

ENGAGING YOUNG MEN IN THE PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY¹

Guidance for young men from Central Asia
who want to take action for more inclusive
and just societies



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication was prepared as part of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Gender Issues Programme project “WIN for Women and Men: Strengthening Comprehensive Security through Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality”, under the Young Women 4 Peace Initiative: Empowering Central Asian Young Women (YW4P), funded by the European Union.

The toolkit was developed by gender experts **Henri Myrntinen** and **Tynchtykbek Bakytov**, and coordinated by an OSCE team consisting of **Aigerim Toktogulova** (WIN Project Officer), **Anastasia Fusco** (WIN Project Manager); **Clara Friedrich** (Adviser on Gender Equality); its content are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union and the OSCE.

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“

We believe in the transformative power of young women's leadership. Their voices are essential to building inclusive and lasting peace across the region,"

Dr. Lara Scarpitta,
*OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues
and Head of the Gender Issues Programme*



“

Women and young people are vital drivers of peace and security. It is our role to help them achieve just that. We need to work collectively to break down the barriers that hamper that potential."

Irène Mingasson,
*Head of Unit at the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy
Instruments.*

WHAT IS THIS GUIDANCE ABOUT?

The movement to engage men for gender equality has been growing steadily over the past decades through global and local advocacy, research, and grassroots initiatives, including in Central Asia. Efforts like HeForShe² and MenEngage³ have expanded men's awareness, encouraging more men to become allies for advancing gender equality. This work can take different forms, be it in the home, the workplace, or in public, and require different degrees of change in men's attitudes and practices. As beliefs about gender norms are embedded in culture and society, and often deeply held, work in this field requires sensitivity, contextualization, and a tailoring of approaches to the intended audiences, even within a given society.

Since its foundation, the Organization for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) has recognized that gender equality is a prerequisite for security and benefits everyone, not just women. Men often hold influential roles in society, and their support can challenge harmful gender norms, create more spaces for women's empowerment, reduce gender-based violence, and promote shared responsibilities at home and at work. By involving men as allies, advocates and role models, society moves closer to dismantling systemic barriers and achieving equitable opportunities for all.

In 2024, the OSCE Gender Issues Programme, under the flagship WIN for Women and Men – strengthening comprehensive security through innovating and networking for gender equality project, launched the Young Women 4 Peace Initiative Central Asia.⁴ Fully funded by the European Union, it aimed to advance the meaningful participation of young women in peacebuilding and security across Central Asia. As part of this project, the existing OSCE toolkit **Engaging Men in Gender Equality at the OSCE: A Toolkit for OSCE Staff** was presented to young men and women active in OSCE-supported networks in Central Asia, and subsequently customized to engage young men in Central Asia, incorporating inputs from the youth representatives involved in the project.

¹ In line with the consensual 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, the OSCE works to promote equality between men and women, boys and girls.

² <https://www.heforshe.org/en>

³ <https://menengage.org/>

⁴ [The OSCE Young Women 4 Peace Initiative: Empowering Central Asian Young Women Programme | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.](#)

WHO IS THIS GUIDANCE FOR?



This guidance has been developed for young men from Central Asia who are interested in engaging peers in the processes of strengthening gender equality and who want to learn more about the role of (young) men in its promotion. It is aimed at those who stand up against gender inequality, seek to initiate conversations and are ready to take action to promote new or join existing initiatives in their communities. It will also serve as a useful tool for both female activists and leaders working in the field of women's rights who want to gain a better understanding of how to engage young men more effectively in their activities and work together to create more equitable and secure societies.

HOW SHOULD THIS GUIDANCE BE USED?

The guidance aims to provide youth with the tools to promote dialogue, partnership and cooperation between young men and women for sustainable social changes.

The guidance is structured in three key sections:



THINK!

This section is aimed at helping you, as young men from Central Asia, to realize the importance of engaging men to promote gender equality. It highlights the benefits of your active participation in creating a fairer society.



PLAN!

This section will provide you with insights on how to wisely approach the development of your initiatives. It focuses on key aspects of the work: what needs to be considered to make projects effective, sustainable and responsive to community needs. It also includes sections on resistance, referrals, and accountability.



ACT!

The concluding section provides you with practical tools and ready-to-use solutions to turn your ideas into action. It contains sample scenarios for events and initiatives that may include trainings, educational campaigns, roundtables and awareness-raising initiatives.

This format will help to structure your ideas and transform them into concrete actions towards creating fairer and more inclusive societies in Central Asia.



GENDER

Gender is a term used to describe socially expected roles, behaviours, and ways of being for women and men, and thus differs from biological sex. Gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies widely within and across cultures.⁵



GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality means equal rights and opportunities for women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society. It refers to women and men being able to access and participate in all spheres of life on an equal footing, including in democratic governance, decision-making and the security sector. Gender equality requires that women and men receive adequate and equitable protection of their human rights, including the right to live free of violence in safe and supportive homes and communities.⁶



GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES

These approaches focus on transforming unequal gender relations as well as unequal gender norms in order to promote shared power, shared responsibilities for care-work, access to resources, decision-making, and support for women's empowerment.⁷



MASCULINITIES

Masculinities refer to norms, expectations, and ways of being associated with manhood. Masculinities are not biologically driven, but are the product of social, cultural, historical, and political processes, and change over time.⁸



PATRIARCHY

A form of societal organization in which men, and what is considered masculine, is accorded more importance than women, or what is considered feminine. This can for example mean that property, residence, inheritance, and descent, as well as power and decision-making, are considered to mainly be the domain of men rather than women.⁹

⁵ OSCE (2006) Glossary on Gender-Related terms, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/2/26397.pdf>.

⁶ ODIHR (n.d.) ODIHR and Gender Equality, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/9/103449.pdf>.

⁷ Adapted and simplified from UN Women Training Centre (n.d.) Gender Equality Glossary, <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36>.

⁸ Adapted and simplified from UN Women Training Centre (n.d.) Gender Equality Glossary, <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36>.

⁹ Adapted and simplified from UN Women Training Centre (n.d.) Gender Equality Glossary, <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36>.

Are you ready? Let's go!



Step 1: THINK!

YOUR CONTEXT

The perception of gender and gender inequality is continually evolving. Recent years have witnessed the development of programmes and initiatives in Central Asia aimed at narrowing the gender gap. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, according to the Global Gender Gap Index¹⁰, many countries of the OSCE region are still facing serious challenges in the areas of women's economic participation, political representation and equal access to opportunities.

Globally, men occupy most positions of societal, economic and political power. Because of this, the involvement of men is essential in promoting gender equality, be it at home, in relationships, in the workplace or in society more generally. Dominant gender norms that favour men's power, commonly referred to as patriarchal values, do not, however, only privilege men, but also place constraints on them that may reduce their well-being. Having more gender equal relationships with women and feeling less bound to rigid gender-role expectations, for example through men's greater participation in caregiving, can positively impact men's mental health, while also promoting equality at home and in society.¹¹

Social transformation requires the full participation of all members of society – men and women – to collectively challenge harmful stereotypes and build equitable societies. Systematic changes can be achieved by encouraging men to reflect on gender norms and expectations, existing privileges and unequal power relations.

Men can have a crucial role in building a more just society by raising awareness of the negative effects of gender stereotypes and structural inequalities, while also cooperating with women's rights organizations and movements and being proactive allies. Eventually, gender equality brings benefits not only to women but also to men, creating the environment for a more sustainable, secure and prosperous future for everybody.

¹⁰ <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/>

¹¹ For an overview, see for example Shane A Kavanagh and Melissa Graham (2019) How Gender Inequity Impacts on Men's Health. An Exploration of Theoretical Pathways, *International Journal of Men's Social and Community Health*, 2:1, e11-e21, <https://utppublishing.com/doi/abs/10.22374/ijmsch.v2i1.5>.

WHY IS ENGAGING MEN CRUCIAL FOR CENTRAL ASIA?

Efforts to promote gender equality and transform harmful masculinity norms are shaped by a complex mix of social, cultural, economic and political factors. Key challenges include persistent patriarchal gender norms, the impact of labour migration on family structures and male identity, the growing influence of conservative religious discourse, and the limited access of young people – especially boys – to critical, gender-sensitive education.¹²

At the same time, there are promising initiatives led by civil society, youth groups and international organizations.¹³ These efforts aim to engage men and boys as allies for gender equality and include context-specific approaches such as educational programmes, discussion groups, community mobilization and advocacy. These resources offer both a structural understanding of barriers and insight into emerging opportunities for sustainable change across Central Asia.

Exercise on Identifying Gender Norms, Roles and Expectations

This is a short exercise that you can do yourself and/or with your colleagues or community members to think through what gender norms, roles and expectations exist in your community, and how they affect women and men.

→ Gender roles and expectations influence both men and women. Often, men and women face pressure to conform to rigid gender norms. With gender norms we refer to cultural expectations of what it means to be a 'real' or 'proper' woman or man in terms what they are expected to do/not do, how they interact with others, and what qualities they are supposed to have.

✓ **THINK:** What are three different common gender norms that you can identify in your community?

→ For men, expectations of 'what it means to be a man' may limit emotional expression, or discourage vulnerability or participation in care-related roles. Men's internalized gender norms and the influence of friends, family members, neighbours, and others may create pressure on men to act as the dominant partner in a relationship, leading to controlling behaviour and potentially intimate partner violence.

✓ **THINK:** How do dominant gender norms in your community affect men and boys?

→ Patriarchal norms and practices reduce the space available for women to participate fully and on equal terms with men in society, the economy, and politics.

✓ **THINK:** How do dominant gender norms in your community affect women and girls?

→ Engaging men and boys is essential to fostering more balanced, respectful and equal relationships, and to dismantling harmful gender norms. When men actively support gender equality, this contributes to safer communities, improved well-being for persons of all genders and more inclusive institutions.

✓ **THINK:** What benefits could women and men in your community gain from more gender equality?

¹² See for example UNFPA (2022) 'Situational Analysis of Men and Gender Equality in the Central Asia Region', Almaty: UNFPA Kazakhstan, https://kazakhstan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/eng_final_situational_analysis_of_men_and_gender_equality_in_ca_done.pdf.

¹³ For resources, see for example UNFPA, Partnering with men and boys for gender justice in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: <https://menengage.unfpa.org/en> and UNICEF (2025) Engaging boys and men in gender equality initiatives in Europe and Central Asia – Technical Note, <https://knowledge.unicef.org/ECAR/resource/engaging-boys-and-men-gender-equality-initiatives-europe-and-central-asia>.

Before designing your activity, it is worth thinking about **what you want to achieve by engaging men**: is it, for example, about changing a particular norm or activity (e.g. encouraging participation in child care); is it about getting men to support and/or make space for women in decision-making; or is it about giving men space to discuss their gendered needs and challenges (e.g. pressure to be a provider)? These are not mutually exclusive, but may require different approaches. Below you can find a non-exhaustive list of potential activities.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE?	WHAT YOU'D BE EXPECTED TO DO	WHAT YOU SHOULD AVOID
 <p>Increase the awareness of your community about the benefits of gender equality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Emphasize that gender equality initiatives promote a strong and united community. Engaging men in promoting equality helps to shape a more transparent and fair environment where every individual feels valued and can contribute to positive changes.✓ Highlight the importance of exploring best practices and innovations. Use success stories from various countries, especially from the region, to build an initiative based on sustainable and proven practices.✓ Your action should have a long-term objective. Identify a set of specific actions that can help you transform the community and/or its gender norms. For instance, develop long-term partnerships with relevant groups/ stakeholders in the community.	<p><i>Organize one-off events – change processes take time, so it is important to engage with the community over a longer period of time, not only once.</i></p>
 <p>Encourage young men to take on leadership roles to advocate for gender equality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Emphasize that present-day leadership skills include knowledge and awareness about the role of men in gender equality, as well as proactive engagement to change harmful gender norms and promote women's equal participation.	<p><i>Just make speeches. While vocal public support to gender equality is important, meaningful engagement should go beyond declarative statements and include introspection, action, and role-model behaviours.</i></p>



Expand the group of peers ready to take action for gender equality

- ✓ Ground prior reflection and discussion on men's role in achieving gender equality.
- ✓ Reflect on your own power and privilege as men and how it has influenced your life and your decisions..
- ✓ Clearly state that the group will be a place for difficult conversations, for addressing both personal and institutional practices of men (and sometimes women) that impede gender equality.
- ✓ Be aware that men may be at different stages of engagement with gender equality. Encourage them into honest and open dialogues with colleagues about gender equality.
- ✓ Encourage discussion on what “patriarchy” means in your community and how it affects everyone, including negative impacts on men as well as women. Emphasize that men have a role to play in ensuring everyone benefits from more gender-equal societies and workplaces.

Categorize all men as “bad actors”.

Change processes work best when they are mutually reinforcing and address different kinds of needs at different levels. Individual level change, for example, can be made easier and more sustainable if it is also supported by work engaging the community that addresses the economic needs of individuals and communities, is amplified by community and faith leaders, and is reinforced by legislative reforms. Approaches that seek to understand and address change at various levels are called socio-ecological approaches (Annex 1). You can of course not address all of these issues on your own, but it is worth thinking already at this stage about what other activities and processes could help support your work, and who your allies might be in this respect.



Step 2: PLAN!

Engaging men in gender equality requires more than enthusiasm; it needs structure, strategy, and readiness to face resistance, which we discuss in more detail further below. Careful planning ensures your activities are effective, sustainable, and inclusive.

For programmes engaging men in gender equality to be effective, they must be well-planned and consider both individual change and the broader social context. At this stage, you should fine-tune your reflections on which men you want to engage with, where and how; men are a diverse group and where and how you engage with them will depend on the target audience – their age, their location, their social standing, and so on. For some, a formal space is more suitable, whereas for others, informality is important. Some will be more comfortable with online spaces and others will not. You may want to have different approaches for different audiences, e.g. for men of different ages. Also consider who your messenger is and what your messages are: who is/are the best person(s) to deliver the message to your audience, and which formats and kind of language would resonate best with them? People may, for example, respond better to someone who shares a similar background to them.

In terms of reaching your audience, it is also worth thinking about suitable entry points and spaces. People are often busy and thus the barrier to engaging with your activity needs to be low. One way to make participation easier is to combine your activity with things that the men would be doing or engaging with already, or which have an appeal to them – such as using sports, online spaces, schools or vocational training programmes, or courses for young fathers-to-be. Be mindful of your intended audience's opportunity and capacity to invest time, as well as the time needed to get to/from the location of the activity.

Consider also what kind of resources you might need, as well as potential allies to amplify your messages.

STEPS	WHAT IT MEANS:	WHY IT MATTERS:	KEY ACTIONS:
1. Research Target Groups	Understand who you're trying to reach.	Men are not a monolithic group. Effective engagement depends on knowing their context – age, profession, location, religion, education, socioeconomic background.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research your target audience to determine how, where and when you can best engage with them.</i> • <i>Identify barriers and motivators for change.</i> • <i>Understand their current attitudes, needs and behaviours.</i>
2. Identify Stakeholders and Allies	Map out individuals, organizations, and institutions who can influence your target groups. Be sure you share a common understanding of the objective.	Engaging men requires a collective effort. Change is more sustainable when you involve others who share the vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partner with local NGOs, including local women's rights organizations, activists, educators, youth groups and media.</i> • <i>Engage allies from religious, cultural or sports communities.</i> • <i>Consider both formal and informal leaders.</i>
3. Identify Relevant Topics and Entry Points (See Annex 2 for examples)	Choose issues that are both meaningful to men and aligned with broader gender goals.	Entry points help connect men's real-life concerns with gender equality narratives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Use topics like fatherhood, emotional health, violence prevention, or workplace equality.</i> • <i>Frame conversations around shared values (e.g., respect, care, justice).</i> • <i>Localize examples to resonate with your audience.</i>
4. Develop a Strategic Approach	Create a clear roadmap that aligns your goals with action.	Without a plan, your initiative may lack focus or fail to scale..	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Define objectives and outcomes (e.g., behavioural change, awareness).</i> • <i>Choose your methods: trainings, media or social media campaigns, peer education, etc., depending on your target audience.</i> • <i>Ensure the approach is participatory, inclusive¹⁴, and gender-transformative.</i>
5. Secure Funding and Resources	Ensure the initiative is feasible and sustainable.	Even small-scale interventions need human and financial support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Apply for grants or donor support.</i> • <i>Integrate activities into existing programmes.</i> • <i>Leverage in-kind support (venues, facilitators, materials).</i>

In order to help you identify potential entry points for discussions on gender equality, some suggestions are listed in **Annex 2**. It is recommended, however, that you think about your intended audience, and reflect on which of these possible discussion topics might work best.

Remember, men should engage with other men and with themselves, rethinking their own privileges, gender stereotypes, and behaviours – rather than teaching women how to achieve equality. Instead of mentoring women, they must become allies: listening, supporting, and transforming “male culture” from within.

¹⁴ This refers to pro-actively ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded.

PLANNING FOR CHALLENGES – resistance, referrals, and accountability

Working with men on promoting gender equality can touch upon issues that people feel strongly about, trigger past traumatic experiences, or reveal issues that require referral to others, for example medical or psychosocial services. Furthermore, we should also make sure that our efforts do indeed make a positive change in terms of promoting gender equality, rather than accidentally reinforcing men's positions of power. This section will cover some strategies to prevent and/or be prepared for such eventualities. It is important to note that these challenges may not arise, but if they do, having prepared for them will have been a worthwhile effort.



RESISTANCE

Resistance to gender norm change can arise for a range of reasons and can take different forms. Resistance may be due to, for example:

- ✓ Personal beliefs that go against gender equality,
- ✓ A lack of knowledge about the issues and their importance,
- ✓ A general resistance to change, especially if it is seen as coming from 'outside' one's group,
- ✓ A discomfort in talking about gender-related issues, or
- ✓ Assuming that other in the group are also against change, and seeking to gain their approval.

Resistance may be open, when, for example, someone raises arguments directly against gender equality, or it can be more subtle and involve ridiculing or downplaying the issue, undermining the authority of the facilitator, or reinforcing harmful norms outside of the training space. Whatever the form or the driver of the resistance, it is best not to ignore it but seek to address it. This should always be done in a respectful way, taking the resistance seriously but also asserting your stance, and not seeking to humiliate the other person. This may need to be done outside of the group space.

Also, keep in mind that there will always be those you cannot persuade, those who already agree with you, and those who fall somewhere in between. You should focus efforts on changing the attitudes of this 'moveable middle'.



REFERRALS

Working on gender issues is not only sensitive due to possible resistance, but also because it can trigger traumatic memories and/or bring to light participants' experiences that might require a referral to a mental or other kind of health care professional, social welfare services, or other support services. In order to be as prepared as possible for such eventualities, make sure that you have made a list of possible support services in the area, if they exist, so that you can share these confidentially with participants should the need arise. Remember, however, that you cannot force participants to reach out to service providers.



ACCOUNTABILITY

A further factor to keep in mind during the planning and design process is accountability, i.e. whether or not the activities are meeting the set goals of promoting gender equality. A part of this accountability comes from routine monitoring, evaluation and self-reflection. However, it is globally good practice for men working on gender equality to also check in with women gender activists and women's rights organizations to have them assess the degree to which the activities are living up to their goals. Ideally, this should already happen at the planning and design stage.



Step 3: ACT!

The following recommendations are adapted from the OSCE report “Engaging Men in Gender Equality at the OSCE and in Participating States”,¹⁵ which summarizes successful strategies for working with men in various contexts. Below are some recommendations to help you to implement the “Men for Gender Equality” initiative and turn ideas into real changes in your community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:



DO



DON'T

1. Build trust through appropriate safe spaces.

Create informal, non-judgmental environments where men feel psychologically safe. This will depend on the audience – depending on their social position, some may feel more comfortable with a more formal process; others will be more comfortable with an informal space. Possible connection-building activities include storytelling, self-reflection or small-group peer conversations. Foster empathy through sharing personal experiences and emotions, and make the space more approachable with humour, culturally relevant references and relatable examples. As a facilitator, it helps to be open about your own process of change and your own experiences..

Avoid rigid structures or formal, training-like tones in early sessions, as they can create pressure and undermine trust. Don't force participation or allow environments with power imbalances or judgment, as these discourage openness and psychological safety..

¹⁵ https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/e/524598_0.pdf

2. Encourage openness and readiness for change

Build on the trust established to engage men in open, reflective conversations about gender norms and masculinity. Use flexible, curiosity-driven discussions that draw on real-life experiences, introduce positive male role models and frame discomfort as a natural part of personal growth and learning.

Avoid using confrontational or moralizing language to persuade participants, as this can trigger resistance. Instead of labelling their views as toxic or wrong, guide them gently through reflection. Refrain from dominating sessions with one-way lectures or expecting rapid change – transformation takes time and trust. Keep in mind that change may be incremental, non-linear (i.e. there will also be setbacks), and that participants may face resistance or ridicule from others as they undergo their transformative process.

3. Leverage online learning and digital programmes, which have become increasingly popular and accessible for educational opportunities

Use online formats that enhance access to learning opportunities. When using online formats, ensure that they foster a psychologically safe space for reflection and dialogue. Carefully assess which topics are appropriate for virtual settings, especially when discussing sensitive issues, and make sure the security and confidentiality of online communication is guaranteed.

Completely replace in-person meetings and live interactions.

4. Consider the role of external facilitators and experts

Engage external facilitators and experts who bring new perspectives, an objective view and professional knowledge, particularly in complex or specialized subjects. Involving experts may be subject to available funds or dependent on partners of co-operation.

Fully rely on experts from outside of the community while ignoring leaders and activists the community. It is important to combine expert opinions with local experience..

5. Comprehensive interventions are proving to be more effective

Use comprehensive interventions that combine different methods such as trainings, discussions, education campaigns and community engagement. This approach enhances impact and promotes long-term changes.

Limit efforts to one-off events or simple lecturing that achieve only short-term results without systematic impact. Gender equality requires multilayered work at various levels of society.

6. Involve opinion leaders and influencers

Involve opinion leaders and influencers. They help to increase reach, communicate gender equality messages in clear language, and connect with new audiences.

Rely solely on influencers without a clear strategy and mechanisms to evaluate their impact or those who may send mixed messages.

7. Engage men and boys through topics and areas that resonate with their interests. (see Annex 2 for examples))

Use topics and areas that resonate with men and boys (which can be traditionally male associated such as sports, technology, leadership, health and fatherhood) as entry points to engage them in conversations about gender equality.

Avoid pushing abstract or unrelated topics without considering the interests and daily experiences of men and boys. Without a personal connection, engagement will be formal and ineffective.

8. Provide information on and establish linkages to appropriate service providers

Provide information on available support services, so that men know where to seek assistance during or after participation in the programme. Include medical and psychological services, counselling, and referral options for both victims and perpetrators of violence, subject to availability.

Leave participants without support during or after the program, expecting them to independently find the resources they need.



FURTHER READING

More resources are available if you are interested to explore the subject. Some of the most important and recent works are listed below:

ON GENDER EQUALITY:

Gender Equality Glossary, UN Women Training Centre, <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36>

OSCE Gender Equality, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/6/341816_0.pdf

OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, 2004. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/d/23295.pdf>

UNDP Gender Inequality Index: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>

ON VIOLENCE:

A Journey to Manhood: A Regional Strategy for Engaging Men and Boys in Ending VAWG in Central Asia <https://kazakhstan.unfpa.org/en/publications/journey-manhood-regional-strategy-engaging-men-and-boys-ending-vawg-central-asia>

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

ILO's Convention No. 190 (on eliminating violence and harassment), 2019 https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ("Istanbul Convention")¹⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/home>

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS:

Now and Men Podcast, 2021

X&Y Blog and resources database (updated weekly)

Role of men and boys in promoting gender equality: advocacy brief - UNESCO

Digital library "Men in focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women." Our Watch, 2019.

ON FATHERHOOD:

State of the World's Fathers, 2021

Being a man in Central Asia <https://be-a-man-in-central-asia.tilda.ws/>

ON ACCOUNTABILITY:

MenEngage Alliance (2023) Accountability Framework <https://menengage.org/resources/accountability-framework-of-menengage-alliance>

¹⁶ Please note that while the Istanbul Convention pertains to the States participating in the Council of Europe, it is referenced here as the most comprehensive regional standard on gender-based violence prevention and response.

ANNEX 1 – The Socio-Ecological Model

Socio-ecological models are approaches that seek to map, understand and address the dynamic interrelations between different factors that shape our lives at different levels simultaneously, from the individual and the family, to the community and institutions that we engage with, up to the policy level.

Figure 1: A socio-ecological model¹⁷



Below, you will find activities, initiatives, and projects that align with the socio-ecological model and demonstrate various levels of men's engagement in promoting gender equality. These examples can inspire you to develop your own initiatives, tailored to your community and context.

¹⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The Socio-Ecological Model: Levels of Action for Long-Lasting Social Change

LEVELS	GOALS	EXAMPLES OF INITIATIVES/PROJECTS
Strengthening individual knowledge and skills	To help men and women understand how existing gender and social norms affect their lives, promote changes in attitudes and beliefs about gender equality, enhance skills, and encourage specific target behaviours.	<p>Vocational guidance project for boys: "Boys' Day – Future Prospects for Boys" (https://www.boys-day.de/)</p> <p>Training based on "Program M Manual" by Young Men Initiative. (https://youngmeninitiative.net/en/)</p>
Establishing positive family relationships and creating an environment of equality	To support efforts to improve intimate partner relationships, reduce gender-based violence, and foster a supportive and equitable environment both in the workplace and within families.	<p>Improving the quality of intimate partner relationships: Promundo's "Program P" training for fathers and couples. (https://promundoglobal.org/programs/program-p/)</p> <p>For more in-depth information on perpetrator programs in Central Asia, please refer to the following publication https://www.osce.org/secretariat/576324</p>
Mobilizing communities using a community-based approach	To foster a supportive social environment that advances gender equality and encourages male engagement by involving communities through participatory planning, media, outreach, mobilization, campaigns, etc.	<p>Community dialogues: "Stepping Stones" program in English (https://prevention-collaborative.org/programme-examples/stepping-stones-and-creating-futures/) (Note: this approach has been adapted for use in Central Asia)</p> <p>Media campaigns and Events: "MenCare Georgia" Campaign (UNFPA Georgia) (https://georgia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/MenCare%20Brochure.pdf)</p>
Advocating for political and legal reform at the societal level	To develop strategies to reform and implement national, regional, and local laws and policies that positively change the social environment.	<p>Information support: A variety of resources related to information support and male engagement are available on the MenEngage Alliance website: http://www.menengage.org/</p>

ANNEX 2 – List of potential gender equality issues to reflect upon

THEMATIC AREA	TOPIC	EXAMPLE	POSSIBLE QUESTIONS
GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S PARTICIAPTION	What is gender mainstreaming?	A ministry adopts a gender strategy but implements it only in “women’s” departments, ignoring how transport, energy, or infrastructure affect men and women differently.	What does it mean to apply a gender lens to all sectors? How can we ensure gender mainstreaming isn't just a box-ticking exercise?
	Reasoning about patriarchy, power, and privilege	During a training, a male participant says, “We respect women — our mothers, sisters, wives,” but objects to the idea of women leading village councils.	What’s the difference between individual respect and systemic equality? How can men reflect upon their own social privileges in their communities?
	Gender equality as a prerequisite for human rights programming	A human rights project faces backlash for “destroying family values” when it promotes gender equality in legal reforms.	How do we talk about gender equality in ways that connect with local values like justice, respect, and dignity?
GENDER AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	How will climate change affect gender equality?	Climate-related droughts force many men to migrate for work, leaving women to care for children and the elderly without adequate state support.	How are gender roles shifting due to climate change? What kinds of policies are needed to protect the most vulnerable?
	The link between economic development and gender equality	In rural areas, microcredit programmes for women have increased family income, but some husbands now take control of their wives’ earnings.	How do we ensure women’s economic empowerment doesn’t lead to new forms of control or violence? What role do men play in supporting gender equity?

GENDER IN THE WORKPLACE

Men, women, and workplace dynamics

In a local development organization, women make up 70% of the staff but rarely speak up in management meetings. Male colleagues often take credit for their ideas.

How do traditional perceptions of male and female roles shape communication and leadership in mixed teams?
How can both men and women contribute to more equitable participation?

Preventing sexual harassment in the workplace

In a government office, a young woman is repeatedly asked personal questions by her male supervisor. When she complains, her colleagues advise her to “just ignore it.”

What do we consider as harassment?
How do social taboos and silence around harassment affect victims in Central Asian workplaces?
What kind of support systems are needed?

Gender stereotypes in the workplace

A woman working in the national security sector notices that in order to be taken seriously, she has to suppress her emotions and behave “tough.” Meanwhile, her male colleagues believe that showing feelings or expressing doubts is a sign of weakness.

How do cultural expectations of men and women influence behaviour in security and defence institutions?
How can we promote diversity and inclusion in these sectors?

GENDER AND FAMILY LIFE

Money matters: Who is responsible for financial decisions in our families?

In a family, the father controls all the finances, even though the mother also works full-time as a teacher.

How do power and trust materialize in financial decisions at home?
What are ways to build transparency and shared financial responsibility?

Sharing responsibilities at home

A young couple tries to split chores equally, but his mother insists her son shouldn't “lower himself” to doing housework.

How are gender roles at home shaped by the expectations of others – of parents, parents-in-law, uncles/aunts, siblings, children?
How can young couples navigate tradition and equality?

How our decisions affect others

A man decides to migrate abroad for seasonal work, leaving his wife to care for three children and his elderly parents.

How do economic pressures affect families in our region, such as the pressure on men to migrate and women to move in with in-laws?
Who takes the decisions? How can relationships be sustained in a healthy way in these situations?
How can families make decisions that consider everyone's well-being?

Parental leave,
family leave,
paternity leave

A man is mocked by relatives for taking paternity leave after his wife gave birth. "Are you the mother now?" they joke.

How do we challenge the idea that caregiving is only women's work?
What are the benefits for children, if both parents care for them?
What would it take for men to feel proud of being hands-on fathers?

GENDER AND MEN'S WELL- BEING

Masculinity and
behaviour for a
healthy lifestyle?

In a support group, men say they rarely go for check-ups because it's seen as weak to worry about health. One participant had a heart attack at 45.

How do traditional ideas of masculinity affect men's health?
What's the cost of silence?

Men and mental
health

A man struggling with depression visits a mullah instead of a psychologist, fearing judgment from his peers if he seeks therapy.

Where do men in our communities turn for help?
Why is seeking help important?
How can we reduce stigma around mental illness?

Men's health is
public health

A district runs free health check-ups for men, but turnout is low. Many say they don't need a doctor unless they "can't walk."

What would make men more likely to care about health prevention?
How can public health campaigns be more gender-sensitive to reach different target groups?

Stress, pressure,
and anger
management

A man in a village lashes out at his son after losing his job but later feels ashamed. He's never learned to express emotions without anger.

What tools do men need to cope with stress and emotions in healthy ways?
How can we teach non-violent ways of working through negative emotions to men of all ages?



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