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Conseil de l'Europe
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION (GEC)

Gender equality: paving the way

Conference to launch the Council of Europe
Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023
(Copenhagen, 3-4 May 2018)

Concept Paper

Achieving gender equality is important to the fulfilment of the Council of Europe's mission: safeguarding human rights, upholding democracy and preserving the rule of law.

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. It also implies equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men. Even if progress is visible and the legal status of women in Europe has undoubtedly improved during recent decades, effective equality between women and men is far from being a reality. Gender gaps and structural barriers persist in many areas, constraining women's opportunities to benefit from their fundamental rights. Progress is very slow as regards women's political participation, access to justice and the elimination of harmful gender stereotypes and sexism. Violence against women is both a violation of the human rights of women and a major obstacle to gender equality. Gender equality is also not a given for men in certain spheres of life such as health, parenthood, caregiving or education.

Growing inequalities, economic difficulties and subsequent austerity policies, political uncertainties, rising nationalism, anti-gender equality agendas and religious fundamentalism and their attacks on women's rights, challenges that come with the inflow of migrants and refugees, the decrease in resources for gender equality mechanisms and policies, failure to implement agreed standards, have all created new challenges and exacerbated some of the problems that persist in society's roadmap towards full respect for women's rights, men's roles and gender equality.

The adoption of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 shows political commitment to address current and emerging challenges and to remove barriers to achieve substantive and full gender equality.

The strategy is grounded on the belief that a strong commitment to *de facto* equality between women and men at all levels and in all areas, alongside women's empowerment, a change in both women's and men's roles, including equal sharing of household and care responsibilities, ending violence against women and domestic violence and the elimination of sexism and gender stereotypes will benefit future generations and society as a whole.