



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

**The role of men and boys
in advancing gender
equality and breaking
gender stereotypes**
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Discussion paper – Austria



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The role of men and boys in advancing gender equality: Prevention measures of male violence against women

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1. Main elements of selected measures to prevent male violence against women

1.1 Gender-based violence in Austria: Background and context

Violence against women is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality, and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies as EIGE, the European Institute for Gender Equality, states on its [website under the topic](#) “Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of their gender. Both women and men experience gender-based violence but the majority of victims are women and girls”, while the perpetrators are mainly men. Also the so-called [Istanbul Convention](#) (Council of Europe, Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) frames gender-based violence and violence against women as a gendered act which is a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women. The Istanbul Convention is the benchmark for international legislation on tackling gender-based violence. Talking about violence against women as “gender-based” is important as it highlights the fact that many forms of violence against women are rooted in power inequalities between women and men and an image of patriarch-hegemonic masculinity, which is positioned as the opposite of caring masculinity.

Like almost all Member States of the European Union also Austria has been working – in close co-operation with Eurostat – on a new data base for having accurate data about the scope of gender-based violence in Austria. The EU-GBV (Gender Based Violence) survey implementation takes place over the 2020-2023 period (wave 2021) based on national timetables. In 2022 data collection was finalised and data validated for the first seven Member States (BG, FR, LV, LT, NL, AT, SI) and the first initial results were disseminated on the [Eurostat website](#). In depth analyses and full dissemination of the results is planned for the first half of 2024.

Statistics Austria was commissioned by Eurostat and the Federal Chancellery of Austria to work on the survey „Gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence“. The [results of the first survey](#) were published in November

2022. The survey demonstrates the prevalence of violence against women in their adult lifetime in and outside of intimate relationships, stalking, sexual harassment at work and violence in childhood. This makes this survey an important source in providing information on victims of violence and is a valuable supplement to judicial crime statistics, which provide information about convictions, and to police crime statistics.

The table below reveals that 27% of women in Austria experienced non-partner violence (physical and/or sexual violence), 16% intimate partner violence (physical and/or sexual violence by a partner), 35% physical violence and/or sexual violence by a current partner, former partner or non-partner (since the age of 15). Additionally, stalking was experienced by 22% and sexual harassment at work by 27% of women.

Table 1: Figures from the survey „Gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence”; Statistics Austria 2022

Characteristics	Population	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency in %
Intimate partner violence (physical violence, sexual violence)	3 130 986	513 934	16.41
Non-partner violence (physical violence, sexual violence)	3 245 166	863 505	26.61
Stalking	3 245 166	709 958	21.88
Sexual harassment at work	2 770 707	736 613	26.59
Sexual violence in childhood before the age of 15	3 245 166	228 910	7.05
Physical violence by current partner, former partner or non-partner (since the age of 15)	3 245 166	761 786	23.47
Sexual violence by current partner, former partner or non-partner (since the age of 15)	3 245 166	770 716	23.75
Physical violence and/or sexual violence by current partner, former partner or non-partner (since the age of 15)	3 245 166	1 119 934	34.51
Threats by current partner, former partner or non-partner (since the age of 15)	3 245 166	495 016	15.25

Women’s shelters were additionally alarmed by the fact that according to a study (FRA 2014) only one out of five women knows where to ask for help after having experienced violence.

Due to the introduction of the Protection against Violence Act in 1997, Austria has gained the status of an international role model in the field of protection against and

prevention of violence against women (Schwarz-Schlöglmann, 2017). The law obliges the police to evict perpetrators from their homes in order to protect a person at risk, and to issue a barring order that forbids them to return to the home of the potential victim. After 1997, several other regulations were adopted. The third Protection against Violence Act (BKA, 2019) tightened several laws (Standke-Erdmann, Gassner & Rosenberger 2020).

Safe housing for victims is crucial for dealing with domestic violence. The first women's shelter in Austria was opened in Vienna on 1 November 1978. There are now 30 women's shelters in Austria. 26 of the 30 women's shelters are considered autonomous, 15 of them are networked in the Association of Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters (AÖF). Eleven women's shelters are members of the Association of Austrian Women's Shelters. Problems exist in the number of places and in the regional provision of services, especially in rural regions. Services for groups with special needs (e.g. immigrant women, refugees) are often lacking. There also exists a problem with financing, with most women's shelters having to struggle to fund their activities. In 1997, the national women's helpline was established.

In Austria we are facing a situation with high numbers of femicides in the last years. According to police crime statistics on female homicides, 29 women were murdered in 2021 and 30 women in 2022, often by their (ex-)partners or other male family members. Domestic violence affects women disproportionately high.

Protection against violence thus was defined as a focus of women's policy for 2022. For example, the centres for the protection against violence have been strengthened financially. Five million euros in additional funds were available for this purpose in 2022: The budget for women and gender equality was increased from 14.65 million in 2021 to 18.4 million in 2022. The federal government has committed itself to strengthening the protection against violence and to far-reaching measures for the prevention of violence. Experts in the field criticise that this budget sum is still far too less to guarantee sufficient protection of women, but recognise that in recent years there has been a greater focus on supporting women and measures stopping violence against women.

The other side of the same coin is working with men to prevent violence and/or to combat violence against women. Both approaches should be part of a comprehensive national policy or strategy, as e.g. Hester & Lilley (2014) suggest in accordance with the above mentioned Istanbul Convention. It embeds such programmes in a wider strategy to prevent violence against women and requires states to invest in programmes against domestic violence involving perpetrators and sex offenders (Article 16, Preventive intervention and treatment programmes). Work with male perpetrators of domestic violence and sexual assault can contribute to a wider process of cultural and political change towards abolishing gender hierarchies, gendered violence and gender discrimination as well as other forms of personal and structural violence and discrimination. It is pointed out that a shift of gender stereotypes and hierarchies are important preventive strategies that have to include men mainly. Thus, the Istanbul Convention provides a legal framework for

establishing and supporting men's work to prevent violence and to work with perpetrators to end violence against women.

It must be stated that when it comes to working with men in this respect, Austria has a pioneering role throughout the European Union, as it can look back on a history of more than 30 years. Despite this tradition, it should be emphasised that counselling centres or organisations working with men are distributed rather sporadically in different regions and have acted with little strategic coordination. Some of them are having confessional background, others have been funded by municipalities and federal states and are organised as NGOs. It was not until 2015 that an umbrella organisation for men's, boys' and fathers' work in Austria (DMÖ) was founded, creating a new organisational form and laying the foundation for an overarching approach. The umbrella organisation was developed by committed representatives of men's and boys' work and masculinity research and opened its doors in January 2016 with an official founding meeting and press conference in Vienna. It should be emphasised that the DMÖ has explicitly laid down the goal of gender equality in its statutes; the work with boys, men and perpetrators must always be done in the sense of promoting gender equality and protecting victims.

With the foundation of the umbrella organisation and the fact that working with men and boys to combat gender stereotypes and violence has become an important goal of the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs' efforts in recent years, new areas can now be opened up. In Austria, the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, among others, promotes men's work and, in cooperation with the DMÖ – i.e. the umbrella organisation – is now funding more men-specific approaches to break down existing gender stereotypes and to combat violence through prevention work and counselling for men. While counselling on violence has been the central topic of the men's counselling centres since their establishment and the topic of integration has been increasingly taken up in recent years, the focus on Caring Masculinities is going to be intensified in the coming years.

The Ministry funds new focal points of violence prevention work with boys and men as well as various approaches so that another form of masculinity – a positive caring concept – can enter the public discourse.

These new approaches and initiatives are developed by the representatives of men's counselling centres or other institutions mainly in the form of project work and are going to be implemented by them under the common umbrella of DMÖ.

Some of these initiatives and approaches are going to be presented in this Mutual Learning Seminar. It is important to emphasise that this new focus in boys' and men's work is in the process of development and that no comprehensive evaluations are available. Moreover, they have to be considered in the overall system of violence prevention as well as the dismantling of gender stereotypes, which in Austria is distributed very differently from region to region and has different foci. The interplay of women- and men-specific approaches is also in the process of development in Austria (even though there are long traditions of cooperation here at the regional level)

and can be seen as an important element in the fight against violence and stereotypes.

In contrast to the women-specific approaches, the focus on boys and men is still uncharted territory, even though there exists some recent experience.

1.2 Description of the selected measures, goals and target groups

The Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs selected six key projects which are supported and (co-)financed by the ministry and implemented together with civil societies partners.

Five of them are conducted together with the organisations dealing with men and boy's work and the umbrella organisation described above, one is conducted with the Association of Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters (AÖF), which is also mentioned above.

The objectives and target groups as well as the scope of the measure vary to a great extent:

- Supporting more counselling hours for men, with the specific target of violence prevention; specialised facilities in all Austrian provinces are getting support.
- Financing gender-sensitive work with boys and male youth via workshops on the problems of violence and toxic masculinity; 14 projects in seven (out of 9) federal provinces are being funded. The range of violence prevention measures is diverse and is adapted to local conditions and the needs of the target group; the aim of the gender-sensitive work is the prevention of violence.
- Establishing and financing the "Helpline „Männerinfo", which is an Austrian-wide men's counselling helpline via telephone that is intended to have a low-threshold effect on the prevention of violence.
- Financing of the campagne "Mann spricht's an" ("Men speak up" campaign) with the focus on raising broad awareness on the issue of male violence.
- Funding of the "StoP - Neighborhoods without Partner Violence" project, which is a community-building project with the goal of involving the neighbourhood and thus developing a sense of responsibility within the community and promoting civic courage to prevent serious violence.
- Supporting and funding the "Boys' Day – Career Orientation Day for Male Youth" which should promote the idea of "Caring Masculinities", with the aim to prevent male violence in the long run, but mainly focussing on the motivation of male youth to consider non-gender-specific professions such as nurses or primary school teachers.

2. Results of the policies – impact on achieving gender equality

The different types of measures described above have not been evaluated yet, therefore an overall assessment on the impact of these measures is not possible at that point of time. Additionally, it has to be stressed that the types and scope of measures are very different as well as their aims, target groups or duration. At least there are a number of indicators related to output, which are helpful for the assessment of the measures., e.g. number of persons who were counselled or number of workshops which took place (see 2.1).

2.1 Some figures and findings around project output

As stated in the fact sheet of the Ministry of Social Affairs, a number of output indicators can be stated. These refer, for example, to how many men called the helpline, how many men were counselled and how many counselling hours were used. In addition to the above-mentioned figures from the Ministry of Social Affairs, there are some activity reports from the implementing agencies that offer a more in-depth insight in some in- and output indicators. This additional information concern three of the six offers, thus only these are presented in more detail here.

The following picture can be drawn from the existing documents:

Establishing and financing the “Helpline „Männerinfo”

The telephone helpline for men was established in September 2021 and for the first time provides around-the-clock crisis counselling for men and their relatives: Professional men's counsellors are available on the phone day and night. A total of about 20 staff members are part of the crisis team, who come from men's counselling centres all over Austria. This ensures that regionally different know-how can be brought in.

A first interim report was prepared in July 2022. It shows that about 1/3 of the calls were related to the topic of relationships and family, 1/4 to problems concerning psyche and body, 1/5 concerned (male) identity and role models, the remaining callers can be classified under general information requests. In total, 2,336 telephone conversations took place in the first 7 months, about 400 hours of telephone time only.

Public relations work e.g. publicising the service were also part of the development work.

The men's helpline team estimates that the helpline is a complementary service to the counselling centres and that it supplements or compensates for the regional men's counselling centres that have limited accessibility. It is seen as a success when men verbalise their problems in times of crisis and in the medium term an impulse for change can be given, for example for reducing violent behaviour. Since the funding is provided on an annual basis, the helpline operators strive for constant funding.

Financing gender-sensitive work with boys and male youth via workshops

14 projects in seven (out of 9) federal provinces are being funded. The range of violence prevention measures is diverse and is adapted to local conditions and the needs of the target group. It includes violence prevention workshops, low-threshold peer education offerings, outdoor offerings, individual and group counselling, as well as digitally created materials (podcasts, social media campaigns), etc.

The projects started in March 2022. By June 2022 (date of interim report) 2,500 violence prevention service hours had been provided and just over 3,865 contacts had been reached. The activity report states that the implementing organisations in the provinces report a high take-up of the services by the target group and that there is a wish for the projects to be implemented in the long term. The aim of the project is to make a contribution to an emancipatory and equality-oriented image of masculinity and to support the young boys and the target group to prevent violence. The target group includes socially disadvantaged boys, people with language barriers or people from rural regions.

"StoP - Neighborhoods without Partner Violence" project

StoP is a community project with the goal of involving the neighbourhood and thus developing a sense of responsibility within the community and promoting civil courage. The first pilot project was launched in 2019 in a district of Vienna by the Association of Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters (AÖF) and accompanied by the Institute of Conflict Research (Institut für Konfliktforschung – IKF) as part of a monitoring evaluation.

In three years of development work, the pilot project implemented various steps, starting with project organisation and financing, through carrying out a social space analysis and activating surveys, as well as the establishment of neighbourhood networks. The heart of StoP is the establishment of so-called women's and men's tables, i.e. groups of committed neighbours who meet on a regular basis to acquire knowledge about partnership violence, but also to try possible reactions, and ultimately to become active against violence themselves and support others. Strengthening civic courage plays a central role in this process. Expanding local networks and to involving the residents as well as clubs and businesses/companies based in the district is important for the community project.

The evaluation team concluded that the establishment of the "tables" was quite difficult in general, but especially due to the multiple COVID-19 lockdowns. Nevertheless, by summer 2020 at the latest, a "regular cast" had come together at the women's table. The anchoring of the men's table turned out to be much more difficult, although the participating men were highly motivated and designed several sustainable projects, but the central problem was the low response in the neighbourhood. The evaluators suggested that the different degrees of interest can be explained by the different degrees of concern, among other things: the creation of gender equality as being more important for women than for men – at least on the

surface. As reaction to the difficult up-take of the “men’s table” the IKF is going to evaluate the establishment of two more men’s tables in Vienna by the end of 2023.

Overall, "StoP - Neighbourhoods without Partner Violence" was assessed as a successful project and has meanwhile been rolled out in different regions in Austria, with funding from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

2.2 Impact on achieving gender equality

It is difficult to assess to what extent the measures actually contribute to the reduction of gender stereotypes or to the reduction of violence. While there are, for example, certain guidelines and empirical values on the extent to which offenders who have already been convicted act less violently as a result of victim protection-oriented offender work, it is much more difficult to prove the effectiveness of a preventive approach. This does not mean that they do not have any effect or that they could not be collected at all, but it would require an actual evaluation with target group control, etc., which is not available yet. Especially the field of work with boys and men is much less researched than, for example, the field of work with women and girls, as there is a longer tradition here.

Against this background the impact on achieving gender equality cannot be seriously estimated on the existing data base. It can be stated that the involvement of men in gender equality issues as well as in preventive measures against violence is essential to actually achieve gender equality and measures that go in this direction can contribute to gender equality. However, it is not (yet) possible to quantify the impact of the concrete measures.

3. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the policies/initiatives

3.1 Strengths

As already stressed in chapter 1, violence against women is deeply rooted in a gender unequal system and gender norms as well as gender stereotypes play a vital role. Consequently, it is important to work on a different perception of what “male identities” might include and to support forms of caring masculinity. Also, it is essential to include men in the fight against violence against women. And, last but not least, it is crucial to implement different services to reach different target groups. In this regard the package which has been established can be assessed as a starting point of a comprehensive approach to combat violence at a very early stage, but also to support (potential) perpetrators on their way to a non-violent life via counselling offers etc. and to contribute to a more gender equal society.

It is also important that the financing of this initiatives does not come from the budget for the protection from violence for women – which was sometimes stressed as one concern against “working with men”. The initiatives mentioned are (co-)financed and incorporated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and constitute an additional funding.

In comparison to measures dedicated to protect women from violence this approach is rather new and initiatives are still in development. The umbrella organisation for men's work in Austria ("DMÖ" *Dachverband für Burschen,- Männer und Väterarbeit*) is also a rather new organisation which is in close contact with the representatives of the ministry and carries out many of the projects in close cooperation with the ministry. This cooperation between authorities and the civil society can also be assessed as a very promising approach.

As it is not that common for men to seek help in different situations, low-threshold services – for example the helpline – can be seen as important elements to support men to seek advice and help and to support them in the long run to live a non-violent caring life.

The growing numbers of men using such offers indicates the need and that calling for advice might be an appropriate approach as a first step.

3.2 Weaknesses

Although some figures are available – e.g. who participated or how many people called the helpline on which topic – the impact is hard to assess as there are no in-depth evaluations of the different measures. Despite the fact that preventive measures as such are difficult to assess an accompanying evaluation or another sort of assessment might be useful to assess the impact in the long-run.

Another weakness might be the fact that it is not quite clear if all group of men in need of such instruments could be reached with the implemented instruments. Many instruments are available mainly in urban areas. Also, language restrictions have to be considered or the need of additional instruments to reach specific target groups. So far, no needs assessment has been carried out. Although all involved counselling centres and NGOs have a good knowledge about the target groups they are reaching, they are not established everywhere and might also not have access to all target groups in need.

Another weakness is that up to now such initiatives are not financially supported in the long-run, but mostly on a year-to-year basis. While campaigns etc. are of course short-term measures, others like the helpline or counselling centres need a long-term financing.

The impact on gender equality is also not in the focus of research yet, as already pointed out in chapter 2.

4. General questions on this topic

How can the complex interrelation between challenging gender stereotypes, adopting preventive approaches focusing on men, gender equality and combating gender-based violence against women be assessed and made evident?

Are there any experiences with measures/strategies/Action plans and approaches in the different countries in this regard, especially focusing on challenging gender stereotypes in the work with boys and men and to foster caring masculinity?

Is it necessary to have different targeted approaches and offers to reach different groups of men? Which groups of men should be in the centre of such policies and are there experiences how to reach them? How to attract men and boys to participate in, for example, workshops (or other voluntary activities) on prevention and toxic masculinity?

Are there experiences how approaches addressing men, masculinity/caring masculinity can be assessed in relation to gender equality and its effectiveness to prevent violence against women?

How do you assess the interplay between men's and women's counselling organisation, NGOs and related approaches? Is it rather a cooperation, a coexistence or perhaps even competition? Are there any experiences and opinions about how cooperation could be supported? Can it contribute to a change? Do you have experiences on how funding of the services and cooperation is best organised?

Are there any experiences and examples how possible effects and impacts of measures addressing men could be assessed concerning achieving gender equality?

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