

## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

# Study. International comparison in masculinity policies. 2022

The study “**INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF MASCULINITY POLICIES**” was promoted and financed by the Government Delegation against Gender-Based Violence and carried out by the Cepaim Foundation.

The Government Delegation against Gender-Based Violence, by virtue of the recommendations of different international and national bodies, and in response to the growing demand for innovative strategies in the face of the persistence of violence against women, recognises the need to make men visible as an objective of public policy for the prevention and eradication of violence against women, developing projects for the promotion of alternative and non-violent masculinity.

The general objective of the study was **to identify success stories and to gather proposals that would allow the design of public policies in line with the Spanish reality**. More specifically, this study has tried to:

- Study **in depth the correlation between models of masculinity and violence against women**.
- Arrive at **successful models** and identify possible obstacles to the implementation of these programmes.
- Carry out an **analysis of the international regulatory framework** in order to learn about the recommendations of international organisations on the introduction of equality policies aimed at men in the prevention and fight against gender-based violence.
- Submit the state of affairs regarding the relationship between public equality policies and men.
- Analyse the place of **men in equality policies** to date in Spain.
- **Review existing international and national masculinity programmes and policies**, preferably developed by public administrations.
- **Identify priority areas and themes for intervention** within the field of prevention of male violence.
- Submit **recommendations for the development of alternative masculinity programmes and policies** in Spain.
- **Address the main discussion points** surrounding the issue and provide a glimpse into future research.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, several qualitative social research techniques were used: the semi-structured interview,



the **triangle group** and the **discussion group**. Experts (16 men and 14 women) from different parts of the world participated.

The following is a summary of the main findings, but first a few key ideas are presented that encapsulate the key messages emerging from this study:

The meaning of masculinity and the role of men changes over time. The analysis of these changes, which must take place not only at the individual level but also at the structural level, is based on the reality of male diversity. The equality policies involved in social transformation face a challenge when it comes to promoting this change in men and in the social meaning of masculinity, but now is the time for action and for transferring internationally learned lessons and recommendations to Spain. There is evidence that violence against women can be prevented and, to this end, it is necessary to consolidate an equality strategy that focuses on men, and that is equipped with technical and economic resources.

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

**1. Persistent inequality and violence against women.** Although Spain is at the forefront in terms of the development of public policies to promote the eradication of violence suffered by women just for being women, there are still numerous indicators and analyses that report on a reality that continues to be both the cause and consequence of persistent structural inequality between women and men. Although the fact that men cause this amount of harm is one of the fundamental reasons to focus on men when designing strategies to prevent male violence, there is another reason that must also be considered and taken into account when designing strategies to prevent violence against women: **many men can play an important role by getting involved in preventing violence against women.**

**2. Men's reactions and change.** The changing and advancing status of women has always provoked all kinds of reactions. Men take different positions on these changes: from those who support them wholeheartedly and join social movements for equality, to those who interpret women's progress towards equality as a threat. The so-called "crisis of masculinity" can be channelled towards equality and feminism or towards more violence and machismo. However, it is not enough to leave it to men to make the necessary changes, not least because the privileges they hold are structural. While it is true that most of the changes that have taken place in men have been driven by the feminist movement and by changes in women themselves, more needs to be done, and public administration leadership is needed to homogenise approaches, terminology and methodologies on what is meant by work on men and masculinity, which entails the investment of public money. Just as it is said that it is difficult to get away from gender-based violence without help, it must

be said that it is difficult to give up male privilege through mere acts of goodwill. This leads us to think that strategies for change in men and masculinity cannot only involve changes in the individual sphere and/or in men's own decisions, but also involve the political transformation of the social and institutional structures that make it possible for these privileges to be maintained.

**3. There are previous examples in Spain of programmes on men and masculinity from public administrations.** Although in general terms equality policies in Spain have not explicitly mentioned intervention with/towards men, this has not prevented the development of some initiatives and programmes, mainly at local and regional level. Different initiatives have been developed that have focused on men and on the transformation of ideas and practices around hegemonic masculinity, despite the fact that not all of them have been cohesive and few have been consolidated within strategies for equality. All of these undoubtedly constitute a starting point that can help the development of other initiatives in the immediate future, which require a certain degree of organisation so that public investment in this type of resources is effective and has a clear focus on feminist transformation.

**4. Patriarchal masculinity and violence as a social problem.** Different studies have shown that current, multi-causal explanations of violence against women demonstrate that the notion of masculinity (specifically, the traditional male role that shapes hegemonic masculinity) is a key element in the genesis of this violence. There is increasing analysis and evidence that much of the violence that exists is rooted in the way men are socialised. However, the relationship between masculinity and violence is not only behind the violence suffered by women, but also behind the violence that occurs between men themselves. Male violence can be viewed as a continuum, which, given the complex framework of patriarchal relationships, must be addressed on all fronts.

**5. Applying an intersectional approach.** Intersectionality is based on the basic premise that social inequalities cannot be understood from a single explanatory framework (gender, race, class...) and that the interrelationship between them must be considered in order to understand how they are constructed. Although intersectionality is a concept and an analytical tool that has been used from the beginning to refer to women, it is also useful to explain the diversity of men's experiences and specific situations, and thus to show that not all men are situated in the same place within the social structure. It is a view that can help explain, for example, why men from other (non-majority or hegemonic) cultures do not enjoy the same benefits and privileges as white men within the patriarchy. It is important, therefore, to grasp social complexity from a multidisciplinary perspective, pointing to plural power positions of both oppression and privilege within the social structure. This analysis allows us to think about men's different positions and gender hierarchies, which has a major impact on the formulation of interventions and policies.

**6. The costs of masculinity for men.** There is a statistical over-representation of

men in many areas that demonstrate the negative impact that certain socially construction gender roles have on men that promote risky behaviour, especially regarding their physical and mental health. These costs of masculinity, which can be seen as a kind of B-side of the privileges they hold, must be addressed by public policies because it also entails working towards equality, as long as this objective is made explicit and is done from a feminist perspective.

**7. International political agendas.** Different top-level international bodies, such as the United Nations and the European institutions, are progressively pointing out the need to take specific account of men's role in equality, as well as to address their specific needs and responsibilities. The latest European strategies on equality place special emphasis on working with men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence. However, this global agenda for men and boys is still being implemented in a partial and limited way: in some cases, the focus on masculinity is beginning to be incorporated into state agendas, in the form of plans and strategies for equality and for the prevention of male violence, while in other places political action is more localised at the provincial or local level.

**8. Men's responsibility.** For the dimension of social change that feminism proposes and promotes, it is necessary to count on everyone, which is why it is essential to awaken men's interest in the values and practices of this social movement that has more than three centuries of history. But this requires understanding men's experiences, their circumstances and vulnerabilities from a gender perspective, while at the same time appealing to their responsibility as human beings in building a better society. Men must stop being seen only as the cause of the problem and instead be seen also as part of the solution.

**9. State of play on public policies and masculinity.** There is a clear consensus in the expert literature on what public policies focused on change for men should look like. The first step requires the identification of actors, awareness raising and political will. Equality policies for men must be **relational and inclusive, intersectional, capable of linking the personal and the political, adaptive in the long term, with sufficient ongoing funding and focus on men's responsibility.** Specific strategies to prevent gender-based violence involving men require a feminist agenda to be maintained, working in alliance with women's associations, linking gender justice with other forms of justice and politicising men and masculinity. It is also necessary to increase male participation in the debate on equality-related policies, to find a balance in the prioritisation of actions aimed at men and to focus on tackling problems that particularly affect men.

**10. Men and masculinity in equality policies in Spain.** Although, historically, there have not been many specific measures formulated specifically by equality policies to promote change in men, some changes are beginning to take place, and it is increasingly evident that without a change in men, it will not be possible to achieve equality between men and women. To date, the few measures that have been put forward with respect to equality plans have focused on areas of

there is an absence of discourse on the relationship between the costs of masculinity for men and their privileges as a social group, as well as there being a need for homogenisation of terminology, discourse and approaches.

**11. International experiences.** One of the conclusions of this study is to have found the enormous amount of information, experiences and proposals that exist on the subject, and whose exponential growth in recent years demonstrates a growing social interest in the subject, as well as a certain consensus among the people and the literature consulted on how to proceed from a public policy point of view. But at the same time, it is a theoretically and academically emerging issue, based on a discourse that is not well formalised, where the diversity of concepts, contexts and criteria make it difficult to standardise and compare for the purpose of providing a complete and systematic overview. A review of existing programmes and policies at the international level shows a wide range of experiences that, to a greater or lesser extent, address masculinity from a transformative approach, seeking to involve men and boys in strategies for equality and the eradication of violence, and that address specific needs, especially in the field of health. The initiatives and experiences presented in this study are very different in nature, with different institutional settings and with very different manifestations in the form of laws, plans, programmes, initiatives and campaigns of all kinds. Initiatives and programmes are being developed on all continents, with a focus on boys and men, to prevent violence against women, from which interesting references can be drawn that can be adapted to the Spanish reality.

**12. Social intervention with men from a gender perspective.** The literature reviewed indicates the inclusion of men in eradication strategies for the prevention of gender-based violence (men as perpetrators and accomplices), and involve a transverse approach and the application of a gender perspective to other general or sectoral policies. Just as there is a consensus that in order to work on the prevention of gender-based violence with women, work must be done on equality and that this should not be limited to what equality bodies or specialised entities do, the same approach should be taken in the case of men. Work with men must take a dual-strategy approach, i.e. specific and transverse.

**13. Gender mainstreaming.** Gender mainstreaming is not easy to implement and has hardly taken place at all in terms of working with men and masculinity, even though a structural transformation such as the one required necessitates changes in laws, institutions, social norms, personal relationships and individuals, requiring work on all fronts and at all levels. Even when the definition of gender mainstreaming includes the application of the gender perspective to men, it seems that it has not materialised in equality policies in Spain, whether specific or transversal. It is also true however that in recent years there have been signs of a change in trend: several laws and equality plans in some Autonomous Communities are beginning to explicitly name men and to allocate public resources to the development of programmes and initiatives.



**14. Institutional embedding of masculinity policies.** The existence of a legal and juridical framework is a necessary condition for the development of a systematic, general and transversal policy with the necessary continuity to guarantee its social relevance. In this respect, even though policies on men and masculinity must be specific in order to have the necessary visibility and specialisation, it should be noted that one of the majority opinions among experts and in the literature consulted is the need to be part of the same normative, institutional and programmatic framework that has been designed for equality policies. The analysis of different international experiences shows a variety in the degree of institutionalisation of public policies and initiatives on men and masculinity. In countries with a constitutionalist culture similar to Spain's, the existence of a legal and juridical framework is a necessary condition for the development of a systematic, general and transversal policy with the necessary continuity to guarantee its social relevance. This is something that, if we really want to incorporate the application of a gender perspective to intervention with men and the transformation of masculinity, will need to end up (or start) being taken on board at the state level, with the inclusion of specific measures in the reform of the laws on equality and male violence, as well as in future state plans and strategies.

**15. Primary and secondary prevention of violence by men towards women.** Violence can be prevented. The model presented in this study sets out a process of intervention that includes the promotion of equality, primary prevention aimed at avoiding and detecting the onset of violence, secondary prevention considered as the response aimed at addressing the immediate risk or escalation of violence, and tertiary prevention as a response to the consequences of violence and the avoidance of its recurrence. Beyond primary prevention, the level of intervention with men, where most of the work remains to be done, is undoubtedly that of secondary prevention, understood as that which takes place with men after the onset of violence. There is a lack of institutional response to these situations where there is still no conviction (and often not even a complaint) but, nevertheless, the situation is known about through the victims, because they demand help for themselves or even for their partners, or because, more rarely, it is the perpetrator himself who asks for help because of a sincere awareness in which the threat of abandonment by the partner, or social pressure from the environment, always plays a large part. There is also knowledge of the situation of violence because there are care professionals in the social protection and promotion systems (Health, Education, Social Services) who are aware of the situation and are adequately trained to detect the need and translate it into demand. In addition to universal primary prevention measures based on the promotion of equality, such as coeducation and education in the values of equality for young people and boys, or sex education, specific primary prevention measures must be developed for male violence aimed selectively at men and situations in which there is a specific risk, such as men with addiction problems, mental health, situations of acrimonious separation, users of personal contact networks, consumers of pornography or prostitution, grassroots sports, video games, etc. of which the study collects several examples of campaigns, programmes and initiatives.

**16. Working with male abusers.** Working with male perpetrators is one of the traditional fields of intervention with men in the field of gender-based violence, both from within the public administration and NGOs. However, the effectiveness of such programmes has always been questioned. Given that all men participate in a macho culture that is at the root of violence against women, much effort must be put into primary and secondary prevention, although it is also true that programmes with abusers must meet at least minimum standards: ensuring the safety and risk assessment of victims as a fundamental priority; adequate training of trainers; adequate assessment of abusers at the time of admission and an emphasis on group formats. On the road between prevention and intervention with men who perpetrate violence, there are several resources that, in Spain, have been in operation for some time, and that should be promoted as they propose interventions in the initial phases of abuse (or even when it has not yet occurred, but where there are indications). Most of the time social professionals report that they do not know where to refer men who could be rehabilitated if intervention is sought at the right time.

**17. Priority areas and themes for intervention.** Given that gender permeates almost all dimensions of the subject, and therefore of men, there are a multitude of spaces and areas where it is possible to work with men on equality and the prevention of violence. The first premise in relation to the areas in which it is possible to intervene and the issues that need to be addressed is that, when formulating violence prevention strategies, it is necessary to take into account the attitude towards equality and violence of the target audience: it will not be the same approach to intervene with openly sexist men with anti-feminist attitudes as with those who have doubts or are curious about what feminism is. In fact, with regard to awareness raising campaigns, the study takes up the idea of tailoring messages and strategies to a certain profile of men and not talking about men “in general” as this does not seem to be a very effective strategy. On the other hand, it is essential to take into account men's experiences as a moment of opportunity for change.

**The priority areas are:** education (formal and non-formal); sport; political parties; the work environment; military and security forces; judiciary; and virtual spaces. In terms of themes, the experiences collected are linked to: sexuality and the emotional world; prostitution and pornography; education in equality; care; health and risk behaviour; violence; feminism; research.

**18. Methodological approach to costs and privileges.** Some believe that in order to attract men to egalitarian practices and feminism, it is necessary to show them how the patriarchal system, as a structure of social organisation, also harms them as well. In this type of strategy, the focus is on explaining to them the costs of their privileges or *patriarchal dividends* and how these constrain them (as well as benefit them).

On the other hand, there are those who argue that men must join the road to equality out of conviction, out of an awakening of their conscience, out of social justice and out of empathy for women. Experts in the field point to the need to work both from a cost approach and by reflecting on and dismantling privileges. Indeed, work on the costs of masculinity for men is often seen as a possible gateway to talking about equality and it must be possible to relate them to the benefits they obtain from the system as a result of behaving in a certain way. Whether to start from one place (costs) or the other (privileges) will depend on many factors: profile of the men, leaders, space, type of resource, type of initial demand, etc.

**19. Evaluation and accountability.** All the expert literature reviewed insists on the need for policies and programmes on men and masculinity to be rigorously evaluated. However, the task of evaluation is never easy and a fundamental requirement for success is to be clear from the outset about the objective of the intervention or policy formulated. The available evidence is inconclusive on men's behavioural changes, which are more complex to elicit and to measure. There is consensus on the need to carry out more experimental formulation studies with long-term follow-up and longitudinal studies. It will also be relevant to assess possible unintended and/or undesired effects of the interventions, and the evaluation will not only try to measure the magnitude of change for men but also the impact that it has on women. On the other hand, accountability, as a key principle of governance in democratic systems, must be standard practice in all policies and investment in men and masculinity. Furthermore, it is also important to hold men accountable for their complicity (explicit and implicit) in systems and practices of gender inequality. This requires creating spaces and capacity to reflect on personal attitudes and behaviours as well as on institutional policies and processes, and to recognise how these serve to disempower women.

**20. Obstacles, resistance and opportunities.** While the greatest obstacle to the success of masculinity-focused policies is men's own lack of interest in change, there are sectors of the feminist movement that also express misgivings about certain types of masculinity-focused policies, since they suspect, for example, that the effectiveness of investing in male involvement programmes does not demand or provide evidence of success. It is also frowned upon that some of these policies and programmes are supported by men who do not promote women's leadership, and sometimes they result in resources and priorities going to men's (and not women's) needs. In addition, there is a clear fear among many women that men are not really willing to give up their male privileges. These logical concerns are putting the spotlight on who does what and how it is done, who leads the men's movement for equality, who is working with men, who these men are, under what evaluation/supervision they intervene and what objective they pursue, among other questions. On the other hand, there is a difficult contradiction between trying to reach more men and not giving too much visibility and prominence to the work being done. It seems that the middle ground would be between centrality and discretion. However, despite resistance and difficulties, there is also moments that present opportunities: there is a whole generation of men who relate to the young protagonists of Fourth Wave Feminism and who are necessarily calling such matters into question.



In fact, we are witnessing an increased interest in participating in men's groups, attending conferences or the purchasing of books on the subject.

Finally, the study offers a series of **recommendations and proposals** that can be implemented:

- The existence of a competent body which, within the framework of equality policies, coordinates and ensures compliance with the basic principles outlined here and which are integrated into a strategy to combat male violence and promote equality with a focus on men.
- The participation of feminist women in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies on men and masculinity.
- Be accountable to the feminist movement and civil society, explaining the objectives and methodologies proposed for the work on men and masculinity.
- The importance of the role of academia in developing critical studies of masculinity from a feminist approach in order to be involved in the development of diagnoses and research that serve as a basis for the design of public policies. There is a need for diagnostics and data that provide detailed information on the costs of violent masculinity and the privileges held by men that derive from the patriarchal system.
- Policies on masculinity and the programmes and projects that derive from them must be rigorously evaluated, with specific budgets.
- Key actors and frontline professionals, particularly in social services, health and education systems, need to be trained in gender, equality and masculinity.
- Support NGOs and civil society organisations to work for change in men by incorporating a gender perspective and a critical analysis of patriarchal masculinity that builds expertise in the field so that good practices can be transferred.
- In the workplace, Equality Plans are a favourable space for incorporating measures specifically aimed at men, especially on issues such as the prevention of sexual harassment and occupational hazards. Partnerships with the private sector and the business world are needed in order to involve them in the scope of the proposed change.
- The entire formal education system, as well as non-formal education spaces and sport, are optimal spaces to reach the youngest populations where egalitarian relationships and values of community, care and cooperation are fostered.
- Reflection on men and masculinities must be incorporated into all training spaces that are already slowly introducing content on the gender perspective (e.g. the judiciary, security forces, etc.), but which tend to avoid analysis and intervention with men.
- Methodological approaches to intervention with men must combine work on privilege with work on the costs of masculinity for men themselves, as well as work involving the community. Strategies must take into account that not all men are equal and are not at the same starting point in terms of equality and violence.
- Support and strengthen grassroots movements that, with a critical perspective, promote a rethinking of masculinity and the involvement of men in the eradication of violence against women.