



**Directorate of Human Dignity and Equality
Equality Division**

Contribution by the Council of Europe Equality Division to the General Discussion on Girls/Women's Right to Education on the occasion of the 58th Session of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Introduction

The Council of Europe welcomes this important initiative and would like to thank the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for the opportunity to provide inputs in advance of the half day general discussion on girls' women's right to education.

The Council of Europe is actively working in the areas of combating gender stereotyping and gender mainstreaming in education¹. Furthermore, “combating gender stereotypes in a through education” is a key part of the first objective of its Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017², namely “Combating gender stereotypes and sexism”. More specifically Council of Europe action in the framework of this objective focuses, *inter alia*, on “*promoting and disseminating education syllabuses and teaching practices which are free from explicit and implicit gender stereotypes as well as the implementation of the other measures proposed in the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in education.*”³

Context: Education and Gender Stereotyping

As an Organisation set up to protect and promote democracy and human rights, the Council of Europe promotes gender equality education and non-stereotyped education at all levels of the education system, including through the adoption by the Committee of Ministers⁴ in 2007 of the [Recommendation](#) on gender mainstreaming in education. The result of the first [monitoring](#) round evaluating the implementation of the Recommendation indicates that despite the inclusion of the principle of equality between women and men in the national laws on education by the vast majority of Council of Europe member states, the strategy of gender mainstreaming throughout their education systems has not been fully implemented in the best part of the member states. The analysis of European education systems carried out in this context indicates that member states have not matched the pace of the recent societal transformation, notably with regard to gender roles and gender stereotypes.

Mainstreaming of gender in the education system is multi-fold. The school system needs to develop a critical spirit in children vis-à-vis the image of women and men in order to deconstruct

¹ See: Council of Europe Gender Equality and Human Dignity department, Steering Committee for Equality between women and men, *Study on “Combating Gender stereotypes in Education”* (2 December 2011) prepared by Maureen Bohan.

² The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy can be found at the following link:
http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/equality/02_GenderEqualityProgramme/Council%20of%20Europe%20Gender%20Equality%20Strategy%202014-2017.pdf

³ *CM Rec(2007)13*

⁴ See the outcomes of the 4th Council of Europe Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men (Istanbul, 1997) and the 7th Ministerial Conference (Baku, 2010). The [Resolution](#) and [Action Plan](#) adopted in 2010 called upon relevant stakeholders to take the necessary measures to enhance the role of education in combating gender stereotypes and in promoting *de facto* gender equality and implementing the measures of Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)13 on gender mainstreaming in education.

gender stereotypes, build up new identities and achieve *de facto* equality between women and men.

The education system should implement the strategy of gender mainstreaming including through the introduction of gender sensitive teaching methods and learning content, the revision of curricula and of teaching material, ensure the use of non-sexist and inclusive language, promote and ensure equal educational and training opportunities and full and equal participation of women and men in the different structures of the system: administration, policy making and decision taking. To that end, awareness-raising campaigns and training initiatives targeting relevant stakeholders in the school system are needed in order to reverse the trend and move towards *de facto* gender equality.

Although the education system should adequately prepare all girls and boys to participate fully in society, the persistence of stereotypes and prejudices in their respective roles results in the under-utilisation of competences of women and men by society. Indeed, in the majority of member states, the excellent school results of girls and high university qualifications of young women are not visible in the labour market.

Comments to the draft text of the General Recommendation on girls/women's right to education

The Council of Europe welcomes the decision to issue a General Recommendation on girls/women's right to education.

With respect to section 3, paragraph 3.2, we advise to include a reference to the European Social Charter, among the regional legal instruments that acknowledge the right to education (Articles 9, 10, 15, 15§1, 17§1.).

The human rights approach introduced in section 5 of the draft text and the broader notion of the concept of the rights to education that also include the rights within education and the rights through education, as well as paragraphs of section 5 on "Eliminating Gender Bias in School Curricula and Teaching materials" (5.4.3) and "Develop Curricula that Reduce Stereotypes that foster VAW" (5.4.4) are considered very positively

In paragraph 5.4.4 we advise that reference is made to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and in particular Articles 12 (on the obligation for Parties to promote changes with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men) and 14 (on education).

With reference to the issue of combating gender stereotypes, the Council of Europe would like to bring to the attention of CEDAW the importance of taking the following issues into consideration for inclusion into the recommendation:

- I. Gender stereotypes have harmful consequences for the personal and professional development of girls and boys, in particular for those pertaining to disadvantaged groups;
- II. Raise awareness among government officials and school professionals on persisting inequalities in education and how it affects girls and boys and their future;
- III. Ensure continuity in the combat of gender stereotypes throughout the education system;
- IV. Combat stereotypes at pre-school level;
- V. Cooperation between families and education system in combating gender stereotypes;
- VI. Combat bullying within schools;
- VII. Stress the importance of exchanging good practices and facilitating partnerships and networks among stakeholders including government officials, school management professionals, teachers, trainers and training institutions, parents, and civil society.

Conclusion

1. We hope that you will find the above comments and suggestions useful and we remain at the disposal of the CEDAW Committee for any further clarification, information or exchange of views.
2. We would be grateful to be kept informed of the next stages in the preparation of the General Recommendation, and would like to invite a representative of the CEDAW Committee to present the General Recommendation, once it is adopted, to a forthcoming meeting of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission.