



# **WORKING GROUP ON "GENDER EQUALITY"**

**2016**

## **FINAL REPORT**

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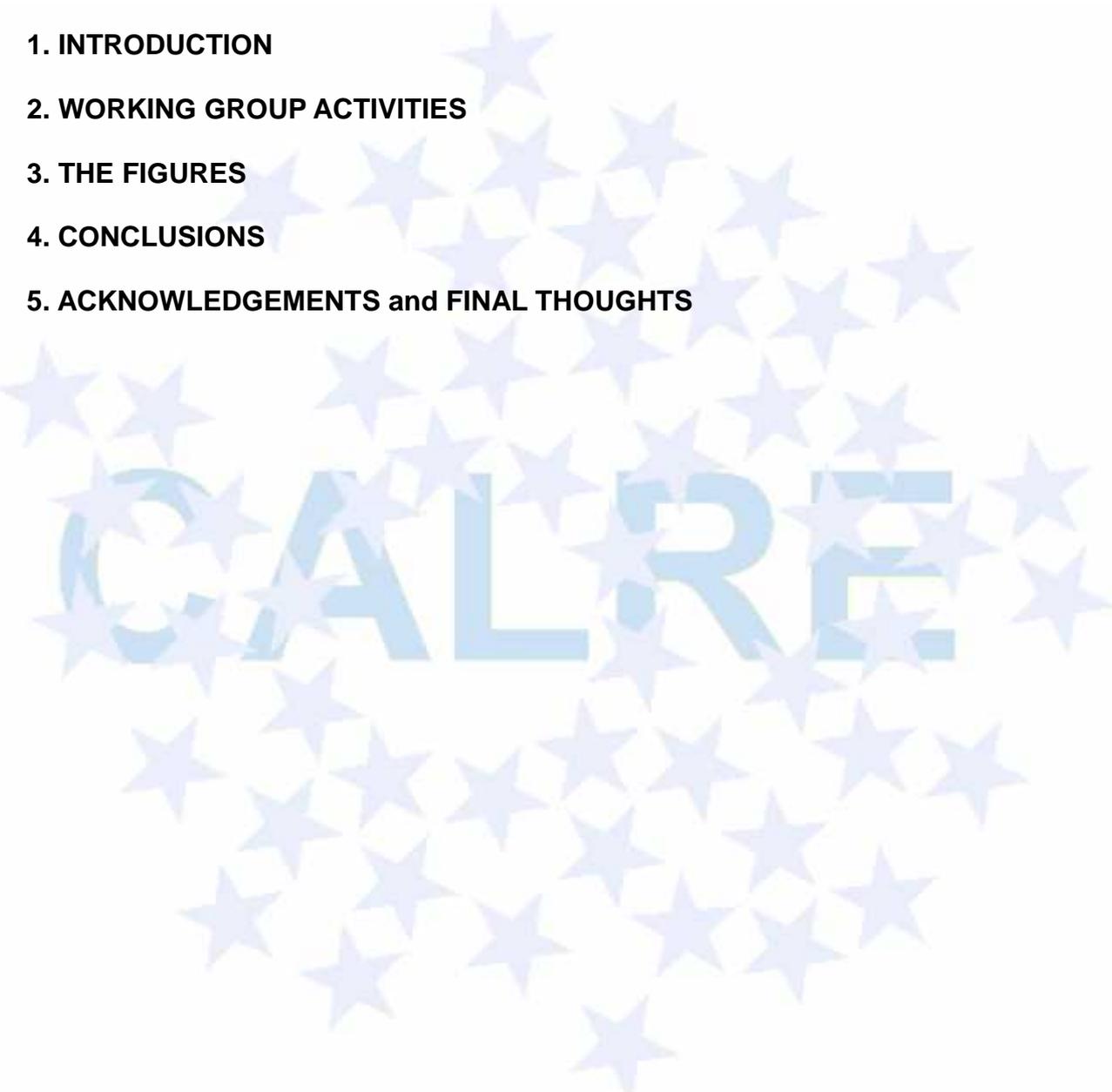
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CALRE



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Gender Equality Working Group started back in 2012, after the commitment of the presidents of CALRE to reaffirm that regional parliaments should play a significant role in eliminating barriers to reach full gender equality in social, economic and cultural life, thus promoting equal access to elective offices.

This year, thirteen parliaments were members of CALRE: Andalusia, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, Cantabria, Catalonia, Galicia, Azores, Molise, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige, Flemish Parliament, Wallonia-Brussels and Parliament of Wallonia. It was coordinated by the president of the Assembly of Extremadura.

These parliaments showed a strong commitment towards the fight against inequality and intolerance. In line with the spirit of commitment set by its predecessors, and through a participatory process among its members, the goals and action lines set for 2016 and contained in its Working Plan have been followed.

First, the efforts of parliaments to become gender-sensitive institutions, as well as a broad range of strategies that can be implemented by all the legislative powers in this subject within this field were examined. The work of this group focused on promoting a study on gender in parliament.

Directly related with the previous goal, it was deemed appropriate to include in the study the measures adopted by European regional parliaments in terms of equal opportunities for parliamentary mothers and fathers, on the balance between professional and family life, or parental leave, and to introduce a compilation of relevant and comparable data on actions or policies aimed at combating discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

Finally, the exchange of good practices, experiences and strategies among CALRE members in a broad range of areas was fostered through a seminar last October to present the results of the analysis. This was aimed at creating a diverse discussion forum, without forgetting the importance of setting up meetings with representatives from EU bodies and institutions to learn first-hand about the activities and policies on gender equality within the European Union.

Ultimately, each and every challenge set in the Working Plan have been met, and the conclusions are included in this document.

## 2. WORKING GROUP ACTIVITIES

### ■ Institutional Visit to Brussels

In April, a delegation formed by the President of the Assembly of Extremadura and Coordinator of the Working Group and representatives for equality in parliamentary groups in the Region enjoyed the opportunity to visit Brussels. During this institutional visit, the President learnt first-hand about the functioning of bodies such as the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee. Meetings were held between the President and other members of the European Parliament's FEMM Committee, where the current state of gender policies in the European Union was discussed, primarily examining the situation of women in the migration crisis Europe is immersed in.

In addition, the delegation conversed with the Director for Equality in the European Commission, Salla Saastamoinen, to analyse the strategic commitment of this body in terms of equality between men and women in the 2016-2019 period.

Finally, the visit also served to build closer bonds for collaboration with the Wallonia-Brussels Parliament, fostering the exchange of good practice, experiences and strategies in implementing gender equality between both parliaments.

### ■ Setting up a working group website

The Assembly of Extremadura has created a website in Spanish and English for the Working Group on Gender Equality, where the work programme, members, activities and relevant news can be consulted.

### ■ Questionnaire

The questionnaire on gender-sensitive parliaments and discrimination on sexual orientation grounds has been a key element for the development of activities of CALRE's working group on gender equality and equal opportunities. Its main goal was to collect data and information related to the legal instruments, actions and initiatives developed in the regions by CALRE in this field.

The research results offers a useful basis to create guidelines including data and experiences or good practices developed in these areas by the Conference's parliaments.



In this manner, regional parliaments contributing strategies, good practices and experiences awaking the most interest thanks to their efficiency, good results or innovation were invited to share them in the Group's annual meeting.

We received 21 questionnaires from regional parliaments in Spain (Andalusia, Asturias, Balearic Islands, Canary Islands, Cantabria, Catalonia, Extremadura, Galicia, Murcia and Basque Country), Portugal (Azores and Madeira), Italy (Tuscany and Lombardy), Belgium (Wallonia-Brussels, Flemish Parliament, German-speaking Community and Wallonia) and Austria (Tirol, Upper Austria and Styria).

The questionnaires provided the number of male and female parliamentary members, the configuration of parliamentary bodies and regional parliaments (disaggregated by sex), regional initiatives for equality and non-discrimination on grounds of gender or sexual orientation, as well as measures put into place at parliamentary level and the good practices applied in these areas.

■ **CALRE's Working Group on Gender Equality seminar, Merida, 6-7 October 2016.**

The goal of holding an international seminar on gender equality and equal opportunities including the fight against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation was, mainly, to promote the exchange of good practices among regional parliaments of the Working Group.

In order to do this, representatives of organisations and institutions from Europe, Ibero-America and Africa participated to provide a broad view in this matter.

The seminar was structured in three panels. The first was aimed at analysing the **"POLITICAL AND REGULATION FRAMEWORK OF EQUALITY" at European, national and regional levels**. It was chaired by the General Director of External Action of the Government of Extremadura, Rosa Balas Torres. The following speakers participated:

- **Equality in the European Union: Barbara Limanowska, Team leader and Senior Gender Mainstreaming Expert at the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).**

Ms. Limanowska pointed out that a strategy on gender perspective (Gender Mainstreaming) should be examined and embedded into every policy and plan, highlighting the importance of a legal framework and political commitment.

A policy which takes into account gender perspective ensuring that the needs of all citizens are equally met, both women and men, is a tool against discrimination and in favour of equality.

In specific terms, when providing the tools to contribute to a gender equal representation, it is necessary to use mandatory quotas. This is the most effective tool to make the demands of women visible, rather than bearing equal representation in each level of decision-making. In particular, parliaments and all the administrations in general, should contribute to create wider quotas until reaching total and actual equality of all members in managing, representation and decision-making bodies.

Without a doubt, one of our main challenges is to legislate in the whole of the EU to contribute to the political representation to have mandatory reasonable quotas. These should be ideally the highest amount possible. If we set a figure, it should never be lower than 30% at the start in places where women are not visible in political life and, therefore, in daily decisions which make them either active beings in decision-making or passive in suffering.

We agree with Ms. Limanowska in this respect, when she explained the different types of quota in terms of politics:

- 1) Reserved seats ensuring a minimum representation of women in parliament. No EU member state has passed a provision in this regard.
- 2) Legislated quotas: A minimum quota of positions for candidates of the least represented gender (usually women). This measure can be prescribed by constitution or legislated through election law.
- 3) Voluntary quotas for the political parties to adopt voluntarily and strictly apply a minimum proportion of positions to candidates of the least represented gender (usually women).

We also believe that the contribution by EIGE in terms of gender-perspective parliamentary tools is interesting. The “segmentation” is divided in three aspects: descriptive, substantive and symbolic. The descriptive aspect refers to women in female organisations, the substantive one to women’s presence in parliament, and the symbolic to the legislative function.

EIGE is working on developing a specific tool for gender-sensitive parliaments, by measuring a series of indicators, differentiated by thematic areas, and the exchange of good practices. The goal is to stress the importance of the working substance, beyond figures and representativeness symbolism. Although the Institute usually works at national level, Limanowska considers that this tool could be applied at regional or local level, so she left the door open to a future collaboration with CALRE in this area.

**-Equality in Spain: Laura Seara Sobrado, lawyer and equality consultant.**

Lawyer Laura Seara explained the origins of the androcentric culture, where gender roles have been assigned making women invisible and placing them outside the decision-making arena. These gender roles classified gay and lesbian people as anomalies, even when they have been an ancestral part of our existence.

However, existing is documenting and documenting is legislating. Being part of a story means that in the telling of the story the members of a society that moves forwards and backwards at the rate of the equality sustaining it are equally included.

Ms. Seara stressed that democracy needs more women with power, and that there is a link between development level and equality. The crisis has been lethal in terms of equality and the institutions play an essential role. Therefore, work needs to be done in transversal policies addressing fields such as economic, labour or even influence on the media.

**- Equality and non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. Special reference to Act 12/2015 on LGBTI social equality of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura: José María Núñez Blanco, President of Fundación Triángulo.**

The commendable work of Fundación Triángulo and its President, José María Núñez Blanco, leads the way that we must follow to contribute to the definite disappearance of the discrimination suffered by LGBTI persons. For example, in schools where they do not teach values, which are the building blocks for natural relationships with someone different to us, because we are different to another people.

Mr. Núñez reminded us that most of the current international regulations on human rights enshrine equality and non-discrimination. Even though most of them implicitly

include reference to sexual identity and sexual orientation, they do not do so expressly. These are matters that should be defended when talking about equality or when positioning ourselves against discrimination. Current legislation addressing expressly and not tacitly this area of social and human diversity is still scarce.

He also pointed out that the so-called political emergencies of each territory tend to hamper the legal progress in this subject. He mentioned the need of a stronger involvement of EU regulation. This would include the diplomatic field, given the outrageous international situation of the LGBTI cause, with 78 countries considering homosexuality or transsexuality still illegal and 8 of them applying capital punishment. The legislative progress should be complemented by comprehensive action plans both at regional and local level. Visibility to avoid reversing the achievements is still necessary.

The second panel was entitled “**WOMEN LEADERSHIP AND PRESENCE IN AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS: ANALYSIS OF THE CHANGE PROCESSES AND SOCIAL PROGRESS**”. It was chaired by Beatriz Muñoz, professor of Sociology at the University of Extremadura. The President and Equality representatives of the Canary Islands parliament participated to share their experience and the conclusions from the First Meeting of Female African-Canary Members of Parliament, which was held last May.

The Canary Islands parliament members highlighted the role of women as agents of peace, as well as the importance of quotas, the necessary empowerment of women and the visibility of her role in society.

The event took place on 16, 17 and 18 May 2016 in the Canary Islands. It was attended by 46 female members of parliament from the Canary Islands, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania, Gambia, Mali, Senegal and Cape Verde. They exchanged opinions on women’s political participation and the global challenges faced by them.

The delegation from the Canary Islands collected data, conclusions and commitments from the meeting with African parliament members, who are holding the highest international positions in terms of women presence in parliaments. They have become important leaders in their countries and play a fundamental role in achieving and keeping of peace in conflicts.

The day ended with a **ROUND TABLE**, which was the real *raison d’être* of this meeting. Here, members of the group presented data, strategies and actions developed in their respective parliaments to promote equality, taking into account the questionnaires that



were filled in within the framework of the Group activities this year.

Representatives of the parliaments of Wallonia, Wallonia-Brussels, Andalusia, Canary Islands, Lombardy and Extremadura presented the data, measures and strategies applied to their institutions, discussing the problems they face in their daily functioning.

Finally, as it has been mentioned before, one of the goals of this Seminar was to examine the situation of equality in the Ibero-American continent.

For this purpose, the President of the Republic of Chile was invited. We were aware of her professional and political career as a strong defender of the rights of girls and women around the world. She is devoted to increasing women's political participation and their economic empowerment, and to end gender violence. Her contribution, which is based on her experience after being the Director of the UN Women Agency and her commitment towards equality policies, could be very useful and enriching to our forum.

Unfortunately, Ms. Bachelet was not able to join us, but she wanted to be present by sending her greetings which were read at the beginning of the meeting. She acknowledged the collaborative work of CALRE, which offers the possibility to make progress in common agreements for the advancement of women in decision-making spheres.

#### **International Course on "Equality Challenges in 21st Century Public Policy"**

On 19, 20 and 21 of October 2016, the Assembly of Extremadura held the International Course "Equality Challenges in 21st Century Public Policy", where several experts participated. It was aimed at showing and analysing the equality challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These should set the political agenda and go beyond politics to enter policy, which is the specific action responding to specific problems and situations of society, combining a study of reality, political theory and transformation experiences.

### **3. THE FIGURES**

Attached to this report there is the data and preliminary conclusions from the study of the submitted questionnaires.

As described above, the final goal is to develop guidelines including data and experiences or good practices carried out in these areas by CALRE parliaments. These could be used

as a reference in unclear situations or when seeking solutions.

The guidelines, together with the final conclusions of the study, shall be sent to all European institutions once the work is done.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The activities developed by the Working Group during this year, particularly the meeting in Merida, as well as the opportunity to learn first-hand about the current state of policies in this area at European and national level and the parliamentary experience in other continents such as Africa, has enabled the sharing of data, strategies and actions. These have made clear the **deficit in terms of equality in regional parliaments** in measures for society: equality plans are almost fictitious, and parental leave and life/work balance measures have unequal regulation. Also, there is a lack of tools for the fight against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

In conclusion, there has been much progress in favour of equality, but there is still a long way to go.

Gender equality and the fight against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation were not a priority issue in the political agenda until recently. Therefore, a big effort needs to be done to break a culture which in all its manifestations has not taken into account these demands.

There is a need for strong political commitment for equality implementation, and its mainstreaming requires not only good will, but the ability to adapt to changes and manage a new work methodology.

Practice demonstrates that integrating equality issues in politics is not enough. It is necessary to adapt its structures and redefine the role, the organizational distribution and the procedures of institutions. To sum up, we should opt for strategies that lead to a structural change of organizations and bring about changes in the organizational culture, thus fostering the gender perspective to be present in all processes as a priority goal.

Therefore, it is our duty to provide society with a set of positive practices in terms of equality with a gender perspective to influence the forms and methods from an equal representation point of view. We should remember that the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020 reaffirmed the commitment of the EU with gender

equality. It specifically sought to “promote women’s empowerment in political and economic life”, among other measures in the fight against inequality.

From a practical point of view, a common agenda with tools, strategies and goals for developing equality should be encouraged. We will not be able to meet these demands without a real materialisation of its development and gradually attaining goals.

Specifically in terms of the **fight for equality and non-discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation**, gender inequality is obviously not the only discrimination we face in a system that makes differences in the hierarchical positions. These differences are also another shame we face on a daily basis.

Society mistook moral with normal, and assumed that only what is visible exists. There has been a long tradition of pointing fingers at those not participating in the established norm. It was a culture which waved the flag of uniformity as its flag. This led us to our times. There are more challenges to overcome in terms of equality and visibilization of “hidden” realities, which are less hidden, stemming from a ravenous system in terms of coexistence with minorities.

In order to end discrimination against people on grounds of their sexual orientation, it is evident that we need to pass laws that objectivise the fact and not subjectivise the norm. The more specific the verbalisation of rights, the less susceptible to interpretation and, therefore, the less intoxicating capacity of moral standards the judge may invoke in the name of timorous cultural ingrained beliefs.

What is the **role of regional parliaments** in this context ? Regional assemblies are one of the closest agents to attend to the requirements and demands of all citizens, so they need to be *gender-sensitive* parliaments.

They are the appropriate place to promote equality, because they reflect society. Therefore, they should reflect the changing dynamics of its electorate, stressing the contribution towards equal opportunities for economic growth and sustainable development.

Excluding half of the productive individuals from the economic force can only have a negative impact in generating wealth. This is what happened with women. They were excluded, forgotten, hidden and relegated to the roles assigned to them.

At this point, it is necessary to refer to the latest **report from the Inter-Parliamentary Union**. It was submitted to the annual meeting of this body in October, and it provides worrying data on the amount of gender violence suffered by members of parliaments and senates.

This study has measured parameters such as psychological, sexual, physical and financial abuse, which is the second most common type of abuse and sometimes is not regarded as important.

The analysis concluded that there the political sphere is still male dominated, both in terms of numbers and hierarchy. It stated that the solution lies in acknowledging the problem, naming it and breaking the existing silence, carrying out a collaborative effort, a shared commitment equality and tolerance-based on education.

In terms of equality, this means that becoming visible and strongly opposing inequality is vital. People have suffered discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation. They are still victims of a society which has legislated towards equality. However, society has not achieved a law which is daily standard in terms of coexistence amongst equals, even if we are different in everything except rights. We must achieve this with our work, our talent and our values. Europe has to be more Europe, i.e. fairer and more human.

## **5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND FINAL THOUGHTS**

We would like to thank the regional parliaments of the Group for their support, engagement and effort, as well as everyone who participated in the questionnaire and the speakers and participants that enlightened us with their analysis and thoughts in the Seminar that took place in Merida last October.

I invite you to keep working together towards the future, continuing the activities of the Working Group on Gender Equality to find solutions from parliaments, and working for full equality.

At the inception of this Group, the Annex to the CALRE Declaration of 2011 stated the advocacy for equal access to the elective function. It also recognised the need to engage in a structured dialogue. It is necessary to reaffirm the significant role that regional parliaments must play in the process of fighting for the elimination of obstacles.

For this reason, it is mandatory to refer at this point to the UIP Report, which has devastating conclusions.

Discriminatory behaviours exist, to a varying degree, in all countries. This violence prevents female parliament members from carrying out their work with total freedom and safety. It also discourages women to acquire political commitment. However, once the phenomenon is acknowledged and visible, there are solutions. We must stop considering these behaviours as the price to pay for devoting to politics.

Female and male political actors, and parliament as an institution, have a duty to be an example; they have to become strong defenders of equality and justice if they do not want to legitimise discrimination and violence against women in all spheres of life, public and private. The good functioning of the parliamentary institution depends on this, as well as the progress in terms of equality and, therefore, the vitality of democracy.

As Anders B. Johnson, Secretary General of UIP said, *“Parliaments cannot consider themselves inclusive until they can boast the full participation of women”*. In the words of Michelle Bachelet, *“Strengthening the public institutions for women involves reaffirming the commitment to the girls and women living in this territory to live in a more equal world, with more equality and opportunities.”*