

Departamento de Europa

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Declaration: Making gender equality a reality

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

Recalling that the core objective of the Council of Europe is preserving and promoting human rights and their full enjoyment, democracy and the rule of law and that all its activities must contribute to this fundamental objective;

Recalling that gender equality is an integral part of human rights and a fundamental criterion of democracy;

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

Recalling that policies should be gender sensitive and that they should take into account the social reality to which they apply, mainly that society is composed of women and men who may have differing needs;

Recognising that the legal status of women has improved over time, but that 20 years after its Declaration on equality of women and men, bridging the gap between gender equality in fact and in law is still a challenge for its member states;

Recognising that the past decades were often marked by neglect of a gender perspective in legislation and policy with gender equality being a partially or totally isolated issue, with few links with other policies and fields although it is both a goal in itself and a cross-cutting issue which should be at the core of practical decision-making;

Recognising the importance of including men in achieving gender equality;

Regretting the under-representation of women in political and public life and the continued gender based discrimination against women in all sectors of society and at all stages of their lives;

Condemning the persistent gender pay gap, obstacles met by women to entry and advancement in the labour market, degrading labour conditions and exploitation, overburdening with unpaid work in the private and social spheres, further exacerbated by economic deprivation and violence, and the more frequent and deeper effects of poverty on women;

Condemning the fact that many women are exposed to violations of their human rights, are victims of physical, psychological, sexual violence, stalking and trafficking for various purposes, including sexual exploitation, and of practices which qualify as torture or inhuman or degrading treatment (inter alia violence, rape, traditional practices harmful to women, genital and sexual mutilation);

Emphasising that a genuine democracy must fully use the competences, the skills and the creativity of both women and men to build a society with a better quality of life for all and respectful of the values on which the Council of Europe is founded;

Urge member states to commit themselves fully to bridging the gap between equality in fact and in law and to act to:

I. Eliminate the structural causes of power imbalances between women and men, including in political, public and economic decision-making process at all levels;

II. Ensure economic independence and empowerment of women by guaranteeing that equality is respected in the labour market and economic life. This will be possible by eliminating discrimination generally, and in particular that emanating from gender stereotypes, and by guaranteeing an equal pay for equal work or work of equal value;

III. Address the need to eliminate established stereotypes by investing further in gender mainstreaming in education and research including gender focused research to ensure that both women and men achieve their full economic and social potential;

IV. Eradicate violations of the dignity and human rights of women through increased and effective action to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women, provide the necessary assistance and support for all victims and prosecute the perpetrators;

V. Integrate a gender equality perspective in governance by ensuring openness, transparency, participation of all relevant stakeholders as well as real accountability in the process of achieving full gender equality;

And to this end:

1. Take the following steps which are of major importance for abolishing obstacles to the achievement of gender equality in fact:

- identify the structural causes of inequalities which affect women, including women affected by multiple forms of discrimination and take the necessary social and economic measures for their eradication;

- eliminate gender stereotypes, responsible for the under utilisation of human resources and which are an obstacle to self-realisation of women and men; take any special measures to address and overcome stereotypes in education and encourage the professionals and actors in the media and communication sector to convey a non stereotyped image of women and men respectful of human rights, including gender equality;
 - create the conditions for a secure life in the private and public spheres by preventing and combating all forms of violence against women;
 - raise awareness among women and men of the need to eradicate violence which is a threat to peace, security, human rights and democracy in line with the provisions of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008);
 - take the necessary measures to guarantee an equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men and create conditions favourable to the reconciliation of private and family life with professional life through a fair and balanced distribution of resources taking into account the different situations in women's and men's lives;
 - encourage men to participate actively in the discussions and activities aimed at achieving gender equality in all spheres of life;
2. To accelerate the achievement of these aims, guarantee a visible political commitment by setting up the necessary legislative and policy framework and implement parallel strategies and innovative and effective tools so that gender equality is recognised as a challenge by the whole of society in all its sectors and place it at the heart of the different decision-making and policy-setting processes:
- Adhere to international standards by ratifying all the relevant international legal instruments and by implementing and monitoring them fully at national level, in particular those contained in the relevant conventions of the Council of Europe, as well as in its recommendations;

- Adopt, implement and evaluate gender equality policies by:
 - adopting strategies, plans and programmes at different levels in all policy areas;
 - acknowledging and addressing the obstacles that persist to the achievement of gender equality;
 - establishing target groups, time frames and benchmarks for its effective implementation and using clear indicators to evaluate results and progress achieved;
 - creating or reinforcing monitoring mechanisms;
 - regularly reporting to parliament on progress and results accomplished;

- Adopt and implement specific policies and action plans at different levels and ensure their adequate financing; enable positive action or special measures to be adopted in order to achieve balanced participation, including representation, of women and men in decision-making in all sectors of society, in particular in the labour market and in economic life as well as in political and public decision-making;

- Adopt and implement effectively specific policies and plans of action to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators;

- Ensure visible political commitment to the strategy of gender mainstreaming, including where necessary by adopting legislation or other instruments to this effect and appropriate structures to co-ordinate it;

- Use gender mainstreaming effectively:
 - by adopting and using tools such as gender analysis, sex disaggregated data, gender impact assessment;
 - by developing skills of all relevant actors to put gender mainstreaming into practice and
 - by creating indicators aimed at evaluating its impact on the promotion of gender equality;

- Explore the use of gender mainstreaming through gender budgeting to guarantee a fair distribution of resources between women and men;
 - Reinforce national mechanisms for gender equality at the highest political level, guarantee their effective functioning by giving them clear mandates, well defined functions and responsibilities and by providing them the necessary human and financial resources to enable them to fully implement their mandates;
 - Support all actions which denounce discrimination against women and combat inequalities between women and men, including by ensuring the existence of specialised institutional mechanisms entrusted with the task of addressing complaints from individuals and groups on alleged violations of gender equality provisions;
 - Develop and support research on gender issues, including policy-related analytical studies on women's and men's situations and on their participation at all levels and spheres; provide evidence-based analysis to governments and other political decision-makers to assess the situation of women and men, to monitor and evaluate progress and to continue to integrate a gender perspective in all policies;
3. Renew their commitment to achieve equality in fact and in law between women and men as an integral part of human rights and a fundamental criterion of democracy in conformity with the values defended by the Council of Europe and to provide the Council of Europe the necessary human and financial resources;
4. Invite the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to monitor and evaluate progress every three years in the implementation of gender equality policy in the Council of Europe member states.

1 This document has been classified restricted until examination by the Committee of Ministers.