




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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Projects that challenge traditional gender norms among boys and men in Germany

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Abstract

As in other European countries socio-economic indicators show that men and women are not equal in Germany. However, multiple projects have been initiated that seek to increase gender equality by especially targeting boys and men both as beneficiaries of gender equality and allies. On the one hand, they target men's issues for instance by creating an infrastructure for men-focused counselling. On the other hand, they try to motivate men to support women's rights. Regarding the first goal a training of male change agents for men-focused counselling seeks to increase the availability of gender-sensitive counselling. The project also includes an awareness campaign that seeks to counter the persistent gender norms that prevent men from seeking help. The latter is for instance implemented within the HEROES® programme, which targets young adults from honour cultures in an attempt to challenge traditional gender norms and affirm the women's unconditional human rights. Most projects have not yet been evaluated and were hampered by the COVID pandemic and financing problems that result from jurisdiction. Germany has the infrastructure to measure indicators of gender norms as outlined by the [6th Statistical Spotlight](#) report, however, currently there is no focused attempt to summarise the existing data into a comprehensive report.

1. Current situation in Germany

1.1 Working on gender stereotypes and gender norms with men and boys

The German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend; BMFSFJ) is responsible for promoting equality. It has initiated and financed multiple projects that promote gender equality and especially target boys and men to fight gender stereotypes. The projects target similar aspects as the ones described in Austria (Bergmann, 2023). Some examples are presented below. The ministry has two separated subdepartment that target gender equality one targeting women and girls and one targeting boys and men, which promote, coordinate and finance targeted initiatives.

1.2 Data collection on gender norms in Germany

The [6th Statistical Spotlight](#) report by the Research and Evaluation Unit of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is a comprehensive report about the availability of gender norm measures in Ireland (Corcoran & Tickner, 2021). The report differentiated between objective indicators of gender equality such as the gender pay gap and subjective attitudes towards gender norms. Objective data is readily available in Germany and of high data quality. This data is provided by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt), the German Institute for Economic Research (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung; DIW), and the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung; bpb). However, there is currently no comprehensive report summarising all indicators.

In addition to objective measures, the 6th Statistical Spotlight calls for better measurement of (subjective) attitudes towards gender norms. In Germany some attitudes towards gender norms have been repeatedly assessed in the German General Social Survey (GGSS [die Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften]; bpb, 2022a). The GGSS is an annual representative panel with high data quality. It collects data from 30,000 people living in Germany. It applies methods, which assure that the data is collected in all regions of Germany and is stratified regarding gender and region. Data has been summarized on specific issues. For instance, a report published by the bpb summarized findings about changes in gender norms over the last 30 years (bpb, 2022a). Gender norms have been repeatedly assessed in the GGSS, however since no targeted attempt has been made to produce something similar to the 6th Statistical Spotlight gender norms have not been assessed annually. It would be easy to change that. In addition, concise questionnaires have been developed to measure traditional gender norms (e.g., Klocke & Lamberty, 2015; Krampen, 1983). Even though these measures do not cover the entire spectrum of attitudes outlined in the [6th Statistical Spotlight](#) they can be used to assess changes in gender norms in a concise way and may be sufficient to aid in the evaluation of programs that target gender norms.

2. Policy debate

All major political parties in Germany have more male than female members (bpb, 2022b) and the German parliament [Bundestag] has roughly one-third female members (Wikipedia, 2021). Thus, women have less influence on political decisions than men. In order to increase women's participation in political decision-making, two parties have introduced quotas for women in the 1980s (bpb, 2018; Faerber-Husemann, 2018). Importantly, the major conservative party (CDU/CSU) has joined them in 2022. They agreed that in 2025 50% of board positions must be filled with women; from the district level onwards (tagesschau.de, 2022). However, neither party has reached parity in terms of membership (bpb, 2022b). Other parties ([FDP](#), [AfD](#)) are not attempting any changes regarding gender representation. Recently the radical right-wing party AfD has gained in favour with voters, especially in the former eastern

German states (bpb, 2022c). The AfD vehemently advocates for traditional gender roles, in which women are supposed to do the family work. Therefore, if current trends continue, a political backlash in terms of gender equality is likely, especially in the eastern parts of Germany.

As in Ireland women in Germany are providing the majority of care work (BMFSFJ, 2019) and frequently work part-time (bpd, 2021). Germany's parental leave is very generous. Since 2007 paid parental leave lasts 12 months if only one parent stays at home, but parents receive 14 months of pay if both parents stay at home for at least two months. This expansion of pay when both parents stay at home seems to have increased the number of fathers taking parental leave ([Domscheit-Berg, 2016](#)). The number of men staying at home increased from 3.5% in 2006 to 34% in 2014. However, the outcomes have been criticised because some men plan to use their parental leave for holidays or advanced training ([Vorsamer, 2019](#)). Further, 75% of men only take the minimum parental leave of 2 month necessary to receive the full benefits ([Juncke et al., 2021](#)). As a result, the average father only takes 3 months of paid parental leave. The main reason not to take parental leave seems to be financial (51%). However, 27% of fathers cite reservations about parental leave as the reason for not taking it. The paid parental leave can be combined with part-time employment which should promote a fast return to the workplace.

A still unresolved problem is that the German income tax system is particularly advantageous for couples with very unequal incomes. The system was intentionally created in 1958 to assure that it is unattractive for wives to work because it was assumed that this would endanger the marriage ([Brinkmann, 2021](#)). This creates economic pressure on couples with equal income spouses and encourages to stay at home or take part-time jobs (Cullen, 2023). A change in this system has been discussed for several decades ([Brinkmann, 2020, 2021](#)), but without success. Especially popular is a reform that would instead benefit couples with children.

This might be a factor contributing to the big gender pay gap in Germany. Data from 2020 showed that Germany had the fourth highest gender pay gap in the EU-27, with women earning 18 % less than men (without adjustments) ([Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023](#)). Thus, changes are still necessary.

3. Good practice examples

The BMFSFJ has initiated and financed multiple projects to promote gender equality and especially support boys and men. Below are three noteworthy projects.

- Training of male change agents for men-focused counselling
- HEROES®
- meinTestgelände

3.1 Training of male change agents for men-focused counselling

The project seeks to create awareness for the specific counselling needs of men and boys and provide an infrastructure for said counselling. For this purpose, men are trained as counsellors and change agents over a period of two years to provide gender sensitive, men-focused counselling. The counselling serves to prevent violence and crises and improve gender sensitivity in all counselling topics. The project is complemented by an awareness campaign that seeks to challenge the gender norm that men do not talk about their problems ([“echte Männer reden”](#) [real men talk]). The progress of the project was interrupted by the COVID pandemic.

3.2 HEROES®

HEROES® targets boys and young men from honour cultures in school settings. The project offers workshops that scrutinise gender norms and support gender equality. The project also trains change agents, who disseminate these ideas. This is especially important since these individuals are often difficult to reach. These change agents seem to be highly relevant for the success of the project. The project already received positive evaluations and is comparably cheap because it is targeting a small group.

3.3 meinTestgelände – Das Gendermagazin

[MeinTestgelände](#) [MyTest Site] is an online platform that allows adolescents to publish articles about personal experiences related to gender and its effects on their life and growing up. The platform seeks to promote boys' examination of gender norms because, in comparison to girl, boys are often less motivated to do so. The platform supports the engagement with different experiences related to gender. An intersectional perspective is a vital part of the platform, even though some perspectives (e.g., representation of asexuality) are still absent.

Difficulties with projects often arise because of Germany's federal structure. Since education is financed and controlled by federal states, organising, and financing these projects on a national level is difficult. As a result, projects such as HEROES® suffer from financing issues despite their positive evaluation.

4. Transferability aspects

Germany has implemented projects highly similar to Austria (Bergmann, 2023). There are similar projects that seek to provide better counselling for men, gender-sensitive work with boys and young men, and [Boys' Day](#). A national helpline for men such as „Männerinfo“ seems to be difficult to implement because different federal states are involved. The low threshold to receive help that such a helpline provides is very valuable for people in crises and especially for men, who are often more reluctant to seek help (Yousaf et al., 2015). It would therefore be valuable to have a visible national helpline for men in Germany. The BMFSFJ launched an awareness campaign ([“Stärker als Gewalt”](#) [[Stronger than Violence](#)]) in 2019 to inform about

different types of violence and ways to counter them, make help more accessible to victims, and encourage the reporting of violence. Making people aware of different forms of violence is clearly crucial to ensure help. People often delay or withhold help because they are unsure whether help is needed (Fischer et al., 2011). My reading of the [material](#) suggests that forms of emotional manipulation and verbal abuse are currently not sufficiently covered. All projects would benefit from structural, long-term funding. Problems with funding regularly arise from Germany's federal organisation. This often means that even successful projects remain limited to certain regions.

Implementing data collection on gender norms as suggested by the Irish report (Cullen, 2023) would be easy. The study infrastructure exists in the form of highly valid annual panels namely the GGSS and the Socio-Economic Panel ([SOEP](#)). Researchers can apply to introduce their questions into the panel. Some relevant data is already available (bpb, 2022a) and would have to be analysed and summarised. I am not sure whether it is necessary to collect such a big set of subjective attitudes towards gender norms as suggested in the [6th Statistical Spotlight](#), since many of these attitudes should be interconnected. It might be more parsimonious to use one of the existent short measures (see Klocke & Lamberty, 2015; Krampen, 1983).

5. Conclusions and recommendations

I am optimistic about the wide range of projects launched in Austria, Ireland, and Germany. Most projects are still not evaluated; therefore, all assessments are preliminary. I believe the new approach to better integrate men into the fight for gender equality is an important step and the projects seem well suited to give the needed impulses. I believe that to increase the acceptance of policies promoting gender equality it is crucial to emphasise that men will also benefit from gender equality. Therefore, projects that target men's problems such as violence against men are key. Further, projects that tackle men's issues such as their shorter life span or difficulties to receive custody for their children are necessary. The projects may also benefit from a stronger focus on intersectional identities.

In addition to measures specifically targeting men or women there are also measures that reduce the impact of stereotypes in general. Regarding hiring biases standardised hiring methods will reduce the impact of stereotypes and can be a useful supplement for quotas. Standardised hiring methods imply that candidates are asked the same questions and hiring criteria are agreed upon before the candidates are invited. Standardised methods reduce or eliminate the effects of gender stereotypes on hiring. Further, they are less obviously promoting women and not limited to women, which might limit criticism of favouritism. An aspect of hiring that has rarely been considered is network hiring where positions are filled based on referrals and positions are never formally announced or if they are announced they are already taken (e.g., Bayer, Ross, & Topa, 2008; Bills, Stasio, & Gërkhani, 2017; Marsden, 2001; Rees, 1966). There is evidence that network hiring will show strong gender biases (Reskin & McBrier, 2000). Therefore, formal hiring, in which open positions are announced should be preferred.

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