

Opinion on **Men in Gender Equality**





Advisory Committee
on
Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

The opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States.



Table of Contents

A) Introduction.....	4
B) Objectives for Work on Men in Gender Equality	4
C) Current Initiatives at Member State Level.....	5
1. (a) Structures.....	5
1. (b) Knowledge Development	6
2. (a) Solidarity and Leadership	6
2. (b) Men in Caring/Family Roles.....	7
2. (c) Choices Made by Boys and Men.....	9
2. (d) Cultural Change	9
3. Issues Specific to Men.....	10
D) Pitfalls	10
E) A Strategic Approach.....	11
F) Recommendations.....	12

A) Introduction

In 2005 the annual report on equality between women and men in the EU addressed the role of men in achieving gender equality and underlined that it is essential that both men and women actively participate in creating new strategies for gender equality. The Commission roadmap on gender equality also includes a focus on men in gender equality. The Commission invited the advisory committee on equal opportunities between women and men to prepare an opinion on men in gender equality.

The Advisory Committee welcomes this opportunity to set out its views on this issue of men in gender equality. The Advisory Committee established a working group to assist it in preparing this opinion. The mandate for the working group was to:

- Identify the challenges relating to the mobilisation of men to support and engage in the promotion of gender equality.
- Identify the implications of a more gender equal society for men and masculinity and strategies to support men in relation to such change.
- Provide examples of good practice in gender equality initiatives targeted at men.
- Make recommendations for initiatives at EU level to address issues identified and further strategies required.

The Advisory Committee is pleased to bring this opinion forward for consideration by the Commission and looks forward to a positive response to the recommendations made to advance the issue of men in gender equality¹.

B) Objectives for Work on Men in Gender Equality

The primary objective for work on men in gender equality must be to strengthen the role and contribution of men in challenging and changing the structures, institutional policies and practices, and culture (including stereotypical attitudes) that generate and sustain the inequalities experienced by women.

Gender inequality is predominantly experienced by women. It is both widespread and persistent. Women experience inequalities in the workplace and in access to economic development. The representation, standing and status of women reflect this inequality. Women experience inequalities in access to power and decision making roles across a broad range of sectors including in politics and senior management in business. Gender inequality also involves relationships with men that involve violence, abuse, being patronised and disrespect. These inequalities experienced by women are a product of societal structures, institutional systems and practices, and societal culture and individual attitudes. These inequalities are also reflected in private and family life. It is important that work on men in gender equality is, and is perceived to be, supportive to women's empowerment and to greater equality for women.

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A gender equal society will inevitably involve a redistribution of resources and power from men to women. However it is important to acknowledge that a gender equal society will involve significant gains for men. These gains include:

- Liberation from the inflexibilities imposed on men by current dominant models of masculinity and male behaviours.
- New relationships of respect, care and solidarity between men and women.
- Access to new roles for men particularly in the caring domain and to a new balance between paid employment and caring work.
- Structures and institutions in society that work more effectively and without discrimination for people- men and women.
- Gender mainstreaming that creates new opportunities for men for example in relation to working time policies.
- More broadly the achievement of gender equality goals will contribute to achieving the Lisbon objectives and will enhance the situation of men and women.

A number of ancillary objectives can also be pursued as part of this primary objective for work on men in gender equality. These ancillary objectives would include:

- To support existing and emerging new models of masculinity and male behaviour and the cultural change required to embed these new models across societal structures, institutions and values.
- To support new gender relations where women's experiences of male violence and abuse and of being patronised or disrespected by men are replaced by relations of respect, care and solidarity.
- To address issues that are specific to men in areas such as health provision.

C) Current Initiatives at Member State Level

A broad range of initiatives are already taking place on men in gender equality at Member State Level. In examining these initiatives a framework for action on men in gender equality can be identified. This framework involves:

1. Mechanisms to secure an informed focus on men in gender equality including structures and knowledge development.
2. Initiatives to support the primary objective for this work on men in gender equality including initiatives to build solidarity and leadership among men for equality for women (including a focus on the role of men in combating domestic violence), to engage men in caring roles and to support boys and men to make new choices in relation to roles and careers, and to generate cultural change in relation to how masculinity is defined and in relation to expectations on the role of men.
3. Initiatives to support the ancillary objectives for this work on men in gender equality including initiatives to address issues specific to men as men.

1. (a) Structures

It is useful to establish and resource an institutional responsibility to drive forward this work on men in gender equality at member state level. It is important that such a structure does not compete with the wider structure for equality for women in terms of resources or policy attention. Such a structure to drive the focus on men in gender equality needs to be, and



to be seen to be, supportive of equality for women. It should be institutionally located within or linked to the structures established for gender equality. The staff involved should have an expertise in gender equality and in the issues of women.

In Finland the Council for Equality was established to focus on the overall promotion of gender equality in Finnish society. The Council for Equality has set up a subcommittee on men's issues. This subcommittee has investigated ways of raising men's interest in gender equality, looked at men's particular problems from an equality perspective and promoted men's studies. The General Secretary of the Council for Equality works at the Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

1. (b) Knowledge Development

It is important that work on men in gender equality is evidence based. Knowledge development needs to be resourced to:

- Further define and understand the role and contribution of work on men in gender equality to greater equality for women.
- Further define and understand the changing perspectives of men on gender equality issues and on equality for women.
- Further define and understand the work on men in gender equality in terms of the diversity of men in relation to identity, status and situation.
- Further define the barriers faced by men in what have been traditionally defined as women's jobs.

In Britain the Equal Opportunities Commission and the MORI Social Research Institute published 'Dads on Dads – Needs and Experiences at Home and at Work' in 2002. The research aimed to help fill gaps in current knowledge in relation to men's fathering roles by exploring:

- How involved fathers are in the lives of their families.
- Men's attitudes towards what it means to be a 'father' and how fatherhood relates to the reality of men's lives who are in employment.
- The barriers faced by men who wish to balance their work and family life.
- Why men do not demand more access to, and use of, family friendly policies and practices.

The Equal Opportunities commission has followed this up with new research published in 2006. This is entitled "The 21st Century Dad". Among other things, it looks at the attitudes of mothers in relation to the greater family involvement of fathers, the need for better paid paternity arrangements and the importance of reconciling work and family life for both men and women.

2. (a) Solidarity and Leadership

Building a solidarity and a leadership from men for equality for women and for effective responses to the issues of women should be at the heart of all work on men in gender equality. This will involve initiatives specifically designed to encourage and support men to engage in actions to promote and achieve equality for women. It will involve initiatives to stimulate and shape a leadership from men in positions of power for this solidarity from men.



In Austria the State Government of Lower Austria has developed a programme called 'Breaking Patterns: New Role Models for Men in Leadership' under the EQUAL Community Programme. The objectives of this project are to:

- Break open traditional patterns of perception of society that the responsibility to reconcile family and work is assigned to women only.
- Sensibilise men in future leading positions (like executive managers, directors etc) for reconciliation responsibilities
- Implementing a training module about reconciliation of family and work in the training system for leadership, especially in the training for men as future leaders.

In Ireland the Equality Authority funded a leadership initiative led by representatives of the Irish Business and Employers Confederation, IBM Ireland, International Women's Forum, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the SIA Group, The Wheel and the Public Service. The initiative set out to address low levels of participation among women in leadership positions in the business, public administration, voluntary, arts and trade union sectors. It organised a future leaders programme providing training to increase personal and leadership skills of women in middle management, it organised leaders conversations to enable men and women in leadership positions to explore different leadership models and it organised a diversity programme for senior managers to explore diversity management and to stimulate participants to take action in this area.

In Finland, there have been a range of specific programs for men that use violence towards their partners. One of the most well known is Lyötätön Linja Espoossa ('no hitting-principle'). It works to stop and to prevent violence among men who have abused their partners or children. The Alternative to Violence-program is a service directed at men. It consists of personal and group counselling and separately agreed-upon assignments. The aim of the program is to increase the security of all the family members and to direct them to places where they can get help. The goal is to stop the violence and also to help the men to change their attitudes such that they can live in equal relationships. Participation in the program is not alternative to a punishment of the crime. The program can help the man to stop the use of violence and therefore prevent future crimes.

In Lithuania, the First Men's Crisis Information Centre has been established. The project is targeted on men wishing to combat their violent behaviour and aims to encourage men in combating violence against women and to promote non violent culture of relationships.

2. (b) Men in Caring/Family Roles

The work on men in gender equality must have a broad focus. Currently the focus is largely confined to the issue of men in caring. It will be important to broaden this focus across the full framework for action outlined in this opinion. However this broadening should not happen at the expense of this focus on men in caring which needs to be further developed and deepened and extended to the sharing of family responsibilities. The need for this focus on men in caring is evident from the significant and persistent inequalities in the sharing of caring between women and men. This is the essence of a wider imbalance in the distribution of paid and unpaid work.

In France paid paternity leave is available to working fathers for eleven days. There is nearly a 66% take up of this leave. This leave (as maternity leave) is paid by social security



up to an amount of €2516 per month. Employers who pay for the differential in case of upper amounts, can benefit from an incentive the “credit d’impot famille”.

In Portugal statutory leave entitlements include maternity leave that enables fathers or mothers take 120 days leave to care for a newly born child, paternity leave of 5 days duration for working fathers, 15 days paid parental leave for fathers immediately after maternity or paternity leave as a form of positive action for men and a right to flexibility in working time where permission must be sought from the Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment (CITE) if such flexibility is to be refused for parents with children up to 12 years of age or disabled children. Fathers who take paternity leave have the same protection as mothers on maternity leave.

In Finland parental leave quotas for men are used to increase take up by men of parental leave.

In Slovenia paternity leave is available for 90 days, 15 days may be taken during maternity leave of a mother until the child is 6 months old with 100% compensation, 75 days may be taken up until the child reaches 3 years old and the state ensures payment of the contribution for social protection of the minimum wage.

In Slovenia a television advertisement was used in a campaign to encourage fathers and potential fathers to participate in childcare and upbringing, to increase awareness of the importance of a father figure in the development of the child and to emphasise the benefits of reconciling work and family life for women and men.

In Germany, 2 months from 14 months paid parental leave is set aside for the father when the mother takes the other 12 months - and vice versa. If this is not claimed, the right to this 2 months leave is lost.

In Austria the Minister for Women organised an information campaign using radio spots and posters with the aim of empowering women and of encouraging a bigger involvement of men in housework and childcare – one slogan “Men can Hardly Believe it: Women Need Space and Time”.

In France ALICE, a programme funded under the EQUAL Community programme focused on the place of the father in society with a view to identifying the stereotypes of fathers and mothers, observe educational practices with regard to men and women, identifying discrimination, providing training to men for fatherhood, sensibilising employers about the role of fathers among their employees and observing the role of the father in different cultures.

In Lithuania under the slogan “It’s cool to be a dad!” research, publications and seminars have sought to encourage men to take paternity leave, to confront male stereotypes and to develop images of men as care givers such that the issue has become part of public discourse. The second phase of the project ‘Modern Men in Enlarged Europe II: Family Friendly Policies’ is aimed to promote family friendly work environment, to encourage employers to implement family friendly arrangements at work for both genders, and to promote changes in the socio institutional systems which has a substantial influence on men’s role at work and in the family.

The European Social Partners Framework of Actions on Gender Equality, concluded in 2005 by ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP, is a commitment to promote gender equality in the labour market, by social partners. It identifies 4 priority areas to be addressed. Two are particularly relevant to this debate: (1) addressing gender roles and segregation, (2) work-life balance.



2. (c) Choices Made by Boys and Men

A segregated labour market involves choices made by men and women. Work has been done to broaden the choices made by women and to open new areas of labour market participation by women. Work on men in gender equality must also be concerned with the labour market choices made by boys and men.

In Germany a nation wide pilot scheme was developed entitled "New Paths for Boys-expanding future opportunities in work and family life". The goals of the project are:

- To encourage local initiatives to offer gender related social work with boys.
- To give boys the chance to experience equality of opportunities and role diversity as a personal benefit for their future careers and lives.
- To widen the range of jobs for boys to choose from by showing them new career perspectives, in particular in the social, caring, education and service professions.
- To support boys in their efforts to meet the rising expectations of the job world as to soft skills such as the abilities to solve conflicts, to communicate and to work in a team.
- To bring together existing initiatives and projects and create a nationwide network for social work with boys.
- To develop new concepts and schemes that take into consideration boys' life plans.
- To sensitise the public and those involved in the process of career choice to gender related vocational orientation.
- To enrich the scientific discourse in research on boys by scientific expertise and continuous monitoring of practical experiences.

2. (d) Cultural Change

Attitudinal change at the level of the individual man is important in work on men in gender equality. However cultural change at the level of society must also be an important goal. This cultural change must address and change the dominance of particular and fixed models of masculinity and of specific expectations in relation to male behaviour. This includes a focus on identity and how society constructs male and female identities. It should include the impact of what can be a compulsory and stereotypical heterosexual identity imposed on boys at school in particular. The changing role of men and women needs to be an element of education at all levels. Teachers and trainers should receive training in this area.

In France the ALICE project has focused on the place of men in caring roles and on making this work attractive to men by making it attractive for all. This work is based on:

- Concretization about "Infancy and Youth" training.
- Communication about the different caring jobs.
- Valuing of male qualities and competences in these jobs.

In Ireland a range of state agencies provide funding to the Men's Development Network which has a mission statement "Better Lives for Men, Better Lives for All". Its work includes:

- A project to facilitate men's community leadership in marginalized communities.
- Maintaining men's development through a national network.
- Coordinating a domestic violence intervention programme.



- Promoting men's health.
- Educational programmes for men.

In Luxembourg, a European project funded by the Fifth Programme on Gender Equality involving Luxembourg, Ireland and the Slovak Republic, includes a focus on the role of men in the promotion of gender equality. Activities include:

- analysis of the role of men in the promotion of gender equality by the means of questionnaires with stakeholders in each partner country
- analysis of the 5 major national daily papers during two weeks in the partner countries
- analysis of national researches on gender dimension in education regarding the role of men in the promotion of gender equality
- analysis of the progress made concerning men in their role of fathers
- a seminar in each partner country with stakeholders and international experts on the subject and with the presentation of the results of the various analysis
- a seminar to present the results of the national partners
- a booklet about strategies, good practices gathered in cooperation with the partners.

Italy is the lead partner of P.A.R.I. project co-financed by the Fifth Programme on Gender Equality in partnership with Spain, Slovenia and Greece. The project aims at producing guidelines for social partners and Managing authorities to support paternal role in society and raise awareness towards a more equal society.

3. Issues Specific to Men

Work on men in gender equality can usefully include a focus on issues specific to men – meeting needs particular to men as men. Such initiatives have initially focused in the area of health provision.

In Ireland, the national health strategy included a commitment to develop a policy for men's health and health promotion. A national steering committee has been established to oversee the development of this policy. A consultation process has been developed to identify the health needs of men and boys, to structure actions to meet those needs and to provide a forum to share information and create networks to support men and those working with men.

In Lithuania the National Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men covers inequalities in health protection and addresses the gap in men's and women's life expectancy, which in Lithuania is more than 11 years. Measures are targeted on men's specific health needs and increasing men's life expectancy.

D) Pitfalls

It is important to develop this work on men in gender equality with some care. There are pitfalls facing those involved in designing and implementing this work.

These pitfalls need to be avoided to ensure that work on men in gender equality does not diminish or limit work on gender equality.

These pitfalls include:



- the danger of shifting the focus in gender equality work away from the experience and situation of women to that of men;
- the risk of this work merely empowering men to maintain a status quo characterised by persistent and significant inequalities experienced by women;
- the problems that arise where work on men in gender equality is not felt to be or is not supportive of women and equality for women or where this work can be experienced as oppositional to women;
- the dangers of this work competing for the scarce resources currently available for gender equality work rather than this work being a focus for additional funding;
- the limitations of an approach that does not take into account the diversity of men in terms of identity, role, attitude and situation.

These pitfalls present important challenges that must be met in this work on men in gender equality. However, they are not presented in any way as a reason for not progressing this work.

E) A Strategic Approach

A strategic approach to work on men in gender equality is required if the objectives outlined above are to be met. A strategic approach should involve initiative across the full spectrum of areas of action set out in the earlier section.

A strategic approach should involve objectives, activities, indicators, targets and resources capable of meeting the following challenges:

1. To develop an institutional infrastructure adequate to develop and drive forward a strategic approach to work on men in gender equality. This institutional infrastructure should be adequately linked to and coherent with the wider institutional infrastructure established to address gender equality goals.
2. To develop an adequate knowledge base to underpin work on men in gender equality. This would include developing an understanding of current perspectives among men in relation to gender equality issues, an understanding of current barriers to the effective involvement of men in gender equality issues and of how best to address these, and to identify the key topical issues for work on men in gender equality.
3. To build solidarity and leadership from men for equality for women. There is a need to develop understanding among men of the experience and situation of women, to create opportunities for peer education among men in relation to gender equality, to generate an understanding of the right to and need for gender equality and the shared benefits that flow from this for men and women, and to stimulate and support action by men to achieve equality for women. Such action should encompass the full range of gender inequalities in particular:
 - working for a more equal balance between women and men in decision-making,
 - addressing vertical and horizontal segregation within the labour market,



- seeking a more equal balance in the sharing of caring and family work between men and women,
 - supporting cultural change in relation to the roles and representations of men and women in particular within the media, the advertising industry, and the education system,
 - challenging male violence against women.
4. To stimulate and support men to play caring and family roles. Positive action targeting men in this area, the development of statutory leave entitlements targeting men, workplace initiatives on reconciliation by men of work and family life and information and awareness campaigns all have a role to play in this.
 5. To support new labour market roles for men including through seeking to shape and inform choices made by boys and young men. Education, guidance counselling and similar interventions have a particular contribution to make in this regard.
 6. To facilitate the emergence of new models of masculinity and new thinking about and expectations of men, men's behaviour and the role of men. Education, media, advertising and research on men and masculinity, and statutory policy initiatives have a particular contribution to make in breaking current stereotypes of men and addressing current social conditioning of men.
 7. To identify and meet needs specific to men as men. This would focus on areas such as health provision, social inclusion and rural isolation in some member states but could expand with new knowledge developed in this area.

F) Recommendations

On foot of this exploration of initiatives already taking place at member state level and of this analysis of men in gender equality the Advisory Committee wishes to make the following recommendations to the Commission.

1. The Commission should develop a communication on men in gender equality on the basis of this opinion.
2. The Commission should give consideration to the conclusions of the conference on men in gender equality being organised by the Finnish Presidency of the EU.
3. The Commission should develop a focus on men in gender equality in the guidelines for member states National Reform Programmes and for the Open Method of Coordination in relation to social protection, health and pensions. This focus should be developed in addition to further developing the focus on gender equality in this guideline.
4. The Commission should develop a focus on men in gender equality in the implementation and further development of regulations, guidelines and reporting arrangements that relate to the Structural Funds.
5. The Commission should review current legislation at EU level in relation to statutory leave entitlements and work- life reconciliation issues with a view to assessing their role and contribution to men in gender equality.



6. The Commission should ensure a focus on men in gender equality in the work of the gender equality unit and of the new Gender Institute.