

Summary

The next step for gender equality

The appointment of the Men's Equality Commission (Mannsutvalget) was based on a recognition that boys and men have not been sufficiently included and safeguarded in the development of Norwegian gender equality policy and in the public discourse. Many boys and men do not believe gender equality concerns them. The next step for gender equality involves a greater inclusion of the challenges of boys and men.

The Men's Equality Commission's investigation reveals that boys and men experience gender equality challenges in a number of areas throughout their lives. The knowledge on which gender equality policy is based must include the experiences and challenges of boys and men. This requires that we talk about, understand, and explore equality in such a way that boys and men also want to participate in the discussion and offer their experiences. This is the next step for gender equality.

We live in a time where democracy and human rights are under pressure around the world. In recent years, there has been a trend in many countries of stronger polarisation and a growing opposition to gender equality. In a number of countries, women and persons belonging to different minority groups are deprived of rights. This is a development that also places restrictions on men. Fundamental human rights and democratic values are essential for everyone to enjoy the freedom to choose how they want to live their lives.

Some may fear that efforts to promote men's equality could come at the expense of women's equality. In some countries and under certain circumstances this fear might be reasonable. The Men's Equality Commission believes that men and women face different gender equality challenges, and that it is possible to address gender equality challenges for all genders – without undermining the gains that gender equality policy have produced so far. In Norway, gender equality is a value that has broad public support, and there exists a strong civil society. The Men's Equality Commission believes that this is a good starting point for an open public conversation about men and boys' place in gender equality policies.

About the Men's Equality Commission

The Men's Equality Commission was a government appointed commission mandated to examine gender equality challenges faced by boys and men in Norway. The commission was appointed by royal decree in August 2022 and published its final report in April 2024.

The commission examines gender equality challenges across a wide range of policy areas, including education and employment, family life, health, participation in civic life, and social exclusion.

In its final report, the commission provides a comprehensive review of the gender equality challenges faced by boys and men in Norway at different stages of life. The commission provides a review of existing policies and suggestions for new efforts and initiatives.

Although men constitute a majority within powerful political and economic positions, and men's earnings on average are greater than women's, men may still face gender equality challenges. Gender equality policies aim to ensure equal opportunities for civic participation to all citizens. A central premise for the Commissions work, is that different groups of boys and men may face different types of obstacles for full civic participation.

The Commission examines how men's gender equality challenges relate to differences in income, education, class, geography, ethnicity, age/life stage, sexual orientation, gender identity, and levels of functional ability. In this way, the commission examines gender equality challenges from an intersectional perspective.

Perceptions of gender roles and norms of masculinity have changed during recent years, and these may differ across groups in the population. Where relevant, the commission will examine the relationship between gender equality challenges and prevailing norms of masculinity.

The Men's Equality Commission consisted of 17 individually appointed members and was chaired by Claus Jervell.

Gender equality has produced a more equitable society

Historically, the primary objective of gender equality policy has been to improve the situations of

women and minorities. Experience shows that gender equality policy measures work.

Gender equality does not mean that improvements for one gender are to the detriment of another. In some cases, equality policy is certainly about the distribution of scarce resources, which in the short term can lead to the loss of privileges for one of the genders. Thus, equality policy can risk pitting various groups against each other. Historically, however, Norwegian gender equality policy has given the vast majority a greater opportunity to enjoy greater freedom. Furthermore, most people in Norway support equality, both as a social ideal and in practice.

The Men's Equality Commission's investigation is focused on gender equality challenges that men and boys are facing. Many of these challenges have not previously been sufficiently emphasized in the gender equality discourse and in the development of gender equality policy. The Commission believes that we must build on the progress that gender equality policy has produced so far. The aim is a society where everyone enjoys equal opportunities to participate and contribute, without being limited by structural conditions or gender stereotypes.

Boys and men face different challenges in different settings

In several areas, boys and men face challenges where as a group, they are at a disadvantage compared to girls and women. This applies, for instance, in parts of the education system, to opportunities to be equal caregivers for one's own children, and when interacting with parts of the public administration.

Some of the challenges faced by boys and men are linked to social inequality and social exclusion. Social exclusion can manifest itself in the form of objective conditions such as unemployment and social isolation, but also as subjective experiences of loneliness and disempowerment. Subjective social exclusion can relate to the experience of a lack of recognition and inclusion and a sense of being useless and powerless in society.

The experience of marginalisation can ultimately fuel destructive behaviour, such as crime, substance abuse, and violence. Such behaviour has to a large extent been understood as problems related to boys and men, i.e., that *boys or men are the problem*. The Men's Equality Commission believes that much of the destructive behaviour must instead be understood as an expression of *the pro-*

blems of boys and men. These problems must be taken seriously, and resolved at the societal level.

Inequality among boys and men

Because men in many contexts have been understood as the norm, or the average person against whom all others' equality challenges are measured, we have failed to recognise the differences among men, both in terms of power and opportunities. Men who have little power and live in poor conditions have not been a target for gender equality policy.

In this report, the Commission has therefore consistently attempted to describe the differences among boys and men, in addition to examining gender differences between men and women. Social inequality is an important factor for understanding these differences. Some challenges affecting persons with a lower socio-economic status affect boys and men in particular or in distinct ways.

Social inequality can intersect with various factors, including sexual orientation, disability, age, and ethnicity, among others. We find that the existing knowledge base is inadequate in this regard. For instance, we have insufficient data both about men from the Sámi community and about men with disabilities. There are, however, some studies that highlight special challenges affecting men in these groups. For instance, Sámi men report that they are more often subjected to physical violence during childhood and adolescence than both non-Sámi men and all groups of women. There is a somewhat higher proportion of men than women with disabilities who have no education beyond primary school and lower secondary school.

The challenges faced by members of ethnic and religious minorities vary and can take different forms depending on the context. For instance, research indicates that men belonging to a visible minority are particularly vulnerable to discrimination in the labour market.

In studies on quality of life and mental well-being, members of the LGBT community fare worse than the rest of the population. Among bisexual and homosexual men, the proportion who have experienced suicidal ideations at some point in their lives is significantly higher than among heterosexual men. The same applies to attempted suicide.

The legitimacy of gender equality efforts will be strengthened if more men are able to recognise themselves, both in the description of the

problem and in gender equality policy. Just as experiences of minorities have challenged old truths, it is important that the experiences of men now become part of the public discourse on gender equality and in gender equality efforts.

Male roles

There are many ways of being male. The gender roles we assume are to a certain extent biologically determined but they are also largely influenced by cultural and social expectations. The Men's Equality Commission believes that some of the gender equality challenges affecting boys and men are linked to narrow gender roles that can limit men's scope for action and opportunity.

The Commission believes it is important to have a broad range of positive male role models. Everyone needs someone they can learn from. Good role models can support the development of boys and men's identities and show that there are many different ways of being male.

We are keen to recognise that male communities are central to the lives of many men. Many men feel comfortable in established male roles and do not perceive them as limiting. At the same time, we know that some men do not feel at home in such communities. The Men's Equality Commission believes that an increased acceptance of a greater diversity of gender and sexuality and men challenging or breaking with the frameworks of the male role, contributes to greater freedom of choice for all.

Structure and content of the report

The Men's Equality Commission's investigation consists of three parts.

Part I: Introduction and perspective (chapters 1–3) describes the Commission's mandate and working methods, the history and development of equality policy, and the Commission's perspective on gender equality and overarching assessments.

Part II: Situational description and the Commission's assessments (chapters 4–10) contain descriptions of the gender equality situations of boys and men in relation to various contexts and themes. The Commission provides an assessment of the equality challenges in each chapter. Family life, education, working life, leisure time, health, violence and social exclusion are the topics considered by the Commission.

Part III: The Commission's recommendations, consisting of the Commission's proposed measures (chapters 11 and 12). Measures are divided into

four priority areas: men as caregivers, gender differences in education and working life, vulnerability and health, and equality policy for all. Several of the measures address gender equality challenges across the thematic chapters, and will have effects across different societal domains.

Below, we present a concise summary of the situational descriptions in the thematic chapters 4–10. We then provide a description of the priority areas, including a list of all the measures proposed by the Commission.

Chapter 4: Family life

The notion that men and women should be equal caregivers in the family is widely supported in Norway. Over the past few decades, the amount of time men spend on household chores and caregiving duties has increased. Nevertheless, gendered patterns in time use remain, as men spend less time on caregiving work and more time on paid work than women.

In Norway, employed parents are entitled to 49 weeks of parental leave. Of the total 49 week period, 14 weeks are reserved for fathers. A 4 week *father's quota* was introduced in 1992, and has since been revised and expanded to today's 14 weeks. The father's quota has led more fathers to play a greater role in the lives of their young children. Nevertheless, around 25 per cent of all fathers do not receive parental benefits, compared to 18 per cent of mothers. In 2022, 65 per cent of fathers used father's quota or less. The current rules for parental benefits treat parents differently in that there are different requirements for the father's/co-mother's use of parental benefits than for the mother's corresponding use.

After a relationship break-up, it is more often mothers than fathers who spend significant amounts of time with the children. At the same time, parents are increasingly choosing joint custody for their children following a break-up. While 8 per cent of the children in such families were subject to joint custody in 2002, the corresponding proportion was close to 40 per cent in 2020. Although the proportion of children permanently residing with their mother has decreased over the same period, there is still a large proportion of children who live with their mother, and a correspondingly large proportion of men who are non-resident fathers.

Among parents who have previously cohabited, the proportion of children living with their mother has decreased from around 80 per cent in 2002 to close to 50 per cent in 2020. Where the

parents have not previously cohabited, 80 per cent of the children lived with their mother in 2020.

Nowadays, there is a diverse array of living and family arrangements. At the same time, an increasing proportion of the population is living alone. Between the ages of 30 and 66, there is a higher proportion of men living alone than women. Single people have poorer health outcomes and higher mortality rates than those who are married or cohabiting. It is particularly single people with low income and limited education who have a higher mortality rate than the rest of the population. The difference in life expectancy between married and unmarried people has increased over time. The number of people who do not have children has also increased significantly, and this development is far more marked among men than women.

Chapter 5: Education

There are gender differences in various parts of the educational system. In kindergarten, children encounter gendered expectations and boys and girls spend their time in kindergarten somewhat differently.

On average, boys fare worse in school than girls but there is also a significant overlap between girls and boys. At the end of compulsory education, boys on average receive poorer marks than girls in all subjects, except physical education. In 2023, boys had an average of 40.5 points from compulsory education, while girls had 44.5.

More boys than girls drop out of upper secondary education. In the period 2016–2022, 76 per cent of boys compared to 85 per cent of girls graduated within five or six years. Those who have not completed upper secondary education are more likely not to be employed or enrolled in higher education later, are more likely to have low-paid work and to be the first to lose their job in an economic downturn compared to those who have completed upper secondary education.

Boys and girls make gender-divided choices in education. In upper secondary school, vocational subjects are particularly gender skewed. For example, in fields such as electrical engineering, computer technology, and construction studies, boys comprise approximately 90 per cent of students, whereas in health and social care studies, the proportion of boys is well below 20 per cent. Fewer boys than girls choose education programmes that provide general university and college admissions certification.

Fewer boys than girls enrol in higher education. Today, 40 per cent of students in higher education are men. In many fields of study, the gender distribution is highly skewed. There is a particularly low proportion of men enrolled in teacher training and study programmes in pedagogy and health, social care and sports subjects.

Far fewer men with disabilities enrol in higher education than other men. In addition to gender, family background, immigrant background and place of residence are also significant for school performance and educational choices. There is a clear connection between parents' educational background and children's school performance, and the same applies to completion of upper secondary education and enrolment in higher education.

Chapter 6: Working life

Norwegian working life is characterised by a high employment rate, and generally small gender differences in employment. Nevertheless, there are significant gender differences in terms of where men and women work. Only 13 per cent of all employed men work in female-dominated industries, and vice versa. Men are largely employed in the private sector, where 8 out of 10 men work in the private sector, compared to 5 out of 10 women. In the public sector, men make up a clear minority of employees, at around 30 per cent. The largest male-dominated industries in Norway today are construction and industry. The proportion of men is particularly low in the healthcare and social work professions, as well as teaching.

Three out of four migrant workers in Norway are men, and migrant workers make up a significant proportion of the workforce in several male-dominated industries. Migrant workers may be particularly vulnerable to social dumping and work-related crime.

Men and women experience different conditions for achieving a good work-life balance. This is linked to the division of labour in the family, but also to our gender-divided working life. Research indicates that there are fewer family-friendly working life standards in male-dominated workplaces than in workplaces where women are in the majority. Men, especially in male-dominated industries, also have a higher-than-average risk of work-related illnesses and injuries. There is an increased risk of exposure to chemical and physical hazards in industries where men represent the vast majority. Men also have a significantly higher risk of losing their lives as a result of workplace injuries.

In the period 2015–2019, 97 per cent of all those who died in occupational accidents were men. Less attention has been paid to mental health problems and psychosocial work in parts of the male-dominated industries, compared to other working environment aspects.

Chapter 7: Leisure time

There are several gender differences in what people do in their leisure time. The proportion who have played organised sports during the past year is higher among men than among women. On average, men spend more time on some forms of voluntary work, and are more active in other parts of volunteerism than women. Men volunteer more often in sports, especially in connection with their own children's activities.

There are gendered differences in which cultural services men and women make use of. Men, for instance, attend sporting events more often, but visit the library, theatre and concerts less often than women. There are significantly more men than women who engage in sports, hunting and fishing.

Among both men and women, there are socioeconomic differences in who participates in voluntary work and organised recreational activities. People with a higher income, more education and a strong connection to working life are the most active. Participation in organised recreational activities is lowest among children and young people from low-income families.

The workplace can be an important arena for experiencing a sense of belonging and mastery and therefore represents a valuable social arena for many men. The transition from working life to retirement can involve a loss of community. Some of the activities offered to pensioners are not perceived as relevant for men. It is important to facilitate meaningful activities where pensioners can use their skills and meet other people.

Chapter 8: Health

On average, men have shorter life expectancy than women. In Norway, the gender difference in life expectancy in 2022 was three and a half years. Important reasons for this are that far more men than women die as a result of drugs, accidents, mental illness and suicide during adulthood. Men also have a higher risk of contracting and dying from cancer, and more men than women die from non-communicable diseases before the age of 75. Such diseases are in many cases preventable. Pro-

state cancer is the most frequently occurring form of cancer in Norway, affecting a large number of men.

Life expectancy is linked to income and education for both women and men. However, this correlation is stronger for men than for women. The difference in life expectancy between those with the highest and lowest income is 13,8 years for men and 8,4 years for women.

Differences between how men and women live their lives contribute to creating significant health inequalities between women and men, and among men. There is still much we do not know with certainty in terms of gender and health in general, and men and health, in particular.

Men use the primary health service less often than women. Among adult men aged between 20 and 50 years of age in the period 2017–2019, more than 15 per cent did not have a consultation with a GP or urgent care centre, while the same applied to around 5 per cent of women. There are also fewer men than women who use low-threshold mental health services.

Chapter 9: Violence

In a 2022 survey, almost half of the male respondents stated that they have been subjected to serious physical violence one or more times after the age of 18. This is compared to 29 per cent of the female respondents. Among the men who have been subjected to violence, 75 per cent stated that the perpetrator was unknown to them when the violence occurred.

Similar to the adult population, surveys among children and young people have found that boys are more exposed to physical violence than girls. In a 2023 survey, about one in four boys stated that they had experienced threats of violence from a peer, and an equal proportion had at least one experience of physical violence. Among girls, about one in eight reported similar experiences.

domestic violence, violence against men has to a lesser extent been understood as an equality challenge. Studies of male victims of violence indicate that they may find it difficult to describe what they have experienced as *violence*, and that they experience being constrained by social expectations of what is an acceptable and manly response to violence and threats of violence.

There is limited knowledge about the prevalence of psychological violence, which seems to affect individuals across genders relatively equally.

Surveys show that the majority of those who perpetrate violence are men. Anger management programmes and services for perpetrators of violence are often inadequate.

Chapter 10: Boys, men and social exclusion

This chapter describes some different ways of understanding social exclusion, and how social exclusion can be linked to gender. The Commission has identified some forms of social exclusion which particularly affect boys and men, or which affect groups of boys and men in distinct ways: social isolation, loneliness and low quality of life, drug use, crime, radicalisation and extremism, democratic exclusion, and discrimination and racism.

Certain men – especially older men, single men, and men with an immigrant background – are overrepresented among those who have a weak social network and few people they can trust if they encounter difficulties.

Men use both legal and illegal drugs to a greater extent than women. Among those who commit and are convicted of criminal offences, there are considerably more men than women. Men make up 93.5 per cent of the inmates in Norwegian prisons.

Young men have a lower voter turnout than women, and these gendered differences have increased over time. At the general election in 2021, 59.2 per cent of men ages 20–24 exercised their right to vote. Among women in the same age group, voter turnout was 72.0 per cent.

Surveys of attitudes to freedom of expression indicate that more men than women find that freedom of expression is limited. It is particularly men who believe that ‘political correctness’ is a major problem in Norway. Queer men, Sámi men, and men belonging to a visible minority experience hate speech more often than others. Persons who belong to multiple minority groups are particularly vulnerable.

Surveys of exposure to discrimination and racism show that boys and men belonging to an ethnic minority often experience discrimination. More men than women state that they experience discrimination when interacting with public services.

There are many reasons for social exclusion. This may be due to life events and personal choices, but it can also be the result of various barriers and obstacles encountered in society.

Social exclusion can have serious consequences for those affected in the form of, e.g., loneliness, social isolation, poverty, health problems and substance abuse. However, it can also affect society at large in the form of increased mistrust, polarisation, crime, and extremism.

Priority areas and policy measures

The Men’s Equality Commission recommends new policy measures across four domains: Men as caregivers, gender differences in education and working life, vulnerability and health, and equality policy for all.

Men as caregivers

Men and women must have genuinely equal opportunities to provide for both themselves and their families through work, and also to be equal caregivers. It has long been a gender equality policy goal to ensure that women have real opportunities to participate in working life. The Men’s Equality Commission believes that better provisions must be made for men’s opportunities to be equal caregivers, including after relationship break-ups.

The Commission proposes to:

- 1: Introduce changes to the parental benefits scheme and rights in connection with childbirth, entailing that the parental benefits scheme equates parents and individual rights to leave
- 2: Strengthen the role and rights of new fathers
- 3: Establish tripartite cooperation for better work-life balance in male-dominated industries
- 4: Before proceedings can be brought to the courts in cases of relationship break-ups and parental disputes, The obligation to attend mediation should be extended to 6 hours from 1 hour
- 5: Strengthen the courts’ ability to award joint custody
- 6: Transfer the authority to relocate children domestically to parental responsibility
- 7: Introduce economic schemes that promote equality
- 8: Investigate a statutory right to unpaid leave for care work for persons outside the immediate family
- 9: Investigate the legal framework for children in families with more than two caregivers

Gender differences in education and working life

The Men's Equality Commission believes it is important to reduce gender differences in the school and education sector. Boys are in the majority among pupils who receive low grades and drop out of school. Far fewer men than women enrol in higher education. The Commission proposes a number of measures, which are aimed at kindergartens, primary and lower secondary school, upper secondary education and higher education. Measures to reduce gender differences must also be viewed in the context of measures to break with gender-divided educational and occupational choices. The gender division in Norwegian working life constitutes a limitation on individual freedom of choice. This applies in particular to men, who to a lesser extent than women make gender-nontraditional choices. Gender diversity is important in many public services, such as health care, social services, and teaching subjects, in part because the services must be perceived as accessible and relevant to all users. The Men's Equality Commission sees a particular need to improve the gender balance in a number of female-dominated professions.

The Commission proposes to:

- 10: Introduce play-based learning in kindergarten
- 11: Introduce a flexible school start
- 12: Introduce more practical and varied everyday school life
- 13: Strengthen alternative courses of study in upper secondary education
- 14: Ensure the right to an apprenticeship in vocational training
- 15: Change the point calculation on the transcripts for primary and lower secondary school and upper secondary education
- 16: Implement a national initiative for more young people to choose and complete gender nontraditional education programmes in vocational subjects
- 17: Implement a national initiative to ensure that more men choose and complete health, care, social, and teaching subjects in higher education
- 18: Change the admission rules to higher education
- 19: Strengthen efforts on psychosocial working environment, harassment and sexual harassment in working life

Vulnerability and health

Everyone will experience stressful situations and phases throughout the course of their lives. Vulnerability, e.g., in the form of loneliness and poor health, can affect everyone. However, the Men's Equality Commission's investigation shows that some health and social exclusion problems affect boys and men in particular. In order to protect the individual, promote equality and build a robust society, loneliness, poor health and social exclusion must be prevented and addressed in several different domains at the same time. The opportunity to enjoy meaningful social relationships and participate in society promotes a sense of belonging and can protect the individual in times of crisis and illness. Men who experience violence need support, and better services must be provided to men who perpetrate violence. Health and care services that lower the threshold for initiating contact increases the chances of men receiving the services they need.

The Commission proposes to:

- 20: Establish a commission on men's health
- 21: Investigate a national screening program for prostate cancer
- 22: Make health services more accessible to boys and men
- 23: Implement a sexual health initiative
- 24: Enhance healthcare workers' knowledge of men's health challenges in order to better utilise the potential of consultations
- 25: Strengthen efforts to prevent suicide
- 26: Strengthen services in mental health services, substance abuse treatment and prisons
- 27: Establish more meeting places for boys and men
- 28: Counter social inequalities in children and young people's recreational activities
- 29: Establish youth centre services in all municipalities
- 30: Provide better help to victims of non-domestic violence
- 31: Strengthen the assistance offered to persons who perpetrate domestic violence

Equality Policy for All

The Men's Equality Commission proposes a number of measures to counter gender equality challenges that affect boys and men in various areas. In addition to these measures, the Commission believes there is a need for a major change in perspective on equality policy. The Commission

seeks an equality policy for all, which takes into account that equality challenges can affect all genders and arise in the intersection between gender and other grounds of discrimination.

The Commission is concerned that the equality policy should also be perceived as relevant for boys and men, and that more boys and men exercise their rights under the Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act.

The Commission proposes to:

- 32: Adopt a gender-neutral statutory objective in the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act
- 33: Introduce more effective measures in equality policy
- 34: Revise statistics websites and indicators for gender equality
- 35: Gain more knowledge about men's gender equality challenges