

SEXISM: SEE IT, NAME IT, STOP IT!



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

All requests concerning the reproduction or translation of all or part of this document should be addressed to the Directorate of Communication (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int). All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the Directorate General of Democracy

Cover and layout: Documents and Publications Production Department (SPDP), Council of Europe

Illustration:
© Council of Europe

This publication has not been copy-edited by the SPDP Editorial Unit to correct typographical and grammatical errors

© Council of Europe, September 2020
Printed at the Council of Europe

The Council of Europe's activities in the field of gender equality

Gender equality is an important policy goal of the Council of Europe. Priority areas of action are defined by the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, and working methods include intergovernmental work within the Gender Equality Commission with representatives from the 47 member states, co-operation projects at country level and gender mainstreaming in all areas of work of the Council of Europe. Combating gender stereotypes and sexism has been a priority of the Council of Europe since 2013 and various activities have been carried out in this field, particularly in the media and education sectors.



The 2019 Council of Europe Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism

■ In March 2019, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism.

■ The recommendation contains the first ever internationally agreed definition of sexism, covering any 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. It points out that sexist behaviour affects women and girls disproportionately, leading to discrimination and preventing their full advancement in society.



■ The recommendation also highlights the link between sexism and violence against women, since acts of “everyday” sexism are part of a continuum of violence creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion and insecurity which limits opportunities and freedom, affecting women first and foremost.

■ The recommendation places an emphasis on what constitutes sexist behaviour and puts forward practical ways for different stakeholders to identify and deal with it. It comprises a comprehensive catalogue of measures to both prevent and combat sexism, and it calls for specific action in such areas as: language and communication; media, internet and social media; advertising and other means of communication; the workplace; the public sector; the justice sector; education institutions; culture and sport; and lastly the private sphere.

■ This innovative text, adopted in response to society’s growing expectations in this area, calls on the Organisation’s 47 member states to step up their fight against sexism in all walks of life, since it is widespread and prevalent in all sectors and all societies, and to pass legislation condemning sexism and making sexist hate speech a criminal offence. The recommendation also calls on countries to monitor the implementation of policies



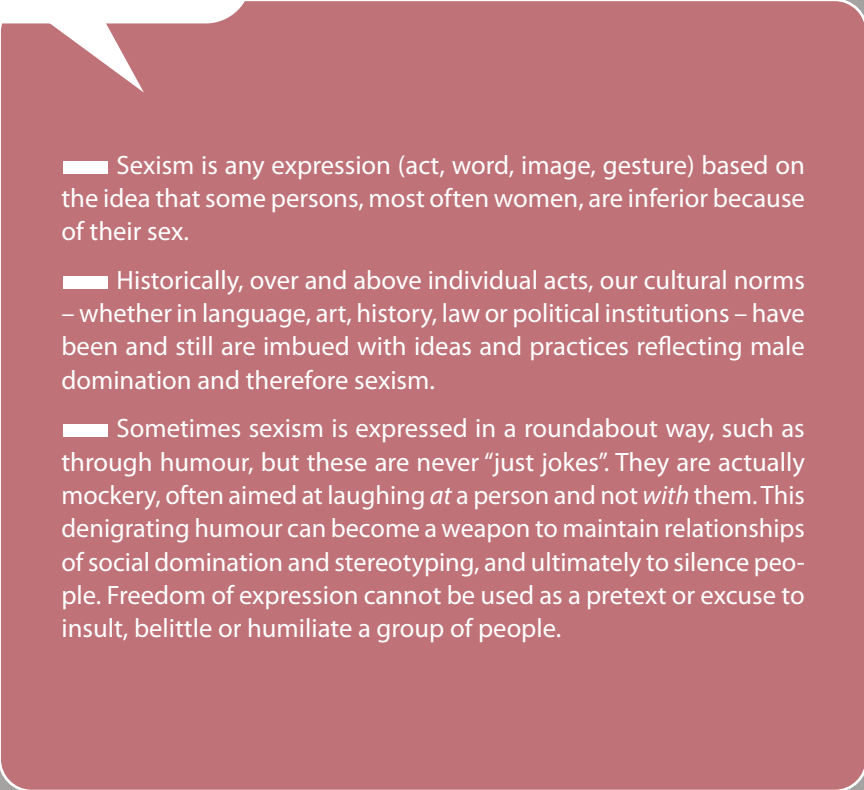
to combat sexism at national level and to submit periodic reports to the Council of Europe.

■ The aim of the Council of Europe's online Campaign "*Sexism: See it. Name it. Stop it.*" with resources available in a range of languages, is to raise awareness of this problem and to eliminate it. This brochure is designed to explain what sexism is and to provide ideas on how to promote the change of mindset that is needed in order to "create a Europe free from sexism and its manifestations" (Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism).






Sexism - what is it?




Sexism is any expression (act, word, image, gesture) based on the idea that some persons, most often women, are inferior because of their sex.



Historically, over and above individual acts, our cultural norms – whether in language, art, history, law or political institutions – have been and still are imbued with ideas and practices reflecting male domination and therefore sexism.

Sometimes sexism is expressed in a roundabout way, such as through humour, but these are never “just jokes”. They are actually mockery, often aimed at laughing *at* a person and not *with* them. This denigrating humour can become a weapon to maintain relationships of social domination and stereotyping, and ultimately to silence people. Freedom of expression cannot be used as a pretext or excuse to insult, belittle or humiliate a group of people.



Sexism -
what are its
effects?

■ Sexism is harmful. It forms the basis of inequalities between women and men and can lead to discrimination. Most women have at some point experienced a sexist act. Inappropriate remarks on public transport in the morning, not being asked to attend an important meeting at work, unequal sharing of household and parenting tasks, and then, later in the evening, sexist remarks on a TV talk show: sexism is something that many women experience throughout the day. This ever-present attitude is a constant and life-long burden.

■ Sexism produces feelings of worthlessness, avoidance strategies and self-censorship, changes in behaviour, and a deterioration in health. Individual acts of sexism create a climate of intimidation and insecurity, which can lead to tolerance of violence, especially against women and girls.

Sexism - who does it affect?

Sexism affects everyone but women and girls suffer disproportionately. Women who are public figures (politicians, journalists, celebrities), those who work in a male-dominated environment, as well as young women, are especially targeted by sexism. They are often taken to task when they act in ways not in line with the traditional role expected of them.

The negative impact of sexism may be more serious for some persons for example because of their ethnicity, age, disability, social origin, religion, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, migration status or other factors.

Sexism also affects men and boys, especially when they do not conform to traditional male stereotypes. This may be the case when men are invested in the lives of their children, when they work in jobs that are predominantly or traditionally done by women (midwives, nurses) or when they are not interested in subjects or activities that they are supposed to enjoy "as men" (certain sports, do-it-yourself (DIY), sexual conquests, etc.).





Who is
sexist?

— In France, in 2018, 87% of victims of sexist acts were women and 91% of those accused were men. However, not all men are sexist, and they have an enormous responsibility in the fight against sexism! Similarly, some women also convey and perpetuate sexist stereotypes or practices. Very often, condemning sexism can mean exposing oneself to mockery or – worse – aggression, so we should not be quick to criticise those who are afraid to stand up to it.

— There is nothing natural about sexism, and therefore no one, neither women nor men, is by nature sexist. On the other hand, we all need to revisit our own perceptions.



Sexism in language and communications

Examples:

■ Using an image of a scantily dressed woman to advertise a car; using language which fails to include women when speaking to a mixed group of people; depicting only men in the visual communication of your company.

Why should it be addressed?

■ Sexist language and images reinforce sexist attitudes and behaviour. By giving or not visibility to certain people or roles, language or images often make women and the contribution they make to society invisible. The use of stereotypes traps women and men in certain character traits.

How to prevent it?

■ Use inclusive language when addressing a mixed audience. Eliminate sexist expressions. Ensure that communication tools offer balanced and diverse images of women and men and/or challenge stereotypes. Produce handbooks on gender-sensitive communication. Promote training and research in this field.



Sexism in the media, internet and social media

Examples:

Articles focusing on the appearance of politicians who are women rather than on their ideas; a television programme presenting women only as witnesses or in stereotyped or sexualised roles and rarely as experts; internet apps that send certain job offers only to men because the algorithms are constructed in a biased way.

Why should it be addressed?

Sexist messages in the media reinforce stereotypes, lock women and men into limited roles and cause real harm. They can lead some people, for example young women, women journalists or activists, to withdraw from social media in order to escape ridicule and insults.

Fact: Overall, almost 2 out of 3 female journalists interviewed said they had been threatened or bullied online at least once. Of these, about 40% said they avoided reporting on certain topics because of online harassment.

How to prevent it?

Legally define sexist hate speech (especially online) and make it a criminal offence. Provide training in digital skills, including for young people and children. Set up specialised services providing advice on how to deal with online sexism. Train media and communication professionals. Refer sexist content to the media regulatory authorities.



Sexism in the workplace

Examples:

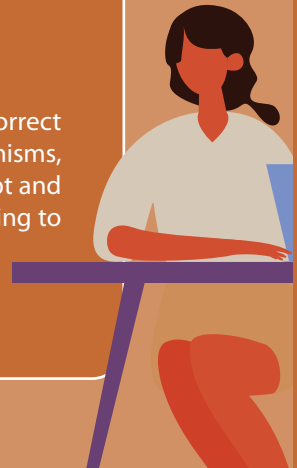
■ Promoting a man rather than a woman on the assumption that she lacks authority or may not always be available when required; lecturing women at a meeting on a subject they are familiar with; calling a colleague childish or overly familiar names; making pejorative comments about men who make career choices enabling them to become more involved in the life of their family.

Why should it be addressed?

■ Sexism at work creates an intimidating and oppressive atmosphere and is damaging to everyone's self-fulfilment. More generally, sexism leads to lower wages and fewer opportunities for those who are targeted by it.

How to prevent it?

■ Revise labour law to include the fight against sexism. Identify and correct gender gaps in wages, bonuses or promotions. Establish complaint mechanisms, disciplinary measures and support services in case of sexist behaviour. Adopt and implement codes of conduct that define sexist behaviour and provide training to prevent it. Raise awareness in the workplace.



Sexism in the public sector

Examples:

Discouraging a woman from certain so-called “male” positions in a job centre/career advice centre; in the course of a hospital appointment, refusing to provide care, doubting what a woman says or disputing her symptoms; comments by public service staff about the sexual orientation or appearance of users; or comments about the appearance of women in the public space.

Fact: 68% of women members of parliament have been the target of comments on their physical appearance or remarks based on gender stereotypes.



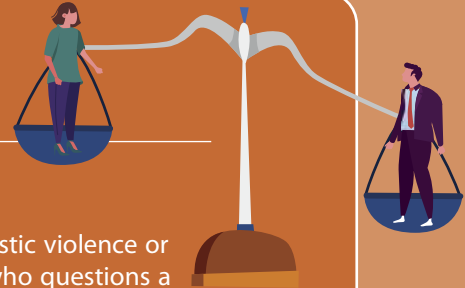
Why should it be addressed?

— The public sector has a duty to set an example. Sexism undermines equal access for those who use public services and the public space. It creates an oppressive environment, preventing mainly women from working there or participating fully in political and public life.

How to prevent it?

— Introduce legislation prohibiting sexism, codes of conduct, complaint mechanisms, disciplinary measures and support services. Train and raise awareness among staff, through the use of appropriate materials or posters in public areas. Include a clause on the fight against sexism in public procurement contracts. Encourage the participation of everyone in decision-making. Promote research and data collection.

Sexism in the justice sector



Examples:

■ A police officer who refuses to act on a complaint of domestic violence or who doubts the word of a woman filing a complaint; a judge who questions a complainant about their attire or sexuality rather than the facts; a professional association's governing body composed mainly of men; and the stereotype that a young rape victim who was drunk had been "asking for it".

Fact: In Europe, on average only 17.7% of police personnel are women. Yet police departments have to deal with women just as much as with men. Especially in cases of violence against women, victims sometimes prefer to talk to a female police officer.

Why should it be addressed?

■ Sexist prejudices and behaviour can lead victims not to report serious incidents, creating mistrust in the justice system. Also for example, sexism towards women who are lawyers or judges can drive them to leave the profession.

How to prevent it?

■ Make it easier to report sexist behaviour to the police. Implement policies on gender equality at work in the justice sector. Counter stereotypes through training and awareness-raising campaigns, and publicise and enforce national and international standards protecting women against violence, human trafficking, etc. Ensure that professionals base their judgment on the facts, the behaviour of the perpetrator and the context of the case rather than on the behaviour and appearance of the victim.

Sexism in education

Examples:

— (Unconsciously) biased or discriminatory practices by educational staff towards girls and boys; the perpetuation of stereotypes via teaching, textbooks or career guidance; the failure to punish comments about the appearance or sexuality of young people, or even bullying, including among pupils or students.

Fact: In the United Kingdom, 66% of girls aged 16 to 18 interviewed for a survey had been the target of or had witnessed sexist comments in school.

Why should it be addressed?

— A climate of sexism – whether in educational material, in the behaviour of educational staff or among young people – has a negative impact on the performance of pupils and students and can limit their career and life choices. Schools should be role models in combating sexism and teaching equality.

How to prevent it?

— Implement policies and laws on gender equality in education. Revise school curricula and textbooks to eliminate sexism, to ensure the inclusion of women artists, scientists and policy makers, and that women and men are not portrayed in a stereotyped manner. Make complaint mechanisms available. Teach women's history, gender equality and provide sex education (including consent and personal boundaries). Train educational staff on how to combat prejudices and give them the appropriate means to do so (resources, good practices).



Sexism in culture and sport

Examples:

■ Undervaluing sports practised mainly by women, by giving them less funding or media time, and making fun of men who practise a so-called “female” sport; in the media, asking sportswomen questions about their family life or filming them in sexually suggestive positions; making women’s contribution to the history of art invisible in museums or in the major prizes awarded for works of art; failing to talk about harassment and bullying in art and sport.

Fact: For the Women’s World Cup in 2019, \$30 million in bonuses were paid out to national teams. For the Men’s World Cup in 2018, the amount was \$400 million, 13 times as much.

Why should it be addressed?

■ Art, culture and sport play a key role in shaping gender attitudes and roles. The often stereotypical representations of women and men that are conveyed make it difficult for people to freely choose their leisure activities, to be able to express themselves through their performance or their talents. Sexism leads to lower income and fewer opportunities for those who experience it.

How to prevent it?

■ Implement measures to mainstream gender equality into cultural and sports policies and the way they are financed (decision-making, grants, exhibitions, training, provision of facilities/spaces). Ensure better media coverage of sports or cultural activities practised by women. Adopt codes of conduct to prevent sexist behaviour. Introduce disciplinary measures. Do not encourage portrayals that trivialise or prettify violence against women.



Sexism in the private sphere

Examples:

— The fact that in families, women bear the majority of the mental burden of parenting and housework, i.e. thinking ahead, planning and co-ordinating all these tasks; children's books or comics that feature stereotypical characters of girls and boys; allocation of certain colours of clothing and accessories for girls and others for boys.

Fact: In Europe, on average women spend 22 hours a week on family and domestic tasks, while men spend just 9 hours.

Why should it be addressed?

— Unpaid work in the family has an impact on women's participation in the labour market, in decision-making and in leisure and social activities which directly affects their economic independence. The unequal division of labour and the assignment of "women's" or "men's" roles begins in childhood, through education, shaping people's character and influencing their choices throughout their lives, whether in education or in their professional and personal lives.

How to prevent it?

— Implement measures to achieve a better work-life balance for all (e.g. affordable and quality childcare, paid maternity, paternity and parental leave). Raise awareness and conduct research on the impact and sharing of unpaid work in families. Train staff working in the early childhood sector. Encourage boys and girls to help with household chores. Ensure that girls have the same space and freedom as boys to play and explore.



Implementing the Council of Europe's recommendation

The Council of Europe's suggestions for combating sexism are addressed first and foremost to the Organisation's 47 member states. But they can also be implemented by companies, associations, local authorities, educational establishments and all types of organisations. Here are a few ideas for steps that could be taken:



- Put in place internal procedures for reporting sexist acts, punishing perpetrators and supporting victims.
- Draw up and apply codes of conduct or guidelines on sexism, tailored to the specific context.
- Run training courses and awareness-raising campaigns, and produce information kits for staff, service providers and partners.
- Ensure that the language and communication used within organisations is inclusive and non-sexist, drawing on available resources.
- Work in partnership with civil society organisations, including women's and/or feminist organisations, to identify and share good practices, training and tools on preventing and combating sexism.

Promote the campaign

- Find the full text of the Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism on the Council of Europe website: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/combating-and-preventing-sexism>
- Visit the campaign page: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-channel/stop-sexism>
- Promote the campaign and the quiz on social media.

Definitions for a better understanding of sexism

Sexism “Any 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, with the purpose or effect of:

- violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or
- resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons; or



- creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; or
- constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or a group of persons; or
- maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes.”

(Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on preventing and combating sexism)

Gender stereotypes are “preconceived social and cultural patterns or ideas whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. Gender stereotyping presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality and feeds into gender discrimination. Such stereotyping can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of girls and boys, women and men, their educational and professional preferences and experiences, as well as life opportunities in general.”

(Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023)



” Aspiring to create
a Europe free from sexism
and its manifestations.

*Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1
on preventing and combating sexism*

www.coe.int/equality
gender.equality@coe.int

www.coe.int

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.