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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Review of promising practices and lessons learned, existing strategies and United Nations and other initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality, in the context of eliminating violence against women

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 35/10. It highlights key lessons learned and promising practices on engaging men and boys to promote and achieve gender equality.



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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 35/10, the Human Rights Council provided detailed recommendations on the prevention of and the response to violence against women and girls,¹ and requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to review promising practices and lessons learned, existing strategies and United Nations and other initiatives to engage men and boys in promoting and achieving gender equality, in particular efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and the negative social norms, attitudes and behaviours that underlined and perpetuated violence against women and girls, and to make recommendations for further action by States and the international community in that regard. The present report is prepared in response to that request.

2. In preparation for this report, OHCHR called for submissions and received contributions from 19 member States, 10 national human rights institutions, 3 United Nations entities, 1 public-private partnership and 21 civil society organizations and other stakeholders.² OHCHR also conducted research on the relevant jurisprudence of the United Nations human rights mechanisms and the relevant strategies and initiatives of the Organization and other entities.

II. Opportunities and risks of engaging men and boys

3. Over the past decade, there has been increasing emphasis on engagement with men and boys³ in gender equality efforts, including interventions to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.⁴ In response, in June 2017, at its thirty-fifth session, the Human Rights Council held a panel discussion entitled “Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls”. The panel emphasized the strong impact of harmful gender stereotypes on persistent gender-based violence against women and the importance of equal gender relations between men and women in eliminating gender-based violence against women.⁵ Further, in September 2017, in its resolution 35/10, the Council called upon States to take action to prevent violence against women and girls by, among other means, fully engaging men and boys, alongside women and girls, and addressing the root causes of gender inequality, including gender stereotypes and negative social norms and unequal and patriarchal power relations.⁶

4. Experience has demonstrated that, although engagement with men and boys in achieving gender equality presents significant opportunities, it can also carry certain risks. In order to maximize the impact of engaging men and boys in achieving gender equality, the nature and context of such engagement must be analysed and understood.

5. The ultimate aim of efforts to engage men and boys is to rectify discriminatory power relations based on the subordination of women and harmful gender stereotypes,

¹ See paras. 9–10.

² Submissions are available at www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/EngagingMenBoysPromotingAchievingGenderEquality.aspx.

³ In the present report, “boys” mean those who are under 18 years of age, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

⁴ E.g. Human Rights Council resolution 32/19 and the HeForShe campaign (www.heforshe.org) of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). In submissions by Norway and Argentina, it was also reported that regional conferences on engaging men and boys in gender justice and violence prevention were convened in 2017 among Nordic, and Latin American and Caribbean countries, respectively.

⁵ A/HRC/37/36.

⁶ See para. 9 (a) and (b).

which lie at the heart of gender-based discrimination and violence against women — a gender-transformative approach. Inequalities between women and men have persisted throughout history and in all regions of the world.⁷ Gender-based violence against women is one of the most significant manifestations of discrimination against women,⁸ as it is one of the fundamental social, political and economic means by which the subordinate position of women with respect to men and their stereotyped roles are perpetuated.⁹ Changing these dynamics requires recognition that men and boys play a role not only in perpetrating such violence, but also as community members who need to support more equal power relations.

6. It is acknowledged in the preamble (para. 14) to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women that a change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women. Article 5 (a) of the Convention places a legal obligation on States parties to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices that are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women as one of the means to eliminate discrimination against women. The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women also observed that the root causes of gender-based violence against women included the ideology of men's entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity, the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles, or prevent, discourage or punish what was considered to be unacceptable female behaviour¹⁰ and the need to transform them.

7. Engaging men and boys as partners in the effort to bring about gender equality holds the potential to engage them in resisting and rejecting harmful masculinity, misogyny and discriminatory gender roles, which is key for the achievement of gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence.¹¹ Such engagement should recognize that men and boys interface with the implications of gender inequality from different positions. They can be perpetrators of discrimination against women and gender-based violence, agents for change, or victims/witnesses of violence — including violence against children. Men and boys can also be victims of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, in various contexts. Perpetration of such violence is deeply intertwined with the same discriminatory gender norms that cause gender-based violence against women and girls. Likewise, men

⁷ The World Economic Forum (*The Global Gender Gap Report 2017* (Geneva, 2017), pp. v–viii) indicates that the global gender gap of an average 32 per cent remains to be closed across the four dimensions of the Index (education, health, economic participation and political empowerment) in order to achieve universal gender parity. In 2017, the global gender gap saw the first reverse trend since 2006, indicating that the overall global gender gap would take 100 years to close, compared with 83 years in 2016.

⁸ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, para. 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, para. 10. See also the eleventh preambular paragraph of Human Rights Council resolution 35/10.

¹⁰ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 35, para. 19.

¹¹ The Committee on the Rights of the Child was a pioneer in recognizing that men and boys must be actively encouraged as strategic partners and allies, and along with women and girls, must be provided with opportunities to increase their respect for one another and their understanding of how to stop gender discrimination and its violent manifestations (see its general comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, para. 72 (b)). In the context of harmful practices, both the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women stressed the need to empower girls and women and boys and men to contribute to the transformation of traditional cultural attitudes that condone harmful practices, act as agents of such change and strengthen the capacity of communities to support such processes (see joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2014) on harmful practices, para. 17).

and boys can be engaged as members of a community or society to join efforts to mobilize demand for gender equality and women's rights or as political, traditional, community, religious or youth leaders to advocate for gender equality and denounce discriminatory social norms, such as harmful practices,¹² and misogynist hate crimes and hate speeches. Men can be engaged: as teachers to provide gender-transformative and human rights-sensitive education; as health professionals and social workers to deliver public service without discrimination or discriminatory stereotypes; as journalists and media workers to transform negative gender stereotypes in the media; and as workers and business managers to eliminate gender inequality and discrimination against women at work. Men who are in positions of authority, such as members of parliaments, the judiciary, law enforcement and Governments, also play a pivotal role in discharging a State's legal responsibility towards gender equality and the prohibition of discrimination against women.

8. Importantly, for efforts to engage men and boys to successfully contribute towards a transformative gender-equality agenda, they must be fully informed of the views and experiences of women and girls, respectful of their rights and autonomy and complementary to — and supportive of — women's rights movements. In fact, women's organizations, feminist groups and organizations working on the rights of women and girls take the lead in — or partner with — many initiatives to engage men and boys in gender equality issues. In this regard, the Council, in its resolution 35/10, called upon States to fully engage men and boys, alongside women and girls, in achieving gender equality and eliminating violence against women and girls.¹³ In the same resolution, the Council further recognizes the critical role of women and girls, as well as of women's and youth organizations and organizations led by women and girls, as agents of change and urges States to meaningfully engage with women and girls as active and equal participants in the planning, design, implementation and monitoring of legislation, policies and programmes, including programmes aimed at engaging men and boys.¹⁴

9. As discussed above, engaging men and boys does not simply mean involving them. Such engagement must lead to gender transformation. While there is no universally agreed definition, the term "gender-transformative approach" in the present report refers to those approaches that promote a shift from gender norms and stereotypes that are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes and unequal power relations between them to gender relations that are based on gender equality and respect for human rights.¹⁵ Gender-transformative approaches to engaging men and boys also imply changing understanding about masculinity, i.e. how male identities are socially constructed and defined, with a view to challenging dominant and violent types of masculinity.

10. When interventions that focus on men and boys are not gender transformative, they may not only detract from the realization of gender equality or the elimination of gender-based violence against women, but in fact perpetuate and reinforce gender inequality and harmful gender stereotypes.¹⁶ In her report in 2014, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences expressed concern about the trend of setting up specialized men's organizations to engage men and boys in gender equality issues, observing that many ideologies about the role of men and boys do not focus on women as autonomous beings, disproportionately affected by inequality, discrimination and

¹² Including child, early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation and honour killings. For more detail, see joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

¹³ See para. 9 (a).

¹⁴ Human Rights Council resolution 35/10, para. 5.

¹⁵ See, for example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, art. 5 (a). See also the advocacy brief of the MenEngage Alliance and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): "Engaging men, changing gender norms: directions for gender-transformative action". Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/brief-engaging-men-changing-gender-norms>.

¹⁶ See A/HRC/26/38, paras. 70–75.

violence.¹⁷ While men and boys may also suffer from discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, ignoring the relative advantages and privileges men and boys enjoy as a result of such norms and stereotypes risks shifting the focus away from women and girls, who are disproportionately disadvantaged by them.

11. Other strategies of engagement with men and boys build on the idea that women deserve respect as mothers, sisters, wives and so on. These approaches may appear to be strategic in certain contexts of highly discriminatory societies or in order to implicate people in a more personal way. However, they risk maintaining social norms that value women only in their relation to others, rather than as autonomous human beings, entitled to all human rights. Such approaches also reaffirm patriarchal notions of men as “protectors” and, by extension, women as “victims”.

12. Some experiences indicate that even with good intentions, interventions to engage men and boys may have the inadvertent outcome of enhancing discriminatory gender stereotypes.¹⁸ Such interventions need constant monitoring of their impacts to avoid adverse effects.¹⁹ Increasing support for engagement by men and boys, without attention to the potential adverse impact, may result in shifting support and resources away from women’s empowerment and women’s leadership and reinstating men’s domination. Such a result would be antithetical to gender equality because, as stated by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, it would empower the group to which perpetrators belong — which overwhelmingly continues to maintain economic, political and societal structures of power, privilege and opportunity — to offer protection from violence and discrimination.²⁰

13. Finally, a potential risk of the framing as “engaging men and boys” is that such framing may limit the understanding of discriminatory gender relations and overlook discrimination and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, including lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex women and girls. Violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, including against non-binary persons, and violence against women and girls share common root causes, including the need to protect the existing power structure and prevent, discourage or punish behaviours that are perceived as challenging traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons also hinders efforts to eliminate violence against women. For example, homophobia and transphobia may make men and boys reluctant to renounce patriarchal masculinity, for fear of being perceived as gay if they do not behave violently against women, girls and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.²¹ Therefore, for interventions to be gender transformative, they have to combat gender-based violence in all its forms.

III. Ongoing efforts and challenges faced

14. Contributions from various stakeholders and the research conducted pointed to a variety of initiatives and strategies to engage men and boys to promote and achieve gender equality, in particular to eliminate gender-based violence against women and girls. The present section summarizes several examples of such efforts

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, paras. 72–73.

¹⁸ See, for example, the submissions by the Centre for Health and Social Justice and Family Planning New South Wales.

¹⁹ E.g. the submission by the MenEngage Alliance.

²⁰ See A/HRC/26/38, para. 72.

²¹ Submission by Puntos de Encuentro. See also the submission by Sonke Gender Justice.

A. Combating harmful practices

15. Harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and honour-related killings are deeply rooted in social attitudes according to which women and girls are regarded as inferior to men and boys based on stereotyped roles. Harmful practices are also used to justify gender-based violence as a form of protection or control of women and children by men.²²

16. Experience shows that efforts to end harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, point to the influential role of religious and traditional leaders, who are dominantly men, in changing those attitudes and beliefs.²³ Case studies in Africa suggested that faith leaders could be a critical intermediary in distilling positive information, particularly for men.²⁴ In this regard, the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage, held from 2014 to 2017, used traditional and religious leaders to prevent faith-based support for child marriage. Community awareness campaigns led by chiefs entailed thousands of public declarations to stop celebrating child marriage.²⁵

17. In their roles as family members (for example, as sons, husbands, fathers or grandfathers), men and boys were also identified as key potential agents for change.²⁶ For example, fathers need to be engaged to help change their understanding of what it means to “love” a daughter and to encourage a shift in mindsets from “protecting her” to “empowering her”. Deconstructing the meaning of protection and linking it to human rights is crucial for families and communities to challenge the idea, for example, that marriage is to protect girls’ safety in contexts of insecurity and violence.

B. Education and awareness-raising

18. Gender norms influence us all. As boys and girls we learn our gender roles from an early stage, internalizing these throughout childhood and adolescence, and by the time we transition into adulthood, these norms are deeply embedded. Gender norms may live from generation to generation, to be passed on through the parent-child relationship. They shape how we understand our own identities. They play an integral role in determining how we relate to others, including to people of a different sex than their own.

19. Helping to disrupt harmful gender norms is a key objective of human rights-based education. The crucial role of education in promoting equal gender relations and transforming discriminatory gender stereotypes was emphasized by many submissions and initiatives.²⁷ In particular, several submissions and initiatives recognized that comprehensive sexuality education for boys and girls was a key strategic intervention.²⁸ It was reported that, in several countries, misrepresentations of the purpose of educational

²² Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, paras. 6–7.

²³ See <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Engaging-Men-and-Boys-to-End-the-Practice-of-Child-Marriage1.pdf>.

See also UNFPA and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Joint Evaluation: UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change — 2008–2012, Volume I* (New York, 2013), box 23, p. 33. Available at https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/FGM-report_11_14_2013_Vol-I.pdf.

²⁴ See Transforming Masculinities in the submission by Georgetown University.

²⁵ See A/HRC/35/5, para. 34.

²⁶ See <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Engaging-Men-and-Boys-to-End-the-Practice-of-Child-Marriage1.pdf>.

²⁷ E.g. submissions by Colombia, France, Honduras, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Uzbekistan.

²⁸ Submissions by Honduras and Mexico.

curricula intended to promote gender equality, and transform traditional gender roles, fuelled strong resistance by parents.²⁹

20. Gender-transformative early childhood development programming was identified as an effective strategy for helping counter discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes and for encouraging more equal gender relations between boys and girls, including children with diverse sexual orientations or gender identities and gender non-conforming. Such programming engages both men and women — parents, caregivers, community leaders and educators — for the purpose of changing the way children are taught so that entrenched discriminatory norms and attitudes based on gender are challenged from early age. It also ensures that girls and boys are provided with equal care and opportunities. Reportedly, such interventions have also promoted support among men for care work and emotional engagement in the upbringing of their children.³⁰

21. The arts, media and other forms of communication can either exacerbate or help transform discriminatory gender stereotypes. Some submissions stressed the need to address discriminatory gender stereotypes in the media and other communication channels, including in the public expression of sexism and anti-feminism online,³¹ as well as in commercial advertisements.³²

22. Many submissions highlighted the power of the innovative use of art, the media and other communication tools in support of gender equality, the elimination of gender-based violence and the transformation of discriminatory gender stereotypes. Such interventions include the use of soap operas,³³ rap music,³⁴ online comics,³⁵ video blogs³⁶ and art competitions³⁷ to disseminate gender-transformative messages. An online media campaign for gender equality in Slovenia included the creation of a virtual “museum of stereotypes”, which invited users to share their perceptions.³⁸ It was reported that these interventions had a strong positive impact on the perceptions and attitudes of adolescent boys. For example, in the Beat the Macho campaign in the Netherlands,³⁹ boys reacted very positively to the message of popular rap artists asserting non-violent masculinity.⁴⁰ In Nicaragua, an evaluation of the impact of a gender-transformative television series revealed that the series had the strongest positive impact on 13–17-year-old boys in conservative areas in terms of changes in attitudes towards gender equality, including increased recognition of women’s rights and the importance of consent in sexual relations, as well as the increased acceptance of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity.⁴¹

²⁹ E.g. the submission by the National Consultative Commission of Human Rights of France.

³⁰ Submission by Plan International.

³¹ Submission by Sweden.

³² Submission by Czechia.

³³ E.g. the television series “Sexto Sentido” and “Contracorriente” in Nicaragua. See the submission by Puntos de Encuentro.

³⁴ E.g. If I Could Go Back in Time, by Palestinian hip-hop band DAM (Da Arabian MCs) in collaboration with UN-Women. See www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/11/palestinian-hip-hop-group-dam-raises-awareness-of-honour-killings-through-a-powerful-music-video.

See also the Beat the Macho campaign in the Netherlands (www.rutgers.international/what-we-do/positive-masculinities/beat-macho-campaign) and the submission by Rutgers.

³⁵ See, for example, the Beat the Macho campaign in the Netherlands and the submission by Rutgers.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ E.g. the annual art competition “My human rights” organized by the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights. See the submission by the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights.

³⁸ Towards Equalizing Power Relations Between Women and Men project. See the submission by Slovenia.

³⁹ See www.rutgers.international/what-we-do/positive-masculinities/beat-macho-campaign and the submission by Rutgers.

⁴⁰ Submission by Rutgers.

⁴¹ Submission by Puntos de Encuentro.

C. Fostering an equal share of responsibility in domestic life

23. Unequal responsibilities of men and women in domestic life are a major factor limiting the participation of women and girls in public life and economic activity. Such an unbalanced distribution also exacerbates the exposure of women and girls to domestic and intimate partner violence. Gender stereotypes perpetuate the image of childcare and domestic work as being women's tasks. Men, on the other hand, "must" be the main breadwinners. This results in a disproportionately heavy domestic work burden for women and girls, confining them to the private sphere and restricting their access to education and their participation in political, economic, social and cultural activities. Therefore, many initiatives focus on engaging men and boys to accept and embrace an equal share of childcare and domestic work, as well as to accept and support women's empowerment more broadly.

24. For example, introducing or expanding paternity leave was considered strategic for a gender-transformative impact in several countries.⁴² Sweden reported that men's equal sharing of parental leave with women had proven to have a positive effect, including in terms of an increase in women's wages, improved relationships between fathers and their children and a reduction in violence.⁴³ In Brazil, the legal framework for early childhood, including the law that extends paternity leave⁴⁴ and the law that prohibits corporal punishment,⁴⁵ is considered a key legal intervention in transforming men's role in the family.⁴⁶ It was reported that programmes on preventing violence that targeted young fathers in Rwanda⁴⁷ and the post-conflict northern region of Uganda⁴⁸ and that promoted the positive engagement of men in childcare and their equal sharing of childcare responsibilities with women led to a reduction in intimate partner violence and violence against children.

25. In Brazil and Rwanda, civil society organizations are taking initiatives to facilitate men's support for women's economic empowerment. Such initiatives are based on the research that suggests that women might experience higher levels of violence by male partners when they have higher levels of income than their male partners,⁴⁹ as such a state of affairs might be perceived as a threat to a man's role as breadwinner. In Brazil, an initiative aims to transform men's negative gender attitudes towards women's economic activities, in support of the national Bolsa Família programme.⁵⁰ The Bolsa Família Companion programme shifted men's perceptions and made them accept a larger proportion of childcare and domestic responsibilities, thus freeing up women's time for economic activities. Male participants in the programme also accepted more equal decision-making power for women concerning family spending.⁵¹ The initiative in Rwanda indicated that involving men and their partners in the community activities and discussions on

⁴² E.g. Brazil, Czechia, France, the Netherlands and Sweden. See the submissions by Czechia, France, Promundo Brazil and Rutgers. See also Programme P, a toolkit for reaching expectant fathers as partners in maternal and child health and violence prevention, developed by Promundo.

⁴³ Submission by Sweden.

⁴⁴ Brazil, Act No. 13257 of 8 March 2016. Available at www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2015-2018/2016/lei/113257.htm.

⁴⁵ Brazil, Act No. 13010/2014 of 26 March 2014. Available at http://legislacao.planalto.gov.br/legisla/legislacao.nsf/Viw_Identificacao/lei%2013.010-2014?OpenDocument.

⁴⁶ Submission by Promundo Brazil.

⁴⁷ Programme P. See the submission by Promundo United States.

⁴⁸ The Responsible, Engaged and Loving Fathers initiative. See http://irh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/REAL_Fathers_Prevention_Science_2016.pdf.

⁴⁹ Submission by Promundo United States.

⁵⁰ See <https://promundoglobal.org/programs/bolsa-familia-companion-program>.

⁵¹ See <https://promundoglobal.org/2016/08/02/final-stages-economic-empowerment-project-promundo-trains-hundreds-professionals-gender-transformative-methodologies>.

women's participation in economic and public life resulted in increased women's income, as well as in greater participation of men in childcare and in a reduction in couples' conflicts.⁵²

D. Promoting gender equality in health

26. Violations of the right to health, in particular sexual and reproductive health and rights, undermine the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights by women and girls and thus exacerbate gender inequality. Certain of these violations are also forms of gender-based violence, such as forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced pregnancy, criminalization of abortion, denial or delay of safe abortion and/or post-abortion care, forced continuation of pregnancy, and abuse and mistreatment of women and girls seeking sexual and reproductive health information, goods and services.⁵³ In addition, lack of enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights has implications for the enjoyment of other human rights, such as education and work, the deprivation of which can also contribute to the heightened risk of women and girls to violence. Engaging men and boys is particularly relevant in the context of sexual and reproductive health and rights, in which gender norms play a powerful role in dictating the terms under which couples choose to engage in sexual intercourse, whether they do so safely, whether they seek to have children and how they communicate about their health status.

27. The World Health Organization has documented the positive impact of engaging men and boys in interventions that are relevant to women's health.⁵⁴ The evidence reviewed confirmed that men and boys had changed their behaviour and attitudes as a result of programme interventions focused on sexual and reproductive health, HIV prevention, maternal and newborn health, fatherhood and/or gender-based violence, with positive results for men, their partners, their children and their families.⁵⁵

28. Several submissions reported initiatives focused on engaging men and boys in the area of sexual and reproductive health.⁵⁶ For example, Colombia has established a National Intersectoral Commission for the Promotion and Guarantee of Sexual Rights and Reproductive Rights, which promotes strategies for the transformation of gender roles and gender inequality.⁵⁷ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), in collaboration with civil society organizations, has produced a number of studies, tools and guidance over the years on engaging men and boys in gender equality, in particular in the areas of sexual and reproductive health and gender-based violence against women.⁵⁸

E. Breaking the cycle of violence

29. Studies show that those who are exposed to or experience violence, ranging from corporal punishment, bullying, child abuse and exploitation, intimate partner violence and street violence to armed conflict, are at increased risk of becoming perpetrators of violence against women and girls during later stages of their lives.⁵⁹ As the majority of perpetrators

⁵² See <https://promundoglobal.org/programs/journeys-of-transformation>.

⁵³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 35, para. 16.

⁵⁴ Gary Barker, Christine Ricardo and Marcos Nascimento, *Engaging Men and Boys in Changing Gender-based Inequity in Health: Evidence from Programme Interventions* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 2007). Available at www.who.int/gender/documents/Engaging_men_boys.pdf.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–29.

⁵⁶ E.g. submissions by Austria, Family Planning New South Wales, the MenEngage Alliance, Plan International and Promundo United States.

⁵⁷ Submission by Colombia.

⁵⁸ See <https://www.unfpa.org/engaging-men-boys>.

⁵⁹ See Human Rights Council resolution 35/10, preamble.

of gender-based violence against women are men and boys, supporting men and boys who experienced or were exposed to violence is one of the key measures for violence prevention. In particular, many interventions aimed to support men to build non-violent and caring fatherhood.⁶⁰ Such initiatives include increased engagement of expectant or young fathers in maternal and child health. The Responsible, Engaged and Loving Fathers initiative, a community-mentoring programme engaging young, first-time fathers to reduce intimate partner violence and physical punishment of children in Uganda, reported that it reduced intimate partner violence and physical punishment of children committed by young fathers.⁶¹

30. Several States reported efforts made to rehabilitate the male perpetrators of gender-based violence against women and girls, through the provision of treatment and counselling.⁶² It was pointed out that open communication in a safe space created by individual and/or group counselling helped men to share their own life stories and perceptions, including reflecting on insecurity and the fear of losing power. Feeling that their experiences were being heard provided an opportunity to learn about non-violent and more equitable ways of relating to others.⁶³ Caution was suggested, however, as the safety of victims/survivors must be secured in such interventions.

31. Men and boys experiencing or witnessing the traumatic events of violence in conflict and post-conflict situations are later associated with higher levels of domestic and intimate partner violence.⁶⁴ The global strategy on sexual and gender-based violence of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁶⁵ includes engaging men and boys as one of the six action areas. It recognizes men and boys both as the potential agents of change as well as potential victims of sexual and gender-based violence.⁶⁶ In Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, UNHCR involves men and boys to develop awareness-raising materials on sexual and gender-based violence and its prevention. The active involvement of youth groups, men and boys as agents of change is also a key feature of the UNHCR response in Mauritania and Yemen. In the displacement camps of Kachin State in Myanmar, UNFPA supports a network of male volunteers to raise awareness of the need to end violence and the need to intervene if it happens. Community-based programmes, such as those targeting both men and women in post-conflict situations to help them recover from trauma,⁶⁷ rebuild their lives and adopt positive coping mechanisms, as well as those targeting young persons (both male and female) to strengthen their agency and voice to respond to negative gender norms,⁶⁸ resulted in positive outcomes.

F. Establishing a legal and policy framework

32. Establishing a comprehensive legal and policy framework on gender equality, non-discrimination and the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence is the foundation for progress towards gender equality. A number of contributions indicated that a lack of or

⁶⁰ Programme P of MenCare, a global fatherhood campaign. See <https://men-care.org/resources/program-p>. Submissions by Georgetown University and Promundo United States.

⁶¹ Submission by Georgetown University.

⁶² Submissions by Japan, Mexico and Norway.

⁶³ Submission by MenCare.

⁶⁴ Submission by Promundo United States.

⁶⁵ UNHCR, "Action against sexual and gender-based violence: an updated strategy", 2011.

⁶⁶ As regards sexual and gender-based violence against men and boys, see, for example, the report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan. Available from www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoHSouthSudan/Pages/Index.aspx. Several other United Nations investigations have also addressed sexual and gender-based violence against men and boys.

⁶⁷ Living Peace initiative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. See the submission by Promundo.

⁶⁸ The Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation project in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Uganda (see http://irh.org/projects/great_project). See also the submission by Georgetown University.

weak legal and policy frameworks or the existence of discriminatory law undermine the capacity of actors, including Governments, national human rights institutions and civil society organizations to combat gender-based violence against women.⁶⁹ Men are often in decision-making positions with respect to efforts to reform such laws and policies, and thus engaging them will be crucial.

33. Integrating gender-transformative interventions, including those that engage men and boys, in long-term public policies and programmes on violence prevention and promotion of gender can be an effective measure to scale up efforts to transform social norms and attitudes.⁷⁰ Some countries recognized the role of men and boys in their national policies and strategies on gender equality or violence against women. For instance, Egypt has adopted its National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030, which recognizes the collective responsibility of men and boys in women's empowerment.⁷¹ The National Policy against Gender-based Violence in Rwanda, adopted in 2011,⁷² recognizes not only women and girls but men and boys as victims of gender-based violence and acknowledges the need to foster dialogue between men and women, and boys and girls, aimed at changing the cultural, social, economic and other systems and structures that deny human rights and equality between women and men.⁷³ Sweden has adopted a national strategy to prevent and combat men's violence against women for the period between 2017 and 2026, which has a specific focus on universal violence prevention, targeting stereotypical norms of masculinity as a cause of violence.⁷⁴

G. Building institutional capacity

34. Public and private institutions, including in the executive, the judiciary, parliaments and in educational and health systems, are key to promoting gender equality and to preventing and responding to gender-based violence. Therefore, it is crucial that these institutions adopt a gender-transformative approach, including in their interactions with men and boys. Some submissions highlighted that some of the challenges for these institutions to adopt a gender-transformative approach included gender bias and the lack of understanding by the professionals working in such institutions of the impact of discriminatory gender stereotypes.⁷⁵ Resistance against efforts to change negative gender norms and stereotypes by religious institutions and leaders was also mentioned as an obstacle.⁷⁶

35. As an example of an effort to engage the judiciary in the elimination of gender-based discrimination and bias, OHCHR prepared a study, "Eliminating judicial stereotyping: equal access to justice for women in gender-based violence cases", in 2014 and has been conducting training sessions and conversations with the judiciary on their role in challenging wrongful gender stereotyping by lower courts, as well as norms and practices that embody harmful stereotypes and that could result in violations of human rights and constitutional guarantees.⁷⁷ The Council of Europe, with the support of OHCHR, has developed the *Training Manual for Judges and Prosecutors on Ensuring Women's Access*

⁶⁹ Submissions by the Human Rights Defender's Office of Armenia, the Human Rights Ombudsman of Guatemala, the National Centre for Human Rights of Jordan, the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights and Sonke Gender Justice.

⁷⁰ See, for example, the submission by the Centre for Health and Social Justice.

⁷¹ See <http://ncw.gov.eg/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/womens-strategy.pdf>.

⁷² See www.migeprof.gov.rw/fileadmin/_migrated/content_uploads/GBV_Policy-2_1_.pdf.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁴ Submission by Sweden. See also www.government.se/4afec2/contentassets/efcc5a15ef154522a872d8e46ad69148/161219-infokit-uppdatering2.pdf.

⁷⁵ Submission by Rutgers.

⁷⁶ Submissions by Switzerland and Restored.

⁷⁷ See www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/judicial_stereotyping2014.docx.

to *Justice*,⁷⁸ which addresses judicial gender stereotyping and bias as one of its conceptual frameworks.

H. Social and community mobilization

36. Efforts to promote social and community mobilization for gender equality were reported. For example, at the global level, the HeForShe campaign of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women),⁷⁹ launched during the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly in September 2014, aims to mobilize men and boys globally to stand up and take action for the achievement of gender equality.

37. At the national level, the White Ribbon Volunteers Network of China organized a series of public dialogue forums entitled “Men talk stories” in 2014. The forums aimed to strengthen social norms, promote non-violent masculinities and gender equality and facilitate the elimination of gender-based violence and homophobia. Based on these dialogues, the network produced a documentary and published a book entitled *The Voices of Men*.⁸⁰

38. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, networks of men who call themselves “Tupac Katari” organized themselves at municipal level to fight against gender-based violence against women and girls in 30 municipalities, in partnership with women community promoters.⁸¹ Some other initiatives, such as Promundo’s Programme H, target or include young men and boys, engaging them in peer or group education, communication campaigns, community mobilization and activism.⁸²

39. At the same time, it was stressed in some submissions that regressive narratives in relation to gender equality were an impediment to engagement with men and boys. For example, in several countries in Europe and Latin America, “gender” terminology is opposed by political and religious leaders.⁸³ Such narratives postulate a “complementary role” for women in relation to the role(s) of men, both in family and society. They are structured around supposed innate differences between women and men, and thus seek to embed a “natural” or “traditional” basis for gendered roles. It was observed that such a discourse undermined efforts to promote gender equality, including efforts to engage men and boys.⁸⁴ Likewise, concern was expressed that, in some settings, affirmation of women’s human rights was being met with counter (but false) narratives asserting that upholding the rights of women meant a “loss” of rights for men.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ See <https://rm.coe.int/training-manual-final-english/16807626a4>.

⁷⁹ See www.heforshe.org/en.

⁸⁰ UNFPA, “UNFPA engagement in ending gender-based violence” (New York, 2016), p. 15. Available at https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/UNFPA_Brochures_on_GBV_Prevention_and_response.pdf.

⁸¹ Submission by Plurinational State of Bolivia.

⁸² Such initiatives include:

Programme H by Promundo and the Gender Roles, Equality and Transformation project in Uganda by Georgetown University. See also the submission by Georgetown University and the police campaign against “party rape” referred to in the submission by Norway.

⁸³ See, for example, for Europe, CEDAW/C/SVK/CO/5-6 and CEDAW/C/POL/CO/7-8. For the Americas, see the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, press release of 8 March 2018, “On International Women’s Day, the IACHR urges States to refrain from adopting measures that would set back respect for and protection of women’s rights”. Available at www.oas.org/en/iachr/media_center/PReleases/2018/044.asp.

⁸⁴ Submission by the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights.

⁸⁵ E.g. submission by the MenEngage Alliance.

I. Methodologies for a gender-transformative approach

40. As discussed under sections II and III above, for initiatives to engage men and boys in gender equality issues and the elimination of gender-based violence against women and girls, they have to be gender transformative in their objectives and outcomes and have to meet certain methodological criteria, such as full respect for the rights, autonomy and leadership of women and girls, and engagement with women, girls and their organizations.⁸⁶ As an example of methodologies for a gender-responsive engagement of men and boys, the MenEngage Alliance has developed concrete guidance on how work with men and boys can be done effectively, while putting the rights and leadership of women and girls at the centre. The Alliance's Accountability Standards and Guidelines⁸⁷ and Code of Conduct⁸⁸ suggest: seeking regular feedback from women's rights organizations for work carried out to engage men and boys; involving women in decision-making processes for interventions on engaging men and boys; allocating a certain number of board seats to members of women's rights organizations; creating "advisory councils" of women's organizations; inviting women's rights organizations to conduct programmes together with efforts on men and boys; and/or contributing in solidarity to women's rights organizations through joint advocacy or activism.

41. A gender-transformative approach aims to change gender norms and relations in society. Changes in attitudes, behaviours and norms at an individual level are not sufficient to drive change at societal level. To make systemic change, efforts need to be undertaken at multiple levels, in the home, in the community, in local and national institutions and through legal and policy frameworks and across public and private spaces.⁸⁹ In this regard, the Alliance has adopted a "socio-ecological model" for engaging men and boys to eliminate gender-based violence, which combines: interventions that aim to change men's individual behaviour and behaviour within relationships with women and girls; interventions targeted at communities that aim to transform dominant social norms regarding gender and violence; interventions that aim to embed positive gender norms in institutions, such as the health and education systems and law enforcement; and national policies and laws that engage men and boys in gender-based violence prevention.⁹⁰

42. A number of those who made submissions emphasized the importance of a strong evidence base for identifying strategic entry points and designing effective interventions, and recognized that insufficient evidence remains a challenge.⁹¹ One of the goals of the Government Strategy for Equality of Women and Men in Czechia between 2014 and 2020⁹² is systematic identification of the ways to efficiently eliminate gender stereotypes and unconscious prejudices in all spheres and at all levels of society.⁹³ In Portugal, the Government published a White Paper on men and gender equality,⁹⁴ which summarized the relevant information on men, male roles and gender equality and helped identify challenges and recommendations in that area, in order to be discussed and weighed by all bodies and

⁸⁶ See also Human Rights Council resolution 35/10, para. 9 (d).

⁸⁷ See http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MenEngage_Accountability-Standards-and-Guidelines.pdf.

⁸⁸ See <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MenEngage-Global-Code-of-Conduct.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Commission on the Status of Women, "The responsibility of men and boys in achieving gender equality, Chair's summary", 2015, para. 3. Available at www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/59/meetings/chairs_summary_men_boys.pdf?la=en&vs=3738.

⁹⁰ MenEngage Alliance, policy brief: "Accelerating efforts to eliminate violence against women: engaging men and boys in preventing and responding to violence against all women and girls", 2017.

⁹¹ Submissions by Mexico and Promundo United States.

⁹² See https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/Projekt_Optimalizace/Government_Strategy_for-Gender_Equality_2014_2020.pdf.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹⁴ See http://cite.gov.pt/asstscite/images/papelhomens/P_Brief_III_en.pdf.

social actors interested in promoting gender equality in Portuguese society. In Qatar, the National Human Rights Committee⁹⁵ conducted a survey on citizens' views on the civil, political, economic and social rights of women in society to identify strategic entry points for engaging men and boys.⁹⁶

43. Many actors, including several United Nations entities,⁹⁷ adopted the methodology of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey,⁹⁸ developed by Promundo and the International Centre for Research on Women, to collect data and to build an evidence base for policymaking. The Survey is a comprehensive, multi-country study on men's realities, practices and attitudes with regard to gender norms, gender-equality policies, household dynamics, caregiving and fatherhood, intimate partner violence, sexual diversity and health and economic stress, among other topics. It includes both women and men as respondents. The outcome of the Survey informed national public policies, for example in Brazil, Chile and Croatia.⁹⁹

44. Violence against children surveys have been used by the Together for Girls partnership,¹⁰⁰ a global public-private partnership against violence against children. The surveys collect nationally representative data on emotional, physical and sexual violence against girls and boys, as well as on the circumstances and perpetrators of violence, reporting and service use, and health and well-being outcomes. The process is led by a multisectoral task force of government ministries, civil society and Together for Girls partners, and the data informs long-term violence prevention and response policy and programme implementation, including through engaging men and boys.¹⁰¹

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

45. **Engaging men and boys is a critical element of strategies to dismantle patriarchy in order to achieve gender equality and eliminate gender-based violence against women and girls. Clearly, the transformation of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of men and boys is necessary to achieve these goals. In order to be transformative, interventions that focus on men and boys must challenge unequal power relations and structures, based on the recognition of how patriarchy is privileging men and boys and oppressing women and girls. In the absence of these premises, there is a risk that initiatives to engage men and boys may preserve and reinforce gender inequality and patriarchal and discriminatory gender stereotypes. In the same vein, interventions focused on men and boys should be designed in consultation with women's rights advocates to make sure their concerns and perspectives are considered.**

46. **Engaging men and boys as agents for achieving gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence must be based on a critical analysis of the privileges they enjoy as a result of discriminatory power structures, and re-engage them as allies and partners to support the human rights of women and girls and gender equality. In the process, the benefits for men and boys of such a transformation will also be realized, including more positive, non-violent, equal and inclusive gender relations based on full respect for the human rights and dignity of all.**

⁹⁵ See www.nhrc-qa.org.

⁹⁶ Submission by the National Human Rights Committee of Qatar.

⁹⁷ Including UN-Women, UNFPA and the United Nations Development Programme.

⁹⁸ See <https://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/>.

⁹⁹ Submission by Promundo United States.

¹⁰⁰ Together for Girls is a partnership among national Governments, United Nations agencies and private sector organizations, working at the intersection of violence against children and violence against women, with special attention on sexual violence against girls. See <https://www.togetherforgirls.org>.

¹⁰¹ Submission by Together for Girls.

47. Various strategies for meaningfully engaging men and boys for gender equality include:

(a) Engaging men and boys in combating harmful practices through their roles as, among others, religious and traditional leaders, fathers, sons, family members, teachers, health professionals and members of the community;

(b) Helping transform discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes and promoting non-violent, respectful and equal gender relations through education and communication, including through: gender-responsive early childhood education and development, the integration of gender equality content into curricula at all levels of education and scientifically based and age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education;

(c) Promoting equal sharing of responsibilities in unpaid care and domestic work, including through parental leave policies and increased flexibility in working arrangements;

(d) Promoting full respect for the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, girls, men, boys and non-binary persons, emphasizing the importance of dismantling discriminatory stereotypes in this area and supporting behavioural change;

(e) Adopting a life cycle and intergenerational approach, including through the rehabilitation of perpetrators of gender-based violence to prevent reoffending and support for men and boys who have witnessed and suffered from violence, in addition to support for women and girls who have been exposed to and experienced such violence;

(f) Promoting the engagement of men in positions of authority and as advocates to support the establishment of a legal and policy framework that guarantees gender equality, prohibits and eliminates discrimination and prevents and responds to all forms of gender-based violence in all spheres of life;

(g) Engaging men who have influence within public institutions relevant to the prevention and response to gender-based violence to address bias in such institutions and adopt gender-transformative approaches. This includes institutions in education, health, social protection, law enforcement and justice systems;

(h) Mobilizing men and boys for gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence at community and societal level, in partnership with women's rights movements.

48. In their efforts to engage men and boys to promote and achieve gender equality and to eliminate gender-based violence against women, States, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, United Nations entities and development partners should:

(a) Invest in efforts that engage men, boys, women, girls and non-binary persons to challenge unequal power relations and to transform discriminatory gender stereotypes and social norms to promote non-violent, equal and inclusive relationships that are also inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons;

(b) Build a strong evidence base for effective policy and programme design and ensure rigorous monitoring to assess the actual impact of interventions on the transformation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, the promotion of gender equality and the prevention and reduction of gender-based violence against all women and girls;

(c) Pay due attention to the intersection of discrimination and discriminatory stereotypes based on gender and other grounds, such as race, economic and social status, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, and cultural and religious background;

(d) **Ensure the active and meaningful participation of women and girls and effective collaboration with women's organizations and feminist groups in efforts to engage men and boys. Such participation should include policy and programme design, the delivery of programmes and services, as well as monitoring and evaluation;**

(e) **Combine efforts to engage men and boys with investment in ensuring an enabling environment for the work of women and girls human rights defenders, women's rights organizations and feminist groups;**

(f) **Take a comprehensive, multilevel, multisectoral and multi-stakeholder approach to transform discriminatory gender norms and relations. This means that relevant efforts should be made at multiple levels, in the home, in the community, in local and national institutions and through legal and policy frameworks and coordinated across various sectors, including education, health, social protection, law enforcement and justice systems;**

(g) **Provide financial, technical and human resources to the long-term efforts to engage men and boys in achieving gender equality and eliminating gender-based violence against women and girls, without diverting existing resources allocated to promote women's rights and support women's empowerment and leadership.**
