

# Engaging Men for Gender Equality

Online Discussion Report



ISBN 978-92-9218-557-2

doi: 10.2839/180724

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This publication summarises the views expressed by 21 people participating in an online discussion held on 11 September 2014 through the EuroGender online platform of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The findings, interpretations, and conclusions are entirely those of the authors and should not be attributed in any manner to EIGE. Neither EIGE nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the content of the information contained in this publication.

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# Introduction

The online discussion on “Engaging Men for Gender Equality” took place on 11th September 2014. It was the follow-up meeting of a previous debate on the same topic held in October 2013. At the same time, EIGE wanted to receive further feedback on the topic in order to prepare its upcoming thematic network meeting on “Engaging Men for Gender Equality” scheduled for the 25th and 26th September 2014. Furthermore, EIGE is currently preparing a concept paper on the topic, which will be presented to the EIGE Management Board in November 2014.

Invitations were sent to a selected group of stakeholders (men’s organisations, gender equality experts and institutions) and access to the debate was made public, so that other interested individuals could make contributions.

This report of the online discussion aims to enable dissemination of the insights and learning from the debate. It will serve to shape EIGE’s future work on the topic including possible updates of the Men and Gender Equality database.

This report summarises the key points made and themes explored during the debates. Inevitably, it is impossible to reflect in full the variety of ideas and perspectives brought forward.

# Organisation

The online discussion was organised in four sessions. Each session explored a different area of work that could be progressed by EIGE and was facilitated around a set of general questions:

## **Session 1: Men and debate on gender equality**

This session dealt with more general questions on how to position men in gender equality debates:

- *Should men have a special space in gender equality debates. If so, how and why?*
- *What are the critical areas for men within the gender equality debate?*
- *Why focus on gender equality and men? Can it be a tool for more gender equality for men and women?*
- *Can there be a unifying organisation for men or are men a too diverse group?*
- *What synergies exist with women’s organisations and where could there be enhanced cooperation?*



### Session 2: The role of men in reducing gender-based violence

This session explored the following questions:

- *The Istanbul Convention puts a special emphasis on men and boys in the prevention of violence against women. How could that be done? What kind of additional information and/or research is needed?*
- *How should men's organisations and other stakeholders in gender equality cooperate better in order to reduce gender-based violence?*

### Session 3: Critical areas for men in the gender equality index

This session dealt with the following questions:

- *The domain of health shows a small gap in the gender equality index, but due to unavailable data it does not include health behaviour. What are the critical topics when we speak about men's health?*
- *The domain of time shows that men do not spend much time in care activities. How to reduce this gap?*
- *How should men's organisations and other stakeholders in gender equality cooperate better in order to reduce gender gaps?*

### Session 4: Campaigning for men in gender equality

Three questions were debated in this session:

- *How to strengthen messages in campaigning by working together?*
- *How could information be shared and targeted best using men's networks and cooperation with other gender equality organisations?*
- *What materials looking at the role of men in gender equality should be available on EMGE's website?*

## Participation

Twenty-one people – either individual researchers, experts or representatives of NGOs, local authorities and women's organisations - actively participated in the online discussion and a larger number of people attended. Between them, they made over 180 contributions to the various debates. The participants were drawn from 13 different Member States (Estonia, Ireland, Romania, Spain, Finland, Belgium, Sweden, Italy, Portugal, The Netherlands, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania). The debate was conducted in English.



# Background

For a long time, gender equality policies have been contextualised mainly as ‘women’s issues’ — as women have been the driving force behind gender equality strategies and have been seen as the only ones who benefit from a more equal society (European Commission:2013). On the other hand, rather too often, men are seen as a monolithic group who benefit from inequality and therefore are reluctant to change the status quo.

However, in the last decade there has been a growing debate on how to engage more men in gender equality initiatives and how gender inequality affects different groups of men. Numerous men’s initiatives (mostly by civil society organisations) that support gender equality have been set up in Europe and beyond. These developments have also taken place at EU level. The study “Role of Men in Gender Equality – European strategies and insights” emphasises that “men need gender equality and gender equality needs men, there cannot be full gender equality without the commitment of both genders.”

The European Commission’s ‘Strategy for equality between women and men 2010–15’ looks at men and gender equality from a horizontal perspective. It states that gender equality needs the active contribution, support and participation of men and that policies should also address gender-related inequalities that affect boys/men, such as literacy rates, early school-leaving and occupational health. It also states that as part of the Commission’s key actions the Commission will address the role of men in gender equality and promote good practice on gender roles in youth, education, culture and sport.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has been working on the issue of men and gender equality since 2010, having organised several meetings and produced the report “The involvement of men in gender equality in the European Union”. EIGE actively supported the White Ribbon campaign to raise awareness on the involvement of men in reducing violence against women <http://eige.europa.eu/content/activities/men-and-gender-equality>.

EIGE also set up a database on “[Men and Gender Equality](#)” which gives access to information about organisations and initiatives from all over the European Union which are involved in the topic.



# Summary

## Session One: Men and debates on gender equality

The first session focused on the question of **how to position men in gender equality debates**. The leading question was whether men and gender equality should be a topic on its own or should it be treated within wider gender equality debates and if so how.

### Contributions and Key Issues

Most participants agreed that both sexes should be part of the same debate or as Concetta Carrà put it that talking about men and gender equality is part of the general debate on gender equality and “a dialogue is needed, not a monologue”.

Claes Sonnerby underlined the importance of the context in which the debate is taking place. If the situation in the country is mature enough as regards gender equality, the question of the life situation of men and gender equality should be part of the general discussion. If it is not mature enough it should not be because there would be a significant risk that men “take over the discussion and destroy it.” And it seems that there are huge differences between Northern European countries (the most developed ones in this sense) and Eastern European countries where men and gender equality are less of a debate, since the structures are still more patriarchal (Andreea Molocea, Katarzyna Wojnicka).

“*The issue of men in gender equality often encounters similar dynamics as the issue of gender mainstreaming in general, even if the power dynamics are different. Of course it is important to pay special attention to men and masculinity from a gender perspective, but it is at least as important to integrate a gender sensitive male and masculinities perspective in all the other topics. Issues like violence, poverty, education, health, safety, decision-making, environment, etc all have strong gender dimensions and influence men's lives in specific ways – as men and masculinity influence these topics in specific ways.*’ Jens van Tricht

Other important areas for men that were mentioned include fatherhood, work (labour market segregation, gender pay gap, bread winner issues...), care in general, politics (institutional and non-institutional), ageing and migration issues; criminal behaviour and education. Men should also be taught how to fight violence against women.

Asked how to put these policies into practice, several participants referred to the important role that education plays in this. Further, Daniel Matias suggested involving community organisations in specific trainings for men. However, Christian Veske reminded the participants that EIGE is not a policy-making institution. They provide Member States and European institutions evidence-based support, that is to say, they prepare reports and research, analyse and disseminate information.

Claes Sonnerby replied that EIGE could perhaps collect and publish more statistics on the costs of masculinity in order to raise men's awareness, since the concept of “a real man” needs to be questioned. Other participants confirmed that the concept of masculinity needs new models (e.g. involvement of men in childcare...) and that it is essential to show men the benefits of these other forms of masculinity (Kristaps Petermanis). Unfortunately, there is still a lot of peer pressure that prevents men from talking about masculinity for fear of being ridiculed (Daniel Matias).

Another part of the discussion focused on the question on how to make men more interested in the debate, knowing that men are diverse and not a homogenous group. One source of the problem lies in the language that is used.

“*If we wish to reach a larger male audience we should change the title of future debates to ‘Men's life situations’ or something alike. Many people connect gender equality with women's rights only.*’ Claes Sonnerby

“*Rationality and emotion, it seems like the necessary two-way street for engaging with men towards gender equality.*’ Daniel Matias

Finally, the question of how to improve the cooperation between men's and women's organisations seemed difficult to answer.

“*Maybe the best way to start is with parenthood.*’ Claes Sonnerby



### Interesting websites that were shared by the participants:

- [www.menengage.org](http://www.menengage.org)
- [www.menengagedilli2014.net](http://www.menengagedilli2014.net)

### Session Two: The role of men in reducing gender-based violence

On 1 August 2014, the Council of Europe **Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence** (Istanbul Convention) entered into force. The convention obliges the 14 governments that have ratified it (another 22 States have signed it) to take specific steps to counter all forms of violence against women: from stalking and sexual harassment to domestic violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

The Convention has a strong focus on prevention. Governments that agree to be bound by the Convention will have to do the following:

- train professionals in close contact with victims;
- regularly run awareness-raising campaigns;
- take steps to include issues such as gender equality and non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships in teaching material;
- set up treatment programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence and for sex offenders;
- work closely with NGOs;
- involve media and the private sector in eradicating gender stereotypes and promoting mutual respect.

Preventing violence against women and domestic violence should not be left to the state alone. In fact, the Convention calls on all members of society, in particular men and boys, to help reach its goal of creating a Europe free from all forms of violence against women and domestic violence.

### Contributions and Key Issues

The Istanbul Convention puts a special emphasis on men and boys in the prevention of violence against women and the first question in this part of the online discussion focused on how to reach this objective. Several participants again mentioned the importance of education from a very early age onwards to prevent men from becoming violent. Alan O'Neill answered that "developing sensitivity in boys is really important and awareness of what and who is safe and what and who is not." Jens van Tricht argued, however, that education cannot solve it all and that our actions should "speak louder than our words". In other words, we need to provide role models of nonviolence in our lives ("non-violent masculinities").

Christian Veske recalled that violence against women does not happen in isolation. It is part of a wider violent culture that is part of men's lives. Several participants of the online discussion underlined the existing culture of violence among men and the fact that statistically, it is almost exclusively men who become violent against other men or against women (cf. also the study by DG Justice concerning "The Role of Men in Gender Equality – European strategies and insights").

It was discussed that there are physiological differences between men and women that can partly explain the differences in behaviour. For example, Aap Toming, medical student, stressed that there is a difference in the brain structure of men and women.

**“** *Disparities how certain brain substances are distributed may be more revealing. Notably, male brains contain about 6.5 times more grey matter – sometimes called "thinking matter" – than women. Female brains have more than 9.5 times as much white matter, the stuff that connects various parts of the brain, than male brains.* Aap Toming

Not all participants in the discussion agreed that violent energy in men is thus innate – it could also be learnt behaviour through the media, peer influences, education and so forth.

Zulema Altamirano added from her previous work experience as a psychologist in prison, providing treatment programmes for perpetrators of intimate partner violence that violence is a tool to exert control and dominance, rather than an energy





they cannot control. She stated further that grounds to use different types of violence against women in a close relationship are built upon the structural and cultural imbalance between men and women in society.

Asked on the type of research EIGE could initiate in this field, Marta Castillo suggested conducting studies about men's perceptions, perspectives and opinions on gender-based violence and what is acceptable or non-acceptable. This information would be key to designing focused actions. According to Philip McCornack further research on the experiences of men participating in perpetrator programmes for their violence against women is equally needed. Other topics mentioned include the motivation of men who actually do act against gender-based violence and to further explore the resources available in the different countries. There should be a wider platform where field professionals, researchers, policy-makers and others could interact. However, research and practical engagement should always be combined.

### Additional resources mentioned:

Report on Violence against Women published by the European Fundamental Rights Agency

- [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results_en.pdf)
- [www.work-with-perpetrators.eu](http://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu)
- <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/>
- <http://www.whiteribbon.ie>
- <http://www.heforshe.org/>
- <http://www.mend.it>

### Session Three: Critical areas for men in the gender equality index

The final session dealt with the Gender Equality Index, a unique measurement tool which EIGE developed in order to combine gender indicators into a single summary measure. It consists of six core domains (work, money, knowledge, time, power and health) and two satellite domains (intersecting inequalities and violence). The Gender Equality Index measures how far (or close) the EU-27 and its Member States were from achieving complete gender equality in 2010. It provides results at both Member States and EU-27 level but also for each domain and sub-domain.

It measures gender gaps that are adjusted to levels of achievement, ensuring that gender gaps cannot be regarded positively where they point to an adverse situation for both women and men.

For example, in the domain of health, gender inequality and stereotypical gender roles and norms have damaging effects on the personal health and well-being of men, as well as women. Men and boys face specific health problems such as premature death through an accident or suicide and higher levels of drug and alcohol abuse. Consequently, they have a lower life expectancy (82.6 years for women, 76.7 years for men).

The domain "health" in the Gender Equality Index measures the differences between women and men in health status and in access to health structures. It measures not only sex-based differences in self-perceived health, life expectancy and healthy life years but also gender gaps in unmet needs. What is missing, however, is data on health behaviour.

### Contributions and Key Issues

The first part of the debate focused on the question: "what are the critical topics when we speak about men's health?"

**“**Isolation, fear of vulnerability, lack of self-care, leaving it too late, embarrassment, male gender conditioning, feeling invincible, not taking ourselves seriously, not prioritising our own personal health issues, ignorance of our bodies and our emotions, ability to bear or ignore pain or injury. There is a saying in English for this "soldier on" – meaning to carry on with everyday life and work despite the health issue that is affecting us.' Alan O'Neill



Claes Sonnerby pointed out that men tend to ask for medical support at a later stage than women and that they “die more than women as a result of risk-taking, alcohol, drugs, violence, accidents, depression and suicide.” It has been observed, however, that differences in health status between persons with high and low education is higher than between men and women (based on data from Sweden).

It would therefore be very interesting to take data both on gender and class into consideration for future research. Alan O’Neill advocated a survey on the review on men’s health policies in Ireland, one of the first countries to implement a national men’s health policy.

A recurring debate also centred on the time spent on care activities. There are strong differences in the amount of time women and men in the EU spend on non-economic activities. A wide gender gap exists in the time spent caring and educating children and grandchildren in addition to time spent on cooking and housework. Throughout all Member States, it is women who perform the bulk of these caring activities. Men are, however, more likely than women (in the vast majority of Member States) to participate in sporting, cultural or leisure activities on a regular basis.

The situation is more divided when it comes to involvement in voluntary or charitable activities because in some Member States it is non-existent, while in others it shows a wide gender gap.

The European Commission’s “Roadmap for equality between women and men 2006 – 2010” specifically stresses the need for men to be more involved in care activities. It emphasises that men should be encouraged to take up family responsibilities, in particular through incentives to take parental and paternity leave and to share leave entitlements with women.

The participants of the online discussion debated how this gap in care activities between men and women could be bridged. Claes Sonnerby suggested that “men should work less hours paid work, women more hours.” Concetta Carrà confirmed that it is also a wider structural problem, for example in Italy men do not ask for parental leave due to the economic gap between female and male salaries. And Andreaa Molocea shared a very inspiring link from the Philippines on a campaign concerning “stay-at-home” dads (see link below).

#### **Additional resources mentioned:**

- [www.macleans.ca/politics/worldpolitics/fatherhood-101](http://www.macleans.ca/politics/worldpolitics/fatherhood-101)
- [www.manup.ie](http://www.manup.ie)

#### **Session Four: Campaigning for Men in Gender Equality**

The last session was dedicated to campaigning for men in gender equality in order to raise further awareness and involve more men in the current activities. There is already a growing number of men’s organisations in Europe and beyond and they could be one of the first target groups to be involved in an intensified campaign on the involvement of men in the gender equality debate.

The participants suggested bringing the White Ribbon campaign (25th November) to other countries such as Romania and to continue activities such as the 16 days of Action Against Violence Against Women that follow November 25th. EIGE confirmed that they will continue the White Ribbon campaign.

Philip McCormack shared another interesting example from Ireland where they involve a public awareness committee on violence against women. Members of this committee include communication experts, state officials (justice, health...) and representatives of non-state domestic and sexual violence support services. The work contributes greatly to how state funding in awareness raising around these issues is coordinated and their advice has assisted in the drafting of guiding principles and messaging in the area.



## Conclusions and follow-up

All in all, it was a lively debate and the participants confirmed that EIGE should continue their work on “men and gender equality”. Different suggestions were made to which research topics could be interesting and the contact database was seen as a very useful instrument.

There is a growing number of men who are sensitive to the topic and a growing number of men’s organisations which work on changing stereotypical views of “masculinities”. They also aim at promoting non-violent behaviour or raising awareness on issues such as health or care-taking. New role models are needed here and education undoubtedly has an important role to play in this.

Campaigning and the development of new communication tools are other important elements which can be further strengthened in the future, for example by transferring the White Ribbon campaign to countries where the topic is less present in the public discourse (e.g. in Eastern Europe).

It was also emphasised by all participants that gender equality is a topic for both men and women, or as stated in the study “Role of Men in Gender Equality – European strategies and insights”: ‘Men need gender equality and gender equality needs men, there cannot be full gender equality without the commitment of both genders.’



# Annex I: Resources

**The background document made available on EuroGender platform during the discussion**

<http://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/events-files/Toolkit.pdf>

# Annex II: Transcript

**Link to the online discussion transcript**

[http://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/web-discussions-files/Engaging%20Men%20for%20Gender%20Equality\\_transcript.pdf](http://eurogender.eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/web-discussions-files/Engaging%20Men%20for%20Gender%20Equality_transcript.pdf)



## Annex III: List of participants

First Name	Institution/Position	Country
Aap Toming	Individual Expert	Estonia
Alan O'Neill	CEO, Men's Development Network in Ireland	Ireland
Alexandrina Satnoianu	EIGE	Romania
Ana Fernández de Vega	Individual Expert	Spain
Andreea Molocea	Individual Expert, Communication & PR Adviser, Department of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men in Bucharest, Romania.	Romania
Association for Men's Equality	Association for Men's Equality	Finland
Christian Veske	EIGE	Lithuania
Christina Andersson	World Peace Foundation, Ambassador coordinator	Belgium
Claes Sonnerby	Individual Expert, Swedish Government Inquiry on Men and Gender Equality	Sweden
Concetta Carrà	Individual Expert	Italy
Cristian Iacob	Individual Expert	Romania
Daniel Matias	Individual Expert	Portugal
Dorothee Fischer	Cultura Lavoro Srl	Spain
Irina Costache	Individual Expert	Romania
Jens Van Tricht	Individual Expert, gender trainer	The Netherlands
Katarzyna Wojnicka	Individual Expert	Poland



Kristaps Petermanis	Administrative Agent, EIGE	Latvia
Marta Castillo	Individual Expert	Spain
Philip McCormack	Research officer, Ireland's national office for prevention of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence	Ireland
Sonia Villar	Psicologa Clinica, Individual Expert	Spain
Zulema Altamirano	EIGE, Seconded National Expert – GBV (seconded by the Ministry of the Interior, Madrid Spain)	Lithuania



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