REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)

2016 Conference

Are we there yet? Assessing progress, inspiring action – The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017

Organised by the Council of Europe in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs of Estonia

30 June – 1 July 2016

Radisson Blu Hotel Olümpia
Tallinn, Estonia

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Background and proposed focus for the 2016 Conference:

Achieving gender equality is central to the protection of human rights, the functioning of democracy, and respect for the rule of law, economic growth and sustainability. The Council of Europe Transversal Programme on Gender Equality, through the Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017, aims to increase the impact and visibility of gender equality standards, supporting their implementation in member states through a variety of measures, including gender mainstreaming and action in a number of priority areas. The overall goal of the Strategy is to achieve the advancement and empowering of women and the effective realisation of gender equality in the Council of Europe member states through activities around five strategic objectives:

1. *Combating Gender Stereotypes and Sexism;*
2. *Preventing and combating Violence against Women;*
3. *Guaranteeing Equal Access of Women to Justice;*
4. *Achieving Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision-Making;*
5. *Achieving Gender Mainstreaming in all policies and measures.*

The Gender Equality Commission follows the implementation of the Strategy, including through the preparation of annual reports that are submitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The 2016 conference will look into the progress of the Strategy and will launch discussions on the priority themes for the next Gender Equality Strategy of the Council of Europe. In addition, more specific attention will be paid to two topics: 1) gender mainstreaming, one of the five strategic priorities of the Strategy, and 2) the impact of new media on gender equality, a topic which relates to at least three of the strategic objectives: combating gender stereotypes and sexism, preventing and combating violence against women and achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.

Gender mainstreaming has been gaining attention in the work of Council of Europe intergovernmental committees and through the role played by Gender Equality Rapporteurs in the different committees. At the same time, some progress has been made also at the national level. As the work of international organisations on gender mainstreaming supports similar efforts at the national level, the conference will aim to bring together international organisations relevant in Europe to exchange information about their work on gender mainstreaming and to discuss good practices to enhance efforts at all levels of policy-making.

New media can have both a positive and a negative impact on gender equality. On the one hand, The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has recognised the importance of the Internet as "one of the principal means by which individuals exercise their right to freedom of expression and information". New media can be used to facilitate attendance in public discussion and decision-making, in campaigning for political leadership, for support network, etc.

On the other hand, new media can also be used to facilitate a prevalence of gender stereotypes, online sexism, sexist hate speech, and other types of violence against women. The UN Human Rights Council has referred to the Internet as having become "a site of diverse forms of violence against women, in the form of pornography, sexist games and breaches of privacy." The increasing availability and use of Internet and social platforms have made sexist hate speech expand rapidly. The feeling of impunity derived from the possibility of publishing anonymously and from considering that the virtual environment is free from consequences, has contributed to an increased level of both hate speech in general and specifically also sexist hate speech. Women receive threats and insults of a sexual character on a daily basis via emails, websites or social media; including threats of publishing personal photos and information. Such phenomenon can also easily have a negative impact on women`s will to participate in public discussions, in political and public decision-making.

2. Format of the conference:

Plenary sessions will be held in a Panel format to present and discuss progress, good practices and remaining challenges of the overall Gender Equality Strategy, as well as on the topics selected as the focus of the Conference. The second day of the conference will be dedicated to exploring themes and priorities that could be included in the future gender equality strategy of the Council of Europe.

The panel discussions will be introduced by a speaker presenting an overview of the issues to be addressed by the panellists and/or providing insight into problems and challenges to which the panellist will offer solutions. Panellists will have a short amount of time for their interventions (without Powerpoint presentations), followed by a moderated discussion. There will be an opportunity for the audience to raise questions and make comments following each panel discussion. All panels will be moderated by members of the Gender Equality Commission.

3. Aims of the conference:

The conference will seek to:

- Take stock of the progress in the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 and analyse its impact;
- Bring forward recent developments in member states concerning tools for enhancing gender mainstreaming, from political will to e-solutions;
- Provide an impetus for a closer future co-operation among international organisations in implementing gender mainstreaming and thus supporting also its wider and more effective implementation at the national level;
- Address both the positive and the negative impact of new media in promoting [2] gender equality, including dissemination of information about the needs and practices to either support or overcome these impacts and to facilitate the creation of relevant co-operation networks;
- Start discussions to form a basis for the future strategy to promote gender equality in the Council of Europe.

4. Targeted participants:

- High-level decision-makers from the Council of Europe member states, including future holders of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers (e.g. Cyprus: November 2016 - May 2017, Czech Republic: May - November 2017, Denmark: November 2017 - May 2018);

- Members of the Gender Equality Commission (GEC);

- Gender Equality Rapporteurs;

- Representatives of relevant CoE intergovernmental committees;

- High-level decision-makers and policy-makers/officials from international organisations: including the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and United Nations (UN-Women);

- Other relevant stakeholders, including civil society.

5. Venue and dates of the conference

The Conference will take place in the Radisson Blu Hotel Olümpia, Tallinn (Estonia) on 30 June and 1 July 2016 (ending at lunchtime).