against women and girls, including its digital dimension; they implement recent Council of Europe standards in this area, such as GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women;
- ▶ member States develop strategies and action plans on preventing and combating violence against women and girls and domestic violence, and exchange good practices, including in relation to perpetrator programmes, their impact and evaluation.

58. With a view to achieving such operational objectives, the Council of Europe will develop and carry out various types of action, such as:

- ▶ supporting member States in implementing relevant international instruments, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), taking into account General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women (updating General Recommendation No. 19) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 38 on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration, which highlights the digital aspect of trafficking in women, as well as SDGs Nos. 5 and 16 and in line with UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security;
- ▶ promoting and providing support, including through legal and technical expertise for member States that request it, for the signature, ratification

35. Evaluation of the Council of Europe’s work under the sub-programme “Violence against women and domestic violence” 2016-2020 (2022).

and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the Anti-Trafficking Convention and the Lanzarote Convention;

- ▶ calling on all signatories of the Istanbul Convention to accelerate steps towards ratification of the convention and to benefit from its standards as well as from the tailor-made recommendations, scrutiny and support offered by GREVIO;
- ▶ developing tools to promote accurate knowledge of, and counter misinformation and disinformation about, the Istanbul Convention, the Anti-Trafficking Convention and the Lanzarote Convention among non-State actors, in order to encourage them to contribute to the implementation of these conventions;
- ▶ increasing funding for Council of Europe (national and regional) campaigns to counter misinformation and disinformation regarding the Istanbul Convention;
- ▶ taking action to:
 - address sexual violence, including rape and harassment of women and girls in public spaces;
 - support member States to take measures that address all forms of violence against women and girls, as well as domestic violence, including by developing and strengthening legislation on sexual violence based on the concept of lack of consent and develop awareness-raising campaigns on consent;
 - support member States in taking measures to address conflict-related sexual violence to ensure a gender-responsive and survivor-centred approach and, where appropriate, use their legal capacities under universal jurisdiction;
 - address the issue of access by victims of domestic violence to shelter, legal and psychological counselling, financial assistance, housing, education, training and assistance in finding employment, as well as access to protection measures; update the 2008 study on minimum standards for violence against women support services;
 - support the development of disaggregated data collection by sex and age and research on violence against all women and girls and domestic violence;
 - support the setting up and development of co-ordinating bodies at the national level, and promote and support the development of national strategies to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence with an intersectional approach;

- develop tools to address the need to prevent and combat domestic violence against men and boys;
 - develop information tools on the role of men and boys in preventing violence against women and girls and address the role of men and boys as perpetrators of gender-based violence; to this end, evidence-based research assessing the efficiency of programmes for perpetrators could be conducted;
 - design pilot projects, programmes and services specialising in the psychological care of perpetrators of gender-based violence, especially with a view to preventing recidivism;
- ▶ gather further information with the support of feminist civil society organisations and build knowledge about the specific forms of violence faced by certain groups of women exposed to intersectional discrimination (such as older women; young women and girls; women with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities; marginalised women, including those experiencing homelessness, poverty or other socio-economic challenges; migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women; women with disabilities; Roma and Traveller women; women belonging to national, ethnic or religious minorities; women in rural areas; women with addictions; and victims of human trafficking or undocumented women) through co-operation and exchange of information with relevant bodies and entities of the Council of Europe;
- develop activities and projects to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and girls, new and other, such as gender-based violence against women in politics and technology-facilitated violence against women and girls;
 - encourage specific action directed at violence faced by women and girls in vulnerable situations, drawing on the information and knowledge referred to in the previous paragraphs;
 - increase education, awareness and capacity building to prevent femicides, strengthening legal protections for victims and improving access to support services, for survivors of gender-based violence;
 - provide specific guidance to member States on avoiding the risk of an increase in incidents of domestic violence as a result of emergency measures taken in response to crises;
 - increase co-operation between relevant Council of Europe entities, such as the GEC and the Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, including its Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence and the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance, the

Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention, and the Council of Europe steering committees, on the facilitation of multi-country dialogue platforms on topical and emerging issues for States parties, signatory States of the Istanbul Convention and others;

- promote the Istanbul Convention, the Anti-Trafficking Convention and the Lanzarote Convention beyond the European continent, making available expertise and sharing good practices in the context of co-operation with non-member States and other regional and international organisations. In particular, support co-ordination and co-operation through the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform),³⁶ which brings together seven United Nations and regional independent expert mechanisms on discrimination and violence against women, including GREVIO; encourage non-member States of the Council of Europe to accede to and ratify the Istanbul Convention. The Istanbul Convention remains, to this day, the only major instrument open to universal ratification that is specifically aimed at fighting violence against women.

Strategic Objective 3 – Ensuring equal access to justice for women and girls

59. Access to justice is a human right and an integral element of promoting the rule of law and a well-functioning democracy. Respect for and protection of human rights can only be guaranteed through the availability of effective remedies (including the right to a fair trial), adequate reparation and/or compensation. Women face additional barriers in accessing justice, due to gender inequality and gender biases, including for women with intersecting identities. Persistent and emerging inequalities between women and men, including economic and social inequalities, gender bias and gender stereotypes result in unequal access of women and men to justice. Evidence also points to the existence of a glass ceiling in the judiciary.³⁷

60. The Covid-19 pandemic had, and continues to have, a major impact on gender equality, as it has challenged decades of gender equality advancements. Significant backsliding has occurred at many levels: the rise in domestic

36. For further information on the Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women (EDVAW Platform), see: www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/edvaw-platform.

37. Report European judicial systems - European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice - CEPEJ Evaluation report - 2022 Evaluation cycle.



violence, unemployment, the resurgence of very traditional role expectations, as well as in the field of equal access to justice. Women face a variety of legal, institutional, socio-economic and cultural barriers in their access to justice. While experiences varied across the member States, these issues were undeniably exacerbated during the pandemic.

” Cultural barriers, fear and lack of trust in the system also affect women’s and girls’ access to justice.

61. Equal access to justice implies the rights to an effective remedy, to a fair trial, to equal access to the courts and to legal aid including free legal aid where applicable, and legal representation. There are a multitude of obstacles that prevent women from having equal access to justice: taboos, prejudices, gender stereotypes, customs, poverty, lack of information, gaps in legislation or in its implementation, violence against women, sex-based discrimination and sexist behaviours within the justice system, and sometimes even the laws themselves. They particularly affect certain groups of women and girls, notably victims of gender-based violence; LGBTI women; migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women; Roma and Traveller women; women belonging to national, ethnic or religious minorities; women with disabilities; older women; undocumented women; and women human rights defenders.

62. Cultural barriers, fear and lack of trust in the system also affect women’s and girls’ access to justice, as do discriminatory attitudes and the stereotypical roles of women as carers and men as breadwinners, which persist in civil and family

law in many jurisdictions. These barriers may exist during investigations and trials, especially in cases of violence against women and girls, and lead to high levels of attrition and even underreporting. Their impact is even more significant on women exposed to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

63. Taken together, all these barriers are pieces in a “justice jigsaw” that excludes women. It is urgent that this gender imbalance be addressed, as equal access to justice is fundamental to ensuring real equality between women and men.

64. This third strategic objective is divided into three major operational objectives:

- ▶ member States can rely on Council of Europe guidance and tools as well as the case law of the European Court of Human Rights to ensure women’s equal access to justice, taking the needs and demands of all women and girls into account;
- ▶ member States increase their capacities to remove barriers and obstacles to women’s and girls’ access to justice;
- ▶ sex-disaggregated data collection and research are enhanced in the area of access to justice for women and girls.

65. With a view to achieving these operational objectives, the Council of Europe will develop and carry out various types of action, in close co-ordination with relevant Council of Europe entities, including the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ). Council of Europe action in this area will seek to:

- ▶ support member States in implementing Council of Europe and other relevant instruments aimed at achieving SDG No. 16, having due regard to General Recommendation No. 33 on women’s access to justice (2015) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;
- ▶ promote and support implementation of the recommendations from relevant studies, including the Council of Europe study on the impact of Covid-19 on women’s access to justice (2022);
- ▶ identify, compile and disseminate good practices from member States and beyond to reduce obstacles and facilitate women’s equal access to justice, offer legal assistance and access to remedies, especially for women human rights defenders;
- ▶ encourage standardised data collection by sex and age;
- ▶ encourage research concerning women’s access to justice, including as victims of violence, and their participation in the judiciary, taking into account sex, age and, where relevant, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability and other relevant intersectional characteristics;



- ▶ continue to address the harmful impact of gender stereotyping on judicial decision making through research, monitoring, training, education, capacity building and the promotion of good practices at national and regional levels, in line with Council of Europe instruments and international law, and in co-operation with other regional and international organisations;
- ▶ develop and disseminate training tools and materials on gender equality, violence against women and access to justice, including the Human Rights Education for Legal Professional (HELP) courses on such topics, adapted to the specific needs of all actors in the judicial chain, and in support of strategic litigation in this field; incorporate such curricula in continuous training programmes for all professionals in the justice chain;
- ▶ monitor and follow up court decisions to raise awareness and ensure a better understanding among legal professionals of issues related to women's access to justice, including stereotypes in the judicial system and protection against gender-based violence and discrimination;
- ▶ develop and disseminate information tools about the main Council of Europe instruments to promote women's access to justice, taking into account the needs of women and girls in particularly vulnerable situations, such as survivors of gender-based violence; LGBTI women; women with disabilities; migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women; targets of sexist hate speech; Roma and Traveller women; women belonging to national, ethnic and religious minorities; undocumented women as well as women human rights defenders.

Strategic Objective 4 – Achieving balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social and economic life



” Together we commit to the following Reykjavík Principles and will: [...] 10. ensure full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life for all, in particular for women and girls, free from violence, fear, harassment, hate speech and hate crime, as well as discrimination based on any ground.

Reykjavik Principles for Democracy

66. Equal participation of all women and men, girls and boys in all their diversity in political and public life is essential for well-functioning democracies. Despite the adoption of new laws and policies and examples of good practice and supportive measures in certain member States, women’s underrepresentation in public, political, social and economic life remains a critical issue which undermines the full functioning of democratic institutions and processes. Political activities and public decision making remain male-dominated areas. Men set political priorities and political culture continues to be structured around patriarchal patterns that create and reinforce structural inequalities between women and men.

” Men set political priorities and political culture continues to be structured around patriarchal patterns that create and reinforce structural inequalities between women and men.

67. Gender inequalities, gaps and imbalances also persist in particular socio-economic areas. While no single strategy can fully address all the complex issues related to socio-economic inequalities, it is a positive step forward to address targeted issues such as providing high-quality, affordable and accessible care services, including healthcare services for all, with better pay and working conditions for carers, addressing unpaid care and domestic work and its disproportionate impact on women, and work–life balance measures for both women and men, as part of a broader effort to reduce socio-economic inequalities and the care gap. By taking specific action in these areas, it is possible to make meaningful progress in addressing some of the root causes of socio-economic inequality, such as unequal access to education, employment, housing and healthcare. By way of example, investing in care, promoting work–life balance and addressing unpaid care and domestic work can help reduce gender inequality in the workforce and support women’s economic empowerment. Any such initiatives should be undertaken in synergy and complementarity with relevant initiatives of other international actors.

68. A number of obstacles make entering and sustainably participating in political and public decision making challenging for women and girls. These obstacles include sexism, gender stereotypes and negative social norms, the unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, gender-based violence against women and girls as well as electoral systems and the functioning of political parties. In most member States, the full and equal participation of women in political and public life, in legislative, executive (including diplomatic), judicial and administrative bodies at the local, regional and national levels is still below the Council of Europe agreed minimum standard of 40%³⁸ and governments’ commitment to “Planet 50-50 by 2030”³⁹

69. Women and girls should have the same power and influence over the formulation of political agendas and priorities as men and boys. To achieve the full participation of women and girls in public, political, social and economic life requires fundamental changes, policies, measures and targeted action to remove both societal and structural obstacles.

38. Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making.

39. “Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality” was launched by the United Nations on the occasion of International Women’s Day 2015. It showcases national actions pledged to achieve gender equality by 2030, see: www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/step-it-up.

” In most member States, the full and equal participation of women in political and public life, in legislative, executive including diplomatic, judicial and administrative bodies at the local, regional and national levels is still below the Council of Europe agreed minimum standard of 40%.

70. Gender equality brings significant benefits for individuals and societies: boosting economic growth, promoting well-being and helping to mitigate climate change. Gender stereotypes perpetuate women’s economic and social marginalisation. Women are disproportionately affected by unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, part-time work and low paid or informal work. The way tax is collected, and growth and productivity are measured (that is, based on gross domestic product) does not reflect the invaluable contributions of women’s unpaid care and domestic work. Furthermore, women’s higher, on average, level of education in Europe does not automatically translate into equal – let alone higher – pay and pensions, quality employment or access to leading positions. Some groups of women (notably women with low levels of qualifications, single mothers, migrant women, Roma and Traveller women, and women belonging to national, ethnic and religious minorities, women with disabilities, LGBTI women) face particular challenges, including greater difficulty in joining the labour market, higher levels of precariousness and related risks of poverty and social exclusion. Women’s economic empowerment and independence require measures that support equal opportunities, equal pay for work of equal value, abolition of discriminatory legislation and of economic disincentives for women to work.

71. The main focus on gender equality issues has traditionally been on women and girls, but there are also important implications that should be addressed by and about men and boys. In line with the Committee of Ministers Guidelines on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women, this strategy includes action on how to influence positive change in the roles and situations of men and boys, women and girls in all spheres of life, including but not limited to family and unpaid care, social life, physical and mental health, education and employment, in relation to the prevention of gender-based violence as well as to the risk of marginalisation.



72. Women's access to healthcare remains unequal in Europe. Health research and industry traditionally rely mainly on male research subjects to assess the risks and efficacy of drugs, thus yielding less and lower quality health data for women. This gender data gap in the healthcare sector leads to less reliable predictive systems when it comes to diagnosing female patients (the same holds true for gender diverse and intersex patients). Health inequalities for women remain substantial, in particular for women from certain groups such as migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women; Roma and Traveller women; women belonging to national, ethnic and religious minorities; women with disabilities; and older women. Men also face significant challenges in relation to both physical and mental health. Men have a lower life expectancy, are generally reluctant to seek medical attention and are overrepresented in relation to drug and alcohol abuse as well as suicide. The strategy will address health-related issues taking into account the work of various Council of Europe entities in these areas, such as the International Co-operation Group on Drugs and Addictions (Pompidou Group), the Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health (CDBIO) and the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare.

” It is crucial to revise laws which criminalise, limit or deny access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and to overcome practical obstacles to women’s access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and services.

73. Women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights are human rights. In Europe, too many women and girls are still deprived of their basic rights to have access to age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, modern contraception, safe and legal abortion, quality gynaecological and maternal healthcare or even the right to choose whom or whether to marry. The rise of anti-rights movements endangers more than ever women’s access to these fundamental human rights. Ensuring that women in all their diversity can exercise their right of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights without coercion contributes not only to the human rights, empowerment and well-being of women but also to the well-being and healthy development of society at large. Violations of women’s rights to sexual and reproductive health⁴⁰ are often due to deeply engrained beliefs and societal values pertaining to women’s sexuality. It is crucial to revise laws which criminalise, limit or deny access to sexual and reproductive health and rights⁴¹ and to overcome practical obstacles to women’s access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and services. Finally, engaging men and boys and addressing their role in developing respectful social and sexual relationships, including sexual consent and shared responsibility in the use of contraception are important steps in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality.

74. This fourth strategic objective will be divided into three operational objectives:

- ▶ member States ensure equal participation of women and girls, men and boys in political and public decision making;
- ▶ member States ensure women’s equal access to the labour market and tackle women’s higher levels of precariousness and related risks of poverty and social exclusion;

40. The CEDAW (Article 16) guarantees to women equal rights in deciding “freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights”.

41. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’ General Comment No. 22 on the right to sexual and reproductive health recommends that states “repeal or eliminate laws, policies and practices that criminalize, obstruct or undermine access by individuals or a particular group to sexual and reproductive health facilities, services, goods and information”; 2016.

- ▶ member States ensure that all women and girls, men and boys have effective access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (reflected in laws, policies and practices), as well as to affordable, equitable and quality healthcare services in general, including in the area of mental health.

75. With a view to achieving such operational objectives, Council of Europe action in this area will seek to:

- ▶ support the full implementation of Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making and of Recommendation CM/Rec(2023)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on Roma youth participation;
- ▶ support member States through targeted assistance in achieving the equal and inclusive participation of women and men in political and public decision making, including through the implementation of effective gender mainstreaming strategies and policies;
- ▶ support, where appropriate, member States in implementing parity measures and gender quotas and in creating policies that promote work–life balance in public services and in the private sector;
- ▶ encourage and support action to facilitate women’s participation in elections at the European, national, regional and local levels as well as action to empower women candidates, elected officials and voters – including women from marginalised groups and young women – in co-operation with relevant bodies of the Council of Europe; encourage and support action to tackle sexism, harassment, violence against women and sexual violence against women in politics, within political parties and institutions;
- ▶ identify and support measures and good practices that promote gender equality in relation to: electoral systems, training of decision makers in both public institutions and political parties, gender-sensitive functioning of decision-making bodies, setting parity thresholds, adoption of effective quota laws and voluntary party quotas where appropriate, and the regulation of political parties including regarding public funding, in co-operation with relevant bodies of the Council of Europe and with a view to achieving gender balance in decision making, combating gender stereotypes and making decision-making processes gender transformative;⁴²
- ▶ recognise the value of care, and support efforts to combat gender bias and stereotypes, promote the evaluation and recognition of both paid

42. Gender transformative approaches seek to challenge gender inequality by transforming harmful gender norms, roles and relations, while working towards redistributing power, resources and services more equally (UNFPA, 2023).

and unpaid care work, and make visible the benefits to society of investing in quality care services;

- ▶ promote the equal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work among women and men, including through paid maternity and paternity leave, paid and non-transferrable parental leave for women and men as well as access to quality and affordable childcare and other social services;
- ▶ support action to effectively encourage more men to take on unpaid care and domestic responsibilities and to make use of flexible working arrangements and other family-friendly measures; develop tools to promote a better understanding of unpaid care work and its value and to address the obstacles that hinder equal sharing between women and men;
- ▶ take measures to encourage employers in the public and private sectors, as well as social partners, to promote concrete voluntary measures conducive to the equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, as well as to work–life balance for women and men. The objective should be to promote women’s economic independence and to remove obstacles to their labour market participation, including in emerging sectors such as the green and digital economy;
- ▶ encourage the implementation of gender equality plans in private and public sectors, which may include an evaluation of the situation and concrete and measurable actions, along with monitoring and assessment mechanisms;
- ▶ review and, if necessary, update Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the inclusion of gender differences in health policy;
- ▶ produce a study (as a basis for a potential new legal instrument) on women’s effective right to decide on matters related to their sexual and reproductive health and rights, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, including women who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination;
- ▶ achieve balanced participation of women and men in all Council of Europe bodies, institutions and decision-making processes;
- ▶ promote the effective implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, of the Programme of Action on the International Conference on Population and Development and of the outcomes of their review conferences and commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Strategic Objective 5 – Ensuring women’s empowerment and gender equality in relation to global and geopolitical challenges



76. The Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine, the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic recession, migration flows, climate change, natural disasters and other global and geopolitical challenges have disproportionately affected women and girls in many parts of the world, including in Europe. These crises have both exacerbated existing gender inequalities and created new ones that leave women at increased risk of violence, discrimination and social exclusion. The Covid-19 pandemic and its longer-term effects will be felt for many years. The food and energy crisis fuelled by the Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine will continue to affect those left furthest behind and threaten global security and sustainable development. Adaptation to climate change and mitigating its impact, in particular regarding climate-driven disasters, still demands the application of a gender and an intersectional lens.

77. Anti-gender movements undermine or challenge existing gender equality standards and policies and threaten the realisation of the fundamental rights of all women and men, girls and boys. These movements are active at all levels. The defence of the gender equality *acquis* and commitment to the development of new standards and policies in this area should be an integral part of multilateral relations.

78. A growing body of data and research highlights the correlation between sex, gender, equality and climate change. The strategy therefore includes the exchange of practices on the disparate effects of climate change and the links between women's empowerment and effective, global climate action.

” Anti-gender movements undermine or challenge existing gender equality standards and policies and threaten the realisation of the fundamental rights of all women and men, girls and boys.

79. Migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women often find themselves in precarious situations and experience threats to their personal, physical and sexual safety and security – especially when they travel on their own, are pregnant, are with children or are subject to intersectional discrimination. In response to these challenges, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)17 on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls in 2022. The recommendation underlines that many migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls are exposed to various forms of sexual and gender-based violence, either in their country of origin, during the journey or upon arrival. Due consideration should be given to their needs and circumstances. Indeed, gender-responsive measures should be adopted to prevent discrimination, violence, harassment, trafficking and other forms of exploitation and abuse – including in times of crisis and natural disasters. In addition, measures need to be taken to ensure that migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women effectively enjoy their rights in terms of personal freedom, employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare, where applicable, and access to information about their rights and the services available. The Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029 aims to support the full implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)17 and other relevant international instruments.

80. This fifth strategic objective is divided into four operational objectives:

- ▶ member States take action based on lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic in the field of gender equality;
- ▶ member States adopt a gender-responsive approach in the prevention and mitigation of crises, whether they are related to conflict, migration, public health, climate change or economic downturn, including where these crises intersect;

- ▶ member States implement Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)17 on protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls;
- ▶ member States join forces to counter anti-gender narratives in co-operation with international organisations and civil society.

” Many migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls are exposed to various forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

81. Council of Europe action in this area will seek to:

- ▶ disseminate, and promote the implementation of, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)17; engage in targeted assistance (through co-operation projects) in line with this recommendation;
- ▶ disseminate, and promote the implementation of, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)20 on human rights and the protection of the environment, which pays particular attention to the situation of women and girls;
- ▶ support the systematic integration of a gender equality perspective, including consideration of increased intersectional vulnerabilities in policies and measures regarding public health, conflict resolution, climate change and economic downturn, for example through awareness and training activities for relevant stakeholders;
- ▶ support member States in recognising gender equality and women’s rights as a core element of multilateral relations and crisis management, including in policies, strategies and programmes that seek to bring about durable peace and inclusive development; with reference to Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)10 on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building, address sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and support women and girls from diverse and variable backgrounds as positive agents for conflict prevention, conflict resolution, relief and recovery, and building sustainable peace;
- ▶ carry out activities addressing the adverse effects of climate change on gender equality, including increased (intersectional) vulnerabilities to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, and socio-economic inequalities;
- ▶ launch an awareness-raising campaign countering anti-gender rhetoric and creating a new narrative;
- ▶ support, including through funding, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in carrying out research on anti-gender narratives and movements.

Strategic Objective 6 – Achieving gender mainstreaming and including an intersectional approach in all policies and measures



82. Council of Europe instruments and practice on gender mainstreaming have laid the foundation for important work in this area, including the reference definition of the term. The Committee of Ministers has adopted a number of recommendations on gender mainstreaming in different fields, including education, the media, sport and the audiovisual sector.⁴³ Various sectors of the Council of Europe have also implemented gender equality-related activities, helping to make gender mainstreaming a regular part of policy making within the Organisation. The integration of an intersectional approach in intergovernmental activities is also crucial to ensure that the combined forms of discrimination and oppression experienced by some groups, in particular certain groups of women and girls, are addressed.

By adopting a gender mainstreaming and intersectional approach to all policies and activities, alongside specific policies for the advancement of women and girls, the Council of Europe will ensure that new initiatives and standards are gender transformative, taking into account the diverse situations of women and men, girls and boys, and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination,

43. Recommendation No. R (98) 14 on gender mainstreaming; Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)13 on gender mainstreaming in education; Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)1 on the inclusion of gender differences in health policy; Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and media; Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)2 on gender mainstreaming in sport; and Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)9 on gender equality in the audiovisual sector.

and therefore result in better informed policy making, a better allocation of resources and better governance, contributing to the sustainable advancement of gender equality.

83. Gender mainstreaming efforts, by focusing on the different needs of groups and individuals, have helped to shed light on intersecting forms of exclusion, discrimination and violence that certain groups of women and men face, due to their different characteristics/statuses. Integrating an intersectional perspective, by taking into account this diversity and compounded forms of oppression, is essential if the Organisation is to adopt and implement inclusive policies and projects. The various needs and challenges faced by certain groups must therefore be analysed and integrated into policy making and activities. The particular challenges that some groups may face in specific areas of policy making (socio-economic issues, education, care, etc.) must also be analysed and strategic decisions must be based on such analysis.

” Gender mainstreaming efforts, by focusing on the different needs of groups and individuals, have helped to shed light on intersecting forms of exclusion, discrimination and violence that certain groups of women and men face.

84. Many member States are actively promoting gender mainstreaming in their national policies and measures through action plans and institutional structures to co-ordinate gender mainstreaming efforts, gender budgeting policies and training of relevant actors. An evaluation of the implementation of gender mainstreaming activities should be carried out on a regular basis at national level, to assess the remaining challenges in this area. Where available, Council of Europe external offices can and should play an important role in providing gender analysis and in mainstreaming gender equality in the development of co-operation programmes, projects and activities.

85. The second strategy, for 2018-2023, reinforced co-operation and synergies to create an institutional culture that takes on board a gender equality perspective in standard setting and general policy making, monitoring work and development co-operation but also in communication. Over 50 gender equality rapporteurs (GERs) have been appointed in steering committees, monitoring mechanisms and other institutional bodies. They lead efforts to integrate a gender equality dimension into their work and activities. Specific and targeted training tools were produced to support Council of Europe staff and experts in their gender mainstreaming efforts.



86. Council of Europe bodies are required to integrate a number of mainstreamed perspectives, namely gender equality, the rights of persons with disabilities, youth, the rights of the child and Roma and Traveller issues. Various bodies and services are specialised in promoting the rights of specific population groups: youth, children, Roma and Travellers, national minorities, LGBTI persons or people combating discrimination, racism and intolerance.

87. Specific Council of Europe recommendations address the particular challenges that some groups of women are confronted with, including migrant women, women with disabilities and Roma and Traveller women. Some standards also insist more especially on the need to address the intersection between gender, sex and other factors, one notable example being Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism.

88. This strategic objective is divided into three main operational objectives:

- ▶ member States and the Council of Europe as a whole strive to achieve gender mainstreaming in all policy areas through the policy, programming and budgetary processes and through the functioning of the various bodies and institutions, including gender budgeting. Effective gender mainstreaming requires the mobilisation of, and input from, the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the European Court of Human Rights,

the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Conference of International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs), as well as steering committees and other intergovernmental bodies, monitoring mechanisms and partial agreements.

- ▶ the Council of Europe will strive to achieve gender mainstreaming through the development, implementation and evaluation of co-operation activities, based on country-specific and thematic action plans and other co-operation documents.
- ▶ member States, and the Council of Europe as a whole, integrate a gender equality and intersectional approach in all their activities and policy areas by supporting policy analysis and implementing policies grounded on the particular situation of different groups of women and men, girls and boys, and their specific needs.

89. With a view to achieving such operational objectives, Council of Europe action in this area will seek to:

- ▶ provide targeted training on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, including an intersectional perspective, to Council of Europe staff and experts;
- ▶ produce materials and tools on how to mainstream gender equality issues in various intergovernmental, monitoring and co-operation sectors;
- ▶ encourage the various Council of Europe sectors to address the need for sex-disaggregated data in standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation activities;
- ▶ establish regular interaction between the steering committees and other intergovernmental bodies of the Council of Europe that combat all forms of discrimination with a view to better integrating gender mainstreaming and the intersectional approach;
- ▶ monitor progress on the implementation of a gender mainstreaming approach within the Organisation, identifying, supporting and replicating promising initiatives;
- ▶ facilitate networking and the exchange of information within the Organisation, with member States, relevant national partners and other regional or international organisations, on gender mainstreaming, including gender budgeting, taking a transformative, intersectional and human rights-based approach to address the root causes of gender inequalities;
- ▶ continue to mainstream gender equality in Council of Europe staff and other internal policies, including budgets, tools and indicators to measure and assess progress;

- ▶ produce guidance and policy support or implement specific activities to address the particular challenges faced by some groups of women and men, girls and boys in all their diversity, confronted with multiple and intersecting forms of prejudice and discrimination in targeted areas, where relevant;
- ▶ continue to actively promote strong and efficient institutional mechanisms for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in member States through the promotion of existing standards, and by gathering information and disseminating promising practices from member States;
- ▶ take due care to involve all relevant actors, including gender equality experts and civil society, in the promotion and implementation of a gender mainstreaming and intersectional approach, where appropriate;
- ▶ collect, analyse and publish detailed data on gender representation in various Council of Europe bodies and within the Secretariat.

Institutional setting, resources and working methods

90. The transversal nature of the gender equality programme presupposes that all Council of Europe institutions (the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the European Court of Human Rights and the Commissioner for Human Rights), decision-making, advisory and monitoring bodies, as well as human resources policies, should support and actively contribute to the achievement of the goal and strategic objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029. They are invited to take initiatives within the scope of their respective mandates and resources. To stimulate and facilitate this process, the following elements complete the Council of Europe institutional setting for gender equality.

91. The Gender Equality Commission (GEC) is a Council of Europe steering committee made up of representatives of the 46 member States. The mission of the GEC is to steer the Transversal Programme on Gender Equality, advise and involve its various components, as well as liaise with relevant intergovernmental bodies, providing expertise and a forum for exchange on good practices and issues of concern.

92. The Gender Equality Rapporteurs appointed within intergovernmental bodies and other Council of Europe structures (see above) work to identify ways to integrate a gender equality perspective in the functioning, policies, programmes and activities of their respective bodies and structures. In cooperation with the GEC, they identify opportunities to develop new measures and activities to promote gender equality.

93. The Gender Mainstreaming Team is a group of Council of Europe staff members serving in the various sectors and bodies of the Organisation. Its task is to share information and expertise, provide visibility of results, identify opportunities for joint action and make proposals to facilitate the implementation of the Transversal Programme on Gender Equality, including the new strategy. The Gender Equality Division convenes and chairs the meetings of this team.

94. In order to assess progress in the implementation of the strategy, the GEC regularly takes stock of results achieved and prepares biennial reports on its implementation, which are submitted to the Committee of Ministers. A final review of the implementation of the strategy will be undertaken to assess its impact.

95. Resources for the implementation of the strategy should be sufficient for it to deliver its ambitious objectives and achieve real progress in relation to gender equality and women's rights.

Partnerships

96. The Council of Europe attaches great importance to maintaining strategic partnerships with other regional and international organisations and civil society working for the promotion of gender equality and women's rights. All the main international partners of the Council of Europe, the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organisation of American States (OAS) have adopted gender equality strategies or action plans. The European Institute on Gender Equality⁴⁴ is also a key partner in the implementation of this strategy. This provides a sound basis for partnerships and institutionalised co-operation, making it possible to identify opportunities for joint action, complementarity and synergy.

97. The Council of Europe has a number of institutional agreements with other international organisations, including the European Union,⁴⁵ the OSCE,⁴⁶ UN Women,⁴⁷ the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),⁴⁸ the OAS⁴⁹ and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).⁵⁰ In addition, the EDVAW Platform, which brings together seven UN and regional independent expert mechanisms on discrimination and violence against women, provides an important forum for partnership among independent mechanisms, including GREVIO. All these partners are invited to contribute to the implementation of this new strategy, as appropriate, in

44. <https://eige.europa.eu/>.

45. Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union (May 2007).

46. Declaration on Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (May 2005).

47. Exchange of letters between the Council of Europe and UN Women on the promotion of implementation of international standards on gender equality and violence against women (February 2012).

48. Joint Declaration on the Reinforcement of Co-operation between the Council of Europe Secretariat and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (September 2013).

49. Memorandum of Understanding between the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe and the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (September 2011).

50. Arrangement between the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, concluded by exchange of letters (September 1961 and January 1962).

particular by holding regular consultations with the Council of Europe, participating in meetings and events and co-operating in joint initiatives. The Council of Europe will seek to reinforce its co-operation with UN Women and other UN agencies and bodies (in particular the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), UN Global Compact, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) and other international organisations (such as the World Bank and the International Organisation of La Francophonie). The aim of this co-operation will be to support member States and the international community at large in their efforts to implement both the Beijing Platform for Action and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

98. The Transversal Programme on Gender Equality also seeks to involve, engage and use the experience and expertise of civil society organisations, in particular women human rights defenders, women's and feminist organisations and other civil society organisations specialising in women's rights and gender equality issues, in the development, implementation and assessment of policies, programmes and activities.

99. Other natural partners in the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029 include:

- ▶ parliaments;
- ▶ national governments;
- ▶ local and regional authorities and their associations;
- ▶ gender equality bodies;
- ▶ national human rights institutions, ombudsperson institutions and equality bodies;
- ▶ professional networks and relevant specialist organisations, in particular in the fields of justice, journalism, education, health and social services;
- ▶ social partners;
- ▶ youth-led organisations and youth workers;
- ▶ academic, educational and research institutions;
- ▶ the media;
- ▶ the private sector.

Non-member States that so wish may share good practices in line with the objectives of the strategy.

Communication

100. Work in this area will continue to:

- ▶ increase the visibility of Council of Europe standards, studies, guidelines, projects, events and their results in the area of gender equality;
- ▶ raise awareness on gender equality issues and contribute to changing attitudes, mentalities and behaviours;
- ▶ facilitate the exchange of information between the various components of the programme and with partners;
- ▶ increase the research and data available in the field of gender equality and women's rights;
- ▶ give visibility to good practices and data collected at national, regional and local levels;
- ▶ harmonise the terminology related to gender within the Council of Europe and its member States.

Appendix – List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
CDADI	Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion
CDBIO	Steering Committee for Human Rights in the fields of Biomedicine and Health
CEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEPEJ	European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice
(the) Convention	European Convention on Human Rights
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
EDVAW	Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on the Elimination of Discrimination and Violence against Women
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
GEC	Gender Equality Commission
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
HELP	Human Rights Education Programme for Legal Professionals
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
Istanbul Convention	Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Convention Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

Lanzarote Convention	Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse
LBTI	Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
LGBTI	Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender and Intersex
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OAS	Organization of American States
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Gender equality entails equal rights for women and men, girls and boys, as well as the same visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation, in all spheres of public and private life.

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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