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## Men and Gender Equality – European insights

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### Introduction

Gender equality policies have been regarded as ‘women’s issues’ for a long time. Due to the perspective on women as the ones who benefit from increased gender equality and to their role as a driving force behind gender equality strategies, men have in general been taken less into account.<sup>1</sup> However, over the past decade, the role of men regarding gender equality has become increasingly relevant in terms of research and policies in the EU. Engagement from men as well as women is needed to create gender equal development.

The new perspective on the contribution of men to gender equality was introduced on the global level by the 1995 UN Beijing 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women. Since then, the perspective on men as part of the gender equality agenda has been increasingly taken up by the various UN and other international agencies. Men and masculinities have also become subjects of studies and gender policies in the EU, although these efforts have not yet been integrated into mainstream research.

Generally, the role of men in promoting gender equality has gained importance in Europe today compared to 1520 years ago. To mention only some of the most important milestones in this respect:

- In 2001, the first EU *Conference on Men and Equality* was held in Sweden, emphasising that men must be addressed in order to develop gender equality. (Hearn 2001)
- The *Conference on Men and Gender Equality – Towards Progressive Policies* took place in Finland in 2006, stating “... *that the best way to promote gender equality is reciprocity and cooperation (between different actors and both sexes).*” (Varanka et al. 2006, 11)
- The role of men and fathers in the reconciliation of work and private life has become a central topic in EU policies, as can be seen in the *Roadmap for Equality Between Women and Men 2006-2010*. (EC 2006)
- The need for the involvement of men in gender equality policies is addressed in the current European Commission's *Strategy for Equality between Women and Men* (EC 2010), as are inequalities affecting men that must be addressed such as early school leaving and health-related topics.

Finally, in 2013 the European Commission published the report *The Role of Men in Gender Equality* (Scambor et al. 2013) in which the results of the first systematic research study of the EU 27 member states plus the four associated EFTA states are summarised regarding men and

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<sup>1</sup> This was also true for the European strategy of Gender Mainstreaming in the early days, i.e. before and around 2000. Gender Mainstreaming prompts all political actors to apply a gender perspective to all their activities, which was understood as only a woman’s perspective in the beginning. Over the last decade, an awareness of the issue of men in gender equality has been created.

gender equality in the fields of education; working life; the involvement of men in family, care and domestic work responsibilities; men's health; gender-based violence; men's participation in gender equality policy. The report was based on the findings of a European research project which was conducted from 2011 to 2012 within the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (*PROGRESS*). In this paper, some of the most important findings and recommendations resulting from this study are summarised.

### **Objectives, methodology and position of the project**

There is much variation regarding men's practices and interests regarding gender equality within Europe due to differences in provider roles and economic circumstances, but also due to different social, political and cultural patterns. However, there is little systematised knowledge about differences between and within the European countries. Consequently, the main objective of the project was to gain better knowledge on the role and positioning of men concerning the gender equality related issues mentioned above in order to derive more knowledge-based policy recommendations for the promotion of gender equality in connection with men. To reach these research- and policy-related objectives, the project team proceeded in the following ways:

- In each of the 31 researched countries, country reports were conducted by gender and policy experts. In this way, basic knowledge of men and gender equality was collected as well as the most important trends and challenges.
- Centralised data on the European level (Eurostat, European Working Conditions Survey, etc.) and national data on men and gender equality provided by the national experts was used to carry out a quantitative data study.
- Three workshops with international gender experts and stakeholders enriched the heuristic basis of the study.
- To broaden the picture, telephone interviews with international experts from the USA, Canada, Australia and other OECD countries were conducted.
- The policy recommendations on the role of men in improving gender equality across Europe were discussed and further developed by the members of the advisory board which consisted of notable experts in the respective fields.

It was an important underlying position of the project team to strive for a 'balanced approach' towards the topic of the role of men in promoting gender equality on two levels:

- Firstly, focussing on men in terms of gender equality always includes thinking about the woman's side at the same time. We need to address the gender relations in order to change gender imbalances and inequalities. When, for example, the work-family balance for men is improved this also means an important step towards achieving a more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men.
- Secondly, a perspective on men as a heterogeneous social group is needed to develop adequate policy recommendations. Based on Messner's (2000) work, the approach to men's social positions was to take at least three elements into account: (a) men's *privileges* in gender-unequal societies; (b) *diversity* among men, which provides some groups of men with privileges and disadvantages other groups according to class, ethnicity, dis/ability etc.; (c) the *costs* of masculinity that result from maintaining privileges (e.g. in the areas of violence of men against men or health problems).

Failing to balance these perspectives, eliding gender relations or framing men and women in static, unchangeable sex roles will result in distorted and reduced perspectives.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is crucial that a critical scholarship, based on feminist theory and men's studies, is closely connected to the development of government policy, programmes and interventions. In this way, the transformation of dominant models of masculinities – such as the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 2005) - which are adverse to equality and inclusion to new, promising forms of masculinities can be fostered by well-informed and knowledge-based policies. 'Caring masculinity' is one such alternative model based on care-giving roles for men instead of breadwinner roles. The roles of men in societies are changing and 'caring masculinity' is increasingly realised in the everyday lives of men (e.g. by taking over care-giving tasks in families, by working in 'feminine' professions of care or through increased self-care consisting of awareness of health or emotional issues, deeper friendships, less risk-taking, etc.). As discussed below, caring masculinities is one way of approaching men's gender equal role in society.

### **Men, gender equality and education**

Gender equality issues in education have changed over the past decades and have become more complex as questions of gender inequality and power have been opened up. From the 1970s onwards, gender equality in education has predominantly been framed with a focus on women (Weiner 2010), but the narrowing of the gender gap has changed the discussion in Europe. Public discourses and policies about gender equality in education have started to focus on the so-called 'boy crisis' and on 'failing boys' at school in recent years. The message is that school privileges girls and disadvantages boys. These debates tend to ignore trajectories including those of class, 'race', ethnicities and sexualities which can lead to a deeper understanding of this complex social phenomenon. (Scambor and Seidler 2013)

Kimmel (2010) points towards a false opposition between the genders, which is drawn on when educational reforms, implemented in order to reduce gender inequality, are blamed for hindering boys' educational achievements. In fact, main trends in education show an increase of educational attainment both for boys and girls, though the increase for girls is higher than the increase for boys. The *Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality* (Scambor et al. 2013) outlines some major changes between 2001 and 2010.

In 2010 30% of all men and 37% of all women (EU 27 and EFTA) between 30 and 34 years of age had attained a tertiary education level. Compared to 2001, the increase of female attainment rate in tertiary education is almost twice as high (14%) as that of men's (7.6%), signalling issues for young men. In Northern countries (e.g. Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark) women's attainment rates in tertiary education were around and above 50% in 2010, while the highest attainment rates of men in tertiary education were reported for Switzerland, Luxembourg and Ireland. During the same period of time, the rate of men's upper secondary attainment was constant or slightly increased in more than two thirds of all the EU member states and EFTA states. Differences regarding socio-economic variables among men appear to have an effect on attainment rates in upper secondary education; lower attainment rates have been reported for men with immigrant backgrounds.

A strong gender distribution in the education system is still persistent. Within upper secondary education and tertiary education, gendered patterns in different fields of study are visible. Girls tend to be predominantly present in the social and caring fields of education, while the participation rate of boys even declined in these female dominant fields of education

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<sup>2</sup> These kinds of perspectives can typically be observed in anti-feminist debates in all European countries, mainly on the internet when men are constructed as the victims of feminism.

due to deeply-lodged gendered assumptions in organisational practices, parental influence, teacher and peer influence and the lack of gender-sensitive vocational guidance programmes for male students.

Furthermore, comparative analyses of gender differences in learning outcomes, based on the results of international students' assessments (data 1995 – 2005; *PISA*, *PIRLS*, *TIMSS* and others) show that girls are increasingly “*catching up with boys in mathematics achievement ... [and] ... beginning to take place in this traditionally male domain.*” (Ma 2007, 96) The results of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009 show that girls significantly outperform boys in reading achievements. At the same time, PISA results indicate a strong influence of socio-economic status (even stronger than gender in some countries) in predicting learning outcomes in reading, mathematics and science.

The rate of early school leavers<sup>3</sup> has declined slightly in many European countries over the past 10 years. Nevertheless, the initial agreed upon European average school leaving rate of 10% by 2010 (European Commission 2011) has not yet been achieved. Cross-national variations partly reflect different structures of the educational system. (Smyth 2007) Some models of education are associated with lower rates of early school leaving. In combination with strong policy commitment to equity in countries like Sweden, Finland and Norway, the Nordic model of education (Arnesen and Lundahl 2006) seems to result in small educational differences between social groups. (Willms 2006) Yet dual system models of education (Germany, Austria and Denmark) also bear potential: the combination of in-school education and on-the-job training seems to offer opportunities for students who might drop out of school systems. (Byrne and Smyth 2010) Nevertheless, it has to be mentioned that dual system models result in restricted career pathways in the long run. (Gangl 2003; Steiner 2009)

Furthermore, research in Ireland (Byrne and Smyth 2010) has shown that particularly working-class boys respond worse to the school environment and are more likely to step into a “*cycle of ‘acting up’ and ‘being given out to’ by teachers, a cycle which reinforces their disengagement from school.*” (172) This leads to early school leaving if the need to attain educational outcomes is disregarded and if access to the labour market (especially construction jobs) can be secured. Despite variations, a common pattern of male early school leavers is found across Europe: the rate of male early school leavers with migrant backgrounds is higher than the rate of male early school leavers without migrant backgrounds in most European countries. Some Southern European countries (Spain, Greece, Italy) show high rates of male early school leavers accompanied by a wide gap between early school leavers without and with migration backgrounds. On the other hand, some Central European countries with low rates of male early school leavers (e.g. France, Austria) show comparable high rates of male early school leavers with migrant backgrounds (more than 20%). For example, Austria is among the countries with the lowest proportion of male early school leavers without migrant backgrounds, but the rate of male early school leavers with migrant backgrounds is four times higher (e.g. in France it is twice the rate of native boys). (Scambor, 2013) The proportion of male early school leavers with migrant backgrounds is lowest in Northern European countries.

Nevertheless, disengagement at school might be strongly connected to the question ‘*what makes a boy a ‘real’ boy?*’, and it is also the peer group which shapes the orientation patterns of masculinity. (Pollack 1998; Kimmel 2008) Pollack (1998) points to the ‘boy code’, characterised by the invisibility of vulnerability, and Kimmel (2008) further developed the

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<sup>3</sup> “The term ‘early school leavers’ is used in connection with those who leave education and training with only lower secondary education or less and who are no longer in education and training.” <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:191:0001:0006:EN:PDF>

‘guy code’ in Guyland. *“What is most astonishing [...] is that it remains fairly firmly in place despite the massive changes in women’s lives.”* (Kimmel 2010, p. 29)

However, there have been significant changes since the 1980s, especially at inner city schools across parts of Europe where alternative masculinities and much more tolerance among young people towards gender and sexual differences are visible. (Seidler 2005) Research on the underachievement of boys across Europe shows that the differences among boys are bigger than those between boys and girls and that the differences related to class, ‘race’, ethnicities, sexualities and migration must be thoroughly considered by any related policy. (Busche et al. 2012) The situation varies in different European countries and across different cultural histories and traditions. However, in general, low education characterises the situation of vulnerable groups. The individual pay-off of education is, however, not certain especially in periods of high unemployment and, in addition, varies according to gender and other social factors. While male students are more likely to drop out of education than female students, it becomes clear that vulnerable groups are determined by more than gender. When refusing to treat boys and girls as homogenous categories, research shows a wider spread in achievement gaps between different groups of boys. Hence, we need to look at which particular groups of boys succeed or fail in education and how this might relate to issues of class, ‘race’, ethnicities and migrant status. Therefore we need to engage boys and men in tackling gender imbalances. (Scambor and Seidler 2013)

### **Men, gender equality and work**

The social relations of work represent some of the most fundamental aspects of gender relations as well as some of the most important elements in the ‘construction’ of men (‘traditionally’ at least) and men’s relation to women and children. Paid work continues to figure as a central source of men’s identity, status and power. However, over the last few decades the work domain has gone through a fundamental restructuring due to the impact of globalisation. Outsourcing is increasing, not only regarding less skilled work but also regarding medium and highly skilled work. Such changes have the implication of reducing many men’s prospects of long-term, secure employment in the sector of their choice. Situations of unemployment, precariousness of work and uncertainties challenge male privileges and self-images and this might have an ambivalent impact on changing masculinities and gender equality.

Based on the study results, a convergence of employment rates between men and women has been noted where the gender gap declined by 5.2% between 2000 and 2010 due to the increase in women’s and the decrease in men’s employment rates. The increasing convergence of employment between men and women is strongly connected to the rapid decline of manufacturing and heavy industry and accompanying structural unemployment. Recently, the concept of ‘multiple masculinities’ (Carrigan et al. 1985) has become one of the most influential terms in analysing men at work. The approach focuses on the social construction of difference according to migration background, age, class, sexuality, ethnicity, occupation and so on, which is seen as an important basis for the reproduction of gendered, asymmetrical power among men and between men and women. Among men, working class men, unskilled men from the former manufacturing industry and rural regions, migrant men and male youth have increasingly been affected by job losses. Concerning the pay-off of education, a clear connection between lower secondary education and lower employment rates can be found. The precarious labour market position of lowly educated people in Europe (especially in the traditionally male dominated industry) became worse in the past ten years



and is likely to deteriorate further in the course of the current economic crisis. Therefore the social projects addressing the integration of marginalised groups of men (working class, unskilled and young men) into the labour market should be supported.

The public sector, which employs a relatively high proportion of women, has in many countries moved strongly towards equal opportunity principles and practices, often ahead of the private sector. In terms of the quality of workplaces, men, who are over-represented in private, industrial occupations, are somewhat more exposed to work related health risks (Wolkowitz 2006) and are offered fewer work and family reconciliation options compared to women. (Bettio and Verashchagina 2009) A legal obligation for private employers to pursue standards of workplace quality and gender equality can bring about a better quality of working conditions for many men working in private companies and may also encourage more women to enter the private sector in the long run.

Over the last decade women have made significant inroads into some traditionally male dominated sectors, whereas men have largely remained in traditionally male dominated professions. For instance, men's share in traditionally feminised care jobs such as nursing, care for the elderly, early childhood education and primary school teaching ranged between 8% and 20% in the different EU member states and EFTA states in 2009. With the shift from traditional industries to the service sector it is important for young men to be offered a wider range of occupations, for instance in health and care fields ('white jobs') that boys may traditionally have rejected as 'women's work'.

Despite important changes in gender relations, in the labour market male dominance still persists in many aspects. Vertical hierarchies remain the basic forms of power in organisations, frequently men's gender power. (Collinson and Hearn 1996) Male homosociality persists in management, often involving men's preference for men's company, competitiveness, emotional detachment, exclusion of women and suppression of other men, reproducing a hierarchical order among men. (Holgersson 2003) Gender changes in middle management and in professions have been reported for some countries in recent years, while changes appear very slowly in the upper hierarchies of business, science and technology. In the top-listed companies across Europe, a typical board of ten has one female member (in 97% of cases the board is chaired by a man). Some countries have already implemented or are discussing legal requirements in order to change the gender imbalance at the top of companies, for instance in Norway each sex should have at least a 40% representation on boards.

The gender pay gap, a central issue in men's and women's relations to work and family, has persisted over the past ten years with a 16.4% unadjusted gender pay gap in the EU 27 in 2010. Larger pay gaps exist for older age groups.

Part-time work is still a work form highly over-represented by women (31.4% women and 7.8% men in 2010) and men with young children continue to have higher employment rates compared to those without children, while for women the opposite holds true. An unequal share of care-giving work in the family has a direct impact on gender segregation because it still drives women to decide on part-time jobs in order to reconcile work and family, whereas men predominantly persist in full-time work arrangements. On the other hand, an empirical connection between work satisfaction and actual working time is visible: Male employees in the EU 27 are most satisfied with their working conditions in the countries studied where the number of weekly working hours are lower: the Netherlands and Norway (36.7 weekly working hours) as well as Denmark (37.2 weekly working hours). In contrast, countries with low scores in work satisfaction show high numbers of weekly working hours (Greece, 42.6 weekly working hours).

Men's attitudes have slowly shifted from clear breadwinner roles towards care-integrating models (especially fathering) over the past few decades, while companies have predominantly not changed their views on men. It seems to be important to change the perspective from 'do men want to care?' to 'do organisations want them to care?'. The main issues are lack of opportunities for work-family balance as well as barriers in occupational careers for men who care. (Gärtner 2012) Therefore, formal and legal regulations are crucial for men who care as they provide a clear sense of entitlement.

## **Men, gender equality and care**

Care has for a long time been a woman-specific concept. In most societies, as emphasised by Tronto (1993), care work is distributed by gender, caste or class and often by race and ethnicity as well. 'Care' as a political concept is an ethical reflection on the fact that 'vulnerable people' are generally cared for by women.

Do men take a substantial share of the care tasks in society? Do they have to increase their 'caring activities'?

Increasingly, the answer to the question of 'do men care' is 'yes', as measured by men's share of care activities at home. Indeed, there is an increasing desire to contribute to family life and childcare that goes beyond a theoretical level. Research and European statistics show a gradual yet historically remarkable change in men's participation in large parts of Europe – a growing participation in caring, especially caring for children at home, and in many fields of domestic work. (EC 2010; Eurostat 2008)

From 2005 to 2010, men's proportion of unpaid work at home continued to grow in Europe. In 2010, men's share of weekly unpaid working time varied from 15.5% in Greece to more than double this figure, reaching 40.3% in Sweden and 40.2% in Denmark. (Scambor et al. 2013)

A similar variation pattern is reported concerning men's share of domestic work. In contemporary Europe men's share of domestic work is generally two times higher in the Northern and Central European countries than in Southern and Post-socialist countries. (Smith 2004)

However, men's proportion of time spent on domestic tasks varies from 50% or more for some formerly 'women-only' tasks to 10% or less for other tasks. (Aliaga 2006) This means that, at the task level, some tasks remain very gender-divided or imbalanced while others have become more balanced.

Studies show that there is not 'one' single factor associated with men's larger involvement and gender equal practice at home, but rather many factors are concerned. These factors include gender equal norms and opinions, gender-balanced income and resources, younger age and non-traditional gender identity. (Holter et al. 2009)

Clearly, gender equality and welfare factors influence the gender division of unpaid care work. As pointed out by comparative studies between the US and some European countries (Gornick and Meyers 2004), existing policy packages (such as public family leave, working time regulation, childcare systems, etc.) support parents' time for care and foster gender equality regarding the division of labour. Those countries with an emphasis on gender equality and a good welfare system generally have the most gender-balanced division of care work. Reforms and structural regulations have proved to have a great impact on family choices and to give fathers more of a choice to participate in caring for small children. However, parental and paternity leave schemes vary greatly across Europe, and some types of reforms have a more positive effect than others (e.g. Iceland's parental leave as a tripartite



model with the right to a non-transferable paid leave period for mothers and for fathers). (Gresy 2011) Studies show that collective regulations that clearly involve fathers have more impact than individual or diffuse arrangements. (Puchert et al. 2005)

Therefore, a policy to involve men in care can be developed together with a policy to ensure parity or gender balance in economic and political top positions. That policy will redress imbalances that contribute not only to the discrimination of women in public life but also to the persistent lack of gender balance in the family sphere. Indeed, there is a critical relation between labour market segregation and the unequal division of household/family work. (Méda 2008)

Increasing men's share of care for small children is one way of reaching a more general goal of strengthening men's care-giving roles. A first strategic priority for a new gender equality policy, including the active involvement of men in care-giving, may therefore have its starting point in focusing on men as active fathers and care-givers for children.

In fact, an extended male share of caring is also strongly associated with women's relationship satisfaction, general well-being and happiness. (Bauer 2007; Holter et al. 2009; Scott et al. 2012) The potential benefits for men include better quality of life, health and better marriages and relationships with less probability of conflict and violence. (Holter 2007)

Clearly, initiatives at the national level should include the implementation of a coherent system of parental leave (e.g. a 20% minimum of parental leave for the father). Policies concerning the role of men in gender equality should avoid pursuing contradictory directions (e.g. labour market targets addressing the increase of women's participation rate while leave regulations are implicitly focused on traditional gender roles) through reforms in different areas. The media, as well as companies, should be included as partners for campaigns that present a new model of masculinity. As is known, the role of stereotypes and attitudes towards men's role are very strong barriers to gender equality. Companies and the media alike should engage in the transition to new role models for fathers.

In addition, the benefits of men's care involvement have to be more visible and states should develop incentives and measures to reward parents of preschool children for a gender-equal balance of care after the parental leave period (e.g. tax bonuses for parents whose gender pay gap narrows, like a tax free gender equality bonus which is given to parents sharing the care-related work).

## **Men, gender equality and violence**

The intersection between men, masculinity and gender equality is especially visible when it comes to interpersonal violence issues. The most dominant and traditional forms of masculinity in contemporary societies are still defined by physical strength, power, domination and aggression (Connell 2005) and socialisation to the male role is based on the 'serious games of masculine competition'. (Bourdieu 2001) Furthermore, proving traditional masculinity is connected to facing conflicts and danger (Whitehead 2005) in order to avoid the status of non-men. Therefore, interpersonal violence is a significant tool of the reproduction of masculine domination and, at the same time, one of the most serious causes of gender inequality as the vast majority of violent acts (physical, psychological and sexual) performed everywhere (in public places, workplaces and in intimate relationships) are committed by men tied to traditional gender roles. For example: among the convicted perpetrators of assault in Europe from 79.2% in Hungary to 100% in Cyprus are men. When it comes to rape, the male percentage of convicted perpetrators ranges from 95.2% in France to 100% in Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. Finally, among the

perpetrators of homicide the male percentage ranges from 71.4% in Austria to 100% in Iceland and Ireland. (Scambor et al. 2013, 107)

One of the most significant arenas of gender inequality is men's violence against women in the private sphere. According to the European data 69% to 96% of Intimate Relationship Violence (IRV) acts are performed by men against women and there is no society where symmetry between female and male victims of this type of violence can be found. (Scambor et al. 2013, 109)

Furthermore, men are the perpetrators of the majority of violent acts committed in public spaces (which include streets, public transport, supermarkets, clubs, schools, playing fields, workplaces etc.), although in this case the majority of their victims are other men. According to the data, in the public sphere men constitute the majority of victims of serious assaults and homicides (while the majority of victims of sexual assaults are women).

Nevertheless, it should not go unmentioned that among male victims of interpersonal violence (performed by other men) the majority come from so-called marginalised, non-hegemonic and non-dominant social groups. The mentioned groups consist of non-heterosexual men, men with migration backgrounds, members of religious and ethnic groups, children and young boys (at schools, other educational institutions, reformatories and orphanages as well as in families), older men and disabled and homeless men.

As men are not only responsible for the majority of violent acts but are at the same time the victims of interpersonal violence, their active role in preventing all forms of violence as well as in protecting victims is crucial. Men should be encouraged to participate in the organisations struggling against male violence such as the White Ribbon Campaign or the Work with Perpetrators – European Network, and EU and national public bodies should put more effort into dealing with the problem of violence through work with men and boys. Such actions can be conducted through the promotion of non-violent, caring masculinities (through changing gender models with campaigns in schools and childcare centres, teacher training, providing violence-prevention material, involving role models, etc.) as well as through raising public awareness and creating better knowledge about types of violence.

Moreover, the actions should focus on fostering and extending work with perpetrators and, at the same time, victim support services (for both men and women). Last but not least, research on crucial issues such as the negative effects of crisis, homophobia, militarism and conflict as well as delinquency prevention and public security approaches should also be improved.

## **Men, gender equality and health**

Women's fight against 'androcentric' medicine (Ussher 2000, 4) was (and still is) a significant equality concern, but we are starting to see improvements in the way that women experience health care. From sex-differences in treatment and drug regimens through to decision making in childbirth and proper investment in breast cancer, the needs of women have been recognised and progress has been made. (Klinke 2008) There are other areas, however, where the sex and gender equality debate can also argue that men have valid needs that require addressing.

The claim that the health of men may be considered a gender equality issue has only properly emerged in the last 10 years. Comparative reports exploring men's health have all commented on the marked disparities between the sexes. (EC 2011; Oksuzyan et al. 2008; White et al. 2013; White and Cash 2004; White and Holmes 2006) Though the difference in life expectancy is not new knowledge, its relative weight of importance in terms of what it means for society as a whole is a new area of concern. (Hawkes and Buse 2013)

However, this is a complex equality issue as, though there are some areas of variance that are based on biological factors, there are also big differences in health (for both men and women) based on socio-economic inequalities and power differentials between men who are living under different circumstances. (Hosseinpour et al. 2012; Schütte et al. 2013) Therefore many of the health and wellbeing problems men face are not specific examples of sex-inequality. This was a key finding from the State of Men's Health Report, which noted that:

“This variability [in men's health] demonstrates clearly that men's health disadvantage is an issue of inequity and not biological inevitability and highlights the impact of the social environment in which men find themselves.” (EC 2011, 398)

The most significant issues for men's health are those based on intersectionality and the social determinants of health (race/ethnicity, class, income, education, ability, age, sexual orientation, immigration status and geography). (Hankivsky 2012; Annandale 2013; Tolhurst et al. 2012) Nevertheless, these are compounded by differences in the gendered nature of society and the way these gender expectations have a marked influence on the health challenges facing men.

There is a one-sided socialisation pattern towards toughness, paid labour and non-caring where more men tend to accept higher levels of all kinds of risks as well as risky behaviour, for example smoking, alcohol consumption or high-risk sports. Men often have more hazardous occupations and are predominantly affected by accidents in the workplace. (EC 2011) From this perspective, men's health problems have been interpreted as costs of masculinity as opposed to the advantages men gain from current gender relations in other areas (higher income, less unpaid work, domination in the decision making bodies, etc.).

These marked differences in the way boys and men are socialised to manage their physical and emotional wellbeing have to compete with a health service that has not recognised many of the important needs of the male sex. Services can therefore be seen to be supporting gender-orientated inequalities as they have not considered and therefore not adapted their services for men and boys. This is most obvious with regard to preventive health care, mental health care and the provision of effective weight loss services for men. Few preventive health campaigns have been successfully implemented that have made strong inroads with the male population. (Zwolinsky et al. 2012) Mental health problems are still seen as based on diagnoses that are more strongly associated with the female form of presentation, leaving more men struggling with hidden emotional difficulties and higher suicide rates. (Brownhill et al. 2005; Ridge, Emslie and White 2011) There are few examples across Europe where a serious attempt has been made to tackle men's obesity, despite more men being overweight than women and the strong links to hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, diabetes and the fat related cancers. (Monaghan 2008)

This is compounded in many cases by inequalities with regard to the gendered provision of health services, with some services configured in a way that leaves some men more vulnerable to poor physical and mental health and wellbeing. This can be seen in a greater proportion of men affected by their limited ability to attend clinics or health promotion opportunities due to shift patterns, reduced opportunity of flexible working and job vulnerability. (EC 2011)

The impact of these differences can be seen within a number of metrics. Women almost universally come out of self-reported assessments of health with poorer health than men, mostly as a consequence of a greater likelihood of musculoskeletal and mental health problems and pain disorders. (Malmusi et al. 2012) This greater experience of poor health and disability is mirrored by higher levels of heavy impact illness and premature mortality in men. This results in the most often cited issue for men's health, that of reduced life expectancy. This has been seen as a criticism of the men's health movement (Annandale 2013), but it

remains a significant issue for society when so many young men die in their early years. Male life expectancy is lower than for women across all the European States (76.7 years for men compared to 82.6 years for women), and though life expectancy is increasing with a narrowing gender gap in many countries, it has to be noted that for many men this improvement is not being seen. Within the EU27, men have more than twice as many deaths a year as women throughout the working ages (15-64 years), though again this high rate of premature death varies considerably across Europe. (EC, 2011)

The rate of men who die from suicide is much higher than that of women (standardised death rate per 100 000 EU27 inhabitants 2009: 4.4 for women and 16.7 for men) with great differences across Europe: most Post-socialist countries (Kölves et al. 2013), as well as Belgium, France, Switzerland, Austria and Finland show the highest rates (EC 2011). The recent recessions have also seen marked increases in male suicide in the affected countries. (Stuckler et al. 2011; Barr et al. 2012; Scambor et al. 2013)

There is no doubt that reducing socio-economic differences, implementing measures towards the redistribution of work and care and working with young people towards the establishment of changes in gender identities would improve men's and women's health in the long run. Examples are already emerging where more gender equal societies are experiencing better men's health as the pressure to try and maintain a main breadwinner role is unsustainable in today's society. (Van de Velde et al. 2013; Holter et al. 2009) Comprehensive approaches that simultaneously take men's health, women's health, gender relations and social inequality into account are needed.

From conception onwards more attention needs to be given to how boys and girls are supported to live in a fairer and more just society. Kindergartens and schools, workplaces and health and social services more generally need to be considering how boys need to be supported to have a more realistic view of their physical and emotional wellbeing. In broader society, initiatives are proving to be effective in reaching out to men, often through approaches that could be classed as novel. (Zwolinsky et al. 2012; Robertson et al. 2013; Wilson and Cordier 2013) To achieve this change a more comprehensive understanding of the role gender plays in health has to be achieved and this knowledge has to be shared not just with academics but also across society, as it is the broader public that needs to live with the resulting policy changes. (Hawkes and Buse 2013)

## **Men and gender equality policy**

While power structures and political representation still have to be discussed under a perspective of dominant forms of hegemonic masculinity in most European countries (Sauer 2011; Scambor et al 2013), focussing on men's involvement in gender equality policy addresses different questions.

As pointed out in the introduction of this article, the role and involvement of men in gender equality policy and politics has gained more attention in the last few years at both the international and European levels. How, to what extent and in relation to which topics men should be addressed in gender equality strategies is still quite ambivalently discussed throughout Europe.

On the one hand, the origin of women's and gender equality policy has to be located in fighting patriarchy and male privileges and women are still the ones mainly disadvantaged by patterns of gender inequality. Including men in gender equality strategies seems to weaken the position and importance of women and is therefore also discussed quite reluctantly. (Pease 2006) On the other hand, focussing on men as a 'gendered social group', the internal

differentiation of this gender group, changing gender roles and attitudes towards gender equality from both genders and the fact that the gender system is a relational system militates in favour of including both genders in gender equality strategies and policies. (Kimmel 2000; The Coalition on Men and Boys 2009; Holmgren and Hearn 2009) Throughout Europe both positions can be found and also different approaches from men and men's movements towards the importance of actively supporting gender equality and being involved in gender equality policies.

Focusing on institutionalised forms of the inclusion of men in gender equality policy, some international and Europe-wide developments can be observed which have strengthened men's involvement in gender equality. For example, Gender Mainstreaming seems to have created an initial awareness of the issue of men in gender equality and the establishment of some pathways towards institutional practice. Furthermore, critical men's studies and pro-feminist men's movements throughout Europe have emphasised the perception that addressing men actively in gender equality strategies will contribute to strengthening coalitions in favour of gender equality.

One overall finding of *The Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality* (Scambor et al. 2013) is that men are increasingly addressed and mentioned in the process of the further development of gender equality policy in many European countries, but much variation can be identified between European countries and country groups in this regard.

In some European countries different types of institutionalised involvement of men in gender equality have already emerged:

- Governmental committees or subcommittees as part of the national governmental gender equality machinery (e.g. Finland, Iceland, Czech Republic)
- Boards appointed by governments (e.g. Denmark) or (informal) counselling structures on the national level (e.g. Switzerland)
- (Sub-)departments for men's politics situated in units other than equal opportunity units (e.g. Austria)

The most prominent example of the first kind of institutionalised practice can be found in Finland, which has a long tradition of men's involvement in state and governmental gender policy development. The European-wide first 'Subcommittee on Men' under the Council for Gender Equality was established in 1988. The role of the subcommittee is to act as a specialist group and to serve the Council. (Varanka, et al. 2006) Other important examples are the Men's Committee as a part of the Council for Gender Equality in Iceland (1994-2000 and started again in 2011) and the Working Group on Men's Equality as a part of the Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the Czech Republic which started its work in 2010. The Panel of Men in Denmark, established as a kind of governmental advisory board in 2011, is, on the other hand, an example of how new perspectives and solutions to the gender equality debate can be developed using other non-institutionalised structures. The panel consists of 19 men from top Danish businesses and universities. (Scambor et al. 2013)

In comparison to (sub-)departments for men's politics situated in units other than equal opportunity units (as is the case in Austria for example) the integration of men's committees as part of an overall gender equality machinery can be seen as more promising for developing a balanced and coherent 'men and gender equality policy' as it is linked directly to gender equality issues.

In other European countries – especially in Southern Europe or Post-Socialist countries – the involvement of men in gender equality might be discussed in relation to different topics, but no institutionalisation of men's involvement has emerged yet. Men are often engaged in women's movements due to a lack of pro-feminist men's initiatives, or men are organised

according to specific ‘men’s issues’ (like fathers’ rights) which contains the risk of counteracting feminist visions of gender equality. Taking these national differences into account is crucial when reflecting on how to strengthen men’s involvement in gender equality.

One finding when comparing men’s pro-active involvement in gender equality strategies within different country groups is that it is strongly connected with the countries’ overall advancements in gender equality policies and practices. This holds true for men’s movements as well as for men’s institutionalised involvement in gender equality policy. It is therefore no coincidence that most examples of an active involvement of men in gender equality strategies and policy can be found in Northern and some Central European countries, while in other countries these initiatives are rather limited. (Scambor et al. 2013)

To avoid risks which are connected with involving men in gender equality strategies – for example mainly reflecting on topics where men seem to be disadvantaged – a close connection between policy and critical, pro-feminist research on men, masculinities and gender equality is crucial. The concept and understanding of men and gender equality in government policy should be based on current research results and a balanced approach towards these issues, rejecting a general ‘male-discrimination’ perspective. (Pease 2006)

## Conclusion

For a long time, gender studies was mainly about women and men’s marginal role in the field was indirectly a reflection of men’s overall dominance in society. Gender was seen as a woman’s concern, a special trait, while men were seen as neutral and normal.

Over the last decade, the EU has taken steps to move beyond this intellectual impasse and has launched several projects addressing men and masculinities (e.g. *Crome, Work Changes Gender, Fostering Caring Masculinities*). There has been a growing recognition that men are important for gender equality development. *The Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality*, financed by the Progress programme, is the latest and clearest step in this direction. The project includes several recommendations for policy makers, clearly outlined on the Commission’s website<sup>4</sup> for the project.

*The Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality* connected more than a hundred researchers and policy makers from all over Europe, as seen in the project documentation and the workshops in Brussels. This network, with a fair balance of women and men, was characterised by an unusually consistent common direction. Although some policy recommendations may not be easy to realise in today’s Europe, such as a more harmonised family policy based on gender-equal principles, the agreement between researchers from many different traditions and contexts was in itself remarkable.

Achievement of the recommendations of the project requires a broader and more sustained effort from the EU. Investigating men *as men* is still a taboo in some contexts and non-existent or very peripheral in many others. It is not well integrated into the main EU research efforts, such as Horizon 2020. This situation needs to be changed. Today, the research on men and masculinities is small, often peripheral and still fragmented, although the network of the *Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality* shows the potential for a much wider combined effort.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/role-of-men/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/role-of-men/index_en.htm)



Men need gender equality and gender equality needs men. This was one of the more general conclusions of the study. Let us start with the last part of the sentence. Why do policies for gender equality need men? The study shows that women are increasingly participating in higher education, the labour market and career positions. The gender system is relational and interdependent and therefore these developments affect men (e.g. changes in work distribution become visible as economic power has to be shared). Men's roles change in relation to these developments – traditional concepts of work slowly disappear and men's share of care work as well as a gender equal balance becomes visible in some parts of Europe. Apart from that, men become relevant social actors in daily life who can support or hinder the process towards greater gender equality.

Why should men support the process? Especially in relation to health and violence (but also related to work, education and care) the study outlines costs of traditional power-based forms of masculinity: they are high for women and for society as a whole, but first of all for men themselves. The vast majority of men in Europe still do less unpaid and part-time work than women and are far better represented in leading positions. Yet at the same time it becomes obvious that men work longer hours than they want to, therefore they are mostly absent from their families. Stress, health risks, lack of friendship and reduced family relationships are often effects of men's orientation towards their jobs, public life and autonomy. Often the high costs of these privileges are overlooked.

Therefore, other forms of 'being a man' are increasingly becoming important. The notion of 'caring masculinities' seems to be an appropriate concept in order to shape the way towards gender equality. The concept 'care', defined as a human norm (Fraser 1996) which forms the basis for social and economic cooperation, has to be widened in order to meet the needs and requirements of complex social realities and to avoid essentialist perspectives (care as a female task, related to division of work, focussed on childcare).

Firstly, men are not just fathers. Policies and research have conceptualised the concept of care in close relation to 'labour' for a long time. Therefore the gender gap in caring mainly represents the gap between mother and father and most data is related to caring for children in heterosexual families. The care needs of singles, of the elderly and of childless couples are not addressed at all by existing data.

Secondly, care encompasses more than childcare. For example men's rejection of violence and the ability to connect with others are issues of care as well. Caring for friends and colleagues as well as the ability to care for oneself by reducing risk-taking lifestyles are crucial topics. From this perspective, men can benefit from gender equality because gender equality questions social norms that are also disadvantageous for men. This study shows insights into a promising development concerning care and the role of men in gender equality. Despite a variety and plurality of country patterns concerning parental leave and care, a European vision becomes obvious, framing 'care' as an important issue in gender equal societies and as a counterpart to traditional concepts of male power. Especially among young men in urban areas of Europe 'caring masculinity' has emerged as a new pattern of masculinity, and there is still potential for an increased care involvement of men.

Thirdly and most importantly, a critical reflection of 'caring masculinity' is indispensable in order to meet gender equal expectations in European societies. 'Caring masculinity' is a term that meets many of the demands for more gender equal participation, though not all. There are two major arguments for using the term in the context of gender equality. Firstly, there is

indeed a considerable overlap. Caring masculinity is clearly associated with gender-equal masculinity. According to new material presented elsewhere in this issue (see Holter: *What is in it for men*), men's share of care is strongly associated with gender equality indexes in Europe. Secondly, there is the argument that caring can be the way to gender equality which, once more, has some good empirical backing (at least in some contexts). However, there are also problems with this argument. Even though there are overlaps, gender equal men, or the role of men in gender equality, is not the same as caring men. Some caring men are not particularly gender-equal, and vice versa, some gender-equal men are not particularly caring. Further, there is the devaluation of caring, as a common process in society, not least in times of economic problems. Whatever the status of gender equality in society, caring may not be a very worthwhile activity in economic terms. Also, there is a devaluation of men at least in traditional parts of the caring sector, both paid and unpaid, and a tendency to connect 'the need for men' to essentialist views of gender differences. Finally, the caring strategy is easily restricted to a heteronormative context of fathers' care for their children in traditional families.

Nevertheless, these problems can be overcome, and caring masculinities emerge as a central path forwards, and one that is increasingly taken up in practice, together with women's increasing education and professional role, and rising expectations of gender balanced task divisions. The present study points to further research on the complex relationship between caring masculinities and gender equal roles, including marginalized and unemployed groups and men who turn their frustrations against gender equality and women's new roles. Ideals need to be backed up by practical possibilities, including policy reforms that recognize and encourage men's gender equal participation and sharing of care tasks. What is clear, now, is not just the potential of men's gender equal role, but also the real-term changes in this direction, provided that the preconditions and contexts are reasonably favorable. There is much more 'in it' for men than realized so far – and much more in it for Europe, developing gender equal and caring male roles and masculinities.

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