



# 2021 REPORT

## CEMR'S CHARTER15 REFLECTION PROCESS

BRINGING EQUALITY CLOSER TO HOME

#LocalEquality

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# FOREWORD

Before becoming Chair of the CEMR Standing Committee for Equality, I was already extremely committed to the European Charter for Equality. One of the goals of my mandate has been to achieve much more for the Charter both at the political level and on the ground in Europe. It is a great goal, to be achieved with all our strength, not only for us, but above all for future generations to be able to live in a fairer and virtuous world.

This century presents us with great challenges and we all need to work together to achieve one of the most decisive SDGs: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Ending gender-based violence, combating sexist stereotypes, closing the gender gaps in the labour market, achieving equality in participation and influence in the political and economic spheres, are goals that cannot be achieved alone and requires everyone's thinking and collective action.

When we set out to celebrate and reflect on the 15th anniversary of the Charter in 2021, a possible upgrade of the Charter was already being debated by CEMR members and Charter signatories. But there were also questions: How to ensure that it is relevant for present and future days? How should it be adapted to the daily work of municipalities and regions? What implications would changes have for those who already signed?

Before a plan was made, dates were set and invitations sent, I knew that the success of our mission would depend on an inclusive working methods and involvement of the CEMR community. I am happy to say that this has been

the case. When we called for your insights, experiences and suggestions, the show of support and interest was clear. You answered the call.

The aim is not to transform the Charter document too much. It brings to mind an Italian saying "*Se non é rotto, non aggiustarlo!*" ("if it's not broken, don't fix it!"). The current text of the Charter is a well-thought out product of many years of exchange, expertise and negotiation; it is a uniquely adapted tool to boost gender equality at local and regional levels.

With the following report, we pass from reflections to recommendations for action. A significant undertaking such as this do not come without risk. It is critical to keep in mind the existing community of Charter signatories, their engagements and their actions. It must also be made absolutely clear that our aim is to strengthen the Charter and its effective implementation, and no attempt to roll back its provisions or weaken the instrument will be accepted.

We are on the right track. Now we must direct our energies to revising the Charter, and I am looking forward to a renewed interest and burst of support for this extraordinary document.

The Charter is and will remain a significant document, both in terms of its impact and size. Beyond chapters and clauses lies a common goal, what really matters at the end of the day: **bringing equality closer to home.**

**Silvia Baraldi**  
Councillor of Legnago  
CEMR Spokesperson on Gender Equality



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life (“The Charter”) is a tool for municipalities and regions to integrate the gender equality perspective into all policies and activities. It was developed by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and its member associations and opened for signatures in 2006.

2021 was a milestone year for the Charter, it marked 15 years of commitment and action in favour of gender equality and women’s rights at local and regional level across Europe. What started with a handful of local governments declaring their intention to act to promote gender equality in their territories has developed into a European community of nearly **2,000 signatories in 36 countries**.

During 2021, CEMR set out to mark the Charter anniversary with a number of activities which revolved around 4 areas:

- To **recognise** the achievements and advances in local equality that have been made possible by the Charter.
- To **reflect** on the Charter as a living document. The discussions touched upon how the Charter can be kept modern and relevant for today’s citizens and for many years into the future, how to identify methods to better communicate how it works and connect it to broader national and international policy frameworks.
- To **celebrate** the people and organisations that have made the Charter a reality and a success on the ground.
- Finally, to **revitalise** the Charter and its tools based on the results of the workshops and interviews carried out in 2021.

The review was conducted through six online workshops organised from June to November 2021. Ideas and inputs collected via the workshops were complemented by 5 interviews with national gender focal points.

This report aims to present the results of the reflection activities and to suggest future actions to revitalise the Charter. It is of interest to existing and potential Charter signatories, national associations of local and regional governments, EU institutions and civil society organisations.

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## 2. BACKGROUND

### 2.1. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is both the oldest and broadest European association representing subnational governments' interests. CEMR brings together national associations of local and regional governments from 40 European countries and represents through them all tiers of government – local, intermediate and regional.

CEMR's work is organised according to long-term objectives under four "Ps": People, Places, Planet and Partnership. In addition to being a specific priority theme, gender equality is an integrated factor throughout CEMR's work.

Within CEMR, two structures exist to inform and orient the work on gender equality: the CEMR Standing Committee for Equality and the Expert group on gender equality. The CEMR Standing Committee for Equality, composed of local elected representatives, is responsible for providing political impulse and direction to CEMR's work on gender equality and ensuring that it remains a top priority across the association and its membership.

For practical and technical aspects of the work on gender equality and the Charter, CEMR has a [network of gender focal points](#) who serve as national coordinators in each member association. In addition to promoting the Charter and supporting signatories in their country, these focal points ensure the links between the CEMR Secretariat and signatories.

### 2.2. The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life

In order to promote gender equality at the local and regional level, CEMR launched the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life in 2006. The Charter is both a **political document** and a **practical instrument, covering all aspects of municipal and regional activities**. It encourages local and regional governments to make a formal public commitment to equality and to implement the principles listed in the Charter. Signing the CEMR Charter implies a political commitment to promote gender equality through concrete actions in different fields of local and regional competences: political participation, employment, public services, urban planning, etc.

The Charter is based on the strategy and approach of gender mainstreaming and is an essential instrument for elected representatives and administrators in municipalities and regions to conduct systematic and effective gender equality work.

To further support Charter signatories in their efforts to implement the Charter and advance gender equality, CEMR launched the [Observatory of the European Charter for Equality](#) in March 2012. This online platform showcases best practices and examples of successful local gender equality policies and facilitates peer-learning amongst signatories. It also includes a guide on how to elaborate an action plan for equality as well as a database (the "[Atlas](#)") which provides information on the local and regional governments that have signed the Charter, such as their contact information and links to their gender equality action plans.

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## 2.3. Gender equality and gender mainstreaming

As the work on the Charter revolves around gender equality and gender mainstreaming, the following definitions from the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) [Gender Equality Glossary & Thesaurus](#) have been included in the report for clarity.

### Gender equality

“Equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, thereby recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.”

### Gender mainstreaming

It refers to the systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all policies and actions. Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated at all levels and all stages.

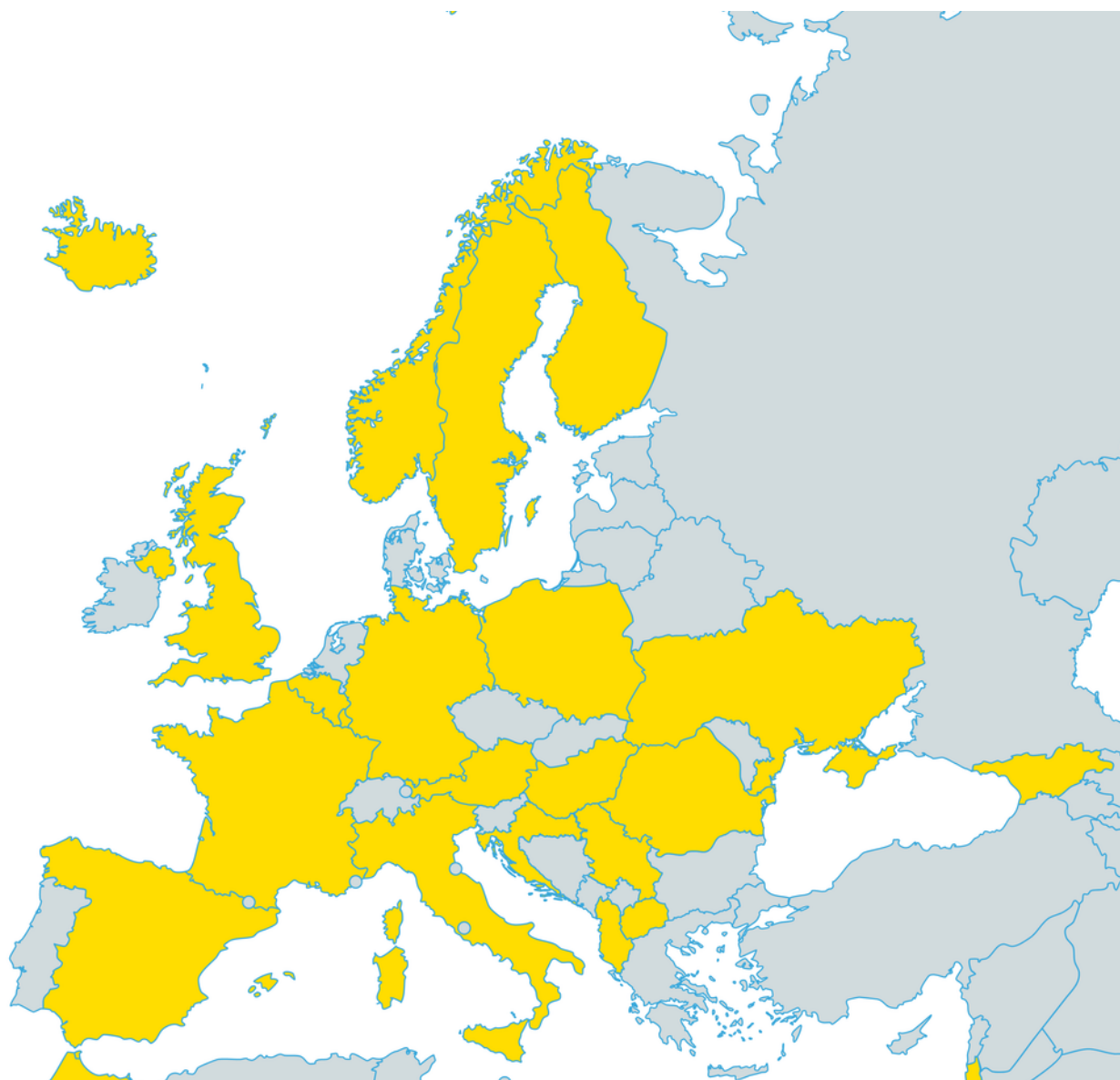
Central to gender mainstreaming is **sex-disaggregated statistics**, gender equality analyses/audits and gender-balanced decision-making.

For further information on good practices and general knowledge on gender equality, [www.includegender.org](http://www.includegender.org) is available. It is a comprehensive Swedish national resource for gender equality and gender mainstreaming that has been translated into English.

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# 3. SUMMARY OF WORKSHOPS AND OBSERVATIONS

A total of 6 online workshops were organised by CEMR. Participants included: national associations of local and regional government, municipalities, regions, and civil society among others. In total **75 participants** from **21 countries** attended the reflection workshops.



*Figure 1. Countries represented in workshops and interviews*

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The aims of the workshops were to:

- Help signatories reconnect with the Charter by engaging a dialogue about the text
- Understand how the Charter has been interpreted and implemented by the signatories
- Gather opinions on the current state of the Charter's articles
- Brainstorm on possible improvements of the articles and develop recommendations

The workshops were centred around the following groupings of Charter articles:

- Communication, countering stereotypes, international cooperation | June 2021
- Multiple discrimination and intersectionality | September 2021
- Public services and administration | September 2021
- Employment and economic development | September 2021
- Climate, urban space and sustainable development | October 2021
- Violence against women and girls | November 2021

Some workshops opened with keynote interventions to spark discussion outside of the box and stimulate the debates. Participants were asked to consider the following questions to prepare their inputs:

- How should the Charter text be in order to be valid for you in your daily work?
- What are the opportunities and challenges for your work on these articles in terms of your administration's responsibilities and relation with other levels of governance in your country?

The workshops generated a lot of information and feedback about the Charter, its interpretations, and the needs it should address. During the workshops, the participants presented many good practices on their work to implement the Charter. They were invited to comment directly on the text of each article using a shared Google document, and further notes were taken and analysed in order to make observations and draw conclusions for each workshop.

Please note that while specific themes were proposed for each workshop, the discussions sometimes took a different direction than anticipated and this is reflected in the summaries below.

### 3.1. Workshop #1: Communication, countering stereotypes and international cooperation

During the workshop there was a discussion about the **intersectional perspective**\* : There is a perception that the Charter needs to be clearer on the intersectional perspective without weakening the gender equality dimension and the principal aim of the Charter. One question on the use of the terms was whether to change references to "women and men" into "citizens" or alternatively find other ways of expressing it to be as inclusive as possible.

Concerns were also raised about the risk that working with a broader equality perspective loses the specific gender perspective and that women become simply another group among others. Therefore, the Swedish expression "always gender, but never gender alone" is highlighted as a possible approach to guide work and revitalise the Charter.

\* "Analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination." Source: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1263>



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The possibility of adding a more general introduction to intersectionality in the first part of the text or to expand Article 10 on multiple discrimination and disadvantage were also considered. However, starting to list different marginalised or discriminated groups is perceived as risky because any list needs to be updated regularly, can give an impression of hierarchy of grounds and can potentially overlook groups/grounds that are not explicitly listed.

The need to better communicate the Charter was raised. The Charter and its content need to be communicated in an understandable and attractive way which motivates more local and regional governments to sign and implement it. There is a general perception that there is a need to review the language of the Charter. It is perceived as outdated and clumsy and there are changes in language use that need to be met. In particular, the quality of the 27 Charter translations was highlighted as an important and urgent aspect to address.

Regarding international cooperation in the Charter, the group did not put forward precise recommendations. However, the City of Frankfurt shared a good example of two cities working together on raising awareness through the [“home” web residency project](#) which was launched in collaboration with Tel Aviv during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The project provides greater visibility and facilitates networking among female and feminist artists.

### **3.2. Workshop #2: Intersectionality, multiple discrimination, social inclusion**

Much of what was discussed in workshop 2 had already been touched upon in workshop 1. When it comes to an intersectional perspective, the majority agreed that it is important to be as inclusive as possible but also that this can lead to dissonance and conflict because of the widespread perceptions and diverse national

contexts in relation to discrimination and inequalities. It was also emphasised that if intersectionality is more explicitly included in the Charter, the language used becomes extremely important and must be accessible and understandable even to those who are not experts. In this workshop, it was again mentioned that specific marginalised groups should not be highlighted as it may lead to a need for regular revisions and to the risk of not mentioning - and consequently excluding - certain groups.

To tackle the lack of awareness or risk of misunderstanding on gender equality and related topics, the City of Poznań created an [“Equality Vocabulary Toolkit”](#). This toolkit aims to clarify and inform those who do not necessarily have specialised gender equality expertise about using inclusive and respectful language. It offers guidance on what language to use to prevent discrimination.

### **3.3. Workshop #3: Public services and administration**

Given that gender equality has not always been seen as a priority by municipal and regional administrations, the workshop focused on the way the principles of the Charter should be spread and translated into action. For example, how procurement can be used to achieve gender equality goals.

In discussions about health care, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality were mentioned. Indeed, not only women were given greater responsibility because of their traditional role in society and family as caregivers (for instance, home-schooling), but there is a perception that they were also not adequately supported by the redistribution of the resources aimed at meeting COVID-19 and related confinement challenges. There is therefore a need to strategise about how to be prepared for future global crises (health, climate, etc.) so that gender equality does not go backwards.

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In the area of health, it was also discussed that not all signatories are responsible for health: local/regional competences vary across Europe and the Charter needs to be clear that signatories are expected to work only with articles that concern the areas under their responsibility.

Moreover, the need of clarifying the intersectional perspective was once again discussed, and the importance of women's involvement in decision-making was emphasised.

### **3.4. Workshop # 4: Employment and economic development**

During the workshop, it was highlighted that in Europe women are still less involved in the labour market than men, that they represent a high proportion of part-time workers, have a higher uptake of parental leave, and still do not receive equal pay for work of equal value. The issue of gender differences in part-time work and the take up of parental leave are of particular concern for local and regional governments as employers and should be addressed in the update.

Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has had particular impacts on women's economic rights and opportunities. As mentioned above, the Charter needs to be reinforced with regard to crises and gender equality. During the pandemic, work life has changed for large groups of people. Higher numbers of women and men are working from home and the effects of this shift on gender equality need to be addressed, including through local government action. The question of how resilience strategies should anticipate and seek to minimise gendered impacts was raised as an important area to consider.

Additionally, the effects of gender inequality in schools, particularly in the form of lower results and anti-study culture\* that is prevalent among many boys, and girls' vulnerability to sexism and sexual abuse, could be addressed more clearly in the Charter.

Once again an intersectional perspective was discussed, for example regarding economic opportunities for Roma women, migrants, refugees and women with disabilities, and the need for working against stereotypes was shared by participants.

### **3.5. Workshop # 5: Climate, urban space and sustainable development**

During the workshop, participants shared a desire to strengthen the text of Article 25 – Urban and Local Planning, by adding evaluation and monitoring. This could boost new reflections on thinking about urban and housing spaces with a gender perspective and renew attention to the needs of women. The Charter and its indicator toolkit can be used to complement work on localising the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG5.

Urban and local planning, as well as mobility and public transport, are areas where the gender dimension is clear and local/regional governments have the power to make a visible difference. It was highlighted that public space is never neutral and the economic resources put in place by public administrations are important in designing more gender-equal spaces.

It was also proposed that the Charter should more clearly describe the positive effects that the greater gender equality has on men and boys. Moreover, it was debated to what extent the current Charter text tends to cast women in more traditionally gender-normative roles (carers, etc.) and amplifies stereotypes.

\* See Leijnse, Emma. I en annan klass: Ett reportage om skillnaderna i den svenska skolan. Natur & Kultur Allmänlitteratur, 2022. ('In another class: A report on the differences in the Swedish school')

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This could be changed so that the connection is to care in general and not merely to women's responsibilities when it comes to care. The workshop also highlighted the need to modernise the text so that it is more easily accessible to younger generations and practitioners on the ground.

### 3.6. Workshop # 6: Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

During the workshop, it was discussed that in the articles that deal with violence against women, it is also necessary to refer to girls. Since children are often victims of domestic violence, they need to be mentioned as well. There are also no writings on how trauma affects women in the short and long term and the question was raised whether the Charter should suggest providing financial compensation for victims and survivors of VAWG (as proposed in the Association of Basque Municipalities' [EUDEL] publication "[Local Actions for the reparation of the victims of violence against women](#)").

In connection with the discussion about violence against women, it also came out that there are no references or suggestions on what can local/regional governments can do to prevent its emergence, such as: tackling grooming, working with young men on issues of sex purchases and the sexualisation of public space. Also, men's exposure to violence from other men and the lack of references about this in the Charter were also highlighted as gaps to address.

There was also a discussion about honour-based violence. There is reason to continue discussing whether it should be included in the sections that concern men's violence against women (Articles 22, 23).

However, one must consider how honour-based violence can be perceived in different parts of Europe and it must be handled in a sensitive and reasoned manner.

The need to include mentions of internet-based violence (cyberviolence) against women was highlighted. In general, there may be reason to update the Charter as regards the Internet, digitalisation and its impact on gender equality.

The discussions addressed how views on prostitution can be controversial. On the one hand, some suggested that it is important to avoid victimisation of sex-workers by automatically connecting sex-work with human trafficking. On the other hand, as mentioned above, prostitution, in some countries, is considered a form of male violence towards women, and the objectification of women is reinforced by the commodification of sex.

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## 4. INTERVIEWS

As a complement to the workshops, 5 semi-structured online interviews were conducted with several national gender focal points\* from CEMR members in different parts of Europe. The selection was made with a view to having geographic diversity and targeted national associations that have some experience of working with the Charter. Interviewees were asked about the status of the Charter in their country at present, success factors and challenges in its implementation as well as about the content of the document and thoughts on CEMR's future work with it. The overview follows the questions posed during the interviews and the purpose is to show the aggregated perception about the Charter from the viewpoint of the national gender focal points that participated.

### 4.1. Status of the Charter

The overall perception about the status of the Charter is good. It is perceived that the Charter is **well-known** as a **good tool** for promoting gender equality at local and regional level. However, there are some differences between the countries. In France, for example, there are legal requirements (which refer back to the Charter) for municipalities with a certain number of inhabitants to develop an equality action plan and to submit a report on the work to the county administrative board. In other countries it is a voluntary commitment, not required by national law. There are also those who hope that the number of signatories and the actual work with the Charter will drive the adoption of new national laws on gender equality.

The majority of those interviewed described that there are many signatories that do not adopt actual action plans or perform any concrete work towards gender equality. This is largely due to **lack of resources** in the form of staff and budget, although for those signatories who have just started the work with the Charter, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative effect, slowing or halting work on gender equality altogether.

There is a perception that there is an increased interest and goodwill towards gender equality in general and towards signing the Charter. This is largely judged to be due to information initiatives and an increased awareness of the importance of gender equality for cities and regions, as well as the specific role they have to play in its promotion.

One interviewee points out that signatories find it difficult to understand the role of the Charter in relation to cases where national legislation concerning gender equality is advanced and that the role of the Charter as a method book should be emphasised and further developed.

### 4.2. Important factors for successful implementation

The importance of political support and political commitment - both locally and nationally - is emphasised. They contribute to legitimacy and help with funding and resource allocation. This is described as necessary as there is a critical need for resources in the form of **dedicated staff and budget** to work with the Charter's implementation.

\* K. Kühne, German Association of CEMR (RGRE); N. Lazarenko, Association of Ukrainian Cities; V. Loirat, French Association of CEMR (AFCCRE); C. Rey, Italian Association of CEMR (AICCRE); S. Talijan, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia.

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Not only is there a general need for personnel in administrations, but also specific staff with expert knowledge on gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Gender budgeting was highlighted as important in the work with gender equality, but in many cases there is a **lack of knowledge** or access to practical expertise to enable signatories to work with it.

There are also those who mention that the fact the Charter provides an incentive for regional and local governments to implement and disseminate it because of its exemplar role as a European initiative. In this sense, links to other international documents such as the "African Charter" and 2030 Agenda could provide further traction and synergistic effects.

Communication about the Charter is defined as relevant. It is about making the Charter and its articles available and accessible to the signatories. It is also about giving support to those who want to sign but are unsure of how they will later conduct the work.

Those who were interviewed unanimously identified working with **peer reviews** and **dissemination of good practice** – both within their countries and across borders – as a useful way to implement the Charter. This is extra helpful when working with signatories that have similar conditions in the form of, for example: size, budget or responsibilities. International exchanges were also pointed out as being very advantageous in dissemination and development work.

Another factor that was mentioned is the recommendation to work more with **quality over quantity**. It is said that you should rather have fewer signatories who are implementing concrete measures than many who sign the Charter but do not perform any activities.

According to information provided to the online Observatory of the Charter, approximately 15% of signatories have gender equality action plans; whereas drafting an equality action plan is expected from all signatories within two years of signing the Charter.

### 4.3. Challenges

The **lack of resources** in the form of staff (availability and level of knowledge), budget and expertise is something that was raised almost unanimously. But there are also several who point out that there is a general resistance towards gender equality in their country and thus to the Charter.

The resistance can consist of different things. There are those who argue that using a **more inclusive language** (gender-sensitive and gender-neutral\*) could distort the linguistic tradition or that it renders text burdensome. Other resistance comes from more conservative angles because promoting gender equality challenges the prevailing worldview and power structures. One result of this is that a lot of time that could be spent on working with action plans is spent on countering myths and rumours about gender and related concepts.

As for the Charter itself, it is mentioned by several of those interviewed that there is a **need to better communicate** what the Charter is and how the signatories can work with it. For example, some potential signatories are reluctant to sign because they believe it would imply a heavy workload. Indeed, they fear having to work on all the articles of the Charter, without having the competence to do so. All of this could be solved through information campaigns clarifying expectations for the work - notably, that signatories should address only a few articles that are relevant for their situation in an action plan - and exchange of experiences.

\* Gender-sensitive language "is gender equality made manifest through language. Gender equality in language is attained when women and men – and those who do not conform to the binary gender system – are addressed through language as persons of equal value, dignity, integrity and respect." Whereas, gender-neutral language is "not gender-specific and considers people in general, with no reference to women or men. It is also called gender-blind language." Source: [eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sensitive-communication/first-steps-towards-more-inclusive-language/terms-you-need-know](https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sensitive-communication/first-steps-towards-more-inclusive-language/terms-you-need-know)

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Other challenges include the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in a lack of resources to work with the Charter. This is something that will be important to address now as similar challenges are likely to arise in the future.

#### 4.4. Content, format, language, etc.

In general, the interviewees are satisfied with the Charter's content and the number of articles. The content has substance and is relevant to local and regional governments. However, it is clear from the majority that the **language is not accessible** to those who are not experts and that at the same time it is to some extent obsolete. It is perceived as complicated and outdated and that there is a need to make sure that the Charter is accessible to both politicians and practitioners. There is also a perception of the Charter as an administrative and bureaucratic document which is difficult to work with. Indeed, it is looked upon as an important document to sign but not necessarily as an instrument for actual change.

Some of the interviewees say that it is difficult to say how it is possible to change the content of the Charter as many signatories have already adhered verbatim to the current document. It is not clear what the consequences would be if the Charter were to be changed. One possibility that is mentioned by a few is to make a shorter version that is less complicated and more accessible and useful in the daily work. It is also highlighted that the title could be shortened and, so to speak, adapted to social media and new forms of communication.

When discussing a potential revision of the Charter it is suggested that it should not be done by a small group of experts but that the whole CEMR should be involved.

One interviewee emphasised that the Charter should be changed so that it becomes more inclusive and with a broad approach to equality in general: limiting it to the binary classification of women and men is perceived as something outdated.

#### 4.5. Thoughts and expectations on CEMR's work with the Charter

There are also those who wish for the CEMR to be more visible in the different countries. In the interviews it is emphasised that CEMR could work more with networks, dissemination and exchange of good practice and experience in the form of workshops at a European level. Content should be practically oriented, for example: expand parts on gender budgeting and gender analysis as methods for implementation. From a survey that was done, the CEMR conference in Bilbao (2018) is highlighted as a successful example of this although it is mentioned that it could be arranged in a simplified format to allow more people to participate.

The 2015 project to develop Charter monitoring indicators and tools was also highlighted; however, the general experience is that they were not very accessible and that they were difficult to work with in practice.

Others mention that webinars with CEMR are very helpful and could be a way to work in the future. According to several participants, regular meetings between the national gender focal points/coordinators and the CEMR could be a good way of working. The Observatory also needs to be improved so that it is more focused on implementation and more accessible to practitioners and those who are not experts. The need for support with resources also in the form of budget/funds is also mentioned.

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# 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are proposed by the CEMR Secretariat for endorsement by the CEMR Standing Committee for Equality. They are based on the experiences and opinions that have emerged from the workshops and interviews conducted during 2021. However CEMR decides to follow-up recommendations, it is advised that academia and other relevant experts in the area of gender equality should be consulted.

An important discussion that must be had is also what the possibilities are to change the text and content of the Charter. There are many views on, among other things, modernisation of the language and changes in the content that could give the Charter more power. At the same time, it is unclear how this will affect the existing signatories. There are those who state that they are legally bound to the text that they signed previously. Changing the content of the Charter could have legal implications and there is a potential risk that some signatories will no longer see themselves bound by it.

This could be solved by including a paragraph in the introduction to an updated version of the Charter that makes clear that existing signatories can choose to reconfirm their commitment or upgrade according to the changes made; or, that their previous commitment remains valid and recognised. It should be emphasised, however, that the majority believe that the main content is still relevant and current.

The text below contains a number of recommendations for the future work in 2022-2023. They provide scope for both actual changes in the Charter and alternative ways to go about

ensuring the Charter's longevity and achieving a successful implementation of gender equality policy and mainstreaming at local level.

The recommendations are presented in the following order: language, intersectionality, content, methods.

## 5.1. Accessibility and language

There is a consensus from both the workshops and the interviews that the language in the Charter in its current form is not easily accessible to the target audience and is sometimes outdated and heavy. As a result, the Charter may be difficult to communicate and may not resonate with local and regional governments - its principal targets. Additionally, the evolution of gender-sensitive language use and orthography in certain languages should be taken into account.

### Recommendations:



- Review the language of the Charter to make it easier to read and more accessible; update expressions that may no longer be relevant.
- Privilege assertive and action-oriented words over passive phrasing.
- Improve quality of translated versions of the Charter in close coordination with the national associations to ensure a high-quality final result.
- Adapt language versions where gender-inclusive and/or gender-neutral words and writing are relevant (ex: French, Italian, Spanish).

## 5.2. Intersectionality

The word intersectionality comes from the word intersection\*. It is used to denote how different power structures and grounds for discrimination affect and sometimes reinforce each other in an individual's lived experience. It is clear in workshops and interviews that there is a desire to strengthen the intersectional perspective in the Charter. Some emphasise that the Charter should apply to equality in the broader sense rather than solely focus on gender equality.

### Recommendations:

- Clarify and reinforce the intersectional perspective in the Charter; either through an introductory text, a review of all text or a supplementary support alongside the Charter. It is of the utmost importance that this does not diminish the gender equality perspective *per se*. The expression "always gender, never gender alone" can be a guiding frame for the Charter's approach and focus.

## 5.3. Contents and clarifications

There are a variety of thoughts and issues that have emerged from the workshops and interviews. Below, each input is presented with attached recommendations.

### COVID-19 pandemic and future crises

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on gender equality. It is stated that there will most certainly be other crises in the future and that the Charter lacks a text describing the need for facing crises with a gender lens.

### Recommendations:

- Supplement the Charter with a text that describes how crises in society are often managed without applying a gender lens.

### Texts that risk reinforcing stereotypes

There are some writings in the Charter that risk reinforcing stereotypes, for example in Article 25 – Urban and Local Planning, where women are described as having a larger responsibility for more nurturing tasks.

### Recommendation:

- Identify texts that may reinforce stereotypes and modify them.

### Men and gender equality

There are views that the Charter does not sufficiently discuss the benefits that increased gender equality brings for men and boys.

### Recommendations:

- Clarify the benefits and responsibilities that exist for men and boys with increased gender equality.
- Introduce additions to the relevant articles in the Charter.

### The Internet and gender equality

In several workshops and interviews, developments during the past 15 years regarding the internet and how it affects gender equality were discussed. Dimensions that emerged concerned public services, sexism, harassment against women, grooming, and pornography.

\* See definition: 3.2. Workshop #2: Intersectionality, multiple discrimination, social inclusion



The internet also provides a space where anti-gender equality material is disseminated and shared on social networks. On the other hand, there is also extensive research on gender equality and tools to promote it available on the internet, as well as networks of like-minded organisations and institutions.

### Recommendations:

It is difficult to give unambiguous and clear recommendations at this stage. Apart from changes in the Charter, it is up to CEMR - together with signatories - to develop strategies for how to meet the challenges and opportunities that the internet and increasing digitalisation present.

The following changes are suggested:

- Include the risks and possibilities of the internet when it comes to gender equality in the introductory text of the Charter.
- Add text to the articles where the internet is a particular risk factor, such as: Article 2 – Political Representation, Article 3 – Participation in Political and Civic Life and Article 22 Gender based violence.

### Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

During the final workshop, a lot of input was received, especially concerning: the reasons behind men's violence against women, the consequences for children exposed to VAWG, intimate partner violence, the impacts and risks of the rapid development of the internet and digitalisation, and also the need to address the issue of prostitution in articles dealing with human trafficking.

### Recommendations:

- Include the consequences for children of violence against women and intimate partner violence in Article 22 – Gender-based violence.
- When it comes to Article 23 – Human trafficking, and the possible connection with prostitution, include a text reminding that the national policy and law guides the possibilities for local action.
- Continue to organise targeted workshops on the theme of tackling VAWG at local and regional level based on the results of the already completed workshop.

### The signatories' responsibilities

Several express that signatories can sometimes fail to sign the Charter because they think they must work on all the articles. Not wanting to sign is related to the fact that they see a risk that there is a large workload, but above all that not all articles apply to their territory or fall within their competences.

### Recommendation:

- Clarify that those who sign only need to work with the articles for which they are responsible, but also that they can prioritise which, for example, are most relevant to them or where they see disrupted development opportunities.

### Connections to other charters/frameworks for equality

Both during workshops and interviews, it appears that the Charter's relationship to other policy frameworks, such as the 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals (SDGs), needs to be clarified either in the Charter or its supporting documents. In this way, the different documents could support each other and act as leverages for each other.

## Recommendations:



- Add an introductory text to the Charter referencing the existence of complementary tools and policies.
- Organise exchange of experiences with signatories of the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Equality and the African Charter for Local Equality.

## 5.4. Methods

Many of the recommendations above can be implemented in different ways. For each topic, CEMR can consider the following:

- Revise the text directly:
  1. Modify existing articles
  2. Add new articles on specific topics
  3. Add explanatory texts as necessary
- Produce a “Charter-lite” version that is more accessible and communicative. This document could also include good practice examples and other tools to encourage successful implementation.
- Communicate on specific topics in-depth via the online Observatory, via informative campaigns and/or via a toolkit that goes out to potential and existing signatories.

## 5.5. Communication

Both during the workshops and from the interviews, a desire emerges to further develop how the Charter is communicated.

## Recommendations:



- Review CEMR’s strategies for communicating the Charter and, in connection with this, attach greater importance to accessibility in language and form.

## 5.6. CEMR’s future work with the Charter

Common needs, desires and expectations around the Charter and CEMR’s work on it arose in the workshops and interviews. They include:

- The need for easily available **technical knowledge** about things such as gender budgeting or methods of implementing gender mainstreaming or gender-transformative measures in local/regional government;
- Expectations for CEMR to **communicate** about the Charter in general; highlight it as a tool-box for working with gender equality and **effectively disseminate** existing toolkits and resources, such as the Charter indicator toolkit;
- Desire for the online Observatory to focus on the **implementation** of the Charter and be more easily accessible to those who are not experts;
- Desire for CEMR to organise **exchanges between signatories** through, for example, peer reviews, dissemination of good practice or webinars. With the help of digital meetings, this can be easier to organise although language interpretation remains a costly barrier to greater diversity and inclusion of participants;
- In connection with the previous point, the desire for CEMR to work with a **network of signatories** is described;
- Desire for CEMR to support national associations and Charter signatories in **accessing funds** to work with the Charter.

## Recommendations:



Beyond the immediate work to revitalise and modernise the Charter text in 2022, CEMR considers the following recommendations for action in the medium to long-term:

- Facilitate a peer-to-peer exchange between signatories based on the methodology used in SALAR's model municipalities project;
- Facilitate an exchange where signatories with a longer experience are mentors for new signatories;
- In order to further strengthen the exchange between signatories, CEMR could organise a network for signatories. The network could have both digital and physical meetings. It could have a revolving steering group which would give more signatories a possibility to influence the content;
- An alternative to such a network is that the CEMR arranges a biennial conference that also serves as a meeting place. The 2018 CEMR conference in Bilbao can serve as a reference;
- Further develop the Observatory so that it is easily accessible, with a focus on methods for implementation and good practice, including toolkits on specific topics covered by the Charter and targeting local and regional governments.

CEMR organised an online seminar on 7 March 2022 to present the key findings and recommendations of this report to its members, signatories and supporters of the European Charter for Equality.

The CEMR Secretariat and CEMR members will proceed directly with an update of the text in 2022 and continue to follow-up the other medium and long-term recommendations made above to ensure the Charter remains a vibrant and relevant tool to achieve gender equality in Europe's local and regional governments.

**Together, we can bring equality closer to home!**

## Acknowledgements

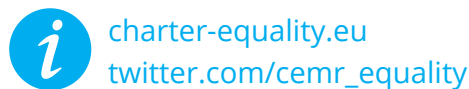
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