



Strasbourg, 6 May 2022

WG-GEC-MB (2022) Report March

GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION

**1st meeting of the Working Group on the place of men and boys
in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women
(WG-GEC-MB)**

Online (BlueJeans) meeting

31 March 2022

REPORT

1. Opening of the meeting and introductions

The Secretariat welcomed participants to the first meeting of the Working Group on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women (WG-GEC-MB). Working Group members and observers introduced themselves briefly.

2. Mandate, working methods of the Working Group and objectives of the meeting

The Secretariat recalled that the [Working Group](#) had been given a mandate by the Committee of Ministers to draft Guidelines on “The place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women”, that should be adopted by the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) by the end of 2022. This follows a study drafted and endorsed by the GEC in 2021 on “[The place of men and boys in women’s rights and gender equality policies](#)”.

Six member States had volunteered to participate in the Working Group. Two NGOs registered as observers to the GEC also accepted to take part (see Appendix II, List of Working Group Participants).

The objectives of the first meeting were presented, namely:

- an introduction of the participants in the Working Group;
- agreement on the working methods of the Group;
- exchange of views with relevant stakeholders (Secretariat to the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) and the NGO MenEngage Europe);
- consideration of a first draft of the guidelines, and
- agreement on the next steps.

The Secretariat proposed the following working methods:

- two meetings of the Working Group: the first one on 31 March, via videoconference, and the second one on 28th June, in a hybrid format;
- the Working Group will be supported by Susana Pavlou, international expert on gender equality, Director, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS)
- the Working Group deliberations will have input from relevant Council of Europe sectors, International Organisations and NGOs;
- the draft Guidelines should be transmitted to GEC members in July/August 2022 for their consideration and discussed and adopted at the GEC plenary meeting in November 2022.

The representative from Luxembourg agreed with the working method but regretted that the observer NGOs in the Working Group did not include organisations dealing specifically with men. The Secretariat recalled that only organisations with observer status as provided by the GEC Terms of Reference (which are generic gender equality/women’s rights organisations) are allowed to be observers in GEC subordinate bodies. However, other relevant NGOs will

provide input through hearings. For example, MenEngage provided a presentation and took part in discussions during the first Working Group meeting.

Presentation of the working document (draft Guidelines)

The Secretariat explained that Council of Europe guidelines are instruments similar to recommendations but that only recommendations are Council of Europe legal instruments foreseen by the Council of Europe's Statute. Guidelines are therefore less formal and should be simpler to adopt than Recommendations¹.

The structure of Council of Europe guidelines is also usually similar to that of recommendations. They start with a preamble that sets out the reasons and objectives of the guidelines, followed by an operational part, which sets out the tasks for the member States. The lengthiest section is composed of general principles and, possibly, definitions, and proposed practical measures to be implemented by member States. Finally, guidelines can comprise a section on reporting and evaluation.

The proposed text drafted by the expert, in consultation with the Secretariat, is based on existing legal and policy commitments and frameworks. It takes into account the work of relevant Council of Europe sectors, of international organisations and NGOs, the GEC explanatory study on the topic of men and boys and current relevant research.

The proposed practical measures cover five main topics:

1. Measures focusing on resistance to gender equality and on men and boys becoming allies. This section addresses equal parenthood, care-related issues and "men's rights"/"anti-feminist" movements;
2. Measures focusing on men and boys as agents of change towards women's rights and gender equality. This section includes the role of men decision-makers, accountability, positive leadership, and training;
3. Measures to reduce the negative impacts of gender inequalities on men and boys. This section concerns education, including sexuality education, and health-related issues;
4. Measures to strengthen the role of men and boys in combating violence against women. This section addresses prevention, men as witnesses and bystanders, child custody issues, and impunity/perpetrator programmes;
5. Development and dissemination of scientific research and data on gender inequality and women's rights. This section comprises knowledge-building, sex-disaggregated data, scientific research including intersectional issues, and gender-sensitive language and communication.

A discussion followed the general presentation of the structure and content of the draft Guidelines. Working Group members made some general comments on the draft Guidelines and their structure. Overall, the members were very appreciative of the draft Guidelines as a basis for discussion.

The representative of Armenia, Lilit Shakaryan, suggested to replace the word "place" with the word "role" on the title of the draft Guidelines, to encompass a more active participation

¹ Pursuant to Article 20.d of the Statute of the Council of Europe, as with any less formal Committee of Ministers resolution, guidelines are adopted via a simple decision by a two-thirds majority.

of men and boys. The Secretariat explained that the title was fixed by the mandate from the Committee of Ministers and therefore could not be changed.

The representatives of Iceland, Tryggvi Hallgrímsson and of Denmark, Jeppe Holm Nielsen, made comments regarding the terminology used concerning “men’s rights movements”, underlining that “men’s movements” can indeed be feminist. While it was stressed by other members that the terminology “men’s rights movements” (especially in an Anglo-Saxon context) usually refers to anti-feminist groups which are in opposition to gender equality, it was agreed that this issue needed further discussion.

The representatives of Croatia, Martina Bosak, and of the European Women’s Lobby (EWL), Mary Collins, proposed to add the concept of patriarchy in the preamble. Camelia Proca, representative of the Women against Violence Europe Network (WAVE), suggested to make a link with other issues such as peace, the SDGs, and the environment, in the preamble, in order to ensure synergy with other topics.

Several representatives stressed that the root causes of gender inequality and the dynamics stopping men from becoming allies as well as the impacts of these power relations on men should be addressed more explicitly.

The representative of Luxembourg, Ralph Kaas underlined that men can also be victims of gender inequality.

Finally, the representatives of the EWL and of Armenia proposed to reinforce measures on care and to include the notion of a new “care deal” in the draft Guidelines.

The Working Group approved the structure of the draft Guidelines as well as, generally, their content and fundamental principles.

3. Discussion on the content of the draft Guidelines

The Working Group then proceeded to discuss the text of the draft Guidelines, paragraph-by-paragraph, based on the [document](#) drafted by the expert, in consultation with the Secretariat, starting with Section I of the Proposed measures for member States.

The Secretariat explained that paragraphs 29 and 30 were explanatory for the benefit of the Working Group members (as were the first paragraphs of each section), but some members considered that they should be kept as useful introductions.

It was reiterated that the issue of care should be made more prominent, for example by making paragraph 32 more specific or by adding a new paragraph on a care deal.

Virginia Gil, representative from WAVE, suggested that the responsibility and role of the private sector could be added. Susana Pavlou, the expert advising the Working Group, proposed that a paragraph asking member States to encourage the private sector to take action could be introduced, including the use of sustainability reporting as a means to hold the private sector accountable. Additionally, the representatives of EWL and of Denmark stated that the role of social partners should also be mentioned.

Regarding paragraph 33, it was suggested to include a right to disconnect, which is of particular importance in a context of growing use of teleworking. The representative of Denmark suggested to include that paternity leave is transferable. The idea of including a certain (minimum) length of paternity leave was also discussed.

Concerning paragraph 35, the representative from Croatia suggested to look into the different types of care work that women and men undertake.

A representative from WAVE suggested to include in Section I measures on the myths that are spread by certain nationalist or traditionalist (anti-gender) movements.

Regarding paragraph 43, in Section II, the representatives of the EWL and of Armenia proposed to include a reference to gender parity and quotas. It was also asked that the terminology “men-only public events” be clarified.

The representative from Iceland observed that a more positive formulation should be found in relation to “non-toxic political leadership” in paragraph 46. The Working Group also agreed to add “the national and regional levels” regarding peace processes in paragraph 47.

The Working Group agreed to add to Section II a paragraph on the description of organisations working on men and boys, which member States should support, in accordance with the criteria included in the “Fundamental principles”.

Regarding paragraph 54, the representatives of Iceland and of EWL proposed to include the notions of gender norms, healthy relationships and responsible behaviour in relationships.

In relation to Section IV “Measures to strengthen the role of men and boys in combating violence against women”, the representative from the EWL observed that cyber violence should be included more thoroughly.

Working Group members also noted some inconsistencies in terminology around violence against women, which the Secretariat will address, in line with the terminology used by GREVIO, while keeping the general title for the Guidelines.

The representative from Armenia raised concern regarding the reference to bystander intervention in paragraph 63. It was agreed to be more specific regarding the type of situations in which bystander intervention could be encouraged.

Concerning Section V, it was agreed to add a reference to gender budgeting in paragraph 77.

Taking into consideration the comments made, members of the Working Group agreed on the general direction and policy content of the objectives, scope, purpose, fundamental principles and proposed measures of the draft Guidelines.

Discussion of the “Key concepts” section of the draft Guidelines

The Working Group agreed that simple definitions of the relevant terms used in the draft Guidelines should be included, if possible, using existing definitions from other international organisations or NGOs. This would be particularly relevant in relation to “men’s rights” movements, in order to avoid confusion, especially with regard to translations of the draft Guidelines. It was stressed by members that organisations referring to “men’s rights” in their names are always against gender equality, but that some men’s movements are indeed feminist. The need was stressed to focus on, and give visibility to, organisations working on men’s roles or with men, which follow a feminist understanding of gender equality policies and cooperate with women’s organisations.

4. Presentation by Johanna Nelles, Head of the Violence Against Women Division and Executive Secretary to the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)

In her presentation, Johanna Nelles focused on the role of men and boys as foreseen by the [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (Istanbul Convention). States Parties are encouraged to implement the Istanbul Convention also with regard to men who are victims of domestic violence, but this is not an obligation. The Convention also considers men as agents of change and encourages them to actively prevent violence against women.

States Parties to the Istanbul Convention are required to raise awareness, increase perpetrator accountability and provide training for professionals. However, monitoring has shown a lack of, or insufficient, implementation in most countries. Awareness-raising campaigns often do not address the root causes of violence and mainly focus on domestic violence, and not on sexual violence and harassment. Perpetrator programmes lack clear quality standards, are often voluntary instead of mandatory, and judges are frequently not aware of the importance of ensuring perpetrators participate in these programmes. Additionally, in many countries, certain professional groups are still mainly composed of men. Training is therefore all the more important, but it is still widely lacking.

Following a question regarding concrete initiatives that could be taken to better implement the Istanbul Convention, Johanna Nelles said that, unfortunately, there were not as many good examples to share as one would hope for. Promising initiatives are often very small in scale and not always shared with GREVIO. However, GREVIO's [Midterm Horizontal Review](#) highlights some good examples and concrete steps that member States can take.

5. Presentation by Anna Lindqvist, Director of MÄN organisation and member of the steering committee of MenEngage Europe

Anna Lindqvist explained that MenEngage Europe was founded in 2009 and has 105 member organisations, including organisations from all EU member States and beyond. The network is not (yet) a strong advocacy network but mainly focuses on supporting its members. Their thematic focus areas include the culture of consent, equal parenting, violence prevention (with youth but also with perpetrators) and psychological support.

Following a question, Anna Lindqvist explained that in order to ensure that new organisations that join MenEngage comply with the feminist principles of the organisation, a vetting committee looks into these groups and a rigorous accountability system is in place. All members need to follow guiding principles, accountability standards and a code of conduct.

Regarding the draft Guidelines, Anna Lindqvist's comments included that it should be made more obviously visible that the draft Guidelines would benefit men and boys. She also stressed that funding for women's and men's organisations should be separate, in order to ensure that funding for (new) men's organisations does not drain existing resources for women's organisation. Anna Lindqvist remarked that the section that addresses resistance to gender equality should also include resistance by religious voices, political parties and a reference to the growing militarisation of Europe. She also stressed the need for concrete practical measures in the draft Guidelines.

6. Next steps and closing

The Secretariat proposed next steps to the Working Group, which were agreed as follows.

Working Group members are welcome to send further, written comments on the text to the Secretariat by 22 April 2022. In consultation with the Secretariat, the expert will revise the document on the basis of the discussions during the meeting and of comments sent in writing by Working Group members.

A meeting report will be drafted, and an oral report will be provided to the GEC at their next meeting in May.

It was agreed to schedule the second, one-day Working Group meeting on 28 June 2022, if possible, in person in Strasbourg. A possibility to attend online will, in any event, be given to those who cannot travel to Strasbourg.

The Working Group members were also invited to make suggestions to the Secretariat as to which organisations could be invited as speakers to the second Working Group meeting.

APPENDIX I AGENDA

Thursday 31st March 2022
10:30 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.& 2:30- 5:00 p.m.

Online Bluejeans meeting

1.	10:30 -11:00 am	Brief introduction of participants	
	11:00 -11:30 am	Mandate, working methods of the Working Group and objectives of the meeting	
2.		Presentation of draft Guidelines on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women (Secretariat/expert)	WG-GEC-MB (2022) 1
11:30-11:40 am		Coffee break	
3.	11:40 am -12:30 pm	Discussion of draft Guidelines	WG-GEC-MB (2022) 1
4.	12:30-1:00 pm	Presentation by Johanna Nelles, Head of the Council of Europe Violence against women Division (and Executive Secretary to GREVIO), followed by discussion	
1:00-2:30 pm		Lunch break	
5.	2:30-3:00 pm	Presentation by Anna Lindqvist, Director of MÄN organisation and member of the Steering Committee of MenEngage Europe, followed by discussion	
6.	3:00-3:30 pm	Discussion of draft Guidelines (continued)	WG-GEC-MB (2022) 1
3:30-3:40 pm		Coffee break	
7.	3:40-4:50 pm	Discussion of draft Guidelines (continued)	WG-GEC-MB (2022) 1
8.	4:50-5:00 pm	Wrap-up and next steps. Date of the 2nd meeting: 28/6/2022 (tbc). (Secretariat)	

APPENDIX II
LIST OF WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Members

Armenia	Lilit Shakaryan Head of the Division of Cooperation with International Monitoring Bodies, Department of Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Croatia	Martina Bosak Expert associate Government Office for Gender Equality
Denmark	Jeppe Holm Nielsen Head of Section, Department for Gender Equality
Estonia	Lee Maripuu Head of Gender Equality Policy Equality Policies Department (<i>excused</i>)
Iceland	Tryggvi Hallgrímsson Special Advisor at the Directorate of Equality
Luxembourg	Ralph Kaas Senior Advisor 1 st Class, Ministry of Equality between Women and Men

Observers (NGOs)

European Women's Lobby (EWL)	Mary Collins Senior Policy and Advocacy Coordinator
Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) Network	Virginia Gil Director, Foundation Aspacia, Spain Camelia Proca Founder and director of Association for Liberty and Gender Equality (A.L.E.G), Romania

Participants

Expert supporting the work of the Group	Susana Pavlou International gender equality expert, Director of the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS)
MÄN organisation and Men Engage	Anna Lindqvist Director of MÄN organisation, member of the Steering Committee of MenEngage Europe

Secretariat

Human Dignity and Gender Equality Department	Roberto Olla Head of Department
Gender Equality Division	<p>Caterina Bolognese Head of Division</p> <p>Cécile Gréboval Programme Manager, Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Equality Adviser, Secretary to the Working Group</p> <p>Christa Jakobsson Policy Adviser</p> <p>Evrydiki Tseliou Administrative assistant</p> <p>Hannah Hetgens Trainee</p>
Violence Against Women Division	Johanna Nelles Head of Division, Executive Secretary (GREVIO)