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Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality

Report[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
Rapporteur: Ms Elvira KOVÁCS, Serbia, Group of the European People's Party

Summary

The Council of Europe has been instrumental in promoting equality and countering discrimination, including on grounds of sex, for seven decades now. Particularly in the last 30 years, the Organisation has stepped up efforts to promote gender equality, with considerable success.

The Council of Europe's *acquis* in this area includes innovating conventions such as the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as a large number of non-binding texts of the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. The case law of the European Court of human rights also confirms that gender equality is one of the major principles of the Council of Europe. In addition, the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 sets out the priorities through six strategic objectives and states that the overall goal of the Organisation in this area is to achieve the effective realisation of gender equality.

However, a backlash against women's rights has emerged in Europe in recent years, in addition to persisting discrimination.

Public authorities in Council of Europe member States should therefore step up efforts to defend women's rights and promote gender equality. Gender mainstreaming, in addition to sectoral policies, is an effective tool to this end. A wide range of policies recommended by the Council of Europe should be consistently implemented.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 14508, Reference 4381 of 27 April 2018.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. As long as women and men do not enjoy the same empowerment, participation, visibility and access to resources, we cannot consider human rights to be respected, or democracy and the rule of law to be achieved. Gender equality is therefore central to the mission of the Council of Europe. In turn, peace, human rights, democracy and the rule of law are key points without which it would be impossible to build the institutional infrastructure required to achieve gender equality.

2. The Council of Europe has promoted equality and tackled discrimination since its foundation seventy years ago. Since 1979, when the first relevant text of the Committee of Ministers was adopted, and particularly in the last three decades, the Organisation has stepped up efforts to promote gender equality and counter discrimination on grounds of sex. The Assembly notes with satisfaction that gender equality has been a priority for successive Presidencies of the Committee of Ministers, including the present French Presidency.

3. The European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and its additional protocols, the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35) and other binding texts, including the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention") and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) have built a solid human rights protection system enshrining the principle that women's rights are an integral part of human rights. These conventions have also established violence against women as a human rights violation and recognised that the realisation of *de jure* and *de facto* equality between women and men is a key element in the prevention of this scourge. They contain a compelling call for gender mainstreaming and gender equality, and provide unique and valuable guidance in this domain.

4. In addition, several non-binding texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe have contributed to promoting and guiding efforts towards greater gender equality in areas such as economic empowerment, participation in public life and political representation, women in media, the rights of migrant women, gender mainstreaming in sport and the rights of women with disabilities. Most recently, these texts have also contributed to preventing and combating sexism.

5. Equal participation is about more than numbers. Women's empowerment is crucial to achieving gender equality: it makes women aware of unequal power relations and equips them to overcome inequalities in all fields of life.

6. The Parliamentary Assembly, bringing together parliamentarians from all the member States of the Council of Europe, has played a leading role in the work of the Organisation in this area. It has triggered progress in combating all forms of discrimination against women and has recommended measures to tackle it, such as gender quotas in politics, policies to increase women's participation in the economy, and the balancing of professional and private life. The Assembly has adopted a firm political stance against all forms of violence against women through its resolutions and recommendations calling for legally binding standards on preventing, protecting against and prosecuting the most severe and widespread forms of gender-based violence, ultimately leading to the preparation of the ground-breaking Istanbul Convention. The Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence has supported the implementation of the Convention by raising the awareness of legislators, policy makers and the public of the scourge of gender-based violence and by providing practical solutions and guidance on how to address it.

7. Despite achievements, recent years have witnessed an increasing opposition to, and erosion of women's rights worldwide, including in several Council of Europe member States. Certain government forces and non-State actors are targeting long-acquired rights and previously agreed language is being questioned. This calls for heightened vigilance in defending the progress achieved in gender equality and strong political commitment and leadership to secure further advances.

8. The Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 sets out the priorities for joint action by all stakeholders. It states that the overall goal of the Organisation in this area is to achieve the effective realisation of gender equality and to empower women and men in Council of Europe member States. The six priority areas of the Strategy (preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism; preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; ensuring the equal access of women to justice; achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making; protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls; achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures) should be the guiding principles for the Council of Europe agenda for gender equality.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 5 June 2019.

9. The Assembly highlights that reaching the Strategy's Goals requires concerted efforts by all players within the Organisation and in member States, as well as external partners, including the private sector and media. It commits to continue providing consistent political support for their achievement.

10. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and the subsequent outcome documents adopted at the United Nations, as well as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (adopted in 2015), guide the action of the Council of Europe in this field. The Council of Europe's comprehensive and extensive legal framework represents a unique contribution to the process of supporting its member States in achieving these Goals, and notably Goal No. 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

11. Substantial progress towards such ambitious goals requires strong political will, adequate resources, institutional mechanisms and a change of mindset to challenge patriarchal attitudes, counter emerging narratives that distort reality and attack women's rights and to challenge behaviour that normalises and trivialises violence against women. Eradicating all forms of sexism and sexist stereotypes, including in language and communication, is an important part of this process. Role models, both women and men, can be greatly beneficial in capturing the attention of the public.

12. The Assembly is convinced that the efforts to reach gender equality must not been understood as a battle between women and men, but as a quest for justice, peace and progress. It is therefore critical to involve men and boys in the planning and implementation of strategies and measures to achieve gender equality, especially those that aim at changing mindsets and attitudes. Our institutions should embrace gender democracy: a system based on the equal distribution of power and influence between women and men.

13. The Assembly believes that a gender mainstreaming approach in all policies and measures, alongside specific policies for the advancement of women, is increasingly necessary to achieve gender equality and resolves to ensure that its own activities and policies are gender-sensitive.

14. The Assembly recalls its Resolution 2274 (2019) on promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment and commits to achieving a harassment-free Assembly by 2020.

15. The Assembly endeavours to ensure gender balance in expert panels and other bodies with two or more members.

16. In the light of the above considerations, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as those enjoying observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly, to:

16.1. as regards gender stereotypes and sexism:

16.1.1. take adequate measures to implement the Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism, with a focus on non-stereotypical representation of women and men and on countering online sexism, including sexist hate speech;

16.1.2. strengthen co-operation with journalists' associations, traditional and online media organisations and advertising federations with a view to promoting gender equality and preventing and countering the use of sexist language and communication, particularly through self-regulation, incentives and the targeted use of subsidies;

16.1.3. make use of role models, including men, in changing mindsets and attitudes;

16.1.4. adopt and enforce guidelines on non-sexist language and communication for institutional information and communication activities;

16.2. as regards violence against women and domestic violence:

16.2.1. sign, ratify, and efficiently implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence;

16.2.2. pay due attention to and implement recommendations put forward in evaluation reports concerning their countries and ensure the involvement of their parliaments in this process;

16.2.3. ensure the implementation of relevant texts adopted by the Assembly, including Resolution 2084 (2015) on promoting best practices in tackling violence against women, Resolution 2101 (2016) on systematic collection of data on violence against women and Resolution 2274 (2019) on promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment;

16.3. as regards women's political representation:

16.3.1. introduce legislation and policies to implement Assembly Resolution 2111 (2016) on assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation;

16.3.2. implement Committee of Ministers Recommendation R (2003) 3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making;

16.3.3. promote gender parity in decision-making bodies, including through positive measures to ensure that women and men are equally represented in both elected and non-elected bodies;

16.3.4. set a target of achieving equal gender representation in decision-making bodies by 2030;

16.4. as regards women's economic empowerment:

16.4.1. introduce legislation and policies to implement Assembly Resolution 2235 (2018) on empowering women in the economy, particularly as regards gender equality and equal opportunities in the workplace, women's access to funding for the creation of businesses, and promoting the study of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines and careers in these areas among women and girls;

16.4.2. implement anti-discrimination legislation on remuneration and effectively ban salary inequalities for work of equal value, with a view to eradicating the gender pay gap by 2030;

16.5. as regards access to justice:

16.5.1. ensure the implementation of Assembly Resolution 2054 (2015) on equality and non-discrimination in the access to justice, with a focus on women, notably victims of gender-based violence; migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women; ethnic minority women; Roma women; women with disabilities; elderly women and other women in a vulnerable situation;

16.5.2. make use of the efficient online tools provided by the Council of Europe Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals, in particular the online course on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence;

16.6. as regards sexual and reproductive health and rights:

16.6.1. mainstream mandatory, comprehensive and inclusive sexual and relationship education, conveying unbiased, age-appropriate information on sexuality, relationships and reproductive rights;

16.6.2. guarantee access to affordable and modern methods of contraception, with a level of reimbursement equal to other services provided by national health systems, and adequate, comprehensible information made available to the general public;

16.7. as regards the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls:

16.7.1. ensure the implementation of relevant texts adopted by the Assembly, including Resolution 2159 (2017) on protecting refugee women and girls from gender-based violence, Resolution 2167 (2017) on the employment rights of domestic workers, especially women, in Europe and Resolution 2244 (2018) "Migration from a gender perspective: empowering women as key actors for integration";

16.7.2. ensure that policies and measures with respect to migration, asylum and the integration of migrants fully integrate a gender-sensitive perspective;

16.8. make use of gender impact assessment tools and procedures on a regular basis when designing legislation, policies, programmes and projects;

16.9. implement a gender mainstreaming approach when designing implementing, monitoring and evaluating all policies and measures at all levels of administration, including gender-responsive budgeting;

16.10. ensure the full implementation of existing standards and the adequate resourcing of gender equality policies and mechanisms, as well as civil society organisations working on these topics.

B. Draft recommendation[3]

1. On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly welcomes the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 and draws the attention of the Committee of Ministers to its Resolution (2019) "Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality".

2. The Council of Europe, including its Parliamentary Assembly, has for decades been a driving force in countering discrimination against women and has promoted substantial progress in its member States. However, gender equality remains far from achieved in practice. In addition, a backlash against women's rights is jeopardising the progress made. This calls for renewed efforts by the Council of Europe, in which a change in mindsets and political will and commitment are preconditions for solid, long-lasting progress.

3. Therefore, in addition to ensuring efficient implementation of the measures already set out in the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, the Assembly invites the Committee of Ministers to:

3.1. renew its political commitment to gender equality and step up its action to achieve it, including by supporting gender mainstreaming in all Council of Europe policies and activities;

3.2. appoint a Gender Equality Rapporteur to ensure gender mainstreaming in its own work;

3.3. pay attention to gender equality when electing and appointing candidates for posts or roles where women or men are under-represented;

3.4. adopt Guidelines for the use of non-sexist language at the Council of Europe (superceding those contained in the appendix to Instruction No. 33 of 1 June 1994 of the Secretary General concerning the use of non-sexist language at the Council of Europe) and ensure the enforcement of these guidelines in all official documents and texts adopted by Council of Europe bodies;

3.5. promote the ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210);

3.6. ensure the full implementation of existing standards and adequate resourcing of gender equality policies and mechanisms, as well as civil society organisations working in this area:

3.7. widely disseminate Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism and take the necessary measures to ensure its provisions are implemented within the Council of Europe;

3.8. review recommendations to member States on gender mainstreaming, with a view to achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures, in line with the indications of the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 of the Council of Europe;

3.9. champion the gender equality agenda at the global level, promoting and supporting the Council of Europe contribution to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular towards achieving Goal No. 5.

3. Draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the committee on 5 June 2019.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Elivira Kovács, rapporteur

"Human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights, once and for all."
(Hillary Clinton, Beijing,1995)

1. Council of Europe's milestones in the area of gender equality

1. Without gender equality, democracy cannot be considered as achieved, nor human rights as safeguarded. I am convinced that the pursuit of democracy is incomplete unless policies, measures and practices are in place that seek to reduce inequalities between men and women in all fields of life and to connect democracy with gender. Policies and practices seeking to increase women's participation, representation and leadership in politics are also indispensable to this end. This is why gender equality is crucial to the mission of the Council of Europe and advancing women's rights is, and must remain, a priority in the action of this Organisation.

2. The European Social Charter (ETS No. 36) of 1961 guarantees the enjoyment of rights in the areas of housing, health, education, employment, legal and social protection, and movement of persons: it complements the fundamental rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, "the Convention") with social rights that must also be implemented without discrimination based on sex or any other ground. When the Charter was revised in 1996, the standards on gender equality were considerably strengthened, with provisions in the areas of education, work and family life, equal work opportunities and equal remuneration.

3. The Council of Europe has promoted greater equality between women and men since it was founded, seventy years ago. The European Convention on Human Rights lies at the heart of the Organisation's commitment to protect human rights in Europe. Its Article 14 stipulates that the rights and freedoms secured in the Convention must be respected without discrimination based on any ground, including sex.

4. The principle of non-discrimination enshrined in the Convention was reiterated and considerably widened in scope in 2000 by Additional Protocol No. 12 to the Convention (ETS No. 177), which applies to all the rights set forth by law, again mentioning sex among the grounds of prohibited discrimination.

5. The Council of Europe's *acquis* includes two ground-breaking conventions that are relevant to women's rights, namely the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention"). While the issues addressed by these conventions do not affect women exclusively, their gender aspect is certainly relevant (in the case of the Istanbul Convention it is central). These conventions are having a considerable impact in Council of Europe member States thanks to the harmonisation of relevant national legislation and the work of their monitoring bodies (respectively, the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)). Their outreach goes beyond Europe, both due to the possibility for any State to become Party to them (they are "open conventions") and the fact that their standards can inspire policy and legislation even in third countries.

6. The case law of the European Court of Human Rights has also contributed to shaping women's rights in member States. Relevant judgments concern in particular Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as regards discrimination on grounds of sex, but also other provisions including Article 8 (Right to respect for private and family life), Article 10 (Freedom of expression) and Article 6 (Right to a fair trial).

7. In line with the founding texts of the Council of Europe, its two statutory bodies (Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly) and all the other organs and departments of the Organisation have consistently invested their efforts in the area of gender equality within their respective mandates.

8. This commitment has become increasingly prominent in the action of the Council of Europe, and has been accompanied by an increasing awareness, among European societies and their leaders, of the need to integrate a gender dimension into the protection of fundamental rights. This approach now permeates the work of the Council of Europe across the three main pillars of its mission, namely promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. None of these goals can be considered as achieved as long as there are inequalities based on gender.

9. The instruments that have been used to achieve progress in this area range from information and awareness-raising campaigns to non-binding texts, including the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, and binding international instruments. Starting in the 1980s, these efforts have intensified remarkably in recent decades.

10. In 1985, Recommendation R (85) 2 of the Committee of Ministers on legal protection against sex discrimination first urged member States to take or reinforce measures for the promotion of gender equality, including through legislation in the field of employment, social security and pensions, taxation, civil law, the acquisition and loss of nationality and political rights. In addition, the Appendix to the Recommendation referred to the need to consider "special temporary measures designed to accelerate the realisation of de facto equality between men and women", thus paving the way for so-called "positive discrimination" measures in areas such as political representation. While it was not the first Committee of Ministers recommendation concerning women (Recommendation No. R (79) 10 concerning women migrants), the 1985 document was the first comprehensive text, encompassing a wide range of forms of gender-based discrimination in all Council of Europe member States.

11. Subsequently, Committee of Ministers recommendations have covered virtually all specific aspects of gender equality, from the elimination of sexism from language (Recommendation No. R (90) 4) to the reconciliation of work and family life (Recommendation No. R (96) 51), violence against women (Recommendation Rec(2002)5), balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making (Recommendation Rec(2003)3) and the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building (Recommendation Rec(2010)10).

12. In this non-exhaustive list, I would like to highlight particularly Recommendation No. R (98) 14 on gender mainstreaming, based on a report on gender mainstreaming prepared by the Steering Committee on Equality between Women and Men (CDEG)[4] that set out the conceptual framework for gender mainstreaming and a methodology for its implementation, accompanied by examples of good practices. Its standards, such as the minimum 40% representation of each sex in decision-making bodies, were then adopted in many countries and other international organisations. Gender mainstreaming, with a focus on education, was also the subject of Recommendation Rec(2007)13. Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers represent a set of standards and analysis which have contributed invaluably to promoting gender equality in Europe and beyond. Gender mainstreaming is crucial to promoting equality between women and men and needs to be strengthened even further. The 1998 recommendation of the Committee of Ministers laid the first stone of a continuous process that still requires our efforts and political support.

13. A parallel process of increasing awareness and commitment to promoting gender equality has taken place in the Parliamentary Assembly. The Assembly has worked on discrimination on grounds of sex in all its manifestations, proposing a variety of measures to tackle it, including positive action to achieve balanced political representation, measures to reconcile work and family life, and policies to increase women's participation in the economy, not to mention the initiative that led to the drafting of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention"). The Assembly has also integrated a gender dimension into its own rules on composition and functioning, with a view to improving gender balance. It has confirmed its commitment to promoting gender equality by establishing a Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (which in 2011 became the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, with expanded terms of reference), as well as *sui generis* structures such as the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence which is committed to raising awareness on the issue of gender-based violence. The Network was instrumental to the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention, as its members played a major role in promoting its ratification by their respective national parliaments.

14. In addition, since 2012, statistics on the gender breakdown of Assembly positions are prepared every year and included in the progress report on the activities of the Assembly's Bureau and Standing Committee presented during the January part-session. They provide an overview of the progress made in achieving gender equality in the functioning of the Assembly.

15. In 2017, the Chairperson of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Ms Elena Centemero (Italy, EPP/CD), jointly with the Secretary General of the Assembly, prepared a memorandum taking stock of the measures to improve gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the work of the Assembly.[5] This memorandum described the measures implemented by the Assembly in this area and assessed their impact.

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4. Report on Gender Mainstreaming, Steering Committee on Equality between Women and Men (CDEG), Council of Europe, 1998.
5. AS/Bur (2017) 23.

16. Subsequently, the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination approved the proposals contained in a memorandum that I prepared on how to further develop gender mainstreaming in the work of the Assembly, which do not require amendments to the Rules of Procedure and are relatively easy to implement and budget neutral. In addition, early in 2019, the Committee decided to re-establish its Sub-Committee on Gender Equality.

17. In 2014 the Council of Europe adopted its first Gender Equality Strategy, covering the period until 2017, with the aim of defending human dignity and fighting gender inequalities by promoting the full participation of women in society and access to fair justice systems for all.[6] In 2018, a second Gender Equality Strategy was adopted for the years 2018-2023. Its six ambitious strategic objectives encompass all the main areas of gender equality, namely preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism; preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; ensuring equal access of women to justice; achieving a balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making; protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls; and finally achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

18. Other Council of Europe activities related to gender equality have a specific focus or target group. For instance, the Gender Equality Guidelines adopted by the Youth Department apply to international youth activities specifically. The same department has carefully considered the gender aspect of online hate speech (addressed by the No Hate Speech Movement Campaign, a human rights campaign against hate speech and intolerance mainly aimed at young internet users), identifying sexism as one of the main motivations of cyberdiscrimination and online bullying.

2. Current backlash against women's rights: the need for new momentum

19. We are approaching the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Council of Europe and can rightly celebrate the contribution of this Organisation to the protection and promotion of human rights, including women's rights and non-discrimination on grounds of sex. However, achievements in this area are never acquired once for all. On the contrary, they are easily threatened by social and political developments. This is the case now, in Europe and beyond, where a worrying situation is emerging. The 2018 Report of the United Nations' Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice[7] refers to "deadlocks, retrogressions and backlashes", in addition to persisting discrimination, leading to the conclusion that "today, there is a need to protect the gains from the past and to urgently advance women's substantive equality."

20. Also in 2018, a report commissioned by the European Parliament's FEMM Committee was published bearing the telling title "Backlash in Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Rights".[8] The report is focused on six European Union member States (Austria, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Slovak Republic) and analyses relevant developments in the last few years, concluding that "the backlash has decreased the level of protection of women and girls and reduced access to their rights".

21. In the light of this backlash, the Parliamentary Assembly should develop a new momentum to promote gender equality, thus accomplishing one of its major tasks, which is to fix new and ambitious goals for the Organisation and its member States. It is necessary, even urgent, to step up efforts in this area: if women's rights are today under threat, as observed in a number of member States, a defensive attitude is not effective enough. In fact, it is necessary both to counteract the attacks on gender equality and to work for new progress.

22. Solidarity, which is often mentioned when discussing social inequalities, is in my opinion also relevant to gender inequality. I would like to emphasise here the link between the crisis of European democracy and a lack of solidarity. As one commentator has pointed out: "In these tumultuous times, solidarity and a new mode of co-operation is more needed than ever. The de-solidarisation of societies thus contributes to the de-solidarisation in democratic politics. Solidarity is not only a redistributive mechanism, it is also a social, cultural and political concept. It refers to social relations created among individuals and social groups by acting

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6. Decent life is preconditioned by pursuing an equal opportunities policy. Starting from the fact that "human dignity is inviolable" and that the right to decent life is a fundamental human right, all activities have taken as their axiom confirm the fact that gender, economic and social justice is not possible and there can be no just society if women are exposed to various forms of discrimination.
7. Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, A/HRC/38/46, United Nations, 14 May 2018.
8. Backlash in Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Rights, European Parliament, 15 June 2018.

together. It rests on cultural aspects, because it is a central norm and a guiding principle in contemporary societies. Solidarity is also a political term, because declaring solidarity means questioning power relations and asking how vulnerable groups and minorities can be supported (or protected against modes of domination)."[9] Men should have an active role as agents of change against gender inequality, and they are actually increasingly joining women as allies in this endeavour. This is also a form of solidarity.

23. My aim as rapporteur is to formulate and submit to the Assembly a range of recommendations that aim high and are concrete and measurable. This should make it easier to assess objectively the progress made, and to understand to what extent the expected result has been achieved.

24. Today, action in the area of gender equality should take into account as an important reference the Sustainable Development Goals, introduced by the United Nations in 2016 with a view to "transforming the world" in the following 15 years.[10] These 17 goals constitute the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, defined as "a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity" that "also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom". An extremely ambitious plan, which takes the situation of women adequately into account, is set out in Goal No. 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. The Agenda sets out nine targets in relation to Goal No. 5, which include ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls, everywhere; eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls; and eliminating harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. It also refers to ensuring women's effective participation at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.

25. The Agenda for Sustainable Development is global and the goals it includes apply differently to different geographic areas. Europe is among the most advanced regions in terms of gender equality, but there is considerable room for improvement. In addition, the European experience is not necessarily always the only reference. In some areas, such as women's political representation, high standards and interesting initiatives have been adopted in non-European contexts, which could be sources of inspiration. European leaders' and public opinion's increasing awareness and support make it possible to build on previous achievements.

26. The specific aspects of gender equality that the Assembly has addressed and in which it has added value include:

– women's political representation, with a focus on the actual impact of women on political decision-making;[11]
– economic empowerment and reconciliation between work and personal life;[12]
– countering gender stereotypes and sexism;[13]
– violence against women;[14]
– access to health care and sexual and reproductive rights;
– access to justice;[15]
– protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeker women;[16]
– gender mainstreaming.

27. Finland was the first European country to introduce general voting rights and to give all adult citizens the right to run for elections irrespective of wealth, status or race. On 15 March 1907, its national parliament was the first to include female members: out of 200 deputies, 19 were women.

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9. Stefan Wallaschek, Without solidarity, democracy is lost, Social Europe, 29 March 2019, www.socialeurope.eu/without-solidarity-democracy-lost.
10. Detailed information about the Sustainable development goals is available at www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/.
11. Resolution 2111 (2016) on assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation.
12. Resolution 1921 (2013) on gender equality, reconciliation of private work and private life and co responsibility; Resolution 1939 (2013) on parental leave as a way to foster gender equality; Resolution 2235 (2018) on empowering women in the economy.
13. Resolution 1751 (2010) and Recommendation 1931 (2010) on combating sexist stereotypes in the media;
14. A number of adopted texts, including Resolution 2084 (2015) on promoting best practices in tackling violence against women; Resolution 2135 (2016) on female genital mutilation in Europe; Resolution 2177 (2017) on putting an end to sexual violence and harassment of women in public space;
15. Resolution 2054 (2015) on equality and non-discrimination in the access to justice.
16. Resolution 2244 (2018) "Migration from a gender perspective: empowering women as key actors for integration".

28. The struggle for the participation of women in political life has never been easy or simple – it still is not, even today. Too much of a woman's thinking is "straw and makes her sick", wrote neurologist Paul Moebius in the treatise "On the physiological idiocy of women" – a bestseller in the years before the First World War.

29. This year we commemorate the 230th anniversary of the French Revolution, which brought about the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen but also made it possible to draw up a Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the female citizen.[17] Today, we are still trying to come up with concrete answers to a number of questions about the participation of women in political life, and particularly on how to ensure that women can enjoy political rights and take an active part in government matters on an equal footing with men. The ultimate question is whether it is possible to correct almost 6 000 years of injustice, and how.

30. The idea of dignity is crucial to our understanding of politics. Participation in the political process, having a voice, being listened to and exercising political influence are key ingredients of dignity. When people are left without voting rights, marginalised and reduced to invisibility, as women were for a long time, they are deprived of human dignity.

2.1. Positive measures and quotas

31. Political representation is one of the top priorities in the gender equality agenda for several reasons. Firstly, it enhances women's power and gives them the opportunity to take part in decision-making processes, including at legislative and executive level. Secondly, this may in turn (ideally, if not necessarily) lead to the adoption of legislation and policies promoting gender equality. Thirdly, political representation is a priority because inequalities in this area are particularly striking: in November 2018, according to figures published by UN Women, only 27.7% of parliamentarians in Europe were women, and only three Council of Europe member States, namely Iceland, Finland and Sweden, are in the list of countries with the highest proportion of female members of parliament.[18]

32. An additional argument is presented as a "business case for women in public life" in the report "Women, Government and Policy Making in OECD Countries", published in 2014. Experts from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) explain that gender balanced institutional representation is beneficial for the economy: "Gender diversity in public institutions – such as parliaments, executives and courts – is particularly crucial, given that these institutions make decisions and create rules that affect people's rights, behaviours and life choices; influence the distribution of goods and services in society; and determine access to public and private resources".

33. The measures adopted in Europe and beyond to increase women's political representation have often been quantitative and measurable. I am referring to positive measures, in particular gender quotas in electoral lists, that are expressed in the form of a share or percentage. The Assembly has dealt with this subject on several occasions, supporting the idea that positive action and, more specifically, gender quotas are useful and should be enforced, albeit temporarily, in order to achieve rapid progress in political representation. Resolution 1825 (2011) "More women in economic and social decision-making bodies" indicates that, "[i]n the Assembly's view, gender quotas are a transitional but necessary exception to allow positive discrimination with a view to bringing about a change in attitudes and achieving *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality".

34. The latest text adopted by the Assembly in this area is Resolution 2111 (2016) on assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation. In this text the Assembly recommends positive measures, in particular electoral quotas, and provides a number of indications on how they should be designed. Quotas should aim high: according to the rapporteur's analysis, quotas have proven effective only when requiring a substantial share of seats to be allocated to the under-represented sex. Sanctions for non-compliance should be introduced. Merely financial sanctions have often not had the expected impact. Effective sanctions include, in particular, the rejection of lists by electoral commissions, making it impossible for parties to take part in elections if their lists do not abide by the quotas.

35. The implementation of quotas should be supervised by independent bodies, such as electoral courts or commissions, which should also be in charge of applying sanctions. While positive measures aim at obtaining substantial results in a short time, accompanying measures should be introduced to ensure that the advances are not rapidly lost once the quotas or other positive measures come to an end. Accompanying measures

17. Olympe de Gouge, a French activist and author, wrote a Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen (Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne), in 1791.
18. Leadership and political participation, UN Women, 2018, www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures.

include: the reconciliation of political activity and private life; awareness raising and training for women politicians; and access to media. These measures aim to ensure that a better gender balance becomes a structural element of political representation, rather than merely a short-term effect of positive measures.

36. Positive measures have proven effective and are still worth recommending, particularly in contexts with particularly low female representation. If designed and implemented correctly, gender quotas (especially if they are of the obligatory, legislated type as opposed to those voluntarily introduced by political parties) allow for radical change to take place rapidly. In turn, this may trigger a virtuous circle of cultural change among voters, an increase in the number of experienced women politicians, and the adoption of new gender equality legislation. Some critics consider that positive measures are at odds with meritocracy. In fact, a positive effect of quotas on politicians' skills was observed, not only as regards women but also men. A study based on the Swedish experience, published in 2017, showed that quotas had a positive impact on the level of competence of candidates, since room for women in electoral lists was generally made by displacing "mediocre men".[19]

2.2. The ultimate target: gender parity in political representation

37. While correctly designed and enforced quotas may increase the level of women's political representation, and in some contexts even lead to substantial change, they can no longer be considered sufficient. The cultural and political landscapes have evolved, making it possible, and at the same time necessary, to switch to a more ambitious perspective in this area. On one hand, awareness of the need to improve gender equality has increased substantially. It has become the subject of numerous international conventions as well as national legislation and policies, and for some countries (such as Canada and Iceland, following the example of Sweden) it is also an important element of diplomatic relations and international co-operation. On the other hand, the backlash against women's rights that I previously mentioned demands that we step up efforts to promote gender equality and combat persisting forms of discrimination. The attacks on gender equality policies, while often well-orchestrated, will not prevail. The response, however, needs to be strong and co-ordinated.

38. I am convinced that we should switch from quotas reserved for the under-represented sex, and which aim to ensure that at least 30% or 40% of members of an elected body are female, to actual parity. The principle of parity is not new in itself: it has been on the table for some time. While often used interchangeably with "gender equality", the idea of parity has a more specific meaning when considering political representation. It means that elected bodies and other decision-making bodies, including, importantly, governments, are required to be composed, insofar as possible, by women and men in equal number.

39. Equal representation of women and men was enforced in a number of governments in Europe and beyond, including Spain's Zapatero government of 2004; the French cabinets under Presidents Hollande and Macron; Italy's Renzi administration in 2014; and, to mention only one example from beyond Europe, Trudeau's government in Canada. When asked why his cabinet was so diverse both in terms of gender and ethnicity, Trudeau replied: "Because it's 2015." If the parity principle were consistently applied, these examples would no longer be interesting exceptions, and would rather be the norm. Political representation involves women's equal rights to articulate their needs and interests, as well as their vision of society, and to shape the decisions that affect their lives, whatever cultural context they live in. I would like to highlight that partnership with women's organisations and other groups working for gender equality is necessary to assist the process of increasing and improving representation.

40. Spanish academic Alicia Miyares explains that feminism understands parity as a civil right, ensuring proportional representation of genders and women's right to be elected and to politically represent the community. Parity, she adds, is not a concession depending on the will of political parties, but rather a right that cannot be altered depending on political circumstances, just like the right to vote. Therefore, she concludes, it should be recognised as a constitutional right belonging to women. In the last few years, several countries of Latin America, including the Assembly's partner for democracy, Mexico, introduced in their Constitutions new provisions on gender parity, demanding that political parties apply this principle when selecting candidates for electoral lists.[20] Enshrining parity in Constitutions, not only as regards electoral regulations, would make it a high-ranking principle, in the light of which other provisions should be interpreted and enforced. This may make a considerable difference and I believe it is one of the avenues we should explore.

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19. Gender Quotas and the Crisis of the Mediocre Man: Theory and Evidence from Sweden, Timothy Besley, Olle Folke, Torsten Persson, Johanna Rickne, *American Economic Review*, Vol. 107, No. 8, August 2017.
20. Gender and constitutionalism in Mexico: from quotas to parity?, José Miguel Cabrales Lucio, Constitutionnet, 2014.

41. Electoral gender quotas are not at odds with parity. In fact, they are one of the means available to achieve it, as Brazilian expert Ana Alice Alcântara Costa observes in her text "Quotas as a Path to Parity: Challenges to Women's Participation in Politics".

42. Is parity a realistic goal? Caroline Turner, an American gender expert, writes: "Leadership gurus tell us that the goals that inspire people the most are measurable, time-bound and attainable. They must be currently out of reach – but realistic over the long term." While the conclusion of this expert's reasoning, based on the high level of discrimination that women currently face, is that gender parity is not a realistic goal in the foreseeable future, I consider that this should be our target. One of the main preconditions for substantial progress to be achieved in a reasonable time is political will. Therefore, I consider it my duty to push this issue forward at a political level, particularly among legislators.

43. A word of warning is probably necessary: while quotas may be indicated numerically as they are generally intended as a minimum threshold, the half-and half meaning of "parity" should not be interpreted as a strictly arithmetic requirement. The ultimate goal is not to divide by two the number of seats in a given decision-making body and allocate exactly the same number of them to male and female members, but rather to have a balanced and proportionate representation of voters. In addition, a sharp division between male and female would be detrimental for people with non-binary identities. Parity should not be conceived in a way that may exclude these citizens.

3. Gender mainstreaming

44. Gender mainstreaming is an important tool for the promotion of gender equality at all levels.[21] As mentioned when referring to the Council of Europe's *acquis*, the Organisation endorsed this kind of strategy from an early stage and even contributed to shaping the concept, creating a definition that is now widely accepted: "Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by the actors involved in policy-making."[22] Today, the Council of Europe implements a gender mainstreaming strategy in its standard-setting, monitoring work and co-operation activities.

45. In other words, gender mainstreaming means integrating a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programmes and projects. In addition, it means taking into account the different situation and needs of women and men and their unequal access to resources and rights (including access to justice).

46. Gender mainstreaming integrates sectoral gender equality policies but does not replace them. Both approaches are necessary and contribute to the ultimate goal of achieving equality. Gender mainstreaming is a long-term strategy that gradually transforms society. Specific policies have a direct impact on the sectors they target and may achieve results faster. However, to ensure that gender equality and non-discrimination in general continue to progress, it is necessary to integrate a gender perspective into all policies, as these inevitably have an impact on women's and men's lives and their different situations, living conditions and needs.

47. A wide range of examples from Council of Europe member States may help to develop an understanding of the scope and the importance of gender budgeting. In Austria, the gender dimension was integrated in development aid programmes in the form of gender-sensitive budgeting as far back as 2009. In Finland, under the Equality Act and the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality, all ministries are required to set up equality working groups to plan and carry out mainstreaming, and the guidelines for drafting legislation stipulate that the gender impact of draft legislation is systematically assessed. In France, all ministries adopt a road map of the activities to be carried out within their respective terms of reference to achieve real gender equality. In Sweden, gender mainstreaming informs the activity of local, regional and national authorities alike, and the best practices are collected and disseminated via a dedicated webpage.[23]

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21. As expressed by participants in the e-discussion on "Parliamentary oversight on gender equality" organised by the think tank Iknow Politics: "As a cross cutting dimension of democracy, gender is addressed through two complementary and critical approaches: gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment–in electoral processes, campaigning for promoting mechanisms/strategies aimed at accelerating equal entry in and retention of gender parity in political leadership and decision making at all levels; leveraging partnership networks with the aim to impose gender as a crosscutting topic in public policies, in order to increase effectiveness in incorporating women as subjects of development."

22. Gender mainstreaming – Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices; Final Report of Activities of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming, Council of Europe, 1998.

23. www.includegender.org/.

48. As regards national parliaments specifically, the report "Gender-Sensitive Parliaments, A global review of good practice", published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2011, is an important source of information.[24] The report aims to lead parliaments to respond to the needs and interests of both men and women in their structures, operations, methods and work, and it covers a variety of issues as, by definition, gender mainstreaming concerns them all transversally. Increasing the proportion of women in key parliamentary positions is an important step. However, this does not automatically lead to producing gender-sensitive legislation. The role of men and that of political parties are other specific aspects, as are policies and procedures, parliamentary infrastructure and parliamentary departments. This report is a mine of valuable information regarding good practices and also shows, at a more general level, the high degree of effort required to enshrine a gender dimension in all aspects of parliamentary activity. Moreover, it shows that this effort is necessary, and that it bears fruit.

49. Critics of gender mainstreaming claim that the transformative effect of this strategy has not met expectations, and, in some cases, the mainstreaming approach has diluted the impact of specific gender equality policies. In fact, the challenge may in some contexts be related to implementation. While it is easy to adopt the gender mainstreaming vocabulary and introduce it in policy documents, it proves more difficult to follow up and to enforce this approach consistently. Long-entrenched habits tend to interfere, widening the rift between theory and actual practice. Stronger political will should therefore support gender mainstreaming at all levels of administration. It will be the Parliamentary Assembly's task to contribute to providing such necessary support.

4. Countering gender stereotypes and sexism

50. Women are often represented in the media only in the traditional roles assigned by society. This has a negative impact on gender equality, as it strengthens the barriers to women's access to certain occupations and careers and particularly to decision-making bodies.

51. I would like to share the experience of the training sessions on women's rights that my colleagues in the Serbian National Assembly and I organised for representatives of women's branches of various parties from our political group. We collected several national daily newspapers and asked participants to pretend they lived on a different planet and that the only information they could receive about the citizens of Earth were those printed in the newspapers. We asked them to count how many men and women were in the pictures, what they looked liked and what they were doing. The results were discouraging. Only 15% to 20% of the characters were female. Men were represented as managers, politicians, successful sportsmen and people in other very important positions. On the other hand, women were mostly shown as mothers or as beautiful girls in the advertisements for underwear, perfumes and other items. They were hardly ever depicted as politicians or businesswomen. We concluded that women were still clearly the victims of sexist stereotypes. They are under-represented, if not invisible, in the media and advertising.

52. It is important to include in gender equality legislation provisions aimed at combating sexist stereotypes and to promote the balanced presence of women and men in the media.

53. Almost thirty years ago, the Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation on the elimination of sexism from language (Recommendation No. R (90) 4). This text recommended that member States take measures to encourage the use of non-sexist language, bring the terminology used in legal drafting, public administration and education into line with the principle of gender equality, and finally encourage the use of non-sexist language in the media.

54. While the main aspects of the issue were correctly identified in the 1990 text, they have not been successfully addressed since then. Earlier this year, a new Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism was adopted. Its Appendix provides for the first time a definition of sexism, described as "[a]ny act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline …".

55. Among the numerous measures indicated in this recommendation, I would like to highlight:

– tailored education and training for educators in all spheres and at all levels of education;

24. The report is available online in Arabic, English, French and Spanish at www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2016-07/gender-sensitive-parliaments.

– assessment of textbooks, training materials and teaching methods used by and for pupils of all age groups and in all forms of education and training for sexist language, illustrations and gender stereotypes, and revision thereof so that they actively promote gender equality;

– legislation that condemns sexism and that defines and criminalises sexist hate speech;

– encouraging relevant public bodies and services, such as ombudspersons, equality commissions, legislative assemblies and national human rights institutions, to draw up and implement codes of conduct or guidelines on sexism;

– effective communication and awareness-raising campaigns on the links between sexism and violence against women and girls.

56. To sum up the meaning of these recommended measures: it is essential to promote training and education at all levels and to carry out awareness-raising actions for everyone to learn how to identify, recognise and overcome gender stereotypes. Women's visibility in the media should be strengthened. A more balanced and non-stereotyped representation of women and men in the media is needed in order to overcome obstacles to gender equality.

57. The Assembly contributes significantly to raising awareness on sexism, particularly in the world of politics. In 2018, in co-operation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, it carried out a study that shed light on widespread sexism, sexual harassment and gender-based violence affecting women in parliaments.[25] At the initiative of the two Presidents, the study was shared with all national parliaments of Council of Europe member States.

58. Based on the findings of this study, and at the initiative of President Liliane Maury Pasquier, the Assembly launched a hashtag campaign called #Not In My Parliament, aiming to raise awareness among both parliamentarians and the general public of the need to counter sexism and harassment, including in politics.

59. In April 2019, a resolution was adopted on “Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment”,[26] calling for measures aimed at stopping sexism and sexual harassment in politics. Among other things, the text recommends introducing effective complaint procedures and mechanisms, with effective sanctions. The text also calls for the Assembly to amend its own Code of Conduct to introduce an explicit ban on sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence, and a reference to the protection of dignity.

5. Gender-based violence

60. Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 highlights that there is close correlation between gender stereotyping and sexism and refers to “a continuum between gender stereotypes, gender inequality, sexism and violence against women and girls”.

61. Violence is at the very core of the patriarchal system, and the key to eradicating violence lies in changing the paradigm and deconstructing the patriarchal system. Empowerment is also about this: women (and also men) gaining control over their lives, setting their own agendas and acquiring new skills.

62. Unfortunately, women still experience physical, sexual and psychological violence. Gender-based and domestic violence are widespread and their effects are long-lasting and difficult to overcome. It is a human rights violation and it constitutes a barrier to the enjoyment of other rights, thus leading to other violations of women’s basic rights and therefore making equal opportunities for women and men impossible to achieve.[27]

63. Domestic and gender-based violence are therefore inextricably entwined with discrimination and denial of equal opportunities. Its victims might not have the chance to rebuild their lives, find a job, another partner, another home. Some of them may not even have a chance to survive.

64. Combating violence against women means fighting for these women’s right to have a second chance. I believe that it is crucial that the Parliamentary Assembly remains committed to this fight.[28]

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25. Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe, Inter Parliamentary Union and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2018, www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe.

26. Resolution 2274 (2019); see also Doc. 14843.

27. The concept of human security that living free of violence is a fundamental, inalienable, inviolable and universal human right, means that violence is marked – ranging from physical to symbolic – as one of the causes of inequality of men and women.

65. The Istanbul Convention has marked a milestone in the fight against gender-based violence. It provides a comprehensive framework for preventing violence against women, protecting the victims and prosecuting the perpetrators. States Parties have a responsibility to prevent, stop and sanction violence against women and they are required to adopt and enforce stringent legislation (for example criminalising specific forms of violence) and effective policies. The high standards enshrined in this Convention bind the Parties and are a reference for measures adopted by other countries as well.

66. As a report on "The Istanbul Convention on violence against women: achievements and challenges" has been prepared at the same time as this one,[29] I will not go further into details here about the Convention, the ratification processes and its enforcement. What I would like to underline is that gender-based violence is strictly intertwined with all other aspects of discrimination against women. The sexism and sexual harassment that are endemic in politics, for instance, are among the reasons behind the low participation of women in political life. I would conclude once again that eradicating violence against women should always go hand in hand with promoting gender equality in all areas. The Council of Europe is best placed to carry out such a many-sided mission, and must do so with determination, demanding increased support from member States.

6. Promoting inclusive language

67. Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism also provides indications on language and communication, which are defined (paragraph II.A of the Appendix) as "essential components of gender equality" that "must not consecrate the hegemony of the masculine model". It adds that non-stereotypical communication is a good way to educate, raise awareness and prevent sexist behaviour, and explains that it "encompasses eliminating sexist expressions, using the feminine and masculine or gender-neutral forms of titles, using the feminine and masculine or gender-neutral forms when addressing a group, diversifying the representation of women and men, and ensuring equality of both in visual and other representations.".

68. Such "language reform" implies a large amount of work and requires the co-operation of experts, media and communications actors, and a good deal of political will, but is bound to have a positive impact on mindsets and should not be neglected. The way these reforms should be devised would vary considerably across member States, as national languages differ. In some cases, adopting gender-sensitive language would mainly be a matter of vocabulary. More often, some grammar and spelling rules would also need to be adapted.

69. The choice of the Finnish Government to adopt the expression "Presidency" of the Committee of Ministers, rather than "Chairmanship" as formerly used, is a good example that should be followed by others. It shows that institutional language can change and gender-neutral terms can be privileged while keeping communication simple. Finland's successor in leading the Council of Europe, the French Government, chose non-sexist language as one of the tools of its feminist foreign policy and is now using among other things the expression "droits humains" (human rights) instead of the traditional "droits de l'Homme" (literally "rights of Man", although the capitalisation makes it synonym with "mankind"). The Académie française, the guardian of the French language, recently decided to encourage the feminisation of profession names. In French-speaking Québec, support for non-sexist language seems to come from civil society and the public at large.[30]

70. The Council of Europe should be consistent with its recommendations and pay special attention to the language used in internal documents and adopted texts. On the basis of the Guidelines on non-sexist language adopted in 1994[31] (which it would be useful to review and amend if necessary) and the Gender equality glossary published by the Gender Equality Commission in 2016, the use of inclusive language should be ensured throughout the Organisation.

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28. Only active disapproving and active engagement for the benefit of the women exposed to violence can stop the "vicious circle of violence". We should always bear in mind the fact that respecting their rights to decent life and work represents a necessary condition for their self-actualisation in the processes of institutional, political and economic consolidation.
29. Doc. 14908 (rapporteur: Ms Zita Gurmai, Hungary, SOC).
30. Canadiens and Canadiennes in uproar as student paper takes stand on gender, *The Guardian*, 8 May 2019.
31. Guidelines for the use of non-sexist language at the Council of Europe, appendix to Instruction No. 33 of 1 June 1994 concerning the use of non-sexist language at the Council of Europe.

7. Economic empowerment and reconciliation between work and private life

71. Women's economic empowerment is a complex, multi-faceted matter and the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination has worked on all aspects of it: women's access to the labour market and their situation in the staff and management of companies, female entrepreneurship and unequal access to funding, the gender segregation across industries and occupations.[32]

72. As regards companies, the "business case" for gender diversity is strong. A 2016 working paper of the Peterson Institute for International Economics presents the findings of a study carried out in 91 countries.[33] While showing that women's participation overall is still low, "the results suggest that the presence of women in corporate leadership positions may improve firm performance. This correlation could reflect either the payoff to non-discrimination or the fact that women increase a firm's skill diversity". The study finds that a company with 30% female leadership could see an increase of 15% in profitability compared to a similar company with no female leadership. This is often explained as a consequence of the positive impact of gender diversity on the quality of management boards. Such diversity brings younger and more skilled staff, triggers positive competition and produces healthier approaches to problem-solving.

73. Similar considerations on the positive impact of diversity apply to the economy at large. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) concluded in 2014 that "by 2050, improving gender equality would lead to an increase in EU (GDP) per capita by 6.1 to 9.6%, which amounts to €1.95 to €3.15 trillion"[34].

74. Women still face obstacles at several levels, preventing them from contributing to the labour market and the overall wealth of European countries as they could: prevailing cultural attitudes, in particular, lead to an unbalanced burden of domestic responsibilities and family obligations. Progressive measures should be introduced in this respect, enabling women to reconcile family and professional responsibilities without having to choose between them.

75. All proposed policies, including and particularly in the area of the economy, should be subject to a gender impact assessment, as a matter of good policy making. More generally, Council of Europe member States should make use of gender-budgeting mechanisms. A gender perspective should be an essential part of budgeting (lower thresholds, such as merely bureaucratic "gender" labels on State budgets, are not acceptable) and be paired with a gender audit aiming to assess *a posteriori* the impact of policies on gender equality.

76. Adult education also plays a key role in policies aiming to promote a general improvement of professional skills. Support from the media and information campaigns would contribute to increasing the use of adult education programmes. As highlighted in an Assembly report on "Empowering women in the economy",[35] which led to the adoption of Resolution 2235 (2018), promoting STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education and careers for women and girls is particularly needed. Appropriate measures should be taken to tackle low employment rates of female and older workers, in particular those who have had atypical career paths or lack information and communication technology (ICT) skills. It is therefore essential to put in place the necessary conditions to provide lifelong learning services at every level to facilitate progress in employment.

8. Sexual and reproductive health and rights

77. A report on access to contraception in Europe is currently under preparation in the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination by rapporteur Ms Petra Bayr. As a consequence, I will not present a detailed analysis of the current situation in this report. However, it is worth noting that inequalities are found across Council of Europe member States in this area, and even within them, due to regional differences in decentralised systems. The gap between the best performing countries and those lagging behind is wide and continues to widen. Some member States are further restricting, or attempting to restrict, the access to contraception and more generally sexual and reproductive health.

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32. The reality of the labour market today sees increasing competition, social segregation and precarious work arrangements, with losses affecting women more than men. This situation runs counter to economic and social justice, in addition to gender equality.

33. Marcus Noland, Tyler Moran, and Barbara Kotschwar, Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey, Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2016.

34. EIGE, Economic benefits of gender equality, https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/economic-and-financial-affairs/economic-benefits-gender-equality.

35. Doc. 14573 (rapporteur: Ms Elena Centemero, EPP/CD, Italy).

78. Abortion, in particular, is put at risk by draft legislation aiming to ban it (Poland) and by practical or administrative barriers, as well as excessively wide rules on conscientious objection (decisions of the European Committee on Social Rights highlighted such difficulties, for instance in Italy). On the other hand, Ireland's Health Act 2018 legalised abortion, which is now permitted during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy, and even later in cases of risks for the pregnant woman's life or health, as well as in the case of fatal foetal abnormalities.

79. The position of the Assembly is expressed by Resolution 1607 (2008) on access to safe and legal abortion in Europe, which states among other things that abortion "should not be banned within reasonable gestational limits".

80. Over ten years later, the principles enshrined in this text are still valid, but the obstacles to their enforcement have become stronger. This is part of the general backlash against women's rights that I previously mentioned, and requires that the Assembly and all those who are committed to human rights be vigilant and step up efforts to defend the *acquis*. The health and life of thousands of women are put at stake by attempts to restrict sexual and reproductive health and rights.

9. Conclusions

81. The Council of Europe has been instrumental in promoting equality and countering discrimination, including on grounds of sex, for seven decades now. Particularly in the last thirty years, the Organisation has stepped up efforts to promote gender equality, with considerable achievements in areas including the labour market, political representation and combating violence against women.

82. Nevertheless, also in the light of the information and data presented in this report, there is certainly room for improvement. In addition, a backlash against women's rights seems to be taking place in various Council of Europe member States, making it necessary not only to act to achieve progress but also to defend the *acquis*.

83. Gender inequality manifests itself in a variety of forms in different environments, both in private and public life. I would like to reiterate that all manifestations of inequality are interconnected and should be tackled simultaneously. Gender equality policies are met with resistance by various forces, particularly by those who see them as a threat to their traditional privilege.

84. For this and other reasons, including the inevitable loss of momentum that all efforts for positive change face, we need to aim high. A very ambitious agenda is the least that States should aim for. Subsequently, in order to reach the ambitious targets set, strong political will be required. The Parliamentary Assembly and the Council of Europe as a whole have a duty to uphold this ambitious agenda and secure the necessary political support by member States.