

THE PLACES OF MEN AND BOYS IN WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES



Study
Gender Equality Commission

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Study

prepared by Claire Guiraud and Romain Sabathier

Gender Equality Commission (GEC)

French edition:

Étude sur les places des hommes et des garçons dans les politiques pour les droits des femmes et l'égalité de genre

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

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

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Printed at the Council of Europe

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Executive summary

The issue of gender equality concerns society as a whole and both men and women are involved. Engaging men and boys in advancing gender equality may, therefore, seem obvious, marked by the seal of modernity and the aspiration to enjoy an egalitarian society together in the future. Consequently, very often, the questions “What are we talking about?” and “Why do we do it?” are replaced by the now urgent question “How do we do it?”.

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission commissioned this study in order to clarify the issues at stake and to map existing initiatives and public policies in this area.

The involvement of men and boys in achieving an egalitarian society is beneficial in the medium and long term to women and men, and to society as a whole. The study shows that this optimism should nevertheless be guided by lucidity and the consideration of facts. Clarifying the terms of the issue “men, boys and gender equality” is an essential prerequisite before proceeding with the “how to”. The various positions that men and boys occupy in relation to gender equality can be divided into three categories, namely:

- ▶ **Place 1** – men and boys as barriers to gender equality,
- ▶ **Place 2** – men and boys as agents of change towards gender equality,
- ▶ **Place 3** – men and boys as collateral victims of male domination.

While there is a consensus on the major importance of men’s role in ending gender-based violence and inequality, there is a debate regarding the appropriate modalities of action regarding their involvement and inclusion. The principal objective must remain that these strategies globally contribute to gender equality, and to women’s rights and empowerment. Today, this is not always reflected upon, let alone guaranteed. Therefore, a growing number of voices in research, civil society and institutions are calling for reasoned caution in this area.

Indeed, the reflection on men and boys in equality policies is often incomplete and influenced by simplistic rhetoric that promotes misconceptions (“what about male victims?”, “only women are considered nowadays”, etc.), and is sometimes based on arguments aimed at distorting realities and at playing down or even denying the persistence of structural inequalities, to the detriment of women in terms of pay, power, or physical integrity. In the very name of gender equality, the thinking – conscious or not – is, that after the time of women, the time of men should come. This narrative has been developed by the anti-feminist, men’s rights movement, a “conservative or reactionary social movement that claims that men suffer from an identity crisis because women in general, and feminists in particular, dominate society and its institutions”.¹ This narrative and movement seeks to depoliticise and undermine gender equality, which is intimately linked to the issue of power sharing.

The global Covid-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of the reality of social inequalities today, including those between women and men. This crisis has demonstrated the fragility of the rights and progress patiently conquered in recent decades, mostly by women. The health crisis has not only deepened existing inequalities but may have generated new ones: a decrease in the number of women experts in the media, a drop in women’s paid employment and an increase in unpaid care work disproportionately affecting women, an increase in domestic violence, and the fact that women and gender equality were neglected in many economic support and recovery plans.² Globally and structurally, there is still a social model of organisation that does not favour equality or the rights of women and girls.

Beyond assessing the status quo, we must consider the places given to men and boys in women’s rights and gender equality policies. While it would be incorrect to suggest that men and boys are excluded from these policies today (one need only look to education or training policies, or parental leave), it is nonetheless a fact that developing actions specifically aimed at men and boys within gender equality policies may well **divert resources and attention away from girls’ and women’s rights and to women’s/feminist organisations that are already underfunded as compared with their needs.** Moreover, it is necessary to look at whether the issues to be addressed are gender-sensitive and whether other public policies already take into account these groups of men and boys. This study identifies and explains these different issues.

Part II of the study is devoted to the mapping of initiatives concerning men and boys and gender equality. Almost 80 initiatives are listed. This work is based in particular on the contributions of the member States solicited within the framework of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission, as well as a literature review and interviews with experts. The inventory does not presume to be exhaustive or to provide an in-depth evaluation of these initiatives. Their nature and ambition are diverse. However, particular attention has been paid to those reforms that appear to be structural and are likely to have the greatest impact in terms of social transformation towards equality between women and men.

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1. Dupuis-Déri, F., 2009. “Masculinism: A Political History of the Term (in English and French).” *Recherches féministes*, 22(2), pp. 97-123 <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rf/2009-v22-n2-rf3635/039213ar/>
 2. See, for example, the statement by UN Secretary General António Guterres, “A crisis with a woman’s face”, 4 March 2021.

A first group of initiatives aims at **producing scientific data and analyses, normative frameworks, as well as spaces for exchange** and reflection on this issue. Although they are growing, scientific data and analyses are still sorely lacking. However, this is essential in order to base debates on the diagnosis, and solutions on solid scientific foundations. Three groups of initiatives then look at the positions of men and boys identified in the first part of the study: obstacles to equality, agents of change and collateral victims of gender relations.

Within the group on **men as obstacles to equality**, many initiatives focus on the important issue of the unequal sharing of unpaid work, i.e. mainly domestic and parental tasks within households. The mobilisation of public authorities seems to be accelerating. However, persistent inertia is still leading to poor outcomes: in all countries, the data shows that, on average, men bear a much smaller share of the domestic and parental workload than their female partners. Since 2020, legal and structural reforms have come into force in at least six member States of the Council of Europe which go towards greater co-responsibility of both parents for childcare. Since 1 January 2021, for example, Spain has implemented a “birth and childcare leave” of 16 weeks for both parents, of which 8 weeks are compulsory for each parent, non-transferable and paid at 100% of salary. By backing ambition with resources, this reform illustrates a possible way to increase the rights of both parents, encourage men’s involvement in care and promote acceptance of it in society, while improving living conditions for women – notably those in paid employment – and for future generations.

Human rights are universal, as is their defence. In the same way that the fight against racism has no borders, the fight against sexism is open to all. Today, as in the past, men are mobilised for the rights of women and girls and the achievement of gender equality. Initiatives are being taken that aim at making more **men and boys active and pro-active agents of change for equality**. This can be done through actions that call on male leaders in politics, the media, heads of large companies and sports and cultural institutions, or even more broadly on team leaders in the world of work, following the example of UN Women’s global HeForShe initiative, or through the development of mandatory gender equality training in public or private organisations.

Finally, as regards **men who are collateral victims of patriarchy and of gender stereotypes**, the initiatives appear to be few, though they are growing. Moreover, a paradox exists. Where data and gender analyses are the most scientifically robust and the least debated – for example, on the issue of boys who are victims of sexual violence or the issue of GBT+ people who are victims of discrimination and sexual violence – few initiatives have been identified. On the other hand, initiatives are undertaken under the same heading of “men, boys and gender equality” on issues where the research is divided and which are prone to being exploited by anti-feminist men’s rights groups (for example, boys dropping out of school or intimate partnership violence against men by women).

How, then, can we pursue and amplify public policies aimed at men and boys through a gender lens?

How can we loosen the restraints of gender norms and stereotypes to increase personal freedom for women and men while acting in a firm way to achieve real equality, no more and no less?

At the end of this study, the following **six recommendations** are formulated for the Council of Europe and its member States:

1. Ensure that initiatives on “men, boys and gender equality” do indeed **promote women’s rights and gender equality**.
2. **Engage men** – especially those in positions of power – to act for structural changes towards real equality.
3. Strengthen **gender mainstreaming** in all public policies.
4. Take seriously the **global threat posed by anti-feminist men’s rights movements**.
5. Co-operate with and **strengthen support for women’s/feminist organisations**.
6. Support the development of **gender studies**.



Introduction

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission (GEC) is seeking to **deepen its reflection on the places of men and boys in gender equality policies.**

Two experts, Claire Guiraud and Romain Sabathier, were therefore tasked to draft a “mapping study of activities and experiences at national and international level on the issue of men and the promotion of gender equality and to give guidelines for Council of Europe action”. This draft study informed the discussion that took place during the GEC plenary session on 14-15 April 2021 and forms, together with the feedback of the GEC, the basis of the present study.

This work is in line with the objectives set out in the Council of Europe Strategy for Gender Equality 2018-2023, which recognises the importance of involving men and boys in achieving gender equality, particularly in relation to the strategic objective of preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism.

By way of introduction, it is important to note that **the topic “men, boys and gender equality” has become increasingly visible in recent years**; the literature on the subject is abundant and the initiatives in this area are growing, from local to global levels.

While the label is recent, questioning the place of men and boys in equality policies is as old as the place and responsibility of men in gender *inequalities*: it has always been and remains central. Women's rights and equality policies have always sought to rebalance the place of women and men in society and have always 'integrated' men and boys. This includes for example, equality education policies for girls and boys in order to fight against stereotypes; the recognition of violence in the penal code – to reduce men's hold over women's bodies; and the introduction of parental and paternity leave.

The emergence of this issue, which is often wrongly perceived as autonomous and independent from the policies for the promotion of women's rights, is the result of multiple factors, including:

- ▶ **Civil society:** action of some committed women seeking support from men, particularly in contexts where men control the overwhelming majority of resources and where women may not yet have equal rights. In France, for example, between 1870 and the inter-war period, the feminist movement comprised 30% men, some of whom made their newspapers or other resources available to the movement.³ During the women's liberation movements in several countries in the 1970s, fellow activist men were invited by women to question, at their level, the reproduction of dominant male archetypes.⁴ Later, organisations developed whose specific objective is the contribution of men to the feminist movement: Promundo – created in 1977 in Brazil, a member of the international network, MenEngage – created in 2004, are examples of this.
- ▶ **Academic sphere:** thanks to the development of a feminist critique in the field of research with the emergence of "gender" as a concept, aiming at the dual objective of "taking women out of invisibility (...) but also of opening the "black box" that constitutes the "social group of men", until then unspecified as a sex category, a dominant one in this case".⁵ In response, *men's studies* developed, followed by *masculinities studies* from the 1980s.⁶
- ▶ **States and international organisations:** guidance was given by a few countries and relayed by international organisations. In Norway and Sweden, voluntary quotas were put in place for the first time within political parties to limit the over-occupation by men of certain positions of power, illustrating a way in which men with power can get involved. In 1993, Norway also became the first country in the world to introduce paternity leave provisions. In 2006, the Finnish Presidency of the European Union (EU) used the slogan "Gender equality needs men, men need gender equality". The issue of men and gender

3. Jacquemart, A. and Albenga, V., 2015. « Pour une approche microsociologique des idées politiques: Les appropriations ordinaires des idées féministes » *Politix*, 1(1), pp. 7-20.

4. In the United States, for example, Warren Thomas Farrell was invited to sit on NOW's governing bodies and to create a sub-group for men only. He is now considered one of the fathers of "men's studies" but has broken away from the feminist movement and his works inspire many masculinist groups.

5. Le Talec, J.Y., 2016. "Des Men's Studies aux Masculinity Studies: du patriarcat à la pluralité des masculinités". *SociologieS*.

6. Hearn, J., et al., 2012. "Hegemonic masculinity and beyond: 40 years of research in Sweden." *Men and masculinities*, 15(1), pp. 31-55.

equality is now one of the four priorities of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Co-operation Programme on Gender Equality,⁷ which has resulted in the funding of activities in so-called developing countries.⁸

- ▶ **Anti-feminisms and masculinisms:**⁹ the influence of reactionary men's rights discourse denouncing a 'crisis of masculinity' has played a role in the emergence of these issues. The history of anti-feminist men's rights activism, as well as its influence on the development of laws and public policies and on funding, including for women's rights associations, is now well documented.¹⁰

In the face of the diversity of discourses, practices and cross-influences, it seems essential to take the time to reflect on two fundamental questions: "men, boys and gender equality" – why and how?

After clarifying the terms, identifying the objectives to be pursued and the risks to be avoided (Part I), a sample of operational initiatives will be presented (Part II).

Finally, six recommendations are made, addressed to the Council of Europe and its member States, regarding the places of men and boys in women's rights and gender equality policies.

The choice of language

The issue of the places of men and boys in equality policies is addressed through a **wide variety of terms and expressions**, namely the "involvement", "inclusion", "integration" or "engagement" of men and boys in equality policies; a reflection on the "place", "position", "role", "responsibility" of men and boys in equality policies; the "participation" or "contribution" of men and boys in/to equality policies; and the need or expectation for men and boys to be "supportive", "unified", "active partners", "allies" of women's rights movements and equality policies or "agents of change".

7. <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1283606/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

8. For example, the international baseline survey on men and gender equality – IMAGES (2017) – conducted in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine, was driven by UN Women, under the aegis of the UN Regional Programme "Men and Women for Gender Equality" funded by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida). The 2015-2020 survey "Becoming Men", co-ordinated by the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands and having received 2 million euros of EU funding, focuses on men in six cities in South Africa and Tanzania. The MenEngage network, launched with the financial support of the Norwegian and Swedish governments, seems to be particularly rooted in countries of the South: launch in Nepal in 2007, symposiums in Brazil (2009), India (2014), Rwanda (2020), and its actions and members seem to come mainly from developing countries.

9. See pp. 8 and 9 for terminological clarification of "anti-feminisms", "masculinisms" and "myth of the crisis of masculinity".

10. See Bard, C., Blais, M. and Dupuis-Déri, F., 2019. "Antiféminismes et masculinismes d'hier et d'aujourd'hui". Presses Universitaires de France; Dupuis-Déri, F., 2013. "L'antiféminisme d'État". *Lien social et Politiques*, (69), pp.163-180 and the report "The angry internet – A threat to gender equality, democracy & well-being" (prepared by the Centre for Digital Youth Care, in the framework of the Danish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers) https://cfdp.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CFDP_the_angry_internet_ISSUE.pdf

The diversity of these expressions is indicative of the fact that meaning in, and the contours of, this field seem to be understood in a variety of ways, at times even erroneously. For example, talking about “including” or “integrating” men and boys in equality policies implies that they are currently illegitimately excluded. The notion of “**the place(s) of men and boys in policies in favour of gender equality and women’s rights**” would appear to be the most relevant way to refer to this issue generally.

Some key concepts in relation to the present study

The term **masculinity(ies)** can be understood as covering “those behaviours, languages and practices (...), which are commonly associated with men, thus culturally defined as not feminine (...). The understanding of masculinity varies across time and socio-cultural contexts, and within groups and networks; and men also ‘perform’ their masculinity differently and inconsistently.”¹¹ In the 1970s, the concept of “**hegemonic masculinity**” emerged, later clarified by the Australian sociologist R. W. Connell, “who envisages four types of masculinities: hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalised”, looking at gender “in relation to other social structures: class and race”.¹²

The term **femininity(ies)** can refer to “different notions of what it means to be a woman, including patterns of conduct linked to a woman’s assumed place in a given set of gender roles and relations”.¹³

Feminism can be defined as “a movement [or a set of movements] to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice”.¹⁴

Pro-feminism generally refers to men who support the demands of feminist movements and who reflect about and deconstruct their own behaviour and privileges to make sure that they do not reproduce relations of domination by reflecting about and deconstructing their own behaviour and privileges.

Masculinism, anti-feminism, manosphere: “On the English-speaking side, the word “masculinism” is most often used to designate the patriarchal ideology (...). On the French-speaking side, from the 1990s onwards, the word has been increasingly used to designate an anti-feminist movement (...) a conservative or reactionary social movement which claims that men suffer from an identity crisis because women in general, and feminists in particular, dominate society and its institutions.”¹⁵ The manosphere can be defined as “groups of people, mostly men,

11. Whitehead, S.M. and Barrett, F. eds., 2001. *The masculinities reader*. John Wiley & Sons.

12. Delphine Moraldo, “Raewyn Connell, Masculinities. Social Issues of Hegemony”, Readings [Online], The Proceedings, posted online 11 June 2014, accessed 1 March 2021. <http://journals.openedition.org/lectures/13753>

13. European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), *Gender Equality Glossary & Thesaurus*

14. Council of Europe Youth Department, Gender Matters Manual Webpage: [Feminism and Women’s Rights Movements \(coe.int\)](https://www.coe.int/t/e/youth/gender_matters_manual.aspx)

15. Dupuis-Déri, F., 2009. “Masculinism: A political history of the term.” *Recherches féministes*, 22(2), pp. 97-123 <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/rf/2009-v22-n2-rf3635/039213ar/>

who are in strong opposition to feminism and gender equality in society. These transnational groups, active mainly online, feel that the strengthening of women's rights and equality comes at the expense of men".¹⁶ Originally, anti-feminist men's rights activists "are disproportionately white, heterosexual, middle-class, affluent men between the ages of 35 and 60, and generally with a high level of education".¹⁷ The mansphere also includes younger men. These are the "masculinists 2.0".

Anti-feminist men's rights activists or movements frequently use the idea of a **crisis of masculinity**, which refers to the confusion experienced by men and boys as a result of changing and contradictory societal norms. The discourse on the crisis of masculinity is very old and comes back every time women gain autonomy.¹⁸ According to social scientist Francis Dupuis-Déri, the "crisis of masculinity" is more "a refusal on the part of men to accept equality and their reaffirmation of the importance of a hierarchical difference between the sexes."¹⁹

This discourse is also echoed in movements/networks that have made "gender" their battle horse, after abortion rights or the rights of LGBT+ people. These movements are particularly opposed to equality education in schools, fearing "emasculatation" and "homosexual propaganda" in relation to boys.

The **cost of male domination** refers to the constraints induced for men by male domination: "affective and emotional retention, fear of losing face; investment in all forms of competition that give access to success, to visibility, to the esteem of peers, and to material resources; a valorisation of risky behaviour and forms of aggressiveness".²⁰ It can be understood "either as an objective cost for society or as a subjective cost borne by men".²¹ The notion of the 'costs' of masculinity is also central to the anti-feminist men's rights rhetoric. It should be remembered that the 'costs' must be "addressed within the framework of the relations of domination constituted by gender relations", because "while learning a 'masculinist' way of being in the world and a 'masculinist' worldview may have secondary costs, it does, above all, allow for the enjoyment of incomparable privileges for the rest of life."²²

16. Alexander Breum Andersson, quoted in the report of the 16th meeting of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission, November 2019 – <https://rm.coe.int/gec-2019-report-november/16809c8236>

17. Blais, M., 2020. "Masculinist discourses on intimate partner violence: Anti-feminist men defending white heterosexual male supremacy". In *Men, Masculinities and Intimate Partner Violence* (pp. 81-96). Routledge.

18. Already in 195 BC in Rome, after one of the first recorded demonstrations of women in history, the consul Cato the Elder was concerned about the lack of authority of their husbands, insulted women as "street girls" and said: "if they become your equals, they will dominate you" (Tite-Live in *Ab Urbe condita libri* quoted in *L'histoire des femmes pour les nuls* by Sophie Cassagnes-Brouquet, First, 2013)

19. Dupuis-Déri, F., 2012. "Le discours de la 'crise de la masculinité' comme refus de l'égalité entre les sexes : histoire d'une rhétorique antiféministe". *Cahiers du Genre*, (1), pp.119-143.

20. Kaufman, M., 1993. "Cracking the armour: Power, pain and the lives of men." Viking. <https://books.openedition.org/pur/67098?lang=fr#ftn15>

21. Clément Arambourou quoting Anne Verjus, in "Boys don't Cry! Les coûts de la domination masculine". PUR, Rennes, 2012, Travail, genre et sociétés 2014/1 (n° 31), pp. 195-198 <https://urlr.me/H6YVv>

22. Thiers-Vidal, L., 2002. "De la masculinité à l'anti-masculinisme : penser les rapports sociaux de sexe à partir d'une position sociale oppressive." *Nouvelles questions féministes*, 21(3), pp.71-83.

Male privilege refers to the set of advantages that come with being born and raised male, such as: “easier access to material resources (power, money), more freedom (occupation of space, availability of free time, ...), the possibility of having less responsibility and emotional involvement in the family sphere, to have more legitimacy (in conversations) and more security (less exposure to aggression, including sexual assault).”²³ Most men are not aware of these advantages, which are neither opted into nor spoken about: “Whereas these men may well (...) perceive that it is men who put “obstacles in the way” of women, they do not go so far as to deduce that it is thanks to this action of collective and individual domination that their own lives are improved and privileged.”²⁴

23. McIntosh, P., 1989. July/August. “White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack.” *Peace and freedom*, 10. cited by Ségolène Roy in Mediapart “Le privilège masculin”, online 4 December 2017 <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/segolene-roy/blog/041217/le-privilege-masculin-0>

24. *Ibid.*



Framing of the “men, boys and gender equality” field

In view of the great diversity of activities that can fall within the field of “men, boys and gender equality”, it seems necessary to clarify the reasons for these actions (why) and their objectives (for what), in order to disclose the issues at stake and point out possible pitfalls.

a) A place or places for men and boys?

The analysis of initiatives and discourses allows **the identification of three ‘places’** that men and boys occupy in social relations and in equality policies:

1. Men as **obstacles to equality**, through their **individual** behaviour (for example, when they are perpetrators of violence or when they do not do their share of unpaid work) or **collective behaviour** (when they organise themselves to resist progress towards gender equality, such as in anti-feminist movements, including reactionary men’s rights or anti-gender groups).
2. Men as **agents of change**, who **mobilise** for equality, either **individually** (by reflecting on their behaviour, their privileges and the transformation of gender norms and masculinities) or **collectively** (by joining feminist organisations) with a strategic stake in the **‘men with power’** who are in a position to have a multiplier effect.

These first two ‘families’ of interventions actually constitute a continuum of actions: any man who is not an obstacle is on the way to becoming an agent of change towards equality. Thus, two reasons for action follow:

Reason 1 – Men’s individual and collective behaviour is crucial to the full realisation of gender equality and of women’s and girls’ rights: they must go from being obstacles to equality to being agents of it, and men in positions of power have a particular responsibility in this respect.

Reason 2 – Anti-feminist men’s rights movements threaten progress in the area of gender equality.

3. Some men and boys are “**collateral victims**” of the gender system and of the stereotypes associated with masculinity (cost of male domination), whether they suffer from violence committed by other men (verbal, physical or sexual violence, including incestuous violence, particularly against boys, gay or trans men, or men and boys who do not conform to gender stereotypes), or whether they adopt harmful behaviours against themselves, such as for example a greater propensity for risky behaviour, less use of preventive health care, disinvestment in school, etc. From this observation comes a new reason for action:

Reason 3 – Men and boys may have a short-term or long-term interest in equality and the end of male dominance.

b) Reasons for, and objectives of, public action

Reason 1 – Men must be agents of change towards gender equality: those who oppose – actively or not – must come to promote it instead, and men in positions of power have an important part to play in this regard.

■ **Facts and figures:** As stated in the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, women still face serious inequalities – especially in relation to unpaid work – and considerable gender-based violence. One must, therefore, ask what it is that men do – or not do – and what impact this behaviour has on women’s lives.

- ▶ **Violence:** Since the age of 15, one in five women (22%) who are or have been involved in a relationship with a partner have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence.²⁵ Of the women concerned, 99.5% indicated that it was a male partner.²⁶ Furthermore, when the women stated that they had been *sexually* abused since the age of 15 by a perpetrator other than an intimate partner, 97% of the perpetrators were men. And when the women stated that they had been *physically* abused since the age of 15 by a perpetrator other than an intimate partner, men are 2,5 more likely to be the perpetrator than women (67% of the perpetrators were men and 26% were women).²⁷

25. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), “Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, main results”, FRA, 2012, page 27 <https://urlr.me/8Y7Qy>

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.* page 48.

- ▶ **Sharing of care-related jobs:** Overall in Europe, the proportion of men in all care-related jobs is around 10% to 20% of the workforce.²⁸
- ▶ **Sharing of paid and unpaid work:** In the EU in 2014, men spent 17 hours a week less than women in unpaid work (9 hours compared to 26 hours), and 7 hours more than women in paid work (40 hours compared to 33 hours).²⁹ In 2019 women earned on average 14.1% less than men per hour for the same job.³⁰ This under-investment of men in unpaid work leads to a high proportion of part-time jobs for women and results in higher poverty rates and lower pensions for women.³¹

Such figures are essential to remember because they form the basis of the feminist movement and of policies for real equality between women and men. Notwithstanding public policies in this area, the systemic, and therefore political, nature of inequalities to the disadvantage of women because they are women is still far from being understood and accepted by the general population or their representatives.

“New” men or “dispossessed fathers”: getting the facts right

So-called “new” men are those who take an active part in their family life, which suggests that a major shift has taken place since the end of the 20th century, as compared to previous generations. Despite some progress, however, data show that equality in this area is still far from being achieved in Europe (see footnote 79).

The expression “*dispossessed fathers*”, first used by anti-feminist men’s rights organisations claiming to be dealing with “fathers’ rights”, refers to fathers whose custody rights are withdrawn, supposedly illegitimately, due to a justice system which favours mothers, or due to manipulation by mothers. These claims sometimes refer to a so-called “*parental alienation syndrome*”. Nevertheless, in France, for example, the vast majority of fathers do not request shared custody of their children, and when they do, they obtain it in the overwhelming majority of cases.³² As for allegations of “*parental alienation*”, aiming to undermine the credibility of the mother, especially, or of the father or the child, and to maintain control over the family, this supposed “*syndrome*” is not recognised by the scientific community – neither the DSM5 Manual of the American Psychiatric Association,³³ nor the World Health Organisation. Conversely, research shows that false allegations of

28. Working paper, 3rd International Conference on Men and Equal Opportunities (ICMEO) 2016 – <https://urlr.me/RrcD4>

29. European Commission – DG Justice “Visions for Gender Equality” by Francesca Bettio and Silvia Sansonetti, 2015, page 14 – <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/150902>

30. Eurostat database – https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/earn_gr_gpgr2/default/table

31. EIGE, 2021. “Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market”. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-inequalities-care-and-consequences-labour-market>

32. In France, 18.8% of fathers apply for shared custody and 17.3% of fathers actually obtain it. Maud Guillonnet, Caroline Moreau – Ministère de la justice (France) “Residence of children of separated parents – From the parents’ request to the judge’s decision – Analysis of the final decisions rendered by family court judges in the period between 4 June and 15 June 2012”, November 2013. http://www.justice.gouv.fr/art_pix/1_rapportresidence_11_2013.pdf, p. 40

33. Romito, P. and Crisma, M., 2009. “Les violences masculines occultées : le syndrome d’aliénation parentale”. *Empa*, (1), pp.31-39. <https://doi.org/10.3917/empa.073.0031>

child abuse or neglect are marginal.³⁴ Several reports from the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO – which monitors the implementation of the Istanbul Convention) have also expressed concerns and criticism regarding the so-called parental alienation syndrome.³⁵

On the other hand, **through their individual or collective behaviour, men can contribute to change and become allies** in solidarity with women's movements and equality policies. In this respect, men holding power, such as politicians, business leaders, managing editors, magistrates or police officers, religious leaders or public figures from the cultural or sport sectors, bear a particular responsibility. Furthermore, from a strategic point of view, identifying committed male role models can facilitate the activation of other men.

- ▶ **Power Sharing:** 83% of the top political positions in Europe are held by men (heads of state and government, heads of regional governments, mayors).³⁶ 95% of top positions in the technology sector are held by men.³⁷ 94% of the top 100 media companies internationally are led by men.³⁸

■ **Public policy objectives:** In order to support changes in men's individual and collective behaviour towards the full realisation of gender equality and of girls' and women's rights, gender equality policies should:

remove the barriers...

- ▶ Promote and enforce laws, including international instruments such as the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) that prohibit violence and punish perpetrators, in order to reduce impunity; better analyse the life evolution and profiles of perpetrators; ensure that these men and boys change, including to better prevent them from re-offending; identify and strengthen resources and knowledge to promote positive behavioural change.

34. Romano, H., 2006. "Suspicion d'abus sexuel chez les enfants de moins de quatre ans". *Le journal des psychologues*, (5), pp. 40-44.

35. See, for example, GREVIO's reports on France, 2019 ([http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf\(2019\)16_France_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-32](http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf(2019)16_France_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-32)); Italy, 2020 ([http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf\(2019\)18_Italy_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-8](http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf(2019)18_Italy_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-8)); Belgium, 2020 ([http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf\(2020\)14_Belgium_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-35](http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf(2020)14_Belgium_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-35)); Andorra, 2020 ([http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf\(2020\)18_Andorra_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-34](http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf(2020)18_Andorra_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-34)); Spain, 2020 ([http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf\(2020\)19_Spain_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-36](http://hudoc.grevio.coe.int/eng?i=GREVIO-Inf(2020)19_Spain_Baseline_Evaluation_Report_eng-36))

36. Council of Europe, *Balanced participation of women and men in decision making – analytical report – data 2016*, 2017.

37. PricewaterhouseCoopers, cited by Jessie Smith, "A glass ceiling in male-dominated Big Tech is keeping innovating women from making their mark", published online 13 November 2019 <https://url.me/b5ytP>

38. Nordicom citing Institut für Medien- und Kommunikationspolitik, in "The media is a male business", online on 26 February 2018 <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/latest/news/media-male-business>

- ▶ Promote effective incentives or binding mechanisms (for example, mandatory paternity leave or shared parental leave) in order to achieve a real sharing of unpaid domestic and care work, including of the psychological burden it entails.
- ▶ Promote or impose a true sharing of power in all areas (for example, through parity laws or quotas).

... and support mobilisation for change:

- ▶ Educate about equality and, in particular, promote respect for consent from an early age; provide positive, diverse and non-stereotypical role models.
- ▶ Engage with men – especially those in positions of power – about their responsibility, raising awareness of the privileges they enjoy, consciously or not.
- ▶ As men, be vocal in supporting feminist and women’s rights movements and gender equality policies; contribute as men towards deconstructing pre-conceived ideas and caricatures about feminist movements and unmasking reactionary men’s rights discourse and its influence on public debate (the idea of a crisis of masculinity, for example).
- ▶ As men, reject single-sex and/or unequal power structures (“boys’ clubs”); break sexist bonds with other men (sexist jokes, conscious or unconscious strategies that exclude women); speak out against violence and support victims.
- ▶ Put one’s power to work in favour of a transition towards gender equality, in particular by allocating the necessary resources to it.

Reason 2 – Anti-feminist men’s rights movements threaten existing progress.

■ **Facts and figures:** While individual men’s behaviour can sometimes unconsciously stand in the way of equality, there are groups of men who voluntarily organise to resist progress towards equality, sometimes acting in disguise: these are the anti-feminist men’s rights activists.

Despite the lack of available data on the prevalence and influence of anti-feminist men’s rights organisations, academic research³⁹ and the testimonies of women’s rights associations demonstrate that they have continued to gain ground, particularly over the last decade. Studies have shown that these groups have a great capacity to adapt to conceptual, societal and technological developments and trends in order to develop their discourse, operating ground and methods. Whereas initially they were political activists operating at the grass roots level, they now recruit men from diverse professional sectors including social workers, educators and researchers. More recently, they have been re-appropriating the notion of intersectionality in order to recruit members outside their traditional target audience, including non-white and non-heterosexual men. In addition, while their political demands were initially limited to “fathers’ rights”, they now tackle broader social issues such as men’s education

39. See Bard, C., Blais, M., & Dupuis-Déri, F. (2019). “Antiféminismes et masculinismes d’hier et d’aujourd’hui”. Presses Universitaires de France and the report “The angry internet – A threat to gender equality, democracy & well-being” (prepared by the Centre for Digital Youth Care, in the framework of the Danish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers) https://cfdp.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CFDP_the_angry_internet_ISSUE.pdf

and health issues. Methods include manipulating data and deploying misogynistic discourses to challenge and undermine feminist claims around gender inequality and violence against women, or engaging in more violent action against women and women's rights defenders. Anti-feminist men's rights groups are also increasingly active in the digital sphere (see definition of manosphere) with the increasing emergence of online misogynist spaces. These anti-feminist men's rights movements are often in opposition to the rights of LGBT+ people, they have driven the backlash against women's rights and gender equality and are often well funded and organised.

■ **Public policy objectives:** In order to counter anti-feminist men's rights movements that threaten progress made, equality policies should:

- ▶ Identify and decipher anti-feminist men's rights discourses, in order to prevent violence (promoted) by such groups both online and offline, and to limit their power to recruit or cause harm.
- ▶ Explore the links between violent men's rights movements and terrorism in order to prevent potential alliances or convergence with other reactionary social movements (for example, far right, white supremacist, and neo-Nazi terrorist groups).

Reason 3 – Men and boys who are collateral victims of male domination may have a short or long-term interest in equality.

■ **Facts and figures:** Manifestations of male domination over boys and men can take varied forms:

- ▶ **Sexual violence against boys:** In Europe, the prevalence of sexual assault is 14% for girls and 6% for boys.⁴⁰ Data provided by Interpol on child sexual exploitation, based on a random selection of images and videos depicting the sexual exploitation of children, showed that 65% of unidentified victims were girls.⁴¹ The most serious forms of abuse depicted were often those involving boys and 92% of visible offenders were male.⁴²
- ▶ **Violence against men:** A survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2021 showed that men therefore account for the vast majority of perpetrators of violence – both against women and against other men.⁴³ Specifically, the survey showed that 68% of acts of physical violence against women were perpetrated by men, and 81% of acts of physical violence against men were also perpetrated by men.⁴⁴

40. World Health Organisation (WHO) "Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020", quoting Moody, G., Cannings-John, R., Hood, K., Kemp, A. and Robling, M., 2018. "Establishing the international prevalence of self-reported child maltreatment: a systematic review by maltreatment type and gender." *BMC public health*, 18(1), pp. 1-15.

41. Interpol has set up an international child sexual exploitation (ICSE) database containing images and video, which enables information to be exchanged on child crime cases. See Interpol "Towards a Global Indicator on Unidentified Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Material", 2018 <https://www.interpol.int/Crimes/Crimes-against-children/International-Child-Sexual-Exploitation-database>

42. *Ibid.*

43. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Rights Survey "Crime, safety and victims' rights", 2021, p. 44, Figure 7.

44. *Ibid.*

Research⁴⁵ has pointed to the links between violence and dominant social norms around masculinity including physical strength, power, domination, and aggression. Male violence against men particularly affects young men and men belonging to marginalised groups including migrant men, GBT+ men, men belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, homeless men and men with disabilities. Men that do not conform to traditional gender roles and norms may also be subject to sexist comments or behaviour.⁴⁶

- ▶ **Violence against gay, bisexual, transgender men and boys:** According to a study conducted by FRA in 2020, 38% of gay men and 30% of bisexual men in the EU reported having experienced harassment on account of being GBT+ in the 12 months preceding the study.⁴⁷

These figures reveal the inherent link between male domination and violence against other men and LGBT+ persons because “Heteronormative societies impose a very distinct way of understanding the role of men and women. (...) Such assumptions and norms lead to direct or indirect discrimination of LGBT+ people in the public sphere, limiting their access to – or even denying them access to different services”.⁴⁸

The “battered men” taboo: myth or reality? Data on male victims of intimate partner violence

While there is evidence that gender norms and stereotypes can affect men’s help seeking behaviours when experiencing intimate partner violence, the notion that there is a symmetry between violence against women and men is not supported by scientific evidence.⁴⁹ Despite this, reports of gender symmetry have come to play a significant role in public and media discussions of intimate partner violence and domestic violence, casting doubt on data that overwhelmingly shows that women disproportionately experience intimate partner violence.

For example, official data published by Luxembourg⁵⁰ indicates that in 36% of police reports, the victims are men and the perpetrators are women. However, these cases involve all types of relationships between the perpetrator and the victim, including violence by parents against their children or violence between cohabiting persons, and not just cases of intimate partner violence. In relation to intimate partner violence specifically, according to the same data, in cases tried

45. Scambor, E. et al., 2014. “Men and gender equality: European insights.” *Men and masculinities*, 17(5), pp.552-577.

46. In France for example, 45% of male managers at work have heard sexist remarks targeting them or a male colleague, such as: “he’s too nice, you need to man up in this job”, “I need real men, with stomachs and hearts”, “with this generation ‘y’, we can’t expect anything from boys”, “he’s useless, he’s a sissy”, and “he’s a father, we can’t count on him” (LH2-CSEP survey, conducted in 2013, published in 2015).

47. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “EU-LGBTI II – A long way to go for LGBTI equality”, FRA, 2020 https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-LGBTQI+-equality-1_en.pdf, p. 44.

48. Council of Europe website on gender equality in the youth sector – <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/gender-equality-and-gender-mainstreaming>

49. Kimmel, M. S., 2002. “Gender Symmetry” in *Domestic Violence: A Substantive and Methodological Research Review*, Violence Against Women, 8(11), pp. 1332–1363. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/107780102237407>

50. <https://mega.public.lu/fr/publications/publications-ministere/2020/Rapport-au-gouvernement-2019-Comite-Violence.html>

by district courts 89% of the perpetrators are men and 11% women. Furthermore, 92% of persons monitored by the intimate partner violence victim support service were victims of male violence and only 8% of violence perpetrated by women.

In addition to the issue of data interpretation, academic literature has also drawn attention to problems in the production of data as well as to definitions used for intimate partner violence and gender-based violence.

For instance, studies highlighting a high proportion of male victims of intimate partner violence⁵¹ often confuse the concepts of “violence” and “conflict”, failing to take into account the context in which acts of violence take place (in self-defence, for example), and taking little or no account of the severity of the violent acts documented, the nature of the harm inflicted, and the frequency of the violence inflicted. In fact, the evidence shows that women’s and men’s experiences of intimate partner violence vary considerably.⁵²

GREVIO’s country evaluation reports confirm these problems in data collection and data interpretation. For instance, in its evaluation reports on Belgium (2020), Denmark (2017) and the Netherlands (2020), GREVIO notes both a lack of sex disaggregated data on intimate partner violence (in Belgium the sex of victims is not yet recorded in police data on intimate partner homicide), and a lack of gender analysis (for example, in the Netherlands, population-based surveys on intimate partner violence refer to the so-called gender-neutral “interpersonal violence”).⁵³ Another issue identified by GREVIO is a lack of data on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator in intimate partner violence statistics.

The idea that intimate partner violence is reciprocal lies at the heart of anti-feminist men’s rights discourse, fuelling the notion that men are neglected in policies to combat intimate partner violence, and that women’s rights have taken precedence over those of men. Consequently, the acknowledgment that women commit violent acts against their partners should not raise questions as to the legitimacy of policies and institutional resources dedicated to combating violence against women,⁵⁴ or cause a radical shift in public policies to combat male violence.

51. Often based on the Conflict Tactics Scale tool.

52. Jouvét-Légrand, L., 2018. “Violences conjugales: une montée du courant masculiniste?”, *SociologieS*; Cavalin, C., 2013. “Interroger les femmes et les hommes au sujet des violences conjugales en France et aux États-Unis: entre mesures statistiques et interprétations sociologiques”. *Nouvelles questions féministes*, 32(1), pp.64-76.; Côté, I. and Lapierre, S., 2014. “Abortion and domestic violence: Women’s decision-making process.” *Affilia*, 29(3), pp.285-297; Brown, E. and Lefaucheur, N., 2012. “Les violences subies dans les différents espaces de vie en Martinique.” *Pouvoirs dans la Caraïbe. Revue du CRPLC*, (17), pp.73-107.

53. On the subject of the Netherlands, GREVIO states that it is “concerned that overall the gender-neutral approach to data collection creates particular difficulties in understanding the different nature and severity of violence against women, the gendered nature of the majority of domestic violence in the Netherlands and the presentation of the conclusions of those data to the public”, <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-netherlands/1680997253>

54. In the introduction to its section on gender-based violence on its website, EIGE points out that “gender” terminology highlights the fact that the main forms of violence against women are rooted in power inequalities between women and men, an idea that also forms the basis for the definitions and the structural concepts used in the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>

- ▶ **Mental health and suicide:** Globally, suicide rates in men are just over twice as high as in women (6.3 deaths per 100 000 for women, 13.9 for 100 000 for men).⁵⁵

Male suicide – are women to blame?

As Francis Dupuis-Déri points out in his work *“La crise de la masculinité – Autopsie d’un mythe tenace”* (The masculinity crisis – autopsy of a stubborn myth), suicide rates among men have been an issue of focus for anti-feminist men’s rights movements, particularly among those claiming to champion “fathers’ rights”, attributing the higher suicide rate among men to the rise in divorce rates and the withdrawal of child custody rights.

Yet the gap in suicide rates in women and men has historically remained stable and there is no evidence that rates correlate with gender equality trends or changes in the position of women in society. There are also major variations in suicide rates in women and men across the world, and in some countries rates among women are higher.⁵⁶

There is also evidence that shows that women are more likely to have suicidal thoughts and attempt suicide more often than men, but use less lethal methods.⁵⁷ Despite this, the instrumentalisation of suicide rates by men’s rights movements does not invalidate the legitimacy of targeted suicide prevention policies. While research shows that the primary causes of suicide are economic crises and poverty, as well as racism, homophobia and transphobia (for example, one in three young transgender persons in Canada has seriously considered suicide),⁵⁸ Francis Dupuis-Déri adds that “the conventional representation of men as active, strong and always successful makes men more vulnerable to personal failure – at work, in their family life, etc. – and makes them less willing to ask for help”. For this reason, in many countries, the findings of such studies on gender and masculinity are rightly taken into account as part of gender mainstreaming approaches to public health policies.

- ▶ **Education:** In 2012, 14% of boys and 9% of girls in OECD countries had failed to reach the benchmark proficiency level of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)⁵⁹ in three subjects: reading, mathematics and science. Since 2000, gaps between girls and boys in the PISA assessment have narrowed, but girls are still more proficient in reading than boys, and boys

55. Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 2016 <https://ourworldindata.org/suicide>

56. The suicide rate is estimated to be higher among women in Bangladesh, China, Lesotho, Morocco and Myanmar (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), 2016).

57. Guillaume, S. & Courtet, P., 2010. “Qu’est-ce qui distingue les femmes des hommes ?” In: Philippe Courtet ed., *Suicides et tentatives de suicide* (pp. 160-163). Cachan, France: Lavoisier.

58. Veale, J., Saewyc, E.M., Frohard-Dourlent, H., Dobson, S. and Clark, B., 2015. “Being safe, being me: Results of the Canadian trans youth health survey”, cited in <https://urlr.me/7j5C1>

59. The PISA programme tests 15-year-old pupils in three subjects: reading, mathematics and science. In 2018, girls significantly outstripped boys in reading – by nearly 30 points on average in the OECD countries – and boys exceeded girls – though by only 5 points – in mathematics. Whereas boys significantly outperformed girls in mathematics in 32 countries, in 14 others, the reverse was observed. OECD iLibrary | PISA 2018 Results (Volume I): What Students Know and Can Do (oecd-ilibrary.org)

perform better in mathematics. In 2019, 17% of men and 14% of women in OECD countries between the ages of 25 and 34 had left the education system with only a lower secondary education qualification.⁶⁰

Are boys at a disadvantage at school?

In recent years, academic literature as well as the mainstream media have promoted the idea that existing gender gaps in educational attainment are the result of the educational system being too “feminine” and of its failure to take into account the needs of boys, mainly as a result of feminist activism.

However, disparities between girls and boys at school date back to well before the achievements of the women’s rights movement, and have existed since the beginning of the 20th century. Furthermore, while the teaching profession is predominantly female, schools are not yet free from sexist content and practices. For example, school textbooks still contain gender stereotypes and women are under-represented in school curricula. Teaching staff also still engage in practices that reinforce gender stereotypes among girls and boys in and outside the classroom. In addition, gender stereotypes continue to shape girls’ and boys’ subject and occupational preferences. Lastly, studies show that social background is a more important factor accounting for academic disparities among students than gender (the gap between girls and boys from more privileged socio-economic backgrounds is almost non-existent).

Importantly, girls’ better performance at school is not reflected in their situation in the labour market and, more broadly, has not led to greater economic independence. In 2020, employment rates in the EU among women aged 15 to 64 were 62.5% compared to 72.8% among men.⁶¹ Not only are women less active in the labour market, on average, they also earn less than men. For instance, in 2019 the gender pay gap in the EU was 14.1%.⁶² The lack of gender-sensitive career guidance to address gender stereotypical career choices also leads to more women working in low-paid sectors.⁶³

■ **Public policy objectives:** to counter the collateral effects of male domination on men and boys, gender equality policies should:

- ▶ strengthen the development of gender mainstreaming in all public policies across sectors to ensure that differences between women and men, and girls and boys, are taken into account;

60. OECD, “Education at a Glance”, 2020, <https://urlz.fr/f24o>

61. Eurostat database – https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsa_organ/default/table?lang=en

62. The unadjusted gender pay gap is the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and female paid employees expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. Eurostat database: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/earn_gr_gpgr2/default/table

63. European Commission: Webpage on gender segregation in the labour market https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/women-labour-market-work-life-balance/womens-situation-labour-market_en

- ▶ promote mandatory training for public sector professionals on gender and equality issues;
- ▶ utilise scientific data and studies to more effectively analyse differences between women and men in relevant policy areas, including on the causes of violence and other pressures against men and between men, as well as intersections between sexism and other forms of discrimination such as homophobia and racism.

c) Possible risks and/or pitfalls

Putting the spotlight on men and boys may give rise to certain risks which need to be taken into account in the formulation and implementation of gender equality policies:

1 – Focusing on men and boys should neither conceal nor restrict a full analysis of the relationship between sex/gender and male domination, as enshrined in international standards.

Highlighting the places of men and boys in equality policies calls for clarity on two fronts:

- ▶ Firstly, there needs to be clarity regarding the responsibilities of certain men (be they perpetrators of violence, or men abusing power) and the privileges that all men enjoy. While recognising the impact of male domination on some men, it is important to draw attention to the responsibilities of men in relation to promoting gender equality. While this is a healthy process, it may sometimes be uncomfortable, both for men and for women, as it may lead to difficult conversations that may not initially lead to consensus.
- ▶ Secondly, there needs to be clear recognition of the influence and impact of anti-feminist men's rights discourse, which seeks to undermine the credibility of gender equality policies and feminist analyses.

Highlighting the places of men and boys in gender equality policies requires compliance with international legal standards to improve the lives of women and girls and achieve gender equality (such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the relevant European treaties, and the binding and non-binding standards of the Council of Europe).

Therefore, policies and measures on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies should ultimately contribute towards the substantive achievement of the rights of girls and women, and to their empowerment and freedom. Gender equality policies call for us to do more than investigate masculinity in itself, for itself and only for the benefit of men.

An enlightening experience: UN Women's rethink

Having broadly acknowledged the benefits of working with men as part of its gender equality programmes, UN Women is now reconsidering its approach.

In its publication “Work with men and boys for gender equality: A review of field formation, the evidence base and future directions”⁶⁴ of November 2020, the authors note that “... evaluations extend well beyond the ‘men for gender equality’ field, but are of particular salience to the field, given the legitimate questions asked about the directing of resources for anti-patriarchal work towards those who, on the face of it, most clearly benefit from patriarchy. Behind the ‘what works?’ question is a more fundamental question about ‘is it worth it?’”.

When interviewed for the purposes of this study, the UN Women representative confirmed that UN Women was at a turning point with regard to its focus on men and boys, taking stock of lessons learned in recent years. She added that it was important to remember that UN Women had a mandate as a UN agency to promote women’s equality and empowerment. It was frequently said that ‘gender equality is also good for men’. However, there was also a need to be clear about the priority that should be given to women’s and girls’ rights, and the responsibility of men and boys to act to establish an equal relationship with women and girls to achieve equality for all.

2 – Focusing on men and boys should not cause us to overlook the need for analysis based on agreed definitions and gender-sensitive research.

The development of gender equality studies over the last fifty years and scientifically robust quantitative and qualitative data has played a key role in the growth of gender equality policies, making it possible to objectively identify gender gaps and inequalities, while measuring progress made.

As outlined above, measures targeting men and boys are sometimes based on poor or insufficient data and analysis (for example, data on suicide or boys losing interest in school), or on data that are not evidence-based, or that make use of questionable definitions or concepts (such as “parental alienation syndrome”).

3 – Focusing on men and boys should not undermine the visibility and funding of women’s NGOs and feminist organisations working for gender equality and women’s rights.

Focusing on the “men and boys” agenda can potentially undermine women’s NGOs or feminist organisations in several ways:

- ▶ **A risk that already low levels of funding will be diverted to fund activities labelled “men and boys”.** The experts interviewed and UN Women⁶⁵ pointed to a risk of increased competition for funding in a constricted or deteriorating financial context. The organisation MenEngage argues that to counter this risk there is a need to firstly increase funding for gender equality policies and,

64. UN Women – discussion paper “Work with men and boys for gender equality: A review of field formation, the evidence base and future directions”, 2020.

65. See list of interviewees in Appendix I to this report and the above-mentioned UN Women report “Work with men and boys for gender equality: A review of field formation, the evidence base and future directions”.

secondly, to ensure that funding for feminist organisations is not dependent on their developing activities targeting men and boys. MenEngage also emphasises the need for dialogue with feminist organisations, to which it considers itself accountable. New activities targeting men and boys, therefore, should not be developed without additional separate funding specifically for this purpose. In addition, activities to address the “cost” of male domination on men and boys (men’s mental health, etc.), should be fully incorporated into public policies (in education and health for example) as part of a gender mainstreaming approach.

- ▶ **A risk that the single-sex organisations or activities will be called into question and that there will be hidden costs for such organisations.** For women, single-sex forums and spaces can be a necessary step towards gender equality, enabling them to pool and share experiences and serving as safe and reassuring settings. For men on the other hand, single sex spaces are often a matter of male peers consciously or unconsciously commanding power (such as gentlemen’s clubs). The shift towards men and boys being more “involved” in gender equality may undermine organisations that are women-only or legitimately engage in single-sex activities.
- ▶ **A risk that the visibility and leadership of women’s organisations and activities will be hijacked.** In many cases, what men say still gains more validation and prominence in public discourse. To counter this bias, MenEngage has undertaken for example not to agree to participate as keynote speakers at events on gender equality and women’s rights.

Identifying and deconstructing myths and misconceptions

Debates on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies are often full of pre-conceived ideas and misconceptions that are often passed on without any awareness or analysis of their origins. Such misconceptions should be identified as they undermine the foundations of gender equality activities.

It is often said that gender equality is good for everyone, a “win-win” situation, in which men have “everything to gain”. It is true that in the medium and long term, society as a whole benefits from equality, as it is an important factor for the achievement of social cohesion and well-being. Similarly, both men and women stand to gain from the elimination of restrictive gender roles and social norms and values, and a shift towards a society that places more value on equality and care, rather than social domination. While these are important messages, it remains important to recognise continuing resistance to gender equality, and how some may even benefit from the existing status quo. Progress towards equality thus inevitably entails some men losing power and privilege. For example, gender parity in decision-making arenas will lead to fewer men in positions of power. So, while it is important to draw attention to the benefits of gender equality for all, it is equally important to highlight responsibility and accountability in efforts to promote gender equality, as well as the possible need for positive action measures and binding policies that will benefit women in the short-term.

It is also often claimed that gender equality has already been achieved and there is no longer a need to highlight “women’s rights” in gender equality policies, and that working with men and boys is a more innovative approach. This has been reflected, for example, in increasingly rare references to the terms “women’s rights” and “violence against women”, in favour of more neutral terminology such as “gender equality” and “gender-based violence”. While these shifts in terminology may, in some instances, be justified in attempts to adopt a more comprehensive approach, several of the people and institutions interviewed for the purpose of this study stressed that it is important not to “jump the gun”, and that there is still a need to continue to highlight both women’s rights and the goal of gender equality.

It is said that disproportionate attention, action and resources have been dedicated to women’s rights. However, studies on the financing dedicated to gender equality policies show that budgets remain far below what is needed to achieve substantive change, and are minimal in relation to total public investment. For example, only 5% of development aid in OECD countries targeted gender equality as a primary objective in 2018-2019, a figure which has not changed since 2012-2013.⁶⁶ In relation to investment in women’s economic empowerment, the percentage was even lower (2%). According to a report published in 2021, women’s rights organisations receive only 0.13% of development assistance and only 0.4% of all gender-related aid.⁶⁷ This underinvestment renders the vast majority of voluntary, public or private sector organisations involved in developing, implementing, supporting or evaluating women’s rights and gender equality policies financially insecure.

It is claimed that feminist organisations are exclusionary, aggressive and “anti-male”, and are waging a “war of the sexes” to replace one form of social domination with another. However, there is no evidence that the feminist movement is pursuing this aim. While many women’s organisations conduct single-sex activities and programmes, the vast majority of organisations promoting women’s rights and equality are open to men and women, and men do not face any real obstacles to their involvement or engagement in such activities.

66. According to the OECD’s development aid evaluation reports: [Which countries support gender equality in their development aid? \(focus2030.org\)](https://www.focus2030.org/); consulted on 16.06.2021.

67. Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), news brief: “Where Is The Money for Feminist Organizing?”, May 2021.



Operational overview of activities relating to men and boys and gender equality

Activities related to men and boys can be divided into four different categories according to the objective pursued: (1) collecting scientific data and establishing the legislative and political framework; (2) focusing on how men and boys can slow down progress on gender equality and women's rights; (3) focusing on their role as agents of change; and (4) focusing on men and boys as collateral victims of male domination. The examples cited below illustrate the range of these activities, without ranking them or validating them as "good practices".⁶⁸

68. See Appendix 2 for the methodology and sources of information.

1. Activities aimed at establishing an evidence base and a shared legislative and political framework

Producing data, studies and reports

At national and local level, sex-disaggregated statistical data is often still unavailable across policy sectors. Accurate and comparable sex-disaggregated data at European level is also lacking, as is data that combines sex with other variables (age, social class, origin, sexual orientation, disability status, region, etc.). Some progress, however, has been made in recent years, especially in the EU, in relation to data collection on the situation of women and men and on examining how gender inequalities intersect with other forms of discrimination, particularly thanks to the statistical database of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).⁶⁹

As indicated above in relation to data on male victims of intimate partner violence (see page 17), when collecting data on gender inequalities, it is also important to ensure that unconscious or implicit bias does not impede a gendered analysis of such data, leading to a gender-neutral approach to policy development and implementation.

Lastly, in relation to policies and measures on the places of men and boys in gender equality, most have not yet been subject to robust impact assessment studies through the collection of rigorous data regarding the effectiveness of such programmes and policies.⁷⁰

To address this lack of available and comparable data, the OECD published a report in February 2021 entitled “Man Enough? Measuring Masculine Norms to Promote Women’s Empowerment”.⁷¹ The report proposes a list of indicators that can be used to measure and analyse changes in masculinities and their impact on gender quality. The list of indicators measures changes in 10 norms of “restrictive masculinities” – five norms related to the economic and political spheres and five to the private sphere. This work is part of the existing Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), which measures barriers to the effectiveness of women’s rights in general. It is an important operational contribution, which can guide government efforts to develop and harmonise data systems and approaches based on measurable and comparable indicators over time.

In 2012, the European Commission published the report “The Role of Men in Gender Equality: European strategies and insights”.⁷² The report provides comparative data on women and men in various key areas (education, work, care, health, violence, men’s participation in equality policies), and includes country factsheets. The report discusses the negative impact of traditional gender roles on men and boys while rejecting the positions of anti-feminist men’s rights groups that distort topics such as custody rights, and male victims of violence.

69. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs>

70. UN Women – Discussion paper, “Work with men and boys for gender equality: A review of field formation, the evidence base and future directions”, 2020, p. 33.

71. OECD, “Man Enough? Measuring Masculine Norms to Promote Women’s Empowerment”, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6ffd1936-en>

72. European Commission, “The Role of Men in Gender Equality: European strategies & insights: the study of the role of men in gender equality”, 2013.

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) study of 2017,⁷³ carried out in the MENA region and entitled “Understanding Masculinities”, was co-ordinated by UN Women and the NGO Promundo and is considered an international reference point on men and gender equality. Based on the methodology of the IMAGES study, a similar study was conducted in Georgia in 2019 with the support of UNDP and UNFPA entitled “Men, Women, and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes”.⁷⁴

In Scandinavia, a 2019 report by the Nordic Council of Ministers, co-ordinated by the NGO Promundo and entitled “State of Nordic Fathers”,⁷⁵ presents the results of a survey involving 7,515 women and men, 85% of whom were parents, the majority of whom had taken at least two weeks of parental leave.

Key findings from the State of Nordic Fathers Report (2019)

While fathers and mothers agree on the importance of equally shared parental leave, fathers believe that childcare responsibilities are in fact shared equally between the two parents, while mothers do not believe this to be so.

Fathers who take the longest parental leave are least likely to rely on a female partner to do most of the care work, least likely to cling to traditional norms of masculinity, and also most likely to seek information about parenting from books, doctors, friends or partners.

When childcare is shared equally, fathers and mothers are more satisfied with their relationship as a couple, fathers are more satisfied with their role as parents, and mothers are more satisfied at work.

Fathers who do not take paternity leave or take only a short period are the most likely to believe that their relationships with colleagues or managers would deteriorate if they took longer parental leave. Lastly, the longer a father has been on parental leave, the more he wants to make changes in his working life in order to care for his children.

In **Lithuania**, in 2020, the government commissioned a study to explore men’s attitudes to measures to reconcile work and private life.

In **Serbia**, a survey of the economic value of unpaid care work was conducted and published in 2020.⁷⁶ The study estimated that the total value of unpaid care work was at 21.5% of Serbian GDP, compared to 9% worldwide (14.9% of GDP from women’s unpaid care work and 6.6% of GDP from men’s unpaid care work).

73. UN Women, “Understanding masculinities, results from the International Men and Gender Equality Study in the Middle East and North Africa”, 2017.

74. UNDP, “Men, Women, and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes”, 2020.

75. Nordic Council of Ministers, “State of Nordic Fathers”, 2019.

76. UN Women and the United Kingdom Good Governance Fund, “Economic value of the unpaid care work in the Republic of Serbia”, 2020.

In **France**, the task of producing an “Annual Report on the State of Sexism”⁷⁷ is entrusted to the High Council for Equality between Women and Men. The 2020 edition reports that in France, while women still do 80% of domestic tasks, 56% of the population believes that gender equality in domestic life has been achieved, with 63% of men believing this to be so.

Dedicated spaces for discussion and exchange

The ICMEO – International Conference on Men and Equal Opportunities – conference cycle was launched in 2012 and is co-organised by the Nordic Council of Ministers and EIGE.⁷⁸ At civil society level, the MenEngage Alliance has held three international symposiums since its creation.

Paying attention to language and communication

Overall, there have been many changes in the area of language and communication, which have led to the replacement of the so-called generic masculine by combining terms to highlight both the masculine and the feminine (for example, in French, “citoyens et citoyennes” instead of “citoyens”), the use of gender-neutral terms (such as “humankind” rather than “mankind”), or the use of inclusive writing (participant-es/participant-es, in French). There have also been changes in language to reflect the shifting role of men and boys in society. In Norway, for example, the title of *helsesøster* (literally “health sister” but meaning school nurse) has now been replaced by the gender-neutral *helsesykepleier*. The aim of this is twofold: firstly, to recruit more men to the profession and, secondly, to encourage a larger proportion of boys to use health services.

2. Activities focusing on how men and boys can impede progress on gender equality and women’s rights

These activities may be intended: to prevent the rise of active resistance to progress on women’s rights and gender equality; to limit the adverse consequences of such resistance; and, lastly, to transform men and boys into allies, promoting and practising equality

Sharing responsibilities and resources in the public and private spheres

The distribution of care work is still far from gender-balanced, even in those countries considered the most advanced.⁷⁹ The Working Paper for the 3rd ICMEO conference

77. High Council for Equality between Women and Men, France, [Rapport annuel sur l'état du sexisme en France en 2019, 2020](#).

78. Conferences were hosted successively by Germany (2012), Austria (2014), Luxembourg (2016), Sweden (2018) and Estonia (2020).

79. According to a survey of 5,000 women on the distribution of domestic and household tasks (IFOP for Consolab, 2019), 69% of Italian women, 44% of Spanish and French women, and 43% of German and British women say they “do a lot more” than their spouse. 73% of women on average say they “do more” than their spouse, compared to 16% of men. In Iceland and Sweden, fathers take around 30% of available parental leave, while in Norway they take 20%, and in Denmark and Finland around 11% (State of Nordic Fathers Report, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019). In none of the Nordic countries does the share taken by men in parental and domestic work approach 50%.

in 2016 entitled “Caring masculinities”,⁸⁰ points out that in order to achieve gender-equal caring “a policy of ‘individual freedom of choice’ does not work, if it does not first create the necessary conditions (for example, in the form of equal pay) for the effective implementation of this freedom of choice”. Thus, an increasing number of member States are adopting legal and structural reforms in this area.

Spain: a non-transferable, 16-week period of “birth and childcare leave” for both parents, with full pay

Following in the footsteps of pioneering countries such as Norway (1993), where fathers are entitled to 15 weeks’ non-transferable parental leave (71% take it), in 2021 Spain became the first country in the world where both parents – women and men – are entitled to a non-transferable, 16-week period of “birth leave” with full pay. Both parents are also required to take six weeks of this leave directly after the birth of the child. The Spanish government has tied the adoption of this reform to the implementation of the Spanish Constitution, as well as Spain’s international commitments on human rights and women’s rights, in particular the objective of combining work and family life and promoting gender-equal parenting. The implementation of the reform of “birth and childcare leave” (*permiso por nacimiento y cuidado de menor*) – which replaces maternity and paternity leave – has been gradual: while maternity leave was always 16 weeks, 8 weeks’ leave were granted to the second parent in 2018, 12 in 2020 and 16 in 2021. The reform is being carried out by the Ministry of Labour, which is monitoring the reform’s impact on employability and non-discrimination in the labour market for women, on reconciling work and private life, as well as men’s involvement in the care sector.

In 2020, several other Council of Europe member States adopted reforms to help parents reconcile work and private life. These include: **Switzerland** (right to two weeks’ paternity leave); **Estonia** (30 days’ paternity leave, compared to 10 previously); **France** (childcare leave has been extended to 28 days from 11 days); the **Netherlands** (right to 5 weeks’ paternity leave paid at 70% of salary in addition to one week of leave at full pay when the child is born). In the **Slovak Republic**, the number of fathers taking ‘maternity leave’ (the legal term, regardless of whether the leave is taken by a woman or a man) rose from 78 in 2009 to 17,000 in 2019, while, over the same period, the number of fathers taking parental leave rose from 4,000 to 7,000.

Other reforms or schemes have been introduced to encourage or support the transition towards gender-equal parenting. For example, in **Denmark**, a new law is under consideration that would ensure that official correspondence relating to a child is sent by e-mail to both parents, not just the mother. In **France**, a new public service for the recovery of unpaid alimony payments has been set up, as about 30% are not paid at all or not paid regularly.⁸¹ In **Norway**, a government parenting support strategy

80. <https://mega.public.lu/dam-assets/fr/actualites/2016/10/icmeo/note-de-travail-FR.pdf>

81. See Bonnet, C., Solaz, A. and Algava, E., 2010. “Les changements professionnels en France autour de la séparation conjugale”, *Population*, 65(2), pp.273-308 or Ministry of Justice (2014), technical factsheet by the High Council for the Family: https://www.hcfea.fr/IMG/pdf/5_Fiches_Pensions_alimentaires.pdf

has been set up to increase participation in, and use of, these services by fathers (for example, via the podcast “My Daily Daddy Life”). In **Ukraine**, the “4 Hands of Happiness” awareness-raising campaign involving professional football players and their children highlights the importance of men in their role as fathers. In **Slovenia**, “Project Action Dad” (March 2020-February 2022) emphasises the importance of active involvement of men in fatherhood and childcare from birth. Other reforms or schemes pertain to the sharing of care tasks in relation to other dependants such as elderly persons or persons with disabilities, given that these tasks are most often carried out by women. In the public sphere, true sharing of power in all areas can be achieved through parity laws or quotas in the political, economic and social spheres, such as in parliaments, on the boards of private companies or in the senior civil service.

Punishing violence and discrimination and preventing reoffending

Impunity for perpetrators for acts of violence and discrimination against women, children and LGBT+ people is still one of the major challenges to be addressed. Despite existing international standards, including the provisions of the Istanbul Convention (Article 45 – Sanctions and Measures), the question of the effectiveness of sanctions is not generally addressed in measures relating to men and gender equality. To quote from a discussion paper by UN Women, “progress towards gender equality is stymied in particular by institutional inaction and impunity. On violence against women and girls, for example, institutional failures when it comes to systemic responses are well documented”.⁸² Linking the Council of Europe’s work on access to justice for women with efforts to more effectively engage men in gender equality would be a catalyst for action to address impunity.

Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention requires States Parties to set up or support preventive intervention and treatment programmes for perpetrators of violence against women, particularly to prevent re-offending. The establishment of perpetrator programmes began in the late 1970s. Paragraph 3 of Article 16 of the Istanbul Convention emphasises that “the safety of, support for and the human rights of victims are of primary concern” and that such programmes should be implemented in close co-operation with specialist support services for victims. GREVIO, in its country evaluation reports, has also stressed the need for systematic evaluation of the short and long-term impact of perpetrator programmes, in order to assess whether they actually serve their preventive purpose.⁸³

In **Spain**, for half of the programmes, 80% of participants are required to attend by a court order, and funding for their operation comes from municipalities or regional governments. At national level, the Government Delegation against Gender Violence is working on a “National Strategy for the Eradication of Men’s Violence against Women (2021-2025)”. The strategy will include a strategic priority comprising of activities on “gendered masculinities and violence” and specific measures on involving young people and men in exercising their responsibility to end gender-based violence.

82. UN Women – discussion paper, “Work with men and boys for gender equality: A review of field formation, the evidence base and future directions”, 2020, p.33.

83. Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), 2021. Mid-term Horizontal Review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports, Council of Europe.

In other European countries, services for violent men, such as telephone hotlines, care centres and temporary accommodation, are being set up to prevent perpetration of crime and re-offending (Belgium, France, Norway). In its baseline evaluation questionnaire adopted on 11 March 2016, GREVIO asks States Parties to the Istanbul Convention to provide information about these programmes. GREVIO has raised questions in relation to such programmes sometimes being deployed as an alternative, rather than as a complement to, a criminal conviction.⁸⁴

Combating violent collective movements against women's rights and gender equality

A resolution adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2017⁸⁵ stresses the need, as a general condition to involving men and boys in gender equality, to combat violence against women and girls, including violence against women human rights defenders.

In 2020, Denmark initiated a study on the "Manosphere" (see definition on page 8). The study, "The angry internet: A threat to gender equality, democracy and well-being",⁸⁶ highlighted the fact that some 850 Nordic men are active in misogynistic internet communities such as INCEL (involuntary celibates – whose members believe that women have deprived them of their right as men to sexual relations) or MRA (Men's Rights Activists), who believe that women's rights and feminism are a direct threat to society. The study points to the serious problem that such online violent spaces pose for democracy, given that these groups push women out of public discussion and effectively silence them.

3. Activities focusing on the role of men and boys' in promoting women's rights and gender equality

While, by and large, activities in this area have been led by civil society organisations, the focus is increasingly shifting to men in positions of power.

Holding men in positions of power to account

According to a 2020 discussion paper by UN Women concerning work with men and boys,⁸⁷ "more work is needed directly with the men who are political actors, such as politicians, party members and civil servants, in order to help foster political spaces and processes in which progressive policy change for gender equality can be advanced".

84. GREVIO report on Belgium (2020). <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-on-belgium/16809f9a2c>

85. Resolution 35/10 of the UN Human Rights Council of 22 June 2017, entitled "Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls".

86. Carried out by the Centre for Digital Youth Care – <https://www.norden.org/en/nyhed/report-prevalence-men-who-use-internet-forums-characterised-misogyny>.

87. UN Women – discussion paper "Work with men and boys for gender equality: A review of field formation, the evidence base and future directions", 2020.

Since 2015, the International Champions Leaders network has been bringing together political decision makers who are committed to breaking down barriers to gender equality in their sphere of influence, for example by pledging to no longer take part in all-male panels.

HeForShe⁸⁸ is an international solidarity movement initiated by UN Women in 2014 that aims to strengthen women's rights and make them universal. To achieve this, HeForShe calls on men and boys to speak up and fight against the inequalities that affect women and girls around the world. HeForShe's IMPACT initiative has recruited male heads of state, business leaders and university presidents. Within this framework, two guides for male allies⁸⁹ and other communication tools have been produced.

Some heads of state or government, both women and men, appoint gender parity governments. Of only 13 countries in the world to have 50% or more women in government in 2021, half are in Europe: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Spain and Sweden.⁹⁰

At diplomatic level⁹¹, drawing on the feminist diplomacy which Sweden has championed since 2014, male and female heads of state and government have also decided to make women's rights and gender equality one of the main priorities of their diplomatic work. This is the case in **Finland, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom**. International organisations such as the Council of Europe, the EU and the United Nations do the same in their co-operation and external action policies.

Education and training in human rights, equality and non-violence

The international legal framework on women's rights and gender equality clearly alerts governments to the need to integrate gender equality and a gender-sensitive approach into education, as well as initial and in-service training systems.

In **Belgium**, in 2020, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation ran a project for an online initial and in-service teacher training module called "Boys-Girls: One School".⁹² In the youth sector, a programme is being developed for the certification and funding of organisations working in the field of education for social, emotional and sexual life. In **France**, where it is prohibited to purchase a sexual act (as in Sweden since 1999), the law considers education on sexuality to be inseparable from the issue of equality between girls and boys, non-discrimination and the non-commercialisation of the body. In **Germany**, measures to combat gender stereotypes applied both to girls and to boys include a digital strategy, which has been publicly funded since 2013, to facilitate exchanges between young people and professionals.⁹³

In adulthood, compulsory in-service training on gender equality at work and the fight against sexual harassment – especially for directors and managers – may effectively

88. <https://www.heforshe.org/en/movement>

89. https://www.heforshe.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/HeForShe_Booklet_ManagingYourEmotions_PRINT2.pdf and <https://www.heforshe.org/en/9-ways-men-can-become-allies-equal-rights>

90. IPU: <https://www.ipu.org/news/women-in-politics-2021>

91. PACE – Doc. 14627 (2018) – The gender dimension of foreign policy (coe.int)

92. www.egalitefillesgarçons.be

93. www.meintestgelaende.de

involve a large number of men and foster major changes in organisation and individual practices. The **French** Ministry of Agriculture, for instance, has set itself the target of training 100% of its executives and managers over two years.

Working in a mixed environment

In **Norway**, the national *Menn i helse* (Men in Health) programme targets unemployed men between the age of 25 and 55, providing them with the training they require for employment in the health and care sector (65 of Norway's municipalities participate, i.e. one in six). In **Germany**, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth runs a federal pilot programme "*Quereinstieg – Männer und Frauen in Kitas*" (Career change – men and women in early childhood education and care), in which around 35% of participants are men (approximately double the percentage usually found in training for childcare workers). Since 2011, a "Girls' Day" and a "Boys' Day"⁹⁴ has been held annually in April to encourage non-stereotyped education and study choices.

Encouraging men and boys to commit to being non-violent and pro-equality

Until now, this type of work has often involved supporting and following up on civil society activities. While there are several such activities across the world,⁹⁵ one stands out globally for its high profile and impact, namely the *White Ribbon Campaign*, which began in Canada in 1991 in response to the murder of women students at the Ecole Polytechnique de Montréal. White Ribbon Canada calls on men who wear the white ribbon "to never commit, condone or remain silent about any form of gender-based violence"⁹⁶ (originally "violence against women" was the term used).

In the **Netherlands**, in the wake of the White Ribbon movement in 2016, the government decided to set up a co-operation framework called *Emancipator*, involving over 30 organisations working with men and boys to stop violence against women.⁹⁷ In **Estonia**, in 2020, the authorities launched a similar campaign calling on men to keep a check on their behaviour and its impact on those around them, entitled "What kind of man do you want to be?" *The Barbershop events*, launched by **Iceland** and **Suriname** in 2014, encourage men and boys to get actively involved in promoting women's rights and gender equality. A Barbershop Conference was held in Riga, **Latvia**, in 2020.⁹⁸

94. See www.boys-day.de: 300,000 German boys took part. Like Girls' Day, it is usually held on the fourth Thursday in April.

95. Zéro Macho against the use of prostitution in France, Men's Action to Stop Violence Against Women (MASVAW) in India (Shahrokh, Edström, Kumar, & Singh, 2015), One Man Can in several African countries (van den Berg et al., 2013), or anti-rape men's groups in the USA.

96. <https://www.whiteribbon.ca/about.html>

97. <https://www.emancipator.nl/whiteribbon/>

98. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3arJCKNSryM>

4. Activities focusing on men and boys as collateral victims of male domination

Documentation reviewed for this study shows a **relatively low number of activities focusing on men and boys as collateral victims of male domination** or gender inequality. Several factors may account for this, including low social demand, the fact that the issue is dealt with within other sectoral policies without a gender perspective, or a reluctance to act because of the many risks mentioned above. The few countries supporting activities in this area often focus on issues with a contested evidence base and which can be exploited by anti-feminist men's rights groups (such as school drop-out rates among boys or intimate partner violence against men by women). Furthermore, few activities are implemented in areas more relevant to gender equality, such as sexist and sexual violence against boys, gay men or trans men.

The 5th ICMEO conference⁹⁹ in **Estonia** in 2020 emphasised the importance of men "taking responsibility for themselves" (enhancing their autonomy) and "taking care of themselves" (enhancing their well-being). In her presentation, Carlien Scheele, Director of EIGE, used the Eurobarometer on Gender Equality to point out that there are wide variations in Europe when it comes to men's attitudes to emotions: whereas in Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, almost all men think it is acceptable for a man to cry, around 35% of men in Bulgaria, Lithuania and Romania believe the opposite.

In **Norway**, the Ministry of Children's Affairs commissioned two reports in 2019 that addressed gender equality for girls and boys, including in schools, and noted that "areas where men's issues are especially relevant are school dropout rates, educational choices, health and risk factors and issues regarding violence". Since 2010, Norwegian municipalities have had a legal obligation to provide emergency shelter services for women and men who are victims of intimate partner violence.

In **Germany**, the authorities point out that "men and boys are also victims of violence (mainly in the public sphere, but also in the private sphere, in care situations and in institutions for children and young people)". A training course was developed in 2019 to offer "specific counselling for men" who are victims of violence, with the objective of integrating such counselling in services provided by existing counselling bodies. A national co-ordination centre for the protection of men against violence is being established as part of a two-year project with the aim to raise awareness on violence against men among the general public, and to establish shelters for men and their children.

In **Denmark**, the authorities point out that men are disproportionately affected by ill-health and other social problems, and that unskilled and single men are particularly affected, stating that "they die earlier, earn less and have fewer children". As a result, special measures are being implemented to improve social outcomes for men and boys. For example, in the health field, vaccination against HPV is now also recommended for boys from the age of 12,¹⁰⁰ and general practitioners are trained

99. <https://www.sm.ee/et/uritused/5th-international-conference-men-and-equal-opportunities-men-who-care>

100. In France, since 1 January 2021, vaccination against the human papilloma virus has been reimbursed for boys between the ages of 11 and 14, as was previously the case for adolescent girls.

on identifying symptoms of penile cancer. Work is also being done at municipal level to improve men's mental health and to address loneliness and unhappiness among elderly men. Similar measures to improve men's use of health care services are being implemented in **Norway** and in **Switzerland**.

Lastly, in relation to contraception, prevailing gender norms may limit men's contraceptive choices and place an undue burden on women (40% of pregnancies in the world are unwanted).¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in Europe the responsibility for contraception still overwhelmingly lies with women, and the use of contraception methods that require men's direct participation is limited.¹⁰²

101. UN, Contraceptive use by method, 2019.

102. *Ibid.*



Recommendations

This study sets out six general recommendations for the Council of Europe.

1. Ensuring that the main aims of measures related to “men, boys and gender equality” are indeed conducive to women’s rights and gender equality

Policies and measures supported and/or financed in the name of gender equality are often taken by and for men alone, without an explicit link to the gender equality and women’s rights agenda, or that may even conflict with or undermine it. The time seems right for institutions to develop and disseminate **guidelines** to assist decision-makers in strengthening policies and measures on the place of men and boys in gender equality. Such guidelines could propose the following practical measures:

- ▶ establish a **democratic governance mechanism** with meaningful involvement of women and girls in defining, implementing and monitoring policies and measures involving boys and men, by systematically consulting organisations working on gender equality and women’s rights. Such a mechanism should ensure transparency in funding allocated to policies and measures on men and boys (1), and accountability to the women’s movement (2) and to funders (3) on initiatives on engaging men and boys in gender equality;
- ▶ ensure that **the ultimate political objective of policies and measures on men and boys is to promote gender equality and strengthen girls’ and women’s effective rights, empowerment and freedom** (4), and not some alternative policy objective to strengthen men’s and boys’ rights without challenging structural inequalities that disproportionately affect women and girls. This objective is in line with the existing international and European legal framework and standards on gender equality policies (Council of Europe standards, CEDAW, European treaties, etc.);
- ▶ adopt a **transformative approach to gender relations, masculinity and femininity** (5) (rejecting a fixed approach to social gender roles for men and for women), taking into account the cumulative impact of systems of domination on women and men, girls and boys;
- ▶ draw on **robust and reliable sex-disaggregated data and scientific research** in the design of policies and measures on men and boys using the concept of gender to inform the baseline situation and allow for systematic monitoring and evaluation (6);

- ▶ ensure that **additional funding is allocated to policies and measures on men and boys** without diverting existing resources allocated to promote women's rights and support women's empowerment and leadership (7);
- ▶ **ensure that policies and measures on men and boys do not negatively impact the visibility and funding of women's NGOs**, so that opportunities and resources assigned to promoting women's rights and combating violence against women are not compromised (8);
- ▶ recognise the **leadership role of women and girls** in making progress towards gender equality (9);
- ▶ ensure that **action taken in this domain is regularly assessed in terms of its effectiveness in achieving gender equality** and strengthening women's and girls' rights (10).

2. Engage men – especially those in positions of power – to act for structural changes towards substantive equality

Men's individual and collective behaviour is crucial to the full realisation of girls' and women's rights and gender equality. Men in positions of power have a particular responsibility in this regard.

Member States should therefore be reminded of their duty to invest in gender equality policies and should be held accountable in this regard at all levels. In this context, emphasis should be placed on effectively enforcing existing laws, as well as strengthening legislation where needed, as well as on adopting a comprehensive public sector approach rather than investing in ad hoc measures centred on civil society and on the responsibility of individuals.

Examples of measures and activities:

- ▶ effectively enforce **laws that prevent and combat violence against women**, protect victims and punish perpetrators; for States Parties, these measures should be based on the provisions of the Istanbul Convention and the recommendations of GREVIO;
- ▶ promote the **redistribution of unpaid domestic and care work**, particularly through the adoption of equal and compulsory non-transferable parental leave for both parents, with full pay;
- ▶ promote **real power sharing between women and men** at all levels and in all sectors, including through binding measures such as parity laws and quotas;
- ▶ support **gender equality education at all educational levels**, starting at the earliest age;
- ▶ prioritise the adoption of **compulsory national initial and in-service training programmes** for all professionals in the public and private sector on gender equality, combating gender stereotypes and sexual harassment in the workplace.

3. Strengthen gender mainstreaming in all public policies to ensure that differences between women and men, and girls and boys, are taken into account

Strengthening gender mainstreaming in all sectoral policies in the member States and the Council of Europe will help to highlight and transform areas in which there are clear gender differences between women and men, and girls and boys.

Examples of measures and activities:

- ▶ Secure the **commitment of decision makers at the highest level** to promote gender equality and women's rights and to attend appropriate training;
- ▶ support the **development of gender mainstreaming** in all sectoral policies (for example, education, access to justice and health) by adopting strategies and providing appropriate human resources and expertise;
- ▶ support **systematic and mandatory training for professionals** implementing relevant policies and the development of practical tools;
- ▶ make use of **gender equality studies** to improve robust analysis of the roots of violence between and against men, including the link between sexism and other relationships of domination such as homophobia and racism.

4. Address the global threat posed by anti-feminist men's rights movements

As outlined above, anti-feminist men's rights movements threaten the progress made on women's rights and gender equality.

The rise of anti-feminist men's rights groups threatens to undermine the credibility of gender equality policies and feminist messages, to give rise to hate speech and violence against women and girls and women's rights defenders, and to reinforce the idea that "problematic" men and boys are never "us" but "others" (foreigners, the poor, etc.). Vigilance in this regard is all the more necessary in a context in which radicalism is on the rise, contesting rights and equality in other gender-related areas, such as sexual and reproductive health, sexuality education, and the rights of LGBT+ people.

It would be important, therefore, to incorporate the issue of anti-feminist men's rights groups into the Council of Europe's work and strategies on internet regulation, hate speech, gender equality, children's rights and counter-terrorism.

5. Co-operate with, and strengthen support for, women's and feminist organisations

To counter the risk that women's and feminist organisations working to promote women's rights and gender equality may be weakened by increased competition over funding that is already restricted, the Council of Europe and its member States should actively involve women's organisations in the debates and activities focusing on men and boys, as well as strengthen support for organisations that prioritise work with girls and women.

6. Support the development of research on gender/women's studies

It is vital to support research which is based on a full analysis of sex/gender relations and male domination as enshrined in international standards and agreed definitions, and to increase support for research on gender equality in light of the growing need for knowledge at a time when gender equality objectives are increasingly contested.

Examples of areas of study or research for the Council of Europe and its member States:

- ▶ **women's and men's perceptions of gender equality** and changes in gender norms. These aspects could be addressed, for example, on the basis of a set of agreed indicators and regular surveys and studies enabling European and international comparisons to be made so as to gain a better understanding of national contexts and to adjust policies accordingly;
- ▶ **anti-feminist men's rights movements**, particularly their links with other radical and/or violent movements;
- ▶ the evaluation of **programmes to treat male perpetrators** of violence.



Appendices

Appendix 1 – List of interviews

- ▶ **Kira Appel**, Deputy Head of the Division for Gender Equality at the Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark, member of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission (13 January 2021)
- ▶ **Ana Arrillaga Aldama**, Head of Department at the Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities in Spain, member of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission (27 January 2021)
- ▶ **Laxman Belbase**, Co-Director of the MenEngage Global Secretariat based in Washington; **Katrien Van der Heyden**, Belgian member of the MenEngage Europe members' Steering Committee; **Jennifer Rodriguez Bruno**, Advocacy Co-ordinator at the Global Secretariat based in Washington; **Anna Lindqvist (Sweden)**, Swedish member and Co-Coordinator of the MenEngage Europe Network (25 January 2021)
- ▶ **Mélissa Blais**, Professor at the University of Quebec, Montreal (UQAM) and member of the Institut de recherche et d'études féministes, of the Québécois network on feminist studies (RéQEF) and of TRYSPACES in Canada and **Francis Dupuis-Déri**, Professor in political science at UQAM and member of RéQEF (20 January 2021)
- ▶ **Victoria Diaz-Garcia**, Partnerships and Advocacy Specialist in the Civil Society Division at UN Women in New York (21 January 2021)
- ▶ **Gwendoline Lefebvre**, President of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) (20 January 2021)
- ▶ **Pierrette Pape**, former Director of Policy and Campaigns at the European Women's Lobby (EWL) (2009-2017) and co-ordinator of the EWL project and publication on men and equality European Women's Voice in 2011-2012 (8 February 2021).

Appendix 2 – Methodological Issues

This study is based on the compilation of documents previously provided by the Secretariat of the Gender Equality Commission (GEC), a series of interviews (listed in Appendix I), and additional research.

In particular, the overview of activities provided in Part II was based on: contributions sent by eight Council of Europe member States to the GEC Secretariat (between December 2020 and January 2021); additional information taken from the national reports submitted by 12 Council of Europe member States on action taken to implement the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for 2018-2023; the document “Activities in the member States on men and boys and gender equality” (December 2020); and other activities identified when reviewing the relevant literature. The overview cannot claim to be exhaustive. The examples cited illustrate the variety of the range of activities, without prioritising them or even validating them. The limited scope of this study has not allowed for an assessment of the robustness and impact of the activities mentioned, in particular as regards the strengthening of women’s rights and shifting gender relations towards greater equality, or with regard to their funding.

Appendix 3 – Brief bibliography

Institutional reports

- ▶ **UN Women and Promundo, 2017**, “Understanding masculinities, results from the International Men and Gender Equality Study in the Middle East and North Africa”
Link to the online publication (full report in EN – executive summary in EN, FR, Arabic): <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/5/understanding-masculinities-results-from-the-images-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa>
- ▶ **United Nations, 2018**, General Assembly, Human Rights Council, “Review of promising practices and lessons learned, existing strategies and United Nations and other initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality, in the context of eliminating violence against women”
Link to the online publication (EN): <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/38/24>
- ▶ **Nordic Council of Ministers, 2019**, Carl Cederström, “State of Nordic Fathers”
Link to the online publication (EN): <http://norden.divaportal.org/smash/get/diva2:1367228/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- ▶ **UN Women, 2020**, discussion paper No. 37, Alan Greig and Michael Flood, “Work with men and boys for gender equality: A review of field formation, the evidence base and future directions”
Link to the online publication (EN): <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/11/discussion-paper-work-with-men-and-boys-for-gender-equality>
- ▶ **Centre for Digital Youth Care and the Danish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021**, “The angry internet – A threat to gender equality, democracy & well-being”
Link to the online publication (EN): https://cfdp.dk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CFDP_the_angry_internet_ISSUE.pdf
- ▶ **OECD, 2021**, General Secretariat, “Man Enough? Measuring Masculine Norms to Promote Women’s Empowerment”,
Link to the online publication (EN): <https://doi.org/10.1787/6ffd1936-en>

Reports from non-governmental organisations

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Link to the online publication (EN): https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewv_autumn_2011_final.pdf
- ▶ **MenEngage, 2014**, “The MenEngage Alliance Accountability Standards and Guidelines”
Link to the page of the online publication (EN): <http://menengage.org/accountability/>

Books

- ▶ **Francis Dupuy-Déri, 2018**, “La crise de la masculinité – Autopsie d’un mythe tenace”, Éditions Du Remue-Ménage
Link to the publisher’s page (FR): <https://www.editions-rm.ca/livres/la-crise-de-la-masculinite/>
- ▶ **Christine Bard, Mélissa Blais, Francis Dupuis-Déri, 2019**, “Antiféminismes et masculinismes d’hier et d’aujourd’hui”, PUF
Link to the publisher’s page (FR): https://www.puf.com/content/Antif%C3%A9minismes_et_masculinismes_dhier_et_daujourdhui
- ▶ **Lucas Gottzén, Margunn Bjørnholt, Floretta Boonzaier, 2020**, “Men, Masculinities and Intimate Partner Violence”, Routledge
Link to the publisher’s page (EN): <https://www.routledge.com/Men-Masculinities-and-Intimate-Partner-Violence/Gottzen-Bjornholt-Boonzaier/p/book/9780367234898>

“The role of men, in both the public and private spheres, is critical to make progress towards real gender equality. Men’s and boys’ participation and responsibility as actors of change for gender equality are very important”.

Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023

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