



World Forum for Democracy

“Gender Equality: Whose Battle?” Council of Europe, 19-21 November 2018

Conclusions

The seventh edition of the World Forum for Democracy, entitled “Gender equality – Whose battle?” gathered more than 2000 participants from over 80 countries, including about 400 graduates from the Council of Europe Schools of Political Studies.

This year’s Forum focused on two issues: why, despite a century of democratic progress, gender equality has not yet been achieved; and at what it takes to end prejudice, discrimination and violence against women in our societies. The Forum’s main finding was that while indeed democracy is still not inclusive, progress has been made. There is a phenomenon of growing awareness and involvement from men and women alike, together in the fight for equality: it is a common battle.

Who’s still afraid of gender equality?

“When a woman goes into politics her life changes, when many women go into politics life changes” (Vittorio Bachelet)

Gender equality is a human right and a longstanding area of policy-making that has recently been at the forefront of the political agenda. From the powerful #MeToo movement to the broad social backlash against male impunity for violence against women, the persistence of heavy stereotyping and discrimination in social life; stakeholders

from all walks of life have called for effective legal and other measures to address structural barriers to gender equality. The Forum focused on strategies to eradicate gender-based violence and discrimination against women. In doing so, it looked at the unequal power relations between women and men which lies at the heart of gender inequality. Gender inequality creates discrimination, entrenches gender stereotypes and prevents women and men, girls and boys from equally reaching their full potential in the workplace, at home and in society at large – with the brunt weighing more heavily on women and girls. But it is in the interests of everyone – women and men – that gender equality should be tackled in a systemic, effective and lasting way.

Obstacles to achieving gender equality are still significant. The nature and magnitude of these obstacles may vary from countries to localities, being very much influenced by cultural contexts, with gender inequalities present in all areas of society. In times of economic crises, their effect is often to entrench more traditional views of gender roles. In recent years, the action and influence of various conservative groups organised to dismantle decades of progress in women’s rights call for vigilance and commitment at by all.

Time to act

The time to act against the multiple disadvantages women continue to face is **now**. The necessary policies and legislation have been in place for decades, but there is still broad scope for action and change in many countries across the world to prevent further backlash and swifter progress. Progress is more effective when changes are introduced in the systems themselves, overcoming resistance and bringing about the necessary cultural shifts and the benefits to the whole of society – women and men – can be shown.

Quotas – gender mainstreaming: musts

The participants in the Forum recognised that effective gender quotas are necessary in both politics and business, but they need to be accompanied by the development of a culture of gender equality in political institutions and in an economy that is free of discrimination, sexism and harassment, thus enabling women to thrive, including in positions of responsibility. However, the progress needed goes beyond the number of women elected and the posts they hold: it must be integrated into policy-making. Gender must be mainstreamed in all policies, and at all levels, together with positive measures such as quotas.

Eradicating gender stereotypes – ending violence

Breaking down conscious and unconscious gender stereotypes must be the starting point for tackling gender inequalities. Gender stereotypes also affect the fight against gender-based violence, as they have an

impact on the capacity of victims to react which often means that the perpetrators are not being held accountable for their acts. All forms of violence against women need to be eliminated through prevention measures, as well as through ending impunity, by encouraging victims – with the appropriate support and protection measures – to report transgressions, and by prosecuting every instance of violence. Addressing violence against women and breaking down sex-based discrimination, sexism and gender stereotypes need to go hand in hand.

Language, education and media

Ensuring gender-sensitive education schemes, notably by educating young men and women on gender equality issues, human rights principles, mutual respect, dignity and anti-discrimination, is essential. Inclusive strategies should target men in particular, so as to involve them in promoting and “normalising” gender equality. Semantics hold true power in issues related to gender-equality: non-sexist and gender-sensitive language and portrayals need to be introduced in all sectors of society, especially the media. Gender bias also needs to be addressed in the field of digitalisation/Artificial Intelligence due to the high risk of big data reproducing stereotypes leading to potential discrimination/disadvantages for women. In order to unleash the great promise these technologies hold for all of humanity, algorithms and data should be free of bias and should not reinforce stereotypes and inequalities in our societies.

Recommendations

To governments

- Introduce targeted measures for gender-equal representation in all areas of public and political decision-making to ensure transparency when appointing members to high-ranking positions and statutory bodies;
- Encourage the adoption of quotas by political parties and introduce effective quota legislation accompanied by sanctions (for example by partially withholding public subsidies from political parties for election campaigns, where applicable);
- Promote mandatory gender quotas in the public and private sectors;
- Develop laws which proscribe acts, words, gestures and behaviours expressing sexism or contempt of a person based on gender
- Ratify and implement the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention and adopt legislation that protects women from discrimination and all forms of gender-based violence (including sexual abuse, rape, physical, psychological and economic violence, verbal abuse, mutilation, torture and trafficking);
- Take measures to prevent sexual abuse and violence, for example through training and awareness-raising campaigns and programmes targeting all members of society;
- Ensure that preventative measures toward creating safe spaces for women in politics and in the public space are not gender binary but also take into account other forms of discrimination;
- Reform parental leave and other care leave schemes (paid or unpaid) in such a way so as to achieve equality between women and men in sharing care work, for example through non-transferable entitlements for each parent;

- Ensure the implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy in all areas of policy-making;
- Introduce and apply measures such as gender-budgeting to make resource allocation more inclusive and gender-sensitive;
- Systematically support gender equality issues in foreign policy and diplomacy (“feminist diplomacy”);
- Ensure gender equality in all aspects of education systems and provide education and training opportunities for young women so as to strengthen their capacity to become economically active and independent.

To Parliaments

- Act assertively against sexist behaviour and violence against women;
- Establish independent and effective mechanisms to which women and men may turn to in the event of being subject to gender-based violence and ensure that parliamentary immunity is not a barrier to legal action against sexual harassment;
- Put in place measures ensuring that gender equality issues are taken into account in all areas.

To political parties

- Fully implement quota legislation as relevant and introduce voluntary quotas for elections and in relation to internal mechanisms and procedures, coupled with effective monitoring;
- Work with national women’s rights organisations as external partners in gender equality policy-making and monitoring processes;
- Provide active training and mentoring opportunities to women party members, thus fostering their capacity and ambition to fill high-level positions and train parties’ leaders on gender equality issues;

- Establish mandatory conflict resolution training and create bodies for reporting discrimination and abuse, as well as mechanisms to give an effective response to reports.

To media and audiovisual industry

- Assure visibility of data/reports on gender equality issues and political representatives' engagement relating to gender equality, thereby increasing transparency and accountability for the benefit of the public;
- Eliminate, expose and deconstruct sexist representations, discourse to denounce misogyny and stereotypes, and to educate and foster change;
- Use gender-sensitive language and portrayals as promoters of change;
- Employ more women in prominent positions (e.g. commentators, news anchors) and in media decision-making;
- Create/join transnational journalism partnerships to promote gender equality and to expose gender-related abuse;
- Move away from unconscious constructs of expected "quality" which tend to favour male creators, focusing instead on more objective criteria such as the relevance of the story for the audience, originality and filmmaking.

To the private sector

- Establish concrete measures to enable women to pursue a successful career, including equality and equal pay action plans and mentoring schemes, particularly in traditionally male-dominated areas (e.g. in the so-called STEM sectors);
- Act for the prevention of sexism, sexual abuse and violence in the workplace, for example through internal regulations, training and awareness-raising workshops;
- Create awareness of, and eliminate, gender markers in consumer goods, services and advertisements;
- Strive to include genuine gender equality as a value of corporate culture, including by tackling all forms of overt and hidden

gender bias in internal structures and processes, and exert peer pressure on competitors to do the same.

To Civil Society

- Ensure gender balance in decision-making and the integration of a gender equality perspective in programmes and activities;
- Consider ways to enhance collaboration between NGOs in order to avoid duplicating efforts and competing for funding for gender equality projects;
- Mix social media and new communication tools with field-centered campaigning to raise awareness so as to involve and reach the whole of society and its actors.

To International Organisations

- Contribute to the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence, based on the provisions of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention;
- Ensure the gathering, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data in all areas in order to support evidence-based policies on gender equality;
- Support the work of non-governmental organisations active in the area of gender equality and women's rights and collaborate with them to ensure change.

To the Council of Europe:

- Support the full implementation and monitoring of existing Council of Europe gender equality-related standards and ensure regular exchanges with other regional mechanisms and their follow-up;
- Encourage and support the appropriate resourcing of policies, programmes, institutional mechanisms and non-governmental organisations, including women's organisations in the area of women's rights and gender equality;
- Ensure the full implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy within all sectors and bodies of the Organisation.