



**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Conference**

**Warsaw, 24 September – 5 October 2012**

**Working session 9: Tolerance and non-discrimination**

**Contribution of the Council of Europe**

**Equality between women and men**

***Introduction***

Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. Gender equality is the opposite of gender inequality, not of gender difference.

It means accepting and valuing equally the differences of women and men and the diverse role they play in society.

The legal status of women has undoubtedly improved, but effective equality is still far from being a reality. Even if women have the same rights as men, they still do not have the same access to opportunities offered to men and the claims to their rights are often unsuccessful.

Women are still marginalised in political and public life, suffer discrimination in employment or difficulties in reconciling private, family and professional life, are paid less for work of equal value and find themselves victims of poverty and unemployment more often than men.

The worst expression of such inequalities and uneven balance of power between women and men is violence against women, a human rights violation and a major obstacle to gender equality. Equality thus must be promoted by supporting specific policies for women, who are more likely to be exposed to practices which qualify as torture or inhuman or degrading treatment (physical and psychological violence, rape, genital and sexual mutilation, stalking, trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation). These violations of women's human rights are still common in Council of Europe member states.

Gender equality can only be achieved by women and men working together. The involvement of men in promoting gender equality has progressively developed over the past years.

***Why the Council of Europe?***

The Council of Europe's pioneering work towards achieving gender equality has provided a solid legal background for the use of a holistic approach: standards that constitute the framework under which all actions to achieve gender equality must be pursued; standards for achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making; for the protection of women against violence; for the development of tools and strategies to achieve effective gender equality, such as gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting.

The Council of Europe is in permanent contact with governments, parliaments, local authorities, civil society and professional networks. This allows the Council of Europe to remain aware of

trends, opportunities and risks and to act as a forum for exchange of good practices, raise awareness and to influence policies and legal texts at international and national level.

Thanks to its rich experience and its network of experts, the Council of Europe can advice and support its partners in the implementation of standards in the field of gender equality in Europe and beyond.

### ***The Council of Europe and Gender Equality***

Two principles are underlying the Council of Europe action: gender equality is an integral part of human rights and a fundamental criterion of democracy. Under this framework the Council of Europe has a crucial role to play in combating inequalities between women and men and promoting gender equality.

The Council of Europe seeks to combat any interference with women's liberty and dignity, eliminate discrimination based on sex, promote a balanced participation of women and men in political and public life and encourage the integration of a gender perspective into all programmes and policies. From the 1980s onwards the Council of Europe had the stimulating task of putting forward European standards which resulted in a new approach to the issue of gender equality and has shaped its development in Europe over the past decades.

These sound foundations enable the Council of Europe to innovate by exploring other avenues, by deepening the reflection on the role of equality standards and mechanisms, and exploring the possibilities for more effective use of such strategies.

This will be done in co-operation with players at the different levels of governance in order to bring equality out of its isolation and make it central to the preparation of the different policy decisions and their implementation processes. All Council of Europe programmes and policies will be gender mainstreamed and the integration of a gender perspective into all programmes and policies of its member states will be encouraged. With the launching in 2012 of a new Gender Equality programme, the Council of Europe aims at increasing the impact and visibility of its standards. To ensure the mainstreaming of gender equality into all Council of Europe policies and to support the implementation of the relevant standards, the Programme counts on:

- A Gender Equality Commission, composed of 16 members appointed by member states;
- A network of national focal points in each member state;
- Gender equality rapporteurs appointed within the membership of the steering committees and other intergovernmental structures of the Council of Europe;
- The Committee of Ministers Thematic Co-ordinator on Equality and Trafficking;
- An Inter Secretariat gender equality mainstreaming team/network.

Steps have been taken to progressively put in place these various elements. The process is still on-going. Three main priority areas of work have been defined:

- The protection of women against violence;
- Combating gender stereotypes in media;
- Access of women to justice.

In this framework, the Council of Europe should further develop its co-operation with partner Organisations, in particular the EU, UN-Women and OSCE.

### **Some gender equality standards and mechanisms developed by the Council of Europe**

European Convention on Human Rights – Article 14 – Prohibition of discrimination

Protocol No. 7, Article 5 – Equality between spouses

Protocol No 12, Article 1 - General Prohibition of discrimination

The European Social Charter (Revised) of 1996

Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197)

*Committee of Ministers Recommendations:*

Recommendation No. R(98)14 on gender mainstreaming

Recommendation No. R(2000)11 on action against trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation

Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence.

Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making

Recommendation Rec(2007)13 on gender mainstreaming in education

Recommendation Rec(2007)17 on gender equality standards and mechanisms

Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)1 on the inclusion of gender differences in health policy

Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)10 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building

**For further information, you can consult our website: <http://www.coe.int/equality> or send an e-mail to the electronic address of the Secretariat of the Gender Equality and Violence against Women Division, Gender Equality and Human Dignity Department, DGI: [dghl.equality@coe.int](mailto:dghl.equality@coe.int)**