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DEMOCRATIC MASCULINITIES BEST PRACTICES REPORT – EXPERT ORGANIZATIONS' INTERVENTIONS AND KEY MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

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ABOUT MEN4DEM

MEN4DEM (2025-2027) is an innovative collaborative co-creation project that involves six partner universities as well as a theater group and a gender justice organization. Together, we aim to gain knowledge about and develop strategies and concrete tools for transforming political masculinities for the future of European democracy. The project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation funding programme under grant agreement No 101177356 (HORIZON CL2 2024 DEMOCRACY 01, topic: Gender roles in extremist movements and their impact on democracy).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores strategies for countering antidemocratic tendencies among boys and men through transforming masculinities and promoting democratic values. It introduces the concepts of democratic and antidemocratic masculinities and connects them to broader cultural norms and democratic ideals.

Drawing on practices from the MenEngage Europe network, the report showcases effective interventions that challenge harmful gender norms and traditional masculinity norms, and foster inclusive, caring masculinities. These practices demonstrate how organizations across Europe are actively engaging men and boys in efforts to promote gender equality and social justice.

Three key mechanisms of change emerge across these interventions:

1. Fostering empathy through immersion in safe, vulnerable spaces;

2. Transforming together: men doing the work and sharing their stories with peers;

3. Messages of care and empowerment for structural change.

While momentum for this work is growing, challenges remain. These include institutional resistance, a lack of structural funding, and the need for more intersectional and culturally grounded approaches. Yet, the report identifies a clear opportunity: to center care, emotional literacy, and democratic participation in masculinities work, to contribute to more gender equal and stronger democracies in Europe.

The report offers concrete recommendations for practitioners, educators, policymakers, and advocates to strengthen and scale up this work. It calls for sustained investment, collaboration across sectors, and a long-term commitment to fostering democratic masculinities. This report provides both a strategic overview and a practical guide for anyone working to transform masculinities in support of gender equality—across Europe and beyond.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 THIS REPORT: BEST PRACTICES & KEY MECHANISMS

The surge of antidemocratic extremism—and the rise of associated violent, exclusionary, and antidemocratic masculinities—has intensified the need for interventions that foster democratic values among men and promote caring, equality-oriented masculinities. This report presents best practices for the promotion of democratic masculinities, and distills three key mechanisms of change. Six civil society gender justice organizations from Greece, Poland, The Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Sweden and the MenEngage Europe network shared the interventions they use in their work with men on fostering democratic masculinities. Based on their interventions and on conversations with representatives of these organizations, the authors extracted three key mechanisms of change. These key mechanisms encompass the exemplary features mentioned by all organizations as essential for interventions to be effective in promoting democratic masculinities.

The best practices provided are the interventions that the organizations experience as most effective, accessible and transferable. They all contribute to transforming rigid, harmful masculinity norms that form the base for further antidemocratic, violent masculinities, into more caring, flexible, open, connected, democratic masculinities.

The ideas and conclusions presented in this report are grounded in extensive collaboration with expert organizations in the MenEngage Europe network. They reflect insights gathered through a combination of group discussions, joint workshops, and individual one-on-one conversations with practitioners across Europe, ensuring meaningful integration of diverse experiences and perspectives. The best practices, key mechanisms of change, and proposed ways forward outlined in this report are thus evidence-based and rooted in practice-led expertise. The interventions and conceptual framework presented in this report align with the approaches, principles, and tools shared by participating organizations.

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Expert organizations

The expert organizations that were consulted for MEN4DEM are:

1. Europe – MenEngage Europe (MEE): European branch of the global MenEngage Alliance, with more than 100 members who work to involve men in gender justice and transform traditional ideas about masculinities.

2. Germany – Federal Forum for Men (Bundesforum Männer, BFM): an umbrella association of 40 organizations. BFM advocates for gender equality from the perspective of boys, men, and fathers. It promotes dialogue on masculinities and gender roles, aiming to contribute to a diverse and equitable society.

3. Greece – Gender Alliance Initiative (G-All) (Η Συμμαχία των Φύλων): works to bring people from different scientific and social fields together to work on gender, diversity and rights issues.

4. Italy – Circle of Men (Cerchio degli Uomini): develops pathways, services and initiatives to change masculinities.

5. The Netherlands – Emancipator: expertise center on masculinities working to involve men in gender justice issues and transform masculinities.

6. Poland – Share the Care: advocates for a partnership model of family and sharing parental leaves between parents, running social campaigns and working with employers, government and local authorities on building parental equality in Poland.

7. Sweden – MÄN (MÄN för jämställdhet): a non-profit working to advance gender equality, combat men's violence and redefine masculinities.

These organizations, all part of the MenEngage Europe network, have long practical experience and expertise with working with boys and men. They are up-to-date with current problems and resources and are therefore uniquely positioned to give input on the interacting issues of masculinities and antidemocratic practices. Together, the expert organizations cover a wide range of backgrounds, histories, contexts, topics, target groups and approaches.

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For this report, the expert organizations shared up to five of their self-reported best practices, in February and March 2025: interventions of any type that help to transform restrictive, violent and antidemocratic masculinities into more caring, democratic ones. In March and April 2025, the authors had one-on-one meetings with representatives from each organization in which they explored details of their interventions and how they relate to the concept of 'democratic masculinity'. In addition, there were two group sessions in which all expert organizations participated, to reflect on ideas, concepts and shared challenges, and identify underlying mechanisms of change in the interventions. Through this dialogue-based process, we further conceptualized the idea of democratic masculinities—a definition which will be presented in the second part of this introduction. This report begins with an analysis of masculinities and (anti)democracy, assessing traditional, antidemocratic and democratic masculinities. Section 2 provides a summary of best practices, which are shown in greater detail in Appendix 1. Section 3 outlines three key mechanisms of change. Section 4 discusses challenges and opportunities for ways forward. Finally, section 5 presents the conclusions of the report.

1.2 MASCULINITIES AND (ANTI)DEMOCRACY

One aim of this report is to define *democratic masculinities* from the perspective of gender justice organizations and explore how they contrast with both traditional and antidemocratic forms of masculinity (also see Bjarnegard & Mügge 2025). How do democratic masculinities relate to long-standing traditional masculinity norms emphasizing control, hierarchy and a lack of caring, empathic and equal relations? And how do they stand in opposition to far-right, exclusionary, violent, and explicitly antidemocratic masculinities—which often represent extreme extrapolations of those traditional masculinity norms?

This section presents the theoretical foundations and reflections guiding the work of experts engaged in transforming masculinities (see e.g., MenEngage Alliance, 2025). The MenEngage Global Alliance defines masculinities as socially constructed roles, behaviors, and identities assigned to men and boys—shaped by historical, cultural and political forces. These constructions often uphold dominance, emotional suppression, heteronormativity and patriarchal structures, which contribute to the marginalization of women, non-dominant gender identities and (other) LGBTQIA+ people. MenEngage advocates for the

transformation of these rigid masculinity norms into more equitable, inclusive, and nonviolent ones, allowing men to be more fully human. For MenEngage, this transformation of masculinity norms must be explicitly rooted in feminist values and anti-oppression frameworks (MenEngage Alliance, 2021).

Traditional masculinities

From the conversations with the MenEngage Europe organizations a clear, multifaceted understanding of prevailing masculinity norms emerged. While "traditional masculinity" was the most commonly used term and is therefore used throughout this report, experts also referred to "patriarchal," "restrictive," or "protective" masculinities—indicating a shared concern with rigid, dominance-based models of manhood. The following analysis draws directly from these conversations, reflecting the organizations' expertise in engaging boys and men across diverse social contexts.

Rigid masculinity norms are historically rooted in a binary gender framework, especially in Western societies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). These norms typically promote strength, competition, leadership, emotional suppression, and dominance. Emotional openness, empathy, and care—traits often stereotypically coded as "feminine"—are discouraged in boys and men (Mahalik et al., 2007). Men expressing feminine-coded traits risk losing privileges and status, teasing, bullying, social exclusion and violence. Especially in contexts that are more individualistic, these more community-oriented characteristics are more strongly coded as feminine and thus less accepted in men (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2024). Over time, the internalization of these norms decreases the development of caring, empathetic, egalitarian characteristics and behaviors in men.

This rigid "man box" of expectations is limiting and harmful—not only to men themselves, but also to women, non-binary individuals, LGBTQIA+ people, and society at large (UN Women, 2020). It fosters disconnection from one's emotions, relationships, and community, while reinforcing control and power over others. As emphasized in reports by organizations such as Promundo and MenEngage, masculinity norms rooted in dominance and emotional suppression limit the full humanity of men and hinder societal progress (MenEngage Alliance, 2021; Promundo, 2018).

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Critically, the use of the concept of traditional masculinities is not meant to imply that all traditional values are inherently antidemocratic. Attention to family or community can align with democratic values if expressed through care, equality, and nonviolence. However, rigid masculinity norms can distort these values into tools for control, exclusion, and repression. As noted by partners such as Share the Care (Poland), the careless use of words, which can be important identity markers, risks alienating men who identify with traditional values. Effective engagement must include a careful use of wording and for example distinguish between positive values (e.g., family commitment) and harmful expressions of masculinity norms, as the context requires.

As observed by MenEngage experts and practitioners working with men, a key challenge is that traditional masculinity norms become self-reinforcing. By late adolescence, many men no longer need external enforcement to conform—they have internalized the norms as part of their identity. They often don't recognize their state as lacking, since it has come to feel natural, but nonetheless this living inside the man box includes suppressing emotional development and impairs men's ability to connect with others.

As a result, men raised within this framework often struggle with loneliness, emotional repression, difficulty forming healthy relationships, and a sense of inadequacy or failure (Van Tricht, 2018; Katz, 2019). Men are less likely to seek help and more likely to adopt coping strategies rooted in anger, avoidance, or attempts to assert dominance. This creates fertile ground for antidemocratic narratives promising men a feeling of control, belonging, and identity, often through scapegoating, exclusion of or domination over others.

These insights reflect the deep practical expertise of MenEngage Europe organizations with both the problems and solutions surrounding traditional masculinity norms. These rigid norms undermine gender equality but also leave men vulnerable—socially, emotionally, and politically. And this vulnerability comes with increasingly larger and darker consequences.

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Antidemocratic masculinities

After collectively characterizing and defining rigid, dominance-based traditional masculinities, the MenEngage Europe expert organizations shared their analysis of broader developments shaping men's identities. This synthesis reflects years of hands-on experience and dialogue with boys and men across Europe, and is strikingly consistent across contexts and countries.

The organizations observe that men's current challenges are not limited to gender or masculinity norms and stereotypes (UNDP, 2024). Instead, these norms intersect with a wider set of (mostly) contemporary pressures: identity instability, cultural dislocation, economic insecurity, and a widespread sense of purposelessness. The emergence of a hybrid digital/physical reality—what some have termed the *onlife* world—has intensified these dynamics by blurring public/private boundaries and amplifying extreme messaging (UN Women Europe & Central Asia, 2023).

In this context of instability, many boys and men are seeking guidance on how they should live, who they want to be, and where they belong. Developmental vulnerabilities—such as adolescent identity formation, emotional suppression, and peer pressure—are intensified online, where exaggerated masculinities are presented as appealing solutions to uncertainty. In only spaces, men are given the false promise of power, status, and purpose, in response to their legitimate emotional and social needs.

Thus, far-right and antidemocratic narratives are exploiting the uncertainties caused by societal developments, men's vulnerabilities under patriarchal norms, and adolescent exploration. They sell extreme variants of masculinity as a cure for alienation, offering simple, hierarchical worldviews that scapegoat others—especially women, LGBTQIA+ communities, and minorities. Growing muscles, earning a lot of money, competing with other men, dominating women and staying emotionally detached and invulnerable are presented as answers. However, rather than solving the root problems, these narratives reinforce emotional detachment and disconnection—the very elements that have created the initial crisis in the first place (MenEngage Alliance, 2021a).

Of particular concern is the "manosphere": a web of online spaces that blend misogyny, antifeminism and antidemocratic ideologies together with content about how to be (as) a man. Many young men

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enter these spaces innocently, searching for dating advice, affirmation, or a sense of belonging. But they are quickly exposed to narratives that valorize rigid gender roles and domination while dismissing care, vulnerability and democratic values like equality and open exchange as weakness. In this way their quest for belonging leads them deeper into alienation and makes them susceptible to radicalization.

Based on extensive expertise and practical experience of the MenEngage Europe expert organizations, we observe that the fact that these radical, antidemocratic masculinity ideologies are able to gain so much traction, is because they are only exaggerated forms of widely recognized and internalized traditional masculinity norms, that are deeply ingrained in the culture and everybody's socialization. It's a continuous spectrum from rigid, dominance-oriented traditional masculinities to violent, antidemocratic masculinity—not a leap but steps. The normalization of hierarchy, emotional repression, and dominance makes men more receptive to extreme antidemocratic messages, especially when other sources of meaning and connection are lacking.

In summary, the mechanisms of antidemocratic radicalization cannot be separated from the emotional and cultural landscape shaping and shaped by men's gendered socialization. A mix of social isolation, emotional repression, a desire for purpose, and a need for belonging creates fertile ground for authoritarian, black-and-white narratives to take root. Addressing this requires not only counter-messaging but a transformation of masculinity itself—offering new models rooted in care, connection, and democratic participation.

Democratic masculinities

The findings and interpretations presented here reflect the shared insights, challenges, and perspectives gathered through in-depth conversations and collaborative reflection with these frontline practitioners. That is, we draw directly from the lived realities of those working every day to transform masculinities and promote gender justice across diverse European contexts.

What, then, are *democratic masculinities*, and how can they be nurtured? Drawing on the foundational values of the European Union—human dignity, freedom, equality, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights—democratic masculinities are interpretations of masculinity that embody and

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reinforce these principles, for instance through empathy, openness, accountability, equality, and inclusive communication.

Rather than prescribing a rigid definition of democratic masculinities, this report—based on contributions from expert MenEngage organizations—aims to deepen the collective conversation about the forms of masculinity that strengthen democracy and social cohesion. The organizations stress that democratic masculinities must be *relational and evolving*, shaped through inclusive dialogue and grounded in care, respect, and solidarity. Developing democratic masculinities should be a process inviting people to participate, and not be normative and possibly alienating groups. This report, and the MEN4DEM project at large, are contributions to broaden and deepen this acutely necessary collective conversation and transformation.

Across the best practices analyzed, a recurring theme is the importance of participatory, experience-based interventions. These interventions create spaces where men and boys can explore their identities, question dominant norms, and develop new forms of connection. Facilitated conversations in safe, respectful environments allow participants to *practice democracy*—by listening, being heard, and engaging in mutual understanding.

An essential aspect of the best practices is the need to open up conversations about the characteristics of masculinity that enhance democracy and to actively foster their development. This often takes place through participatory methods that many intervention participants have rarely, if ever, experienced before. In this way, these interventions build solutions from the bottom up. Guided conversations in safe environments—where individuals both listen and are listened to—are themselves democratic practices. Being truly heard can break through feelings of isolation and not being known or understood, while active listening helps cultivate empathy and equality. This mirrors principles of deliberative democracy, where meaningful change arises from inclusive, informed, and respectful dialogue (Fung, 2004; Habermas, 1996).

Through these processes, participants begin to:

- Recognize privilege and power dynamics,

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- Relate without needing to dominate,

- Express vulnerability without shame,

- See other men share thereby breaking isolation,

- Ask for support, and offer it in return,

- Gain agency over internalized behaviors,

- Challenge the idea that gender roles are fixed or "natural."

Seeing others do it—others sharing the same doubts and struggles, even though they are different—and truly, humanely being seen and seeing others is the path toward democratic participation. And this is beneficial for men. The flip side of male privilege is the disconnectedness and loneliness that traditional masculinity norms encourage. Genuine democratic connectedness, equality, and mutual care offer a core response to the search that can otherwise lead men toward violent, antidemocratic ideologies.

These shifts foster empathy, perspective-taking, and relational engagement—skills that are essential for democratic participation (MenEngage Alliance, 2021). Helping men develop these capacities not only prevents exclusion and violence but improves men's own social integration. Importantly, this work is not only about prevention—it is about empowerment. As many MenEngage organizations highlighted, male privilege often comes with emotional isolation. In contrast, democratic masculinities offer pathways to connection, meaning, and inclusion. They benefit not only others but men themselves.

For empowering democratic masculinities we propose a dual approach. First, comprehensive, society-wide prevention efforts must be implemented, with a particular focus on fostering open, relational, and emotionally vulnerable conversations among boys and men. Second, there is a need to collect, evaluate, and further develop targeted interventions, supporting boys and men who are at risk of radicalization, bystanders and the broader public.

However, developing new interventions is not enough. Without structural support, this work will remain in the research and development phase. Insights from best practices and conversations with expert organizations show how much knowledge, evidence, and practical tools already exist. What is lacking are the resources and political commitment needed to upscale and structurally embed this work.

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As early as 2009, the MenEngage Alliance emphasized this need in the closing declaration of their global symposium in Rio de Janeiro, stating that to "achieve transformative and sustainable social change around gender inequalities, we must go beyond scattered, short-term and small-scale interventions and harness all efforts towards systemic, large-scale, and coordinated action" (Sonke Gender Justice Network, 2009).

1.3   CONCLUSION

This analysis of traditional, antidemocratic, and democratic masculinities reveals that addressing far-right radicalization among men requires a deeper understanding of why such ideologies appeal to them. At its core, this is a human issue—a search for connection, belonging, and meaning. Men have been promised markers of success, necessary for a fulfilling life—such as meaningful work, intimate relationships, and strong friendships—but many struggle to attain these (Equimundo, 2024). While broader structural issues such as economic instability also play a role, we have shown how socialization into traditional masculinity norms undermines men's capacity to form emotionally fulfilling connections. Many men experience loneliness, yet, due to the way they are socialized, they lack the tools to recognize or address these emotions. As a result, they may turn to simplistic, antidemocratic narratives that offer clear explanations and targets for their frustration—especially in online spaces where such content is heavily promoted (Equimundo, 2024).

At the heart of the problem are the dominant norms of masculinity and the ways in which boys are socialized into them. Sustainable solutions must create spaces that promote vulnerability, emotional openness, and human connection—offering men alternative ways of engaging with themselves and others. This includes helping men escape social isolation and fostering solidarity across gender and identity lines. Men must come to see that others—especially women and LGBTQIA+ individuals—equally deserve access to safety, participation, and the full development of their human potential.

Ultimately, it is the rigidity of traditional masculine norms that lies at the root of the issue. From these norms, especially when reinforced by broader social and economic grievances, more violent and antidemocratic forms of masculinity emerge. Addressing far-right radicalization therefore requires more

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than counter-extremism strategies—it requires the transformation of traditional masculinities themselves, so that all men can become fully rooted, emotionally connected, and genuinely valued.

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2. BEST PRACTICES FOR THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRATIC MASCULINITIES

2.1 BEST PRACTICES

The aim of this report is to collect and analyze interventions that promote democratic and limit antidemocratic masculinities. The interventions presented here were submitted by the seven expert organizations introduced in Section 1.1. The question asked to the organizations was: *What best practices do you have to transform men and masculinities from more traditional, violent, antidemocratic forms, to more inclusive, caring and democratic forms?* This is quite a broad frame, and what exactly contributes to change towards democratic masculinity and how, was deliberately left up to the interpretation of the organizations. Appendix 1 contains the full list of 23 interventions. Six of the interventions are more extensive and include a reflection on some of the key mechanisms by the organizations themselves.

The interventions are categorized into three groups, corresponding roughly to micro-, meso-, and macro-level approaches. Micro-level interventions typically are a concrete, delineated tool that can be used modularly in different settings. They have a specific, narrow purpose. Meso-level interventions here are workshops or a series of workshops that contain a variety of tools, involve more interactions and mechanisms of change. They are usually focused on a group in a delineated setting. The macro-level approaches can be large both in scope and target group. They are more focused on addressing broader societal structures, aiming to shift public discourse, influence policy, or drive cultural change through campaigns, advocacy, or systemic reforms. Grouping the interventions by micro, meso and macro size allows for a clearer understanding of their different role in change and their use on different levels.

The organizations sent in the following mix of interventions as their best practices:

1. Eight micro-level tools: single interventions with a clear purpose

2. Nine meso-level workshop or series of workshops: interactive interventions delineated in time and target group. Up to several hours, sometimes in series of multiple workshops. In the workshops various tools and methods can be used. Usually with a group size of a few to about 30 people.

3. Five macro-level campaigns: longer interventions made up of a series of similar or different interventions targeting large or mass audiences.

In Appendix 1, a table overview of characteristics of the interventions is presented, followed by a detailed description.

2.2 ANALYSIS

The interventions that organizations use to effectively transform traditional masculinities into caring, democratic masculinities are varied, but they also show interesting similarities. In their thematic focus and their approaches towards change they all touch on the same fundamental issues and propose similar pathways. As for their thematic areas, it is clear that almost all interventions explicitly focus on gender equality, transforming gender or masculinity norms, violence prevention, or gender mainstreaming.

Almost all interventions concentrate on prevention rather than working with, for instance, perpetrators of violence or radicalized men. Prevention of violence and other issues is approached through working with broad audiences on transforming masculinity or gender norms. Only a couple of the interventions, like Gender Alliance's 'It's a matter of Democracy' and Bundesforum Männer's 'Men against the Right' explicitly name defending democracy as subject. But the promotion of core democratic traits, though hidden, is fundamentally present in most of the interventions, as practicing empathic engagement, active listening, open exchange and equal participation trains participants in democratic engagement. In reflecting on what democratic masculinities are, several of the organizations realized that their work actually actively promotes democratic participation.

As mentioned before, most of the interventions focus on preventative work, whether with groups directly vulnerable to antidemocratic radicalization, people working with those groups (as professionals or bystanders), or a broad general audience. None of the interventions focus specifically on already radicalized or radicalizing men, as organizations say it is already extremely hard to reach those men in the places where they are, let alone being able to do any meaningful transformation with a brief intervention.

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Most interventions take place in the analogue world, with only a couple using digital media or touching on the digital realm. This is partly explained by the focus is on prevention through the transformation of masculinity, more than focusing specifically on (de)radicalization and online spheres. While all organizations emphasized that preventative work is the ultimate answer, the urgent need for more immediate online interventions was also repeatedly expressed. But organizations reported that they are not working on this as much as they might like, because of limited capacity and the difficulty of designing effective, slick digital messaging that can compete with other media youth will see online. A possible solution for this that has been proposed is to work with young people who are more versed in participating in the digital sphere; some of the organizations reported some successful experiences there.

The organizations furthermore emphasized that 'men' should not be seen as a homogeneous group and interventions should (and usually can) be adjusted to specific target groups: most interventions are easily transferable, whether between countries or local contexts. This mostly depends on the type of intervention; most interventions in the tool section are regarded as transferable between target groups, the workshops and campaigns often less so.

Even though the expert organizations and their interventions are quite different, they tend to agree on most issues. The main differences between the organizations revolve around the use of the words "traditional masculinity", as mentioned in the introduction, and about gender transformative language. The MenEngage network, of which all organizations are a member, advocates for always working in what they call a *gender transformative* way. This includes staying away from gender reinforcing language, for instance talking about "real men", and avoiding language reinforcing traditional masculinity traits or stereotypes to reach men. Only the Share the Care foundation from Poland has included an intervention using such language, in the form of their "100% Man" fatherhood campaigns. Share the Care expressed this works to connect with the lived experiences of the fathers who they aim to reach and transform rigid norms for this group. The choices to use the phrase "100% Man" or to avoid the phrase "traditional masculinities" reflect organizations' search for what works best in their specific contexts and for their specific target groups.

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Gender transformative language might be experienced as too radical by their more traditional target groups, which would risk losing them. At the same time, continuing to use gender essentializing language ("real men") risks limiting the scope of potential transformation in men. In the end, it's most important to adapt language and practices to the specific context and target group, while ensuring that the core transformation towards caring, democratic and truly equal gender dynamics is not lost. Transforming masculinities should be in service of creating a more equal world for all, not merely improving the individual lives of men. It remains challenging to find a balance between reaching men and improving their lives, and not losing sight of the contribution to gender justice for all.

One final difference is that some organizations sometimes or often work specifically with men, as opposed to working with mixed groups. Working with men-only spaces can create a safer space for participants to share, thereby facilitating deeper, more transformative conversations. And it takes away some of the burden of emotional labor and educating from non-men. But this separation in gendered group is not always easy to realize. The Greek organization Gender Alliance explicitly mentioned that until now they do not feel empowered enough to do so, because of continuous resistance on the institutional and policy level. The more explicit the organization is about transforming masculinities, the stronger the resistance. This forces them to shy away from focusing on sessions exclusively with men. The impact of institutional and policy resistance was voiced most explicitly by the Gender Alliance, but all organizations have mentioned similar continuous headwind on all levels of society. It is difficult to break these barriers.

All-in-all the organizations fundamentally agree in their analysis of the issues at hand and the solutions necessary. Several of them conveyed the complexity of choosing only a mere handful of their usually long list of useful interventions. And they kept bringing up other inspiring organizations, practices and research in the field, showing how rich the knowledge and expertise in this field is.

The next section presents the key mechanisms of change in the interventions, that effectively contribute to transforming masculinity norms towards more democratic masculinities.

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3.   KEY MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

In analyzing the best practices, and drawing on insights from group discussions and one-on-one sessions with practitioners from the expert organizations, several building blocks can be identified that appear to be essential for the effective transformation of masculinity norms in men. This section presents three key mechanisms of change: 1) fostering empathy, 2) transforming together, and 3) messages of care and empowerment.

These mechanisms or parts of them are present in the work of all organizations although some mention them more explicitly. The key mechanisms provide directions for change to create meaningful, inclusive spaces for men to reflect, grow, and act in support of gender equality and democratic values.

3.1   KEY MECHANISM: FOSTERING EMPATHY

Actual change requires more than simply conveying ideas; it means creating the right conditions or it, facilitating experiences that allow men to engage vulnerably, (self)reflect critically, and explore new, more caring ways of relating both to themselves and to others. Building a safe space where they can immerse themselves in a new way of relating can foster empathy and transformational growth. The growth of empathy and emotional literacy through practice is the core of promoting caring, democratic masculinities.

Centrally important for empathetic exchanges is the need for a safe(r), open, but guided space. A calm, ordered setting with a manageable group size helps ensure a sense of security and togetherness. Inside such an environment, "safer and braver space" rules are co-created to ensure respect for diverse identities and experiences, support voluntary sharing, and encourage openness. These collective agreements mark a departure from the outside world's usually rigid norms, making room for vulnerability and self-reflection. A brave space invites men to confront internalized harmful behaviors in a supportive atmosphere, rooted in genuine curiosity and mutual respect. Emancipator's check-in intervention is good example of a tool that helps create a setting for safe and brave sharing, as it allows everyone present to share something about their inner selves and have other people carefully listen. It helps people to feel seen and stimulates openness and connectivity. And, as various organizations

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emphasized, when the space is exclusively for men that usually makes it easier to share vulnerable stories. Also in other interventions, such as Emancipator´s Men's Weekend, MÄN's online forum Killar.se, and Cerchio Degli Uomini and Share the Care's father's groups, men are encouraged to share stories in this way.

The power of these spaces lies in plurality and inclusion. When men hear a range of different voices and experiences, the myth of a single definition of "a real man" begins to erode. This exposure legitimizes each person's unique search and normalizes emotional exploration. At its core, transformational change emerges from vulnerable exchanges and the recognition that everyone is navigating a shared human journey toward connection and belonging. Representation of a wide variety of types of masculinity can be found in various interventions, like the Bundesforum Männer's Men Against the Right campaign and the G-ALL workshops What Makes Me A Boy.

A truly transformative conversation must be guided. Interventions are most effective when they follow a specific flow: beginning by creating a sense of inclusion, moving into personal development, and ending with a sense of affection and connection. This arc ensures participants feel seen, supported, and empowered. Guidance also implies holding space for accountability. Problematic ideas cannot go unchallenged; rather, as the expert organizations emphasized, they must be met with dialogue that is open but grounded in a feminist and gender-justice perspective. This means the focus on transforming masculinities should be on making the world safer and more equal for non-men, and not merely for the sake of men themselves. This is a perspective all expert organizations and the MenEngage network subscribe to (MenEngage Alliance 2024, p.3). This isn't about confrontation—it's about engaging critically and compassionately to foster understanding and growth. A path towards more fulfilling relations to oneself, others and society is essential in getting men on board for caring, democratic transformational growth. A good example of an effective tool to achieve understanding and growth, which is used by many of the organizations, is Emancipator's Man box intervention.

Crucially, such conversations should not be passive but participatory and interactive. Effective interventions go beyond lectures or information delivery. They are experiential and emotionally engaging. Immersive experiences—such as role-playing, storytelling, or theater-based exercises—help

participants feel and embody insights rather than simply understand them intellectually. Theater, in particular, has proven powerful in opening hearts, deepening empathy, and making abstract ideas tangible and personal. The interventions Progetto Scuola from Cerchio Degli Uomini and the G-ALL What Makes Me A Boy are examples of including immersive forms in ways the organizations report as impactful.

This immersion enables men and boys to recognize that much of who they are and how they behave is socially constructed—shaped through repetition, modeling, and reinforcement. By temporarily experiencing a different reality, they are offered alternative paths of relating that undermine the limited, one-dimensional and non-connected, non-empathetic understanding of lived experiences. Thus, developing more compassionate, democratic, and loving traits also requires practice and habit-building. The work is not about arriving at fixed answers but about continually searching and learning together. When men are invited to explore rather than instructed toward specific behaviors or changes, they are more likely to engage honestly and change deeply.

3.2 KEY MECHANISM: TRANSFORMING TOGETHER

At the core of interventions working to transform masculinities is the idea that men need to engage with the issues of gender inequality, harmful internalized norms and their own relation to both. This needs to be done through individual (self)reflection but also has important collective aspects. Collectively sharing stories of change is essential. This means both reflecting on what norms people have internalized and what actions they did because of this, and talking and hearing about growth. When men share their stories with one another and reflect on their own behaviors and norms, they become at the same time participants and leaders in the process of transformation. Sharing stories already is behavior change. The Cerchio Degli Uomini talking groups and the Share the Care GROW Group are good examples of such collective sharing and transforming.

Peer-to-peer exchange plays a crucial role in this. Seeing others like themselves also struggling with similar and different questions fundamentally undermines the idea of one type of 'real man' and challenges internalized, isolating masculinity norms like never showing vulnerability, always being

strong, in control, in competition. When men see others like themselves—people with similar backgrounds, experiences, or challenges—grappling with masculinity and embracing healthier forms of relating, it normalizes change and makes it feel possible, inviting men to reflect and grow. Representation is important in interventions; role models and counter-narratives work as a visible example of a reimaged masculinity that is more caring, empathetic, and inclusive. This kind of exchange builds trust, lowers defenses, and invites honest reflection. Interventions should validate the search of boys and men, and show healthier options as more fulfilling, attractive and real answers to their questions and insecurities. Collective sharing and knowing you are not alone is liberating and empowering.

For this to work effectively, the space and structure of conversations must be considered carefully. Separate men's spaces can provide a safer, more open environment for vulnerability, with participants who share the socialization of being raised as boys and men. In such spaces it can be easier for men to feel secure enough to drop their guard and speak openly about their struggles, their growth, and their evolving understanding of themselves.

Connecting men in a network of changemakers like Emancipator's Ambassadors and Peer network can be a very powerful tool, because such networks empower individuals to carry the message into their communities and institutions. Such networks outlast one-time workshops and build a sustainable, multiplying force for cultural change. In such a way men become change makers and representatives of the change they encourage in others. And people seen as examples to live up to, for whatever reason – celebrities, experts in a field, family, peers – can also have a major impact in encouraging transformation in other men. Some interventions make use of people with wide reach, like celebrities, for instance Share the Care's 100% Men and G-All' A New Gender Era.

Importantly, the people who are facilitating these spaces must also be doing the work themselves. Leading by example—by sharing personal stories of transformation, moments of doubt, or continued self-questioning—builds credibility and sets a tone of openness. Facilitators who model vulnerability and critical self-reflection can help unlock the same in others, encouraging a culture of growth rather than judgment.

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Yet while peer-led work in men-only spaces is crucial, it must not exist in a vacuum. Sometimes including women and queer individuals in specific sessions or formats can powerfully illustrate the real-world impacts of gender injustice. However, such exchanges must be carefully designed so that they emphasize structural awareness and leave participants with tools and motivation to change, rather than guilt or defensiveness, and not having non-men take up the emotional labour of educating. Every intervention should be intentional about its goals, audience, and group composition. The G-All workshop The Things That We Do Not See and MÄN's Macho Factory are strong examples of combining the real-world impacts of gender inequality with providing tools and motivation to change.

Tailoring interventions to the specific target group is another key mechanism of success. A young teenager's understanding of gender will differ vastly from that of an older man, just as educational background, cultural context, and other lived experiences influence how individuals engage. Language, tone, content, and methodology must be adjusted accordingly. Messages should be accessible, light when needed, and always framed positively. Within the MenEngage network and organizations there is an increasing focus on positive narratives inviting men along instead of framing them as the problem. At the time of writing this report MenEngage is about to publish an extensive report on positive narratives.

Reaching boys and men "where they are"—both in physical spaces and online, through interests they already hold—can vastly increase engagement. Messaging should invite curiosity and empowerment rather than confrontation. The work should feel like a shared exploration, not an accusation.

To move beyond isolated impact, it's vital to also involve key stakeholders and institutions. Educators, social workers, psychologists, and others working directly with men and boys can become everyday multipliers of this work. The G-All intervention Exploration, Experimentation, and Reconstruction of New, Healthy Expressions of Masculinity is an example of educating educators to ensure gender transformative work is integrated into their everyday work. Likewise, engaging policy makers helps mainstream the issue, embedding the consequences of violent or restrictive masculinities into policies on education, health, justice, and even climate action. The focus on a specific subject to engage people around that topic is the core of MÄN's Men In The Climate Crisis intervention. Working with companies and building alliances with other organizations can amplify the message, increase legitimacy, and offer

the structural support needed for long-term success. Share the Care employs this cooperation with companies successfully, while Bundesforum Männer focus on cooperation with other organizations, groups of professionals, policy makers and institutions.

3.3 KEY MECHANISM: MESSAGES OF CARE AND EMPOWERMENT

Transforming masculinities in a meaningful, lasting way requires more than isolated interventions or reactive messaging. It demands a structural shift, both in participants' personal experiences of masculinity and in society as a whole. This can only be reached if messaging is clear about the benefits for men and empowers them for transformational change. Boys and men must see change not as punishment or loss, but as a path to growth, connection, and shared humanity. Interventions like the Man box show men how they can grow by regaining agency over internalized, limiting gendered traits.

At the heart of this work is the language and practice of care. Boys and men are often socialized into competitive, dominant, and emotionally distant behaviors. And in language, interpersonal and institutional ways they are often treated with less care, warmth and connection fostering attitudes. To break from these norms, men must be invited into spaces where empathy, vulnerability, and emotional expression are not only safe but celebrated. Experiencing the warmth of open, caring exchange can be transformative in itself—it builds new habits of relating and protects against violent and dominant tendencies. Rather than framing empathy and care as foreign or new, the caring behaviors and skills men already possess should be highlighted and nurtured. These qualities are not contrary to who they are or something that they need to learn, but existing, essential parts of their humanity that need only to be allowed to flourish. Such new ways of relating would undermine the search that leads men into far-right traps, and would provide a healthier base of relating democratically and equally with other men, women, LGBTQIA+ people and other marginalized groups.

A narrative of benefits is helpful in that. Too often, boys and men encounter discussions of gender in terms of blame, guilt, or sacrifice. The work must show that gender justice is not a zero-sum game. A positive, future-oriented narrative—one that shows how more caring forms of masculinity benefit not only women and society, but also men themselves—is essential for sustained engagement. Men should be shown that they can live richer, more connected lives by embracing more democratic, empathetic

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ways of being. Workshops in which men openly share is an immediate way of experiencing such increased connectivity, empathy and belonging.

This approach is empowering, not punitive. While not all men are perpetrators of harm, all men have a role in challenging harmful norms, and a responsibility in contributing to social change and confront patriarchal power dynamics. Interventions must emphasize accountability and agency—making it clear that men didn't choose the norms they've internalized, that these norms often hurt them too, and that changing them can be liberating for them as well as for others. To support this, participants must gain concrete tools for and pathways to change. The Man box intervention gives excellent insight into the ways norms lead to harm and starts a conversation about changing this on the personal and societal level. The Pyramid of Gender-based Violence shows how masculinity norms and violence exist within the same system and empowers men to intervene. In this way men can learn to look critically at their own and others' behavior while also seeing paths towards change.

The way we speak is central to this effort. Language should be tailored to the group at hand—meeting people at their level and within their cultural context—without falling into essentialist or exclusionary narratives. The work must be gender transformative and resist the temptation to reinforce binary or rigid ideas of what it means to be "a real man." While such narratives might offer simple answers that appeal to young men, they ultimately reinforce the very structures that need to be changed. Instead, core human needs—connection, growth, dignity—must be addressed in inclusive, accessible language.

In both content and form, this work should model democratic practice. To counter violent, authoritarian expressions of masculinity, boys and men must experience the value of equality, participation, and being seen as full human beings. Workshops and conversations should promote pluralism and inclusive exchange, where differences are not erased but respected. These democratic experiences foster belonging, reduce defensiveness, and provide a living example of what caring masculinity looks like. Democratic exchange is present in all interventions in which people and especially boys and men share openly and with respect.

At its core, this work is about human relationships—relationships of people with themselves, others, and society. Helping boys and men reflect on their needs, desires, fears, and vulnerabilities in the

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context of their relationships allows them to navigate these more consciously and healthily. This relational focus moves the conversation beyond abstract norms and into lived, everyday experience.

Yet, for real impact, interventions must be structural, not incidental. Many organizations struggle with the limitations of one-off events and short-term projects. True transformation happens over time, across various stages of life, and in multiple contexts. Without consistent support, repetition, and reinforcement, change risks being surface-level and short-lived. To build more caring, democratic masculinities, lasting investment, infrastructure, and a systemic commitment to this work are needed. Ultimately, transforming masculinities is not about telling boys and men who to be—it's about inviting them to grow, offering them meaningful alternatives, and empowering them to be part of the solution.

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4. WAYS FORWARD: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

This section outlines key challenges identified by expert organizations working on gender transformation and the prevention of antidemocratic masculinities. From their practical experiences, three main challenges emerge, which relate to the need for mainstreaming of masculinities:

(a) The scale of interventions and a lack of structural funding and support;

(b) Communication and narrative strategies;

(c) Cooperation with stakeholders and the broader (political) mainstreaming of this work.

First, the scale of interventions poses a major challenge. Addressing the growing influence of antidemocratic attitudes among (young) men requires a large, coordinated, and structural response—far beyond what most organizations currently have the capacity or resources to implement. A common concern raised by experts is that interventions often begin too late in the lives of men, when harmful narratives and ideologies have already taken root. This significantly reduces their effectiveness and increases resistance to change. The expert organizations have plenty of knowledge about what works and tools and interventions at their disposal; key obstacles for change are a lack of sufficient funding, political support, and the infrastructure to implement their work on a broad and sustainable scale.

A major recurring point of conversation is the tension between the need for immediate online interventions combatting harmful masculinities and far-right narratives, versus long-term fundamental preventative work by transforming masculinities. The interventions presented in this report almost solely focus on long-term prevention; while the need for more pro-active digital interventions was expressed repeatedly, the expert organizations currently just don't have the capacity to develop and deploy those.

Second, finding the right language and narrative approach is a recurring difficulty. Effective communication must meet people where they are—taking into account their social context and lived experiences—while still conveying core messages about gender justice and transformation. This balancing act requires powerful, positive narratives that invite participation and show clearly how more equal and inclusive masculinities benefit everyone. At the same time, organizations must counter the appeal of far-right messaging, which often offers simplistic, emotionally charged, black-and-white

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narratives. This is particularly difficult when interventions are short-term or lack a safe, participatory context.

Linked to this is the challenge of collaboration with professionals in the radicalization prevention field. Based on the experiences of expert organizations, many general radicalization experts do not meaningfully engage with masculinity as a relevant factor. And the expert organizations are mostly focused on (early) prevention and find it challenging to reach and change radicalized men. Bridging this gap—through mutual learning and exchange between gender-focused and radicalization-focused practitioners—is essential for improving both fields.

Third, cooperation with stakeholders remains difficult, especially at the policy and institutional levels. Resistance can emerge at all stages—from funding bodies to implementation partners—often due to the politicization of gender-related language. As "gender" has become a contested term in some settings, it can be difficult to engage stakeholders willing to support work on masculinities, even when its relevance is clear. This points to a deeper issue: the lack of mainstream recognition of masculinities as a structural factor in social inequality, violence, and democratic backsliding. There is a need for top-down policies that explicitly include masculinity-focused work within broader gender equality and democratic renewal strategies.

This connects to what experts identify as the most fundamental challenge: that antidemocratic or violent masculinities are not fringe phenomena, but manifestations of and deeply rooted in widely accepted traditional gender norms. The problem is not only hypermasculinity or far-right ideology—it is the normalized, traditional masculinity embedded in our social institutions, cultural expectations, and political systems. These norms fundamental and confronting them requires deep, structural change.

The solution, then, is not a quick fix to radicalization. It requires a long-term, well-funded, participatory, and inclusive reassessment of gender norms, human relationships, and democratic values. Only by addressing the root causes—through sustained cultural, educational, and political efforts—can we meaningfully transform masculinities and build a more just, equal, and democratic society.

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Both within and outside of the MEN4DEM project, there are concrete opportunities for change. The process of collectively reflecting on current developments and their own best practices has already helped the expert organizations taking part in this project to better conceptualize what they do, and deepening understanding of what key mechanisms of change towards caring masculinities are. The exchange between civil society organizations and academic institutions holds significant potential. While most interventions are practice-based and often lack long-term scientific evaluation, collaboration with academic experts can strengthen the evidence base and enhance the quality and effectiveness of these initiatives. Drawing on the key mechanisms outlined in this report, such partnerships can support the development of new tools and interventions—expanding and enriching the existing toolbox for transformative work with men and boys.

To effectively counter the rise of antidemocratic groups and narratives among (young) men, we need a new paradigm—one that reimagines how we understand and transform masculinity norms and behaviors. The first pillar of this new paradigm is the need for a meaningful and affirming vision for boys and men. We need to acknowledge the role traditional ideas about masculinity play in how men experience themselves and the world, and how transforming those norms can contribute to both their wellbeing and making the world a better place. Many men are searching for belonging, recognition, community, and purpose. It is essential to acknowledge the very real challenges they face. Existing traditional models of masculinity based on adherence to rigid masculinity norms, have become increasingly unfit for today's social realities—reflected, for example, in the fact that men in many societies experience more health problems and have shorter life expectancies than women (World Health Organization, 2018). At the same time, newer, more inclusive forms of masculinity are still struggling to gain broader acceptance and visibility.

What is needed is a compelling, socially grounded perspective on being a man—one that supports men in becoming whole human beings, connected to others and anchored in purpose. This new paradigm must center ongoing dialogue and the co-construction of healthy, respectful relationships, guided by principles of gender transformation, gender justice, and democratic values: redefine what it means to be a man and offer credible, constructive alternatives, demonstrating how these new models can help men address their struggles more effectively and lead more fulfilling lives.

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The second pillar of this new paradigm, as emphasized by expert organizations, is that meaningful change must occur across multiple, connected layers of society. Based on their long-standing experience, several key requirements emerge:

- **Comprehensive Reach**

  Transformative efforts must reach a broad and diverse spectrum of boys and men. Without such reach, even the most effective interventions remain isolated, limiting their long-term impact. Organizations stress the importance of designing interventions that are scalable, sustainable, and accessible to a wide variety of social, cultural, and economic groups.

- **Structural Commitment**

  The challenges outlined throughout this report demonstrate the need for structural, long-term investment in the transformation of masculinities. Antidemocratic masculinities cannot be countered with fragmented, short-term initiatives. Instead, systemic change is needed—backed by consistent funding, supportive policy environments, and political will.

- **Sector-Wide Integration**

  To counter the growing appeal of antidemocratic narratives and rigid gender norms among men and boys, interventions must be embedded across key societal sectors—including education, youth work, media, civil society, and policymaking. Organizations underline that transformation must be made part of everyday institutional practices to be truly effective.

- **Meaningful Alternatives for Men and Boys:**

  Central to these efforts is the need to offer positive, relatable, and justice-oriented models of masculinity. These should center care, connection, emotional expression, and equality—not as compromises, but as paths to fulfillment and belonging for everyone. Rather than framing transformation through guilt or shame, organizations advocate for messaging that is hopeful, inclusive, and grounded in lived experience.

- **Cross-Sector and Interdisciplinary Collaboration:**

  Practitioners consistently report a gap between masculinities work and other fields such as

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radicalization prevention, education, and mental health. Many experts in those areas overlook how gender norms shape men's vulnerabilities to antidemocratic ideologies. Closing this gap through deliberate partnerships—with researchers, educators, policy actors, and civil society—will be crucial for advancing understanding and impact.

- **Evidence-Based Practice and Shared Learning:**
  Civil society groups call for stronger collaboration with academic institutions to evaluate, document, and expand successful practices. A shared knowledge base can support the refinement of tools, demonstrate impact, and make the case for further institutional support.

Ultimately, the organizations stress that transforming masculinities is not simply a tool to counter radicalization—it is a foundational strategy for fostering democratic resilience, social cohesion, and gender justice. Transforming masculinities must be treated not as an optional add-on, but as an essential component of any serious effort to build more inclusive, caring, and equitable societies.

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5.   CONCLUSIONS

The growing influence of antidemocratic forces presents a profound challenge to the principles of free participation, equality, and democratic coexistence that form the foundation of the European Union. This trend, while complex and multifaceted, finds significant support among younger male populations—a demographic that appears particularly vulnerable to exclusionary and authoritarian narratives.

These developments underscore the importance of addressing the deeper cultural and social forces that shape men's identities and worldviews as part of efforts to safeguard democratic institutions. A critical aspect of this work involves rethinking dominant models of masculinity—shifting away from rigid, hierarchical, and control-oriented ideals toward more caring, reflective, emotionally open, and democratic expressions of manhood. One promising strategy lies in the early and meaningful engagement of boys and men through targeted interventions that offer alternative pathways to belonging, purpose, and strength—paths that do not depend on scapegoating or the false promises often advanced by antidemocratic movements. By investing in such transformative efforts, we not only support the personal development of men and boys but also contribute to the resilience and vitality of democratic societies as a whole.

In Section 1 of this report, we examined the rise of the far right online and the growing influence of the manosphere. While often framed as a new phenomenon, this trend is best understood as a modern expression of long-standing violent, dominant, and patriarchal forms of masculinity. It is essential to name the problem clearly: antidemocratic masculinities are only new flowers rooted in the same old traditional, rigid gender norms. Society, politics, and academia must focus on how violent masculinities build upon these existing norms—and the harm they cause.

These antidemocratic movements feed on men's loneliness, pain, and their search for meaning, belonging, and significance in a world that feels increasingly complex, unstable, and disconnected. The challenges that many men are facing are real—but they are deeply tied to traditional ideas of masculinity that discourage emotional awareness and connection, both to the self and to others. As a result, men often search for purpose in isolation.

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Based on our work with both radicalized and deradicalized men, we understand that antidemocratic narratives exploit male isolation by offering promises of power, control, and dominance as substitutes for basic human needs—love, belonging, and meaning. Challenges in sustaining long-term relationships, along with difficulties in forming romantic connections, can further increase the appeal—and perceived legitimacy—of antidemocratic messages. These narratives often rely on calls to restore rigid social hierarchies, exert greater control over others' lives, and promote a black-and-white view of social relations and conflict. Yet these answers only reinforce the same restrictive norms that caused the isolation in the first place, deepening the cycle of disconnection. This creates a self-perpetuating loop of non-belonging and resentment, further fueling radicalization.

Based on the work and experience of MenEngage organizations, the answer lies in transforming the underlying norms of masculinity—either removing harmful messages or providing healthier responses to men's legitimate search for meaning. This involves fostering care, empathy, and democratic participation. It requires taking the struggles and experiences of boys and men seriously, and offering meaningful, healing alternatives that lead to more fulfilling lives—while grounding this work firmly in the broader context of gender justice. Targeted interventions in education, training, online engagement, and counter-narrative development can help men navigate the complexities of modern life and resist antidemocratic messaging by offering better, more constructive paths forward.

In Section 2, we provided a summary and analysis of 23 best practices (included in the Appendix)—tools, interventions and campaigns—employed by European civil society organizations working on transforming masculinities. Six European civil society organizations and the larger MenEngage Europe network have developed extensive expertise in transforming masculinities work.

In Section 3, drawing on the analysis of best practices, we identified three key mechanisms of change essential for fostering more caring and democratic forms of masculinity. First, transformation begins by fostering empathy through immersive, emotionally grounded experiences in safe and inclusive spaces. These spaces—built on trust and mutual respect—enable men to explore vulnerability, reflect on personal experiences, and question internalized norms. Transformation is not achieved through

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information alone, but through participatory settings that allow men to connect emotionally, experience discomfort safely, and imagine new ways of relating to themselves and others.

Second, men can transform together through peer-to-peer engagement. When men share personal stories of change, they help normalize emotional openness and challenge dominant masculinity scripts. This process positions participants as both learners and role models. Facilitators who model vulnerability themselves enhance authenticity and credibility. Carefully designed interventions—sensitive to language, cultural context, and group composition—help ensure accessibility and resonance, especially when supported by a wider network of educators, practitioners, and institutions. Collaboration between civil society and academia also strengthens the evidence base and long-term impact.

Third, through messages of care and empowerment transformation becomes meaningful and extends beyond the individual to address the structural and cultural systems that sustain restrictive gender norms. Public messaging that highlights care, accountability, and shared benefit—rather than guilt or loss—can help reframe gender justice as a positive and inclusive goal. When men see equality as something that benefits them and their communities, rather than as a threat, engagement becomes more meaningful and lasting.

The ultimate goal is to build a democratic and inclusive model of masculinity rooted in empathy, agency, and connection. Achieving this requires sustained investment, cross-sector collaboration, and political will to prioritize work on masculinities as a core element of democratic renewal. And while the organizations reported the need for more interventions in the digital sphere that can compete with violent, antidemocratic masculinities, they all emphasize that long-term preventative work focused on empathy, care and belonging that is the key to fundamental change.

In Section 4, we assessed key challenges and opportunities for a broader paradigm shift. While organizations report having developed substantial expertise in transforming masculinities, what remains lacking is sustained implementation and the ability to scale up these interventions effectively.

The findings of this report highlight a clear and urgent message: transforming masculinities is not a marginal issue, but a central task in defending democratic values, advancing gender justice, and

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strengthening social cohesion. The rise of antidemocratic masculinities, though deeply concerning, also reflects real and unmet needs among men and boys—for belonging, meaning, and connection. Addressing these needs with empathy, care, and transformative engagement offers a constructive path forward—not only to counter radicalization, but to foster more inclusive and resilient societies.

The work of expert organizations across Europe shows that meaningful change is already happening. We have many of the tools, insights, and practices needed to promote caring, democratic forms of masculinity. What is now required is the collective commitment to invest in, scale up, and integrate these approaches across institutions, policies, and everyday life.

By centering this work in our strategies for democratic renewal, we reaffirm that the transformation of masculinities is not just about men—it is about building a more just, equal, and humane future.

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APPENDIX I.   BEST PRACTICES

1.1.   Introduction

The aim of this appendix is to gather and analyze a comprehensive set of interventions focused on working with men to transform traditional masculinities, thereby contributing to the challenge of countering antidemocratic and far-right masculinities. Presented here is the full list of 23 interventions collected from expert organizations, offering a diverse range of approaches and methodologies.

Among these, 17 interventions are summarized briefly to provide an overview, while 6 are described in greater detail, including reflections on the key mechanisms of change they embody. The interventions are categorized into three types:

1. **Tools (8 interventions):** Discrete, reproducible activities that vary in size, impact, and duration.
2. **Workshops or Sets (9 interventions):** Time-bound, interactive sessions ranging from a few hours to multi-part series, often involving groups of a few to about 30 participants and employing a variety of methods and tools.
3. **Campaigns (5 interventions):** Extended initiatives consisting of multiple interventions aimed at large or mass audiences.

To support further understanding, the appendix includes a summary table outlining the main characteristics of each intervention, followed by comprehensive descriptions. This collection serves as a valuable resource for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers committed to fostering democratic masculinities.

This document contains, first, a table overview of all best practices, and then an elaborate description. They are categorized in three groups: tools, workshops, and campaigns. **Tools** are individual, reproducible interventions that typically focus on a specific activity or resource. They can vary widely in size, scope, and impact but are generally designed to be used independently or integrated into broader programs. Examples might include educational materials, exercises, or specific techniques that can be replicated across different settings. **Workshops** consist of structured, interactive sessions that are limited in duration—ranging from a few hours to a series of sessions. These usually involve a defined group of

participants, often between a handful and about 30 people, and use a combination of methods and tools to engage participants in dialogue, reflection, and experiential learning. **Campaigns** are broader, longer-term initiatives made up of multiple activities or interventions aimed at reaching a wide or mass audience. Campaigns often combine public outreach, awareness-raising, and education to shift social norms and attitudes on a larger scale.

The descriptions of these best practices have been offered by the seven organizations introduced in the introduction. We asked the organizations to complete a file with:

1. The name of the intervention
2. Name of organization and country
3. The thematic area
4. Target group
5. Target size
6. Duration
7. Main aims and objectives of intervention
8. Short description of the intervention
9. Effectiveness and efficiency
10. Transferability
11. Link to materials or website if any
12. The key mechanisms of democratic change that make it work (added later)

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TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF THE BEST PRACTICES

Name	Category	Thematic areas	Main aim	Target group	Scope or size of target	Duration
Man box	Tool (part of workshop)	Gender norms, transforming harmful gender patterns, prevention of gender inequality and violence	Conversation starter, for shared understanding of the gender binary as basis for open conversation. Works with all types and sizes of groups, best done with space after for in-depth conversation. Easy to use and adapt.	Anyone, especially people new to the topics	No upper limit, preferable up to 20	20 minutes to two hours
Check-in	Tool (part of workshop)	Fostering a safe environment, active listening, participatory engagement	To foster a sense of togetherness, active interested attitudes and safety; to test the sense of safety people in the group feel and to encourage this by having everyone actively share.	Anyone	Can be in very large groups, divide in pairs	Usually up to 10 minutes, can be more extensive
Pyramid of gender-based violence	Tool (part of workshop)	Gender-based violence prevention	To show that gender-based violence does not happen in a vacuum but in a system where less frequent forms of violence are built upon fundaments of strict gender and masculinity norms, and on the normalization of misogynistic, dehumanizing behavior. To provide anyone with options to challenge this system of gender-based violence	Anyone, especially men who don't feel they are a part of this system	Unlimited, but better with smaller group	10 minutes to 1 hour
Men's weekend	Tool (days: training weekend)	Gender-based violence prevention, unlearning harmful masculinity, empowerment to be a changemaker	To inspire men and people who have internalized masculinity and give them tools to be changemakers and contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence in their own surroundings	Men and people who have internalized masculinity who want to be part of the solution	Around 25 people each year; dependent on venue capacity	2 full days including overnight stays
Masculinities in Extremism and Anti-feminism	Tool (day: Conference)	Intersections of masculinity, extremism, and antifeminism. Strategies for democracy promotion and gender equality in the face of hate ideologies.	Analyze how masculinities are instrumentalized in extremist and antifeminist contexts. Develop practical approaches for prevention and democratic education. Promote interdisciplinary exchange among experts,	Professionals in gender equality, democracy promotion, and extremism prevention. Representatives from politics, civil society,	Set of groups	One day 1030am to 9pm

			civil society, and policymakers. Strengthen gender-equitable and diversity-oriented societal structures.	academia, and media. Organizations and individuals engaged in gender-reflective work.		
"What makes me a boy?"	Tool (Performance)	Gender equality, masculinity studies, raising awareness, arts, culture	To explore and reflect on the possibilities of transforming masculinity through art; to raise awareness about the representations of masculinity and challenge the rigid stereotypes associated with male identity; to promote gender equality and empower individuals by facilitating discussions on gender roles and identities.	Diverse audience, including individuals interested in gender studies, the arts, and the general public who may have questions or misconceptions about masculinity	16x groups	70m + time to discuss
The Macho Factory (since 2008)\	Tool (toolkit)	Violence prevention, gender equality	To prevent violence and promote gender equality by discussing and challenging destructive masculinity norms	Youth 13-25 years old	Group	Varied
Killar.se	Tool (online forum)	Support for boys and young men, mental health, violence prevention	To support boys and young men; to let them discover in safe ways.	Boys and young men 10-20 years old	Unlimited	Endless
Understanding Gender (in)Equality	Workshop	Gender equality	To understand why gender inequality exist and why genders have unequal power in the society	Teenagers, from age 12 onwards but also adults	Group	1 to 2 hours
These things that we do not see	Workshop	Gender-Based violence, educational outreach	To raise awareness about gender-based violence among pupils in Second Chance Schools; to educate participants about the continuum of everyday sexism and how it can escalate through the pyramid of violence; to highlight how men are affected by patriarchal structures and promote discussions around healthy masculinity	Approx. 60 participants, predominantly men from diverse ethnicities and religious backgrounds, primarily from working-class communities in Second Chance Schools	Groups, in total 60 people	3 hours
It's a matter of Democracy	Workshop (experimental seminar)	Democracy, marginalization, intersectionality, equality	To identifying and deconstruct, through an intersectional and interconnected approach, anti-democratic attitudes and behaviors	General audience	Up to 30, 35 participants	4 hours
Exploration, Experimentation, and Reconstruction of	Workshop	Gender equality, men's engagement, capacity building	To facilitate the exploration of alternative representations of masculinity through experiential learning; to encourage participants to engage with	Parents and educators, professionals in psychological and educational fields, and	One time for groups	3 hours

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New, Healthy Expressions of Masculinity			gender roles in a non-toxic, positive, inclusive, and cooperative way; to empower parents and educators to serve as multipliers in their own communities	individuals interested in gender equality and men's engagement		
GROW Group	Serie of workshops	Support for young fathers	To strengthen the skills, confidence, and emotional well-being of men in their role as fathers.	Fathers of young children in Poland	15 per group	8 sessions, two months
CUAV (Center for Men Authors of Violence) - Gruppo Trattamentale con uomini autori di violenza intima contro la (ex)partner	Serie of workshops	Prevention of violence, support for relationships and parenting	To prevent violence against women; to protect victims by reducing recidivism among perpetrators; to offer perpetrators of domestic violence recovery and to prevent reoffending	Men aged 30 and above who have committed intimate partner violence	Limited groups	Approx. one year, with 40 weekly sessions of 2 hours each, followed by a 6-month follow-up
Progetto scuola (Educational Project to Raise Awareness among Young People about Gender-Based Violence)	Serie of workshops	Gender relations education, prevention of gender-based violence	To educate adolescents about gender relations and the recognition of abusive dynamics; to teach participants to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes; to promote awareness of personal boundaries and consent	High school students (ages 14-18)	Class	8 weekly sessions of 2 hours each
Cerchio dei Padri (Fathers' Sharing Circle)	Serie of workshops	Parenting support, gender relations	To develop parenting skills, including relationship-building with children and partners; to address and manage frustrations related to parenting roles; to promote respect for differences and co-construction of educational strategies	Fathers in the first 1,000 days of their children's lives	Group	8 weekly sessions of 2 hours each
Cerchi di Condivisione (Talking Circles)	Serie of workshops	Personal development, gender relations, violence prevention	To encourage self-reflection and personal growth; to promote non-violent communication and emotional awareness; to challenge gender stereotypes and promote respectful relationships	Men aged 30 and above, particularly those who have experienced or are at risk of engaging in violent behaviors	Group	Weekly 2-hour sessions
Men in the climate crisis (since 2018)	Serie of workshops	Men, masculinity norms and attitudes, climate change and crisis	To discuss how masculinity norms affect the Earth's climate and ecosystem; to encourage men to contribute to a transition towards a sustainable world	Men in general and specifically the ones who are interested in change (climate, personal, societal and so on)	Group	Four sessions of around 2 hours, preferably with some days or a week in between

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100% MEN (Facet na 100 PRO)	Campaign	Promotion of engaged fatherhood and its benefits for men, children, and partners	To highlight the importance of fatherhood in the lives of children while emphasizing the personal benefits that engaged fatherhood brings to men themselves	Fathers and expectant fathers in Poland	Varied, annual in June	Varied
A New Gender Era I: Getting rid of gender stereotypes	Campaign	Prevention work, raising awareness, deconstructing gender stereotypes	To deconstruct gender stereotypes and reconstruct new versions of masculinity and femininity, enhancing visibility and awareness through media and social media engagement	General audience, with a focus on social media users and media consumers	Individual social media, repeatable and unlimited	1 minute and 16 seconds per video
Männer Gegen Rechts/Men Against the Right Wing	Campaign	Prevention work, raising awareness, deconstructing gender stereotypes	To increase the visibility of men in the fight against right-wing extremism; to promote diversity, solidarity and gender equality; to redefine masculinity; to strengthen democracy and a pluralistic society	Broader audience, especially men. Original context: aftermath of elections in East Germany which showed a remarkable success of right wing extremists.	Social Media networks	Some months
"Together against Sexism"/Bündnis "Gemeinsam Gegen Sexismus"	Campaign	Sexism and sexual harassment, cultural change, equality, respect and diversity	To make sexism and sexual harassment visible and prevent it; to develop and implement effective measures to promote a respectful and non-discriminatory society; to initiate structural changes and establish sustainable solutions	Organizations, companies, public institutions, associations and civil society actors who want to actively combat sexism and sexual harassment	Mass	Campaign
Men's Counselling Network & Guideline Brochure: "Men Well Advised"	Campaign (network)	Psychological/emotional issues, partnership/marriage/family, fatherhood and work-life balance, violence prevention/intervention	To bundle counselling services specializing in concerns of boys, men and fathers; to show directions for men and the broader public about where to find help	Men, boys, fathers, and the broader public. Specialists and counsellors	Hundreds of professionals reaching thousands of people	Unlimited
Ambassadors and peer network	Campaign (network)	Gender mainstreaming, participation and advocacy, promoting healthier masculinities	To have men and everyone speak out about transforming masculinities and men's role in feminism and equality; to mainstream this issue; to empower other men to feel empowered and speak out; to stay connected with people	People, especially men, who support our message of gender transformation	Unlimited, now 250	Unlimited

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1.2. Best Practices: Tools

1.2.1. Check-in, Emancipator, the Netherlands

Main aims

To foster a sense of equal exchange, mutually interested attitudes and social safety, especially with regards to sharing openly and vulnerably. This is to both test the sense of safety people in the group feel, since it quickly becomes obvious how openly people share, and to encourage safe, open exchange by having everyone actively share something personal about themselves and listen to someone else doing so.

Short description

This part of a workshop wasn't developed by Emancipator and has long been used in many settings. But we see it as an essential part of the beginning of any workshop for any target group. We use it to create a safer environment for exchange, with active listening and sharing and a moment in which everyone participates on an equal basis.

Usually the check-in is a two-to-four-minute exercise. We ask the group to make duos and share: 1) their name 2) how they are doing / sitting here and 3) a question relevant to the day's conversation, for example 'who is a man in your life you feel safe with and what character traits does he have that give that feeling?'. Then the first of the duo shares for 1 or 2 minutes, after which they change from sharer to listener and vice-versa. We always ask the listener to thank the sharer as it makes someone feel appreciated for being open and vulnerable. Then everyone introduces their neighbor within a hard 20 second time limit. In this way everyone has already talked and shared something personal, everyone has actively listened, and a respectful, participatory start of the day has been made. An extra sense of safety and the possibility to share openly has been stimulated for the rest of the workshop. All of this is not usually so present, especially for some (young) men. The check-in can be altered or made more extensive depending on need, with check-ins of an hour or longer working very well in creating safety for a long day or weekend of exchange.

Effectiveness

The Check-in is an effective way to both check the level of safety (if people don't want to talk or share superficially, it is usually a sign of unsafety to share vulnerably) and to foster an extra sense of safety and participation. In all settings, from late primary school to late career management professionals, such a sense of human sharing and active interests does wonders for the group atmosphere and being present as a full human being.

The core change mechanism here is an active vulnerable sharing and listening that is rare in our society, especially in public/professional settings. This creates new participatory presence and thus fosters caring attitudes and a more democratic engagement. Especially (young) men who feel very not-known, alone and closed off can have a hard time sharing but are also invited to step out of isolation and into empathetic relating.

1.2.2. The 'Manbox', Emancipator, the Netherlands

Main aims

The 'Manbox' is a conversation starter and creates a shared fundamental understanding of the limitations of the gender binary so that everyone in the conversation shares a basic understanding of what we are talking about. From this shared understanding an open conversation challenging & transforming ideas and practices about gender can be started.

Short description

The 'Manbox' is a tool that can be part of any workshop and that is useful for any target group, but especially people who are relatively new to conversations about gender. Its main thematic area is transforming gender and masculinity norms. We almost always use it in workshops in the Netherlands, but we borrowed it, and it is used in many places. It can be done with all types and sizes of groups but works best if you can have an in-depth conversation on the group level afterwards. That makes a maximum of 15 to 30 people ideal. This tool can be as quick as 20 minutes and up to two hours. It is easily used and adapted in any context which makes it an outstanding tool.

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The people giving the workshop need a good visible surface and writing materials. They draw a square with 'masculinity' and, if wanted, a circle with 'femininity' on it. They then ask the public to shout out words traditionally associated with masculinity. With this you form a set of words that are our shared associations with what 'being a real man' is and you can then start to have a conversation about that totality, the gender binary or specific aspects of it. Anyone can reproduce these normative character traits in two minutes, showing how it is ingrained in all of us. And by letting the audience produce it, you're not sending one truth but collectively, democratically building your framework of conversation. You can then show how limiting and harmful these ideas of masculinity can be, how everyone internalizes and perpetuates them to some extent, how going against them always costs energy, takes confidence and knowledge, and how it brings with it the danger of exclusion, bullying and violence. It also shows how masculine traits are rated higher in society and how there are harmful codes that set men up for gender-based violence. After all this is discussed, you can then go into personal conversations about how people live this, what we would like to see differently and what tools we need for that.

Effectiveness

The man box is our most effective conversation starter. Not only because it draws from the crowd's knowledge and gives a collective ownership of the masculinity norms and conversation they created, but also because people talk with a shared framework. Without such a framework, dialogues about gender can easily derail because there is unclarity of meaning and concepts. It always leads to a fruitful conversation, even with people who have never talked about these topics before. It also is an excellent way to help people recognize how they have internalized societal gender norms, even though they might not agree with them. It also shows how these hurt men as well and gives hopeful ways of changing oneself and societal norms by exploring possible alternatives and routes of growth.

The key of change here is: 1) make people see the gender binary and gender norms clearly 2) see how it is damaging 3) see how they have also internalized it or have had to relate to it 4) open a conversation about what works, what doesn't and what alternatives could be desired and 5) give people a chance to talk about what is needed for growth, what kind of tools, foci or conversations are a next positive step. It leaves people empowered to start dealing with harmful internalized and societal masculinity.

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1.2.3. The Pyramid of gender-based violence, Emancipator, the Netherlands

Main aims

The main aim of the 'Pyramid' is to show how less frequent forms of gender-based violence are built upon fundaments of strict gender and masculinity norms (e.g. A real man is a hunter'), and on normalizing misogynistic, dehumanizing behavior (e.g. sexist jokes). And the second aim is to provide anyone with possibilities to challenge all forms of gender-based violence by changing the lowest level(s), even though they might not physically be present to intervene in instances higher in the pyramid.

Short description

The 'Pyramid' can be used for any target group, since it shows anyone how they can contribute to limiting gender-based violence. It can be used in any workshop, but especially when it is about limiting gender violence, since the prevention of gender-based violence is its main thematic area.

The pyramid can either be constructed together in workshop form (up to two hours), presented and used as a dialogue tool (medium time consuming) or used as a training tool to teach about gender-based violence and how to intervene (10 minutes). As such it can be done in large groups, but discussion always works better in more intimate environments. The concept of the pyramid we borrowed, and it is used by other MenEngage partner organizations. It is built of 5 different layers, with femicide at the top, then a layer with extreme violence (e.g. sexual assault), then one with violence that often leads up to that (e.g. boundary crossing behavior, stalking). Then it has one layer where the normalization of dehumanizing behavior takes place (e.g. locker-room talk, sexist or homophobic jokes), and lastly the base where our norms of masculinity and what it is to be a 'real man' form the foundation of all higher levels. The lower two levels are the levels where it usually happens on a more daily basis and where the most preventative intervention can constantly be done by anyone.

Effectiveness

The pyramid is an effective tool to show how gender violence is built upon our gender norms and normalized misogynistic behavior. And it works well to show people how they can contribute to limiting gender-based violence in a preventative way, even though they might not be able to limit higher levels

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of the pyramid. As such it is activating, empowering and makes everyone feel more ownership of large societal problems.

The key towards change is that it empowers people to start intervening more in layers where they can actually have an active impact, mostly in the preventative lower layers. People see more clearly how seemingly innocent norms and behavior lead societally to gender-based violence and can take a more active role in prevention. It would be interesting to make a 'radicalization and masculinity' pyramid to see how gender norms in the lower base lead to loneliness, isolation, a search for control and belonging et cetera in the layer above, with more radical antidemocratic, misogynist content above that, more actively violent behavior nearer to the top and femicide, school shootings, far-right misogynist violence at the top to talk about and give people more control over intervening in all these steps.

1.2.4. "What makes me a boy?", Gender Alliance, Greece

Main aims

The primary aim of this initiative is to explore and reflect on the possibilities of transforming masculinity through art. The performance seeks to raise awareness about the representations of masculinity and challenge the rigid stereotypes associated with male identity. It aims to promote gender equality and empower individuals by facilitating discussions on gender roles and identities.

Short description

The intervention consists of a performance titled "What Makes Me a Boy?" of 70 minutes with extra discussion time which has been performed sixteen times since its premiere on March 16, 2024. It explores various themes related to masculinity through movements, narratives, and testimonies from a spectrum of masculinities. The performance includes post-show discussions with the audience and experiential workshops for individuals engaged in the arts. The initiative is funded by the Ministry of Culture of Greece and has included two additional activities:

- Discussion with Audience: Titled "Opening the Discussion on Masculinity… and Other Demons!", this experiential discussion invites participants to explore and reflect on masculinity, providing stimuli for discussion and opportunities to exchange thoughts, emotions, and experiences.

- Experiential Workshop: An experiential workshop inspired by the performance facilitating the exploration of alternative images and dimensions of masculinity. This workshop encourages participants to feel, play, and experiment with new gender roles, empowering them to visualize and perceive their masculine gender identity in a healthy, non-toxic, positive, inclusive, caring, and cooperative manner, with practical applications in their everyday lives.

Effectiveness

The intervention has received positive feedback from participants, with many expressing a newfound understanding of masculinity and its societal implications. Audience reactions indicate that the performance effectively engages them in critical conversations about gender roles. Participants have reported feeling empowered to reflect on their perceptions of masculinity, suggesting that the goals of raising awareness and fostering dialogue were achieved.

A key mechanism of change is that it is very experiential. It lets people see themselves in the mirror, with masculine poses et cetera, try to be a persona, try to walk as themselves, asking them to draw, interact with each other. This makes them aware of themselves and opens up the conversation.

1.2.5. Masculinities in Extremism and Anti-feminism, Federal Forum for Men, Germany

Main aims

The main aim of this conference day is to analyze and share how masculinities are instrumentalized in extremist and antifeminist contexts. From this, participants can develop practical approaches for prevention and democratic education. The intervention promotes interdisciplinary exchange among experts, civil society, and policymakers. And finally, it strengthens gender-equitable and diversity-oriented societal structures.

Short description

The one-day 10-hour event combines an expert conference and an annual political reception. It is focused on the intersections of masculinity, extremism, and antifeminism and developing strategies for democracy promotion and gender equality in the face of hate ideologies. Its target audience is

professionals, representatives from politics, civil society, academia and media, and organizations and individuals engaged in gender-reflective work.

The content this year were:

- A keynote: "Is masculinity in crisis – or are old ideals of dominance and strength simply resurfacing in troubled times?". Johanna Niendorf explores how masculinity is involved in authoritarian movements, right-wing extremism, and anti-feminist ideologies. Drawing on social psychology, she highlights the links between antifeminism, group-based hostility, and authoritarianism, and outlines strategies for progressive men's policies.

- Panel (4 experts): Why are extremist ideologies appealing to boys and men, and how does the image of the "real man" play into this? The panel discusses how extremists exploit masculinity ideals, what social experiences lead to radicalization, and what can be done to counteract this.

- Talk: Men are overrepresented in extremist circles and often support violence-based, rigid masculinity norms. Swiss men's psychologist Markus Theunert presents "Factor M" – a gender-aware approach to counteract these dynamics in practice.

- Workshops on overcoming extremism: Interactive workshops focus on various forms of extremism and anti-feminist radicalization. They provide practical insights and highlight effective prevention strategies and best practices.

Effectiveness

The event's full booking after only 5 weeks of announcement reflects its relevance and the demand for addressing the topic. Combining theoretical input with practical workshops ensures comprehensive knowledge transfer. The interdisciplinary approach fosters collaboration across various sectors. The inclusion of high-profile speakers enhances the event's impact and visibility.

The keys to change are:

- Critical examination of masculinity constructs within extremist and antifeminist ideologies.

- Empowerment of professionals through knowledge sharing and capacity building.

- Promotion of inclusive narratives that counteract hate and polarization.

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www.men4dem.eu

Funded by
the European Union

- Strengthening networks to support sustained efforts in gender equality and democracy promotion.

1.2.6. The Men's Weekend, Emancipator, the Netherlands

Extensive best practice tool 1

Thematic area

Gender-based violence prevention, unlearning harmful masculinity, empowerment to be a changemaker.

Target group

Men and people who have internalized masculinity (intersex, non-binary and trans people) who already see gender injustices and want to play an active role in challenging this and gender-based violence.

Target size

Around 25 people each year.

Duration

Once a year for three days since 2018.

Main aims

The main aim of the yearly Emancipator Weekend is to train men and people who have internalized masculinity to be change-makers. The Weekend is a safe space to share and grow, and to learn about tools and information about intervening in gender norms and gender violence. Participants are guided during and after the weekend to organize an event of whatever size in their own environment. It is a kind of train-the-trainer or leadership weekend that leaves participants inspired and empowered.

Short description

The Emancipator Weekend is a yearly 3-day retreat for people who've internalized masculinity and want to be changemakers in their own environment. It is a train-the-trainers intervention focused on fostering leadership and activating change-makers to take their gender-based violence prevention work in their own environment to the next level.

It is free for the +-25 participants, and they get a whole weekend of training, sharing, good food and lodging in a relatively safe and inviting atmosphere. In the Weekend they gain theoretical knowledge, understanding of their own place in relation to gender injustices, self-confidence to be a leader in the field and they get encouraged and helped to work out a plan to implement an activity where they can make impact. These activities can be small or big, incidental or structural. Over the 7 years of Emancipator Weekends this has led to more than 200 empowered change-makers who've made a plethora of activities ranging from a massively popular international theater show about gender and masculinity (Boys won't be Boys), masculinity talking groups that reached over 1500 people in six years (Patriarkraakt) and much more. Besides these large activities the Weekend participants take the lessons with them for life in personal, relational and professional contexts.

The Weekend is experienced as exceptional because it is only for men or people who have internalized masculinity and this fosters a safer sense of expressions of masculinities, including internalized harmful masculinities. Participants experience a powerfully different way of feeling safe, expressing freely in a group largely men. This is an empowering, caring and democratic alternative to what almost all participants say they usually or ever experience.

Effectiveness

The Weekend is regularly described as 'life-changing' by participants. And many report how new, special and important it is to feel so safe, seen and free amongst in a caring group of predominantly men. To be in a safe environment with people who've internalized masculinity to both dive into their own relation with masculinity and get strengthened to be an agent of change in the world is a golden combination. Some interventions the participants do are massive and long duration, and some are smaller in size but can still be highly impactful on the personal, relational and societal level. The main challenge is to stay connected and keep people engaged within a wider network of changemakers.

Transferability

In smaller form the idea of the Weekend, training change-makers and offering an inspiring alternative male space to grow together, is recommendable to copy and quite transferable. But the three-day

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Emancipator Weekend with paid-for expenses for participants is less easily transferred because of limitations in money, time and capacity.

Especially the vulnerable, open and safe sharing that gives participants a taste of better relations and empowers them to take this with them in their lives is something that can and should be copied. A similar albeit less powerful form is found in gender transformative men's talking groups.

Link to materials or website

https://emancipator.nl/event/emancipatorweekend-2025/

Key mechanism of change

Being together with a group of people that internalized masculinity and want to be change-makers in limiting gender-based violence and other injustices is empowering and gives momentum. The safe and participatory setting fosters equality and empathy. It shows a different kind of relating is possible. And giving them extra knowledge and tools only strengthens their resolve to be leaders on these topics in their own settings. This leads to participants making larger circles of impact by promoting caring, democratic masculinities in their own environment.

The safe peer-to-peer sharing in a guided setting is also present in many other best practices. During the Weekend we also make extensive use of other best practices that are included by Emancipator in the tool section like regular extensive check-ins, the man box and the pyramid of gender-based violence. These tools are seen as very effective, as they are used by many organizations for a variety of purposes.

1.2.7. The Macho Factory, MÄN, Sweden

Main aims

To prevent violence and promote gender equality by discussing and challenging destructive masculinity norms

Short description

The Macho Factory is audiovisual materials toolkit for teachers, youth leaders and other professionals working with young people between 13 and 25. It was developed in 2008 and used and updated ever since.

It takes a critical look at social norms on masculinity, gender and sexuality. Through short videos of up to 3 minutes, interactive exercises and discussions, participants have the opportunity to reflect on topics such as friendship and relationships, sexual harassment, consent, violence and the vulnerability of young people online. The toolkit enables young people to start questioning restrictive and destructive norms.

Effectiveness

The short films (up to 3m) to watch in a group about specific situations like a locker-room situation and then with the Man Box discuss this is very effective. We create a language together to be able to discuss this. And because the videos are specific and immersive they can reach different groups in their specific situation and open up through being swept along.

1.2.8. Killar.se, MÄN Sweden

Extensive best practice tool 2

Thematic area

Support for boys and young men, mental health, violence prevention.

Target group

Boys and young men between 10 and 25 years old.

Target size

Unlimited.

Duration

Open-ended.

Main aims

To support boys and young men. To let them discover in safe ways.

Short description

Killar.se is an online platform that includes an online support chat, a therapy clinic and various forms of information and support for anyone who identifies as a boy or young man. The thematic area is open exchange for searching men and the transformation of masculinity. It has been modified throughout the

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years to better fit what the guys are asking for and how and when they interact. The guy-to-guy forum and the therapy clinic are the latest editions. The chat is manned by volunteers that have had a training but the clinic has professional staff.

The specific part that I want to highlight is the guy-to-guy part of the cite ("kille-till-kille") https://killar.se/vara-stod/kille-till-kille where you can talk anonymously with other guys and get information by reading what other guys have written.

Effectiveness

The chat has been evaluated since the beginning. Today it has between 6 000 – 9 000 support-seekers every year. The therapy clinic is for young men aged 15-25 and the therapy is based on an approach from the Response-Based Practice method, in which violence is always seen as a choice. The goal is for perpetrators of violence to change their perspective on their actions, and to make different, non-violent choices in the future.

Transferability

Not the most low-cost, low effort initiative, but transferable for sure. The chat and the forum have been adapted by some Spanish organization's members in MenEngage Europe and today there is also a chat in Spanish run by Spanish organizations and their volunteers. https://www.broders.es

Link to materials or website

www.killar.se or www.killar.se/en (in English) there are also a possibility to get information on the cite on Arabic, Somali and northern Sami languages.

Key mechanism of change

One of the key mechanisms of change of the online forum that there is a moderated space where boys and men can explore in a safe, positive way. Given the fact that many men enter the manosphere through legitimate, vulnerable searches for answers, meaning and connection, such tools can be a great alternative and preventing people to fall into that rabbit hole. It is a great answer to the 'legitimate search, terrible answers' problem that partly powers far-right radicalization.

The forum offers resources, peer-to-peer conversations between men, moderated forum spaces and multiple pathways to help including therapy. In this way it offers aid to young men in all stages of searching. And it covers many parts and kinds of uncertainties and questions young men have like masculinity, emotionality, relations, sexuality and more. With a slogan of 'no matter what you're dealing with, we're here for you' it strongly encapsules a positive alternative to the search of many young men that leads them into far-right influence.

It also links with the Federal Forum for Men's 'Men's Counselling Network' that similarly helps to connect men with legitimate questions and needs to answers, organizations and professionals and in that way keeps them out of adopting violent and antidemocratic far-right narratives of masculinity, control and belonging. Instead, these interventions offer a space for vulnerability, co-discovery, positive narratives of what it means to be a man and to be human and it reaches men some men where they really are. Its vulnerable sharing between peers is also a core mechanism that features for example in the Italian Circle of Men's interventions about (people being at risk of being) perpetrators of gender violence and the next example, the Emancipator Weekend.

1.3.   Best Practices: Workshops

1.3.1. "These things that we do not see", Gender Alliance, Greece

Main aims

The primary aim of this seminar is to raise awareness about gender-based violence among pupils in Second Chance Schools. These schools provide education to adults and young people who have dropped out of traditional schooling, often from disadvantaged backgrounds. The seminar seeks to educate participants about the continuum of everyday sexism and how it can escalate through the pyramid of violence, ultimately leading to severe outcomes such as femicides and murder. Additionally, it aims to highlight how men are affected by patriarchal structures and promote discussions around healthy masculinity. This target group is considered high risk for radicalization due to their socio-economic status and educational background.

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Short description

This workshop consists of a three-hour seminar designed to engage participants in discussions about gender-based violence, starting from the concept of everyday sexism. Using experiential methods, the seminar facilitates small group work to encourage dialogue and reflection on the impact of patriarchy on men and women. Participants explore the pyramid of violence [described more extensively above as tools best practice 3], discussing how minor acts of sexism can escalate into more severe forms of violence. The interactive format aims to create a safe space for participants to share their thoughts and experiences, fostering a deeper understanding of the issues at hand.

Effectiveness

The seminar's effectiveness will be gauged through participant engagement and feedback during and after the session. Initial responses suggest that the experiential methods used encourage open discussion and reflection among participants, helping them connect personal experiences to broader societal issues. The goal of raising awareness about gender-based violence and its roots in everyday sexism appears to be achieved through these interactive discussions. The key to change here lies in the connection of personal experience to broader societal injustices, sharing openly and from multiple perspectives about that and to give concrete steps towards betterment.

1.3.2. "It's a matter of Democracy" – Experiential Seminar: Educational Tools and Experiential Techniques for Strengthening Democracy, Gender Alliance Greece

Extensive best practice workshop 1

Thematic area

Democratic education, anti-violence actions, prevention of radicalization, gender equality, intersectionality, critical pedagogy, civic engagement.

Target group

Educators, youth workers, civil society actors, community leaders, and other multipliers working with groups in formal or non-formal education. Open to all genders and especially inclusive of men and boys, women and girls, and LGBTQI+ and non-binary individuals.

Target size

Up to 30 participants preferable.

Duration

4 hours (with possible 30-minute extension due to the experiential nature).

Main aims

- To deconstruct anti-democratic attitudes and behaviors through an intersectional and interconnected approach.
- To equip participants with specialized theoretical and experiential tools that enhance critical reflection and action on issues such as racism, sexism, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and totalitarianism.
- To support the development of democratic attitudes and practices, especially in educational and social settings.
- To build solidarity-based gender alliances and reinforce inclusive democratic values.

Short description

The seminar combines theory and practice to challenge anti-democratic ideologies. It uses experiential learning tools such as role-playing, visual methods, body movement, theatrical improvisation, and collaborative reflection. Educational content is centered around the five "-isms": Racism, Nationalism, Religious Fundamentalism, Sexism, and Totalitarianism. Participants are engaged cognitively, emotionally, and physically to reflect on their own experiences, biases, and societal structures. The flow includes plenary sessions, group work, visual and embodied exercises, and personal reflection.

Effectiveness

The intervention is described as highly engaging, with strong emotional and intellectual involvement from participants. Participants report increased awareness of how anti-democratic behaviors manifest in daily life, as well as greater motivation to take action in their personal and professional spheres. Activities such as "Painting the -Isms" and "The Stories of -Isms" foster deep insight, empathy, and commitment to democratic values. The safe and inclusive environment encourages honest sharing and reflection, and participants consistently express the relevance and urgency of the topics addressed.

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Transferability

Yes, the methodology and materials are adaptable for other contexts, groups, and countries.

The tools used are flexible and can be tailored to schools, NGOs, youth centers, or civic spaces.

The seminar can serve as a blueprint for other organizations looking to work at the intersection of democracy, gender, and human rights education.

Key mechanism of change

- Safe, inclusive spaces where participants of all genders feel empowered to share, reflect, and learn.
- Participatory, experiential methods that make abstract concepts like democracy, patriarchy, or extremism tangible and personal.
- Intersectional framing that connects various forms of oppression and discrimination, promoting holistic understanding and action.
- Artistic and embodied techniques (e.g. painting, theatrical exercises) that bypass purely rational approaches and engage emotions and creativity.
- Reframing and collective reflection, helping participants rethink inherited norms, myths, and practices and commit to inclusive, democratic attitudes.
- Gender-inclusive dialogue encourages men and boys to reflect on masculinity, power, and care within democratic contexts.

A key methodological innovation is the equal, inclusive participation and empowerment of all genders—including men and boys (or those who identify as such), women and girls (or those who identify as such), and LGBTQI+ and non-binary individuals. Ultimately, our methodology is based on the core belief that only through collaboration, inclusivity, and intersectionality—leaving no one behind—can we inspire and strengthen transformative and allied mindsets, behaviors, and life attitudes. Gender Alliance emphasizes that they don't feel empowered enough to do things with men only. So, they focus on people who are already situated to work on gender like teachers, psychologists et cetera. In this way Gender Alliance contributes to gender mainstreaming, spreading discussions, knowledge and tools about transforming limiting gender norms, so they these groups can do gender mainstreaming in their

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own environment. As such, gender mainstreaming is a key mechanism of change both in society and in everyone's specific environment. And by focusing on a target group of people adjacent to and working with boys and young men, the impact of such a workshop can be prolonged and multiplied.

Interestingly, Gender Alliance also adds that they also want to reach parents and also mothers; how they are reinforcing patriarchy. We're not defining masculinity norms as something that is something that is internalized by men only. It is also in women. Women also need to have some masculine energy to move in hierarchies, to be able to express themselves. So, working on masculinity and patriarchy in women and others, also non-men, is what is sometimes is missing. Mixed groups are nice. Nice to see how also mothers or wives have reacted. In the end they must discover which masculinity and femininity they admire in themselves, and another person draws this out. This is also interesting, to discover which part they are proud of.

The clear linking of masculinity and sexism with other forms of oppression and antidemocratic practices stand out as another key mechanism for change. By showing and discussing these participants see the need to work on these to promote equality and defend democracy in many interrelated areas. In this way this intervention stands out, because most other interventions want to enhance care and democratic behaviors, but don't like masculinity and gender injustice this centrally to other forms of violent and antidemocratic behavior. This needs to be practiced with care when talking with boys and men about masculinity however, as it might alienate men who could otherwise be reached. But the organization emphasizes that a language of inclusion and benefits for all should be utilized.

1.3.3. "Exploration, Experimentation, and Reconstruction of New, Healthy Expressions of Masculinity", Gender Alliance, Greece

Main aims

To facilitate the exploration of alternative representations of masculinity through experiential learning, encouraging participants to engage with gender roles in a non-toxic, positive, inclusive, and cooperative way. The initiative aimed to empower parents and educators to serve as multipliers in their own communities.

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Funded by
the European Union

Short description

This 3-hour workshop was developed and implemented as part of a capacity-building project for small NGOs working on gender equality, funded by the Bodossaki Foundation. The intervention consisted of an experiential psychoeducational workshop titled "Exploration, Experimentation, and Reconstruction of New, Healthy Expressions of Masculinity." Using specialized educational, psychological, and body-movement tools, the workshop encouraged participants to explore and experiment with new gender roles while reflecting on and reconstructing personal perceptions of masculinity. Promotion was conducted through social media, a dedicated newsletter, and direct invitations to beneficiary organizations.

Effectiveness

A total of 39 individuals registered for the workshop (25 women, 13 men, and 1 non-binary person), and 28 attended, including representatives from psychological and educational institutions as well as municipal authorities. The participants demonstrated high levels of engagement throughout the session, despite varying levels of familiarity with gender equality and men's involvement. The most well-received experiential exercises included small group sharing, body movement, artistic creation, and collective reflection. Participants reported that the workshop helped them reshape their understanding of masculinity, share personal experiences, and connect with others. Professionals suggested adding more theoretical discussions, while parents and personally motivated participants expressed a preference for more hands-on, experiential activities.

A key methodological innovation is the equal, inclusive participation and empowerment of all genders—including men and boys (or those who identify as such), women and girls (or those who identify as such), and LGBTQI+ and non-binary individuals. Ultimately, our methodology is based on the core belief that only through collaboration, inclusivity, and intersectionality—leaving no one behind—can we inspire and strengthen transformative and allied mindsets, behaviors, and life attitudes.

1.3.4. GROW Group, Share the Care, Poland

Main aims

To strengthen the skills, confidence, and emotional well-being of men in their role as fathers.

MEN4DƎM

Short description

The GROW Group is a support initiative for fathers, providing a safe space to share experiences, navigate everyday challenges, and build parenting confidence. This initiative has been running for three consecutive years, with multiple groups organized annually. Key features of the intervention include:

- Format: A closed, intimate group of up to 15 participants, meeting online over 8 sessions spread across two months.
    - Eight Sessions for two months. Topics include:

      Pregnancy and Birth – How Did I Experience It?
    - My Fatherhood Priorities – What Kind of Dad Do I Want to Be?
    - My Own Father – Role Model or Burden?
    - Child's Developmental Needs – How to Recognize and Respond to Them?
    - Relationship with Partner After Birth.
    - Everyday Duties – How It Is vs. How It Could Be?
    - How to Take Care of Myself?
    - Fatherhood Q&A
- Leadership: The group is led by Kamil Janowicz, PhD, a psychologist, father, and Ambassador of the Share the Care Foundation.
- Need and Motivation: The initiative arose from the observed lack of dedicated spaces where fathers can openly discuss the challenges of early parenthood, learn practical parenting skills, and gain confidence. Many men lack role models or resources to understand their new responsibilities. GROW Groups create a confidential, male-only environment where fathers can explore these issues with honesty and trust.
- Program Design: The unique program was co-developed by the Share the Care Foundation and Dr. Janowicz. Recognizing that men are often more open when guided by other men, the program ensures relatable leadership.
- Participation: Joining the group requires a commitment to attend all eight sessions, ensuring continuity and trust among participants.

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- Recruitment: Participants are recruited via the Foundation's social media channels and newsletter.
- Engagement: Meetings encourage active participation, with every father invited to share, ask questions, and engage in discussions.

Effectiveness

Demand: The program has seen overwhelming interest – with around 100 applications for just 15 available spots per group.

1.3.5. CUAV (Center for Men Authors of Violence) - Gruppo Trattamentale con uomini autori di violenza intima contro la (ex)partner, Cerchio Degli Uomini Italy

Main aims

Prevention of violence against women. Protection of victims by reducing recidivism among perpetrators. Recovery of perpetrators of domestic violence and prevention of reoffending. Emphasis on the rights and safety of victims.

Short description

This intervention involves a long-term group therapy in the form of a series of workshops, with a professional facilitator process where participants reflect on their violent behaviors and take responsibility for their actions. The target group are men aged 30 and above who have committed intimate partner violence (e.g., abuse, stalking). The group size is limited to ensure intimate participate and takes about one year, with 40 weekly sessions of 2 hours each, followed by a 6-month follow-up. The program includes:

- Initial phase: Individual interviews to assess motivation and readiness for change. Participants must sign an agreement committing to non-violence and behavioral change.
- Group phase: Focus on recognizing violence, understanding its cultural and social roots, and developing non-violent relational strategies. Techniques include emotional literacy, role-playing, and discussions on the effects of violence on victims and children. The Duluth Model's "Power and Control Wheel" is used to help participants understand the dynamics of abusive relationships.

Funded by
the European Union

Effectiveness

About one-third of participants show significant positive change, developing awareness and non-violent strategies. Another third shows moderate improvement, while a minority remains resistant to change. Participants often express gratitude for the program, reporting improved emotional well-being and reduced fear of reoffending. Testimonials include statements like: "I feel calmer now," "I have started to enjoy life again," and "I am no longer afraid to walk the streets."

Key mechanisms of change:

- Structured Phases: The program is divided into clear phases (individual assessment, group work, follow-up), ensuring a systematic approach to behavior change.
- Use of the Duluth Model: This model helps participants visualize and understand the power dynamics in abusive relationships, making it easier for them to recognize and change their behaviors.
- Peer Support: The group setting allows participants to learn from each other's experiences, fostering a sense of community and mutual accountability.
- Focus on Responsibility: The program emphasizes taking responsibility for one's actions, which is crucial for long-term change.
- Follow-up: The 6-month follow-up ensures that participants continue to receive support, and it reinforces the lessons learned during the program.

1.3.6. Progetto scuola (Educational Project to Raise Awareness among Young People about Gender-Based Violence), Cerchio Degli Uomini, Italy

Extensive best practice workshop 2

Thematic area

Gender relations education, prevention of gender-based violence.

Target group

High school students aged 14 to 18.

Target size

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A class. Preferably less than 30.

Duration

8 weekly sessions of 2 hours each.

Main aims

Teach participants to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes. Educate adolescents about gender relations and the recognition of abusive dynamics. Promote awareness of personal boundaries and consent.

Short description

Progretto Scuola is an educational project to raise awareness among young people about gender-based violence. This is a series of interactive workshops in schools that uses group work, videos, songs, and short films to engage students.

Topics include:

- Recognizing gender stereotypes in media and society.
- Understanding the continuum of controlling behaviors and violence.
- Activities focus on listening, empathy, and critical thinking.
- Role-playing exercises help students practice non-violent communication and conflict resolution.

Effectiveness

Generally well-received by students, with increased awareness of gender stereotypes and violence. Younger students (ages 14-15) showed more resistance and sarcasm, while older students engage more deeply. Participants expressed interest in extending the duration of the program. Anonymous feedback from students included: "I learned a lot about respect," and "I now understand what consent really means."

Transferability

The program can be adapted for different educational contexts and age groups, with potential for broader implementation in schools.

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Link to materials or website

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8

Key mechanism of change

- Interactive Methods: The use of videos, songs, and role-playing keeps students engaged and makes complex topics more accessible.

- Anonymous Questions: Allowing students to ask questions anonymously encourages participation from those who might be too shy to speak up.

- Focus on Media Literacy: Analyzing media content helps students critically evaluate the gender stereotypes they encounter daily.

- Peer Learning: Group discussions and activities foster peer-to-peer learning, which can be more impactful than traditional lectures.

- Safe Space: Creating a non-judgmental environment where students feel safe to express their thoughts and questions is crucial for effective learning.

Like many of the broad-view workshops, this workshop gives an overview through accessible knowledge. It helps to show how everyone internalizes gender norms and participates in continuing them. By teaching these knowledges and appropriate tools for change, it gives agency over themselves and their relations to both boys and girls. By discussing this vulnerably in safety with the possibility of anonymity and in peer-to-peer exchange, the students can grow and practice participatory exchange (or democracy) together. Additionally, the use of a variety of attractive gender transformative media and a focus on media literacy helps in more immediately defending against far-right online influencing.

The Circle of Men organization explained that such workshops help explore opposition to patriarchal masculinities and explore what it is to have power, how to use power, what is competition and performance. And opposite to that it teaches how people can speak about emotions, share, understand others. This is really a connecting line between perpetrators, fathers, talking circles et cetera. It provides instruments to live better with ourselves and our surroundings. This sentence Circle of Men described as their core. If we live better with ourselves and our surroundings, we are already doing better democratic behavior. An equal, participatory exchange.

This key mechanism is central in many of the workshops and tools mentioned in the best practices list the Macho Factory, the Man Box, the Share the Care 'Grow Group' and the Greek workshops 'Exploration [..]', 'Healthy expressions of masculinity' and 'These things that we do not see'. All these focus on transforming masculinity through starting a safe, vulnerable conversation about limiting gender norms. This type of workshop with tools is mentioned most as important for fundamental inoculation against the search for meaning and belonging that might lead to the far-right, and violent, antidemocratic answers to that search. This works better if it is a structural intervention.

1.3.7. Cerchio dei Padri (Fathers' Sharing Circle), Cerchio Degli Uomini, Italy

Main aims

Develop parenting skills, including relationship-building with children and partners. Address and manage frustrations related to parenting roles. Promote respect for differences and co-construction of educational strategies.

Short description

This series of 8 weekly workshops of two hours involves group meetings where fathers in the first 1000 days share experiences and challenges related to parenting. Techniques include:

- Peer support and shared storytelling.
- Reflection on personal experiences and their impact on parenting styles.
- Discussions on gender roles and the emotional complexities of fatherhood.
- Activities focus on emotional regulation, communication, and co-parenting strategies.

Effectiveness

Fathers report feeling enriched and supported by the experience. Some participants continue to meet informally after the program ends, indicating strong group cohesion. The program helps reduce isolation among new fathers. Testimonials include: "I feel more confident as a father," and "I've learned to manage my frustrations better."

Key mechanisms of change:

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- Peer Support: Fathers benefit from sharing experiences with others in similar situations, reducing feelings of isolation.

- Focus on Emotional Regulation: Teaching fathers how to manage their emotions helps them respond more effectively to parenting challenges.

- Co-Parenting Strategies: Encouraging fathers to work collaboratively with their partners promotes healthier family dynamics.

- Non-Judgmental Environment: Creating a safe space where fathers feel comfortable sharing their struggles is key to the program's success.

- Ongoing Support: The option for participants to continue meeting informally after the program ends helps sustain the positive effects.

1.3.8. Cerchi di Condivisione (Talking Circles), Cerchio Degli Uomini, Italy

Main aims

Encourage self-reflection and personal growth among participants. Promote non-violent communication and emotional awareness. Challenge gender stereotypes and promote respectful relationships.

Short description

This ongoing workshop series involves weekly 2-hour group meetings for men aged 30 and above, particularly those who have experienced or are at risk of engaging in violent behaviors. Participants share personal experiences and reflect on their roles as men, partners, and fathers.

Techniques include:

- Storytelling and peer support.

- Role-playing and discussions on power dynamics and control. Activities to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes.

- The Duluth Model's "Power and Control Wheel" is used to help participants understand abusive dynamics.

Effectiveness

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Participants report increased self-awareness and improved relational skills. Some men who initially resisted the program later acknowledged its value in helping them manage emotions and avoid violence. The program fosters a sense of community and mutual support among participants. Testimonials include: "I've learned to listen without judging," and "I now understand how my actions affect others."

Key mechanisms of change:

- Storytelling: Sharing personal stories helps participants connect on a deeper level and fosters empathy.
- Role-Playing: Practicing non-violent communication in a controlled setting helps participants develop new skills.
- Focus on Gender Stereotypes: Challenging traditional gender roles helps participants rethink their behaviors and attitudes.
- Safe Space: Creating a non-judgmental environment where participants feel safe to share their experiences is crucial.
- Ongoing Participation: The program's open-ended nature allows participants to continue growing and learning over time.

1.3.9. Men in the climate crisis, MÄN, Sweden

Main aims

To discuss how masculinity norms affect the Earth's climate and ecosystem. The guide addresses how men's violence against women and nature are interconnected, which, in turn, is linked to norms, power and privileges. The guide also encourages men to contribute to a transition towards a sustainable world.

Short description

This series of workshops is four sessions that build on four sessions from a guide for reflective groups for men called "After #metoo". Every session lasts about 2 hours. They are preferably led by one person who facilitates the conversation and follows a specific structure so that everyone can participate in an open and safe way. The sessions are based on the method called the "small room" and the "big room" (more below). The small room focuses on personal experiences. Here we talk about what you as an

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individual have experienced – the close and personal stuff that has made an impact on you and your life. We allow ourselves to become vulnerable. We do not comment, question, or challenge other people's stories. We focus on being an open and nonjudgmental listener. We try to avoid discussing structures and theories – again, focus on yourself and your own experiences. Also try to note whenever you move over to saying something just to make yourself sound smart or someone who is knowledgeable. If you do, try to make your way back to the personal and close experiences and focus on how it feels.

The big room is a place where the big discussions can take place. We try to see ourselves in the bigger picture and our role in society. Here we can discuss theories and structural analyses and explore each other's thoughts and ideas. If we don't agree with one another, we can try to challenge what's been said and bring a new perspective on the subject. You're also free to be a problem fixer on issues such as how to change a society based on masculinity and to plan for the future. The sessions that make up this material are mostly based on the small room. On a number of occasions, we have seen the great impact and power that lies in these kinds of talks where the possibility of change is great. Important: We're all different individuals, and where we are in our process of change might vary. We all have a responsibility to clearly set our own boundaries on how much we want to share, and we should only share something when we're ready. This is a key thing for these kinds of sessions. So, try to view this method, and these sessions with the small room, as a suggested guideline for a certain kind of conversation.

Effectiveness

These workshops are powerful because they connect large societal issues to the personal level. Especially in the 'small room', the talk from the heart, it allows participants to transform their masculinity and reflect on how they can relate to such crises in a way that is empowering instead of defeating.

1.4.   Best Practices: Campaigns

1.4.1. 100% MEN (Facet na 100 PRO), Share the Care Poland

Extensive best practice campaign 1

Thematic area

Promotion of engaged fatherhood and its benefits for men, children, and partners.

MEN4DEM

Target group

Fathers and expectant fathers in Poland.

Target size

Mass.

Duration

Annually it is most active for one month in June, but its content is always available. Open-ended.

Main aims

The "Facet na 100 PRO" campaign (100% Men), organized annually by Share the Care Foundation in partnership with Gillette, aims to highlight the importance of fatherhood in the lives of children while emphasizing the personal benefits that engaged fatherhood brings to men themselves.

Short description

The campaign runs annually in June to mark Father's Day. The campaign seeks to break stereotypes and highlight the joy and fulfillment that engaged fatherhood brings. It promotes engaged fatherhood and its benefits for men, children, and partners. The target groups are fathers and expectant fathers in Poland.

Every edition has its leitmotiv. In 2022 it was "100% Man. How to Embrace Fatherhood to the Fullest.". In 2023 the focus was on promoting the new legal benefits for fathers – extra parental leave due to the implementation of the work-life balance directive in Poland. In 2024, the key message was "I am a 100% dad. Because I want to be." The campaign underscores that fatherhood is not an obligation but an opportunity to build deep emotional bonds with children. The 2025 edition, themed "100% Men. Real Stories," focuses on authentic, everyday experiences of fathers – acknowledging that fatherhood isn't always easy, but it's always meaningful. Gillette, the strategic partner, aligns the campaign with its mission of supporting men in feeling and looking good every day. The engagement of a men's brand strengthens the campaign.

Campaign Elements:

- Video Content: Interviews with fathers sharing personal stories.

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- Expert Articles: Insights on parenting and fatherhood.

- Landing Page: Centralized information about the campaign.

- Social Media Collaboration: Engaging with influencers and sharing authentic fatherhood experiences.

- Promoting PRO Employers: Highlighting companies that normalize and support fathers taking parental leave.

- Cooperation with Other NGOs: The campaign also invites organizations working for the benefit of men and boys to join the initiative as partners.

Effectiveness

The "Facet na 100 PRO" campaign is now in its fourth year and continues to attract widespread attention. Each year, the campaign generates significant engagement on social media, drawing interest from fathers, families, and companies. And this continues to grow each year.

- IMM Media Monitoring: 350 publications, reaching almost 3 million recipients.

- Landing Page (May/June): Active users: 18,000; page views: 30,000; total visits: 93,000.

- Estimated Content Reach with Promotion:
  YouTube Videos: Average 50,000 views per video.
  Meta (Facebook & Instagram): Average post reach: 60,000 views per post.

- The campaign contributes to shifting societal perceptions of fatherhood, promoting its importance for both children and men.

Transferability

The campaign model is highly transferable and could be successfully implemented in other countries.

Link to materials or website

https://teamrodzina.pl/facet-na-100pro/

Key mechanism of change

As Share the care writes the "Facet na 100 PRO" role models show democracy in the making. Seeing others doing things and seeing that they are different but have the same struggles creates a

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togetherness. They emphasize that a language of benefits is crucial in reaching men. It is not just about the tools which are used or the content, but how things are communicated. Therefore, the campaign has clear rules of language which reinforce that being in favor of working moms doesn't mean being against non-working moms or working dads and preventing use of polarizing language. They do show the data and do not hide it, but avoid reinforcing an us vs them situation, which always has losers. Showing that gender relations and democracy are more than a zero-sum game where one loses when one gains comes back repeatedly in gender justice organizations' work. It is a strong antidote against far-right narratives of men losing because of feminist change, or that emphasizes dominance because otherwise you are the dominated. Instead, it promotes equality and flourishing together. The avoidance of certain terminology and the use of '100% men' does set it apart from most other organizations who more clearly use gender and masculinity transforming language, but that also limits their impact in certain parts of the society.

Besides this positive messaging key mechanisms of this campaign are a well-funded and thought-out campaign with a variety of interventions that can reach large and broad audiences, including less progressive parts of society. They actively search for cooperation with a broad range of organizations, including conservative ones, and companies which enhance their reach. Plus, the many platforms of their campaign add to the visibility. Lastly their use of a specific theme, in this case the commonly used fatherhood, to reach parts of the population that otherwise wouldn't be easily reached and given a chance to grow is the final aspect of their success in achieving widespread success.

1.4.2. A New Gender Era. Getting rid of gender stereotypes, Gender Alliance, Greece

Main aims

To deconstruct gender stereotypes and reconstruct new versions of masculinity and femininity, enhancing visibility and awareness through media and social media engagement.

Short description

This is an online campaign of two videos of about one minute created during a CERV project in 2022-2023 in collaboration with the Hellenic League of Human Rights. The campaign, titled "A New Gender Era | Getting Rid of Gender Stereotypes," aimed to highlight the burden of gender stereotypes on both

men and women in a relatable and humorous way. As such its thematic areas are prevention work, raising awareness and deconstructing gender stereotypes. It is aimed at general audiences, with a focus on social media users and media consumers. The intervention focused on social media outreach and media engagement to maximize visibility. To increase engagement, we developed the campaign concept but chose to involve a young director and young, recognizable actors. The campaign continues to be used as an educational tool in workshops, with educators and parents encouraged to share and discuss the videos with children.

Effectiveness

The campaign achieved significant outreach, going viral on social media. The two videos together accumulated a total of 25,000 views on Instagram and 18,000 views on YouTube. They were reposted by major gender equality influencer accounts, further amplifying their reach. The videos continue to be used as educational material in workshops, contributing to ongoing awareness efforts.

1.4.3. Männer Gegen Rechts/Men Against the Right Wing, Federal Forum for Men, Germany

Main aims

Increasing the visibility of men in the fight against right-wing extremism. Promoting diversity, solidarity and gender equality. Redefining masculinity. Strengthening democracy and a pluralistic society.

Short description

This campaign offers the following opportunities for action: to stand up for the preservation of a pluralistic society, democracy and against right-wing extremism. The audience (especially men) are asked to:

- Take stance, using a social media post Sharepic generator: maenner-gegen-rechts.de/mach-dich-stark - share and like posts on the Instagram channel www.instagram.com/maennergegenrechts/ and support the initiative on social media and activate their environment;

- 'Make a stand, man!': Using this motto, the initiative invites men* to use positive images of masculinity on Instagram to peacefully and respectfully stand up for an open, supportive society in where hate and hate speech do not have the upper hand. Hashtag: #MachDichStarkMann.

- Posts and statements on Instagram in which @maennergegenrechts is tagged will be amplified via the initiative's channel. It is aims to involve men but to reach broader audiences through Social Media networks and lasted for some months.

Effectiveness

3000 followers on Instagram, 450 active supporters.

Key mechanisms of change

More equal and caring forms of masculinity need a democratic environment; in fact, we can call "gender democracy" the political basis for any transformative, equality-oriented masculinity. This is why the threat of the right wing is a huge one: It connects anti-democratic politics with traditionalist, anti-equal and violent ways of being a man. The initiative aims to show that men do not have to be "real men" in the ideal of the right wing: dominant, violent, thinking of themselves as "superior". Thus, it serves as a testimonial for gender equality, various democratic and caring ways to be a man – and for democracy as a whole.

1.4.4. "Together against Sexism"/Bündnis "Gemeinsam Gegen Sexismus" [BFM], Federal Forum for Men Germany participates as network member

Extensive best practice campaign 2

Thematic area

The alliance 'Together against sexism' is dedicated to preventing and combating sexism and sexual harassment in all areas of society. It promotes a cultural change in society towards more equality, respect and diversity.

Target group

Organizations, companies, public institutions, associations and civil society actors who want to actively combat sexism and sexual harassment.

Target size

Mass.

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Duration

Open-ended.

Main aims

The alliance pursues the goal of making sexism and sexual harassment visible, preventing it and putting an end to it. It focuses on the development and implementation of effective measures to promote a respectful and non-discriminatory society. A particular focus is placed on the areas of the world of work, public spaces, culture and the media. The aim is to initiate structural changes and establish sustainable solutions by working together with various stakeholders.

Short description

The alliance 'Together against sexism' is dedicated to preventing and combating sexism and sexual harassment in all areas of society. It promotes a cultural change in society towards more equality, respect and diversity. It is a mass campaign to involve organizations, companies, public institutions, associations and civil society actors who want to actively combat sexism and sexual harassment. BFM is a member of the alliance initiated and led by EAF Berlin; practically, we support the network by contributing input and knowledge on men and masculinities, allyship/men as agents of change etc. Founded in February 2023 under the patronage of the then Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Lisa Paus, the alliance brings together over 800 signatories from various areas of society. By signing the 'Joint Declaration against Sexism and Sexual Harassment', participating organizations commit to concrete measures against discrimination. The alliance offers a wide range of support services such as network meetings, specialist forums and a free print-on-demand exhibition to raise awareness. Practical materials, definitions and a glossary on sexism and discrimination are also provided to help with the implementation of anti-sexism strategies. By sharing examples of good practice, the alliance promotes the transfer of knowledge and the further development of effective measures. BFM and other organizations and single experts also contribute to discussions on toxic masculinity and transformation, e.g. in inputs or workshop units.

Effectiveness

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The broad participation of over 800 organizations, including well-known companies and institutions, demonstrates the high relevance and effectiveness of the alliance. Practical materials and events enable an effective transfer of knowledge. The provision of free resources such as the print-on-demand exhibition increases accessibility and promotes the efficient implementation of anti-sexism measures. The continuous expansion of the network contributes to the sustainable anchoring of the alliance's goals in various areas of society.

The central mechanisms of the alliance are the promotion of awareness-raising, the development of action competence and the establishment of binding standards against sexism. Through a combination of political support, practice-orientated resources and a strong network, the aim is to achieve cultural change at workplaces and in public spaces. The active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders enables a multi-perspective approach to problem-solving.

Transferability

Alliances as an idea are very transferable and cooperation with so many organizations on so many levels is powerful.

Link to materials or website

https://www.eaf-berlin.de/en/project/the-together-against-sexism-alliance

Key mechanism of change

One key mechanism is the mainstreaming of gender injustices and the necessity to involve issues of masculinity in this. By having so many organizations sign it gives a powerful message to the outside but also stimulates putting these issues centrally within each organization and its individual members. In this sense it overlaps with the Ambassador and Peer network by Emancipator, the Gender Alliance's A new Gender Era and the other campaign by the Federal Forum 'Manner Gegen Rechts'. Repeated online boosting, normalization of the message of gender transformation and speaking out on an individual, organizational and institutional level are keys to changing towards more democratic masculinities.

1.4.5. Men's Counselling Network & Guideline Brochure: "Men Well Advised", Federal Forum for Men, Germany

14/7/2025

MEN4DEM

Main aims

The men's counselling network bundles counselling services that specialize in the concerns and conflicts of boys, men and fathers. It shows directions for men and the broader public about where to find help.

Short description

This is a campaign to build a network of connecting boys and men with needs to professionals in that area. It is a platform and information about counselling services for boys, men and fathers on psychological/emotional issues, partnership/marriage/family, fatherhood and work-life balance, violence prevention/intervention and other topics. It connects men, boys, fathers, and the broader public to specialists and counsellors (to fill in their relevant counselling service). It is an open-ended campaign that now reaches hundreds of professionals talking to thousands of people on a mostly individual basis.

Searching and finding professional support for emotional or life-related problems can be tough: It is not expected from boys and men to be in need. Shame is often in the way. A specialization in boys' or men's needs can be rare to find – especially in remote areas. In 2019, the BFM launched the Federal Men's counselling Network online, supported by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth. Since then, it has been successively expanded and now it comprises many services. These offer advice on issues such as health, domestic violence, separation and divorce, fatherhood, job loss etc. If possible, BFM aims at male-sensitive advisors who reflect on masculinity and possible tensions between role models, stereotypes, expectations and individuality. The portal features an interactive map showing the regional support services that can be found quickly using a location and topic search. The portal is accompanied by two main measures: 1) The brochure "Men Well Advised" in German and English, online and in print. It gives an overview of the topic of men's counselling, provides practical examples and contains interviews with experts. 2) The annual "Network Conference on Men's Counselling". It brings together professionals from men's counselling, men's work and related fields. The aims are to exchange practical experiences, challenges and innovative approaches as well as the professional, political and structural development of men's counselling. Recent topics were for example gender-reflective work with boys, counselling on 'honor-based oppression', men in prison, telephone counselling, care work or advice for fathers on parental allowance and parental leave.

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Effectiveness

- It enlarged boys' and men's scope of action beyond masculinity stereotypes, in seeking help and showing vulnerabilities.

- This does not only happen on an individual level of the help-seeker, but also on a public level by the visibility of the Männerberatungsnetz. Thus, it is clearly a public alternative to misogynist or manosphere-based options.

- It can release boys and men from performance pressure and thus contribute to (self-)caring masculinities.

- It can, even more directly, help reduce problems that can lead to toxic, even violent or abusive behavior.

- Men's Counselling Network comprises more than 400 services in the German-speaking countries. In 2024, the men's counselling network reached a total of 32,500 visits. Compared to the previous year 2023 (22,000 visits), the number of visits increased by 47.8%.

1.4.6. Ambassadors and Peer network, Emancipator, the Netherlands

Main aims

Main aims of this network are having men and everyone speak out publicly in favor of transforming masculinity and men's role in feminism and equality to mainstream this issue. This also serves as representation of healthier masculinities and motivation for other people, especially men, to feel empowered and speak out. It also helps us stay connected with people.

Short description

The ambassador and peer network of Emancipator is a two-tier mode of supporting our message that contributes to a strong network and the mainstreaming of transforming gender and masculinities. It is focused on people, especially men, who support our message of gender transformation and healthier masculinities. There are about 250 people who support our message in this way as ambassadors and a couple of dozen peers. Its duration is unlimited.

As ambassador you are featured with a photo and short text on our website, and you speak out in favor of our message. The second, more active, tier is that of Peer. As peer you are part of a pool of

volunteers that help Emancipator give workshops (mostly in high schools and to students) and other possible activities. The peer tier is for people that support our message and have the time/energy/capacity to prioritize helping Emancipator do its activities.

Partly overlapping with these networks Emancipator ran a 'What kind of man do you want to be?' campaign in which a picture and quote of a new man was posted for 200 days straight on our social media. This created a powerful picture of how men both struggle with many similar things as well as emphasizing how different men and masculinities can be, thus undermining the idea of 'the man' and the real man'. These different types of having men connected to the organization more passively, more actively and in an activated campaign are recommendable for activating people, engaging them with your organization and thus creating larger lasting influence, mainstreaming transforming masculinities and undermining strict norms of masculinity in a visible, personal and diverse way.

Effectiveness

It is good to have several ways with different thresholds to have people support your message. Especially our peer network keeps people engaged with us, aids us and makes sure that the peers continue their journey with their own and the spread of our message of masculinity. But it remains a challenge on how to continuously engage people, have people speak out, especially once they are in a passive 'Ambassador' role. We did also translate that into a social media campaign 'what kind of man do I want to be' which was more activating, but it remains a search on how to engage with interested people. The key mechanism of change is connecting people actively to live out our message in their lives and to create positive representations of more caring masculinities.

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