

## 3. Men, boys and policy

### The international context

‘Men in many contexts, through their roles in the home, the community and at the national level, have the potential to bring about change in attitudes, roles, relationships and access to resources and decision-making which are critical for equality between women and men. In their relationships as fathers, brothers, husbands and friends, the attitudes and values of men and boys impact directly on the women and girls around them. Men should therefore be actively involved in developing and implementing legislation and policies to foster gender equality, and in providing role models to promote gender equality in the family, the workplace and in society at large.’<sup>37</sup>

Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan

A central principle of international law, articulated in many UN documents from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights onwards, is equality between men and women. The most complete set of international standards in this area is set out in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),<sup>38</sup> which requires ratifying states to abolish sex discrimination and to promote the equality of women with men in all aspects of political, social, economic and cultural life.<sup>39</sup> CEDAW was ratified by the UK Government in 1986.

Interest in the issue of how to involve men and boys in achieving gender equality has grown significantly at international level over the past decade. For example, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo set out a Programme of Action which highlighted the need to encourage men to take responsibility with respect to child-rearing and housework, family life as well as parenthood and sexual and reproductive behaviour. And at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the ‘Beijing Declaration’ committed participating governments to ‘*encourage men to participate fully in all actions towards equality*’ (paragraph 25).<sup>40</sup>

In 2004, an important UN Conference on ‘The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality’ called for action on a range of themes, including:

- promoting education based on gender equality;
- engaging men as fathers in socialising and caring for children;
- including men and boys in gender equality and gender mainstreaming policies;
- engaging the media in ensuring less stereotypical imagery and attitudes;
- engaging men and boys in HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, and in sexual and reproductive health; and
- engaging men and boys in the reduction of gender-based violence.

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37. Report of the UN Secretary General, *The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality*, 22 December 2003, E/CN.6/2004/9

38. See <http://un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/> for details

39. Other international treaties and conventions are also relevant. These include: the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the 1966 International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination; the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child; the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and a range of conventions developed by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

40. The accompanying ‘Plan of Action’ reaffirmed the principle of shared power and responsibility between men and women, suggesting that women’s concerns could only be addressed ‘in partnership with men’ towards gender equality.

The Conference concluded, among other things, that key ‘stakeholders’ – governments, UN organisations, civil society – should promote action at all levels to increase the contribution of men and boys to furthering gender equality.

Mirroring this new agenda at the political level, there is some evidence of positive initiatives emerging in a number of countries which are encouraging men to show support for gender equality.<sup>41</sup> For instance, a group of national and international NGOs have formed a global network called MenEngage – A Global Alliance to Engage Boys and Men in Gender Equality.<sup>42</sup> This alliance has held consultations with large numbers of NGOs in Eastern and Southern Africa, South and South-east Asia, India, Europe and Latin America.

Nevertheless, most initiatives have been relatively small-scale and have reached only a small number of men.<sup>43</sup> A UN review of progress since 2004 also concludes that the majority of projects have been initiated by/with NGOs, but often without the engagement of other important stakeholders. What is needed is to scale up initiatives to achieve broader change, backed by sufficient political will.<sup>44</sup>

## European context

‘...in order to improve the status of women and promote gender equality, more attention should be paid to how men are involved in the achievement of gender equality, as well as to the positive impact of gender equality for men and for the wellbeing of society as a whole’.

Council of the European Union, ‘Conclusions on Men and Gender Equality’, 1 December 2006

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of the European Union,<sup>45</sup> and there is a long tradition of support at this level for measures to promote gender equality.<sup>46</sup> In particular, the EU has focused on combating sex discrimination in employment, social security and access to goods and services.

From the mid-1990s onwards, increasing emphasis has also been placed on ‘gender mainstreaming’, which aims to achieve gender equality by bringing this perspective into all policy areas and activities, complementing more traditional approaches based on legislation and positive action. One argument that has been used in favour of gender mainstreaming is that it focuses attention on gender relations rather than on policies specifically for women, and that ‘gender’ therefore becomes a responsibility of men as well as women. Some commentators have suggested, however, that a focus on men may shift attention too far away from women’s interests, and that men and women will be treated as if they face similar obstacles.<sup>47</sup>

41. See, for example, Pease B., Pringle K.(eds.) (2001) *A Man’s World: Changing Men’s Practices in a Globalized World*, London: Zed Books; Ruxton S. (ed.)(2004) *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice*, Oxfam GB

42. Members include: EngenderHealth (US and South Africa), Instituto Promundo (Brazil), Save the Children-Sweden, Sahyog (India), the International Planned Parenthood Federation, UNDP, WHO, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (US) and the White Ribbon Campaign (Canada). <http://www.menengage.org>

43. Barker G., *The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality*, written statement, Commission on the Status of Women, 51st Session, New York, 26 Feb-9 March 2007

44. Moderator’s summary of the interactive dialogue to evaluate progress in the implementation of the agreed conclusions on *The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality*, 2 March 2007, 51st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women

45. Article 119 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome addresses the principle of ‘equal pay for equal work’

46. For example, the 1975 Equal Pay Directive (75/117/EEC); the Social Security Directive (79/7/EEC); Article 13 of the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam on anti-discrimination

47. Pease B., *Gendering Men: Implications for Gender Equality*, in Varanka J., Narhinen A., Siukola R.(2006) *Men and Gender Equality: Towards Progressive Policies*, Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Report 2006: 75

In practice, there has been a limited explicit focus on men within EU policy. There has been a longstanding interest in encouraging men as carers (especially for children<sup>48</sup>), but only in the last few years have initiatives to combat violence<sup>49</sup> – and in particular, transnational issues in relation to prostitution, trafficking and sexual exploitation – developed any focus on men and masculinities.

Recently there has been growing awareness of the importance of seeking to engage men and boys in the achievement of gender equality more broadly. In 2006, for example, Finland's EU Presidency<sup>50</sup> organised an expert conference on men and gender equality,<sup>51 52</sup> and the EU Council of Ministers<sup>53</sup> – the heads of Member State governments – subsequently agreed a set of 'Conclusions on Men and Gender Equality' (see box on previous page). These promote a range of actions at Member State level, including:

- development of education methods to eliminate gender stereotypes and to improve the capacity of men and boys to care for themselves and others;
- reinforcement of institutional structures for promoting gender equality, both in the public and private sectors;
- measures to ensure equal career opportunities, and to encourage men and boys to choose education and employment in female-dominated fields (and vice versa);
- recognition of the gender dimension in health;
- punitive measures against the perpetrators of violence, and preventive measures targeted especially at men and boys;
- policies to reconcile professional and private life, in order to support an equal sharing of domestic and caring responsibilities;
- encouraging men to take-up family leave entitlements;
- promotion of awareness-raising and take up of flexible working; and
- increasing gender-related research and the exchange of good practice.

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48. The 'European Commission Childcare Network', an expert group supported by the European Commission between 1986 and 1996, undertook studies on a range of issues related to the reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities. See in particular, Ghedini P., Chandler T., Whalley M., Moss P. (1995) *Fathers, Nurseries and Childcare*, European Commission Equal Opportunities Unit/EC Childcare Network, and Jensen J. (1996) *Men as Workers in Childcare Services: A discussion paper*, EC Childcare Network, Brussels: European Commission

49. For a summary of the activities of the EU's Daphne Programme on violence against women and children, see Bellander-Todino I., *The Daphne Program and Projects Directed Towards Men*, in Varanka J., Narhinen A., Siukola R.(2006) *Men and Gender Equality: Towards Progressive Policies*, Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Report 2006: 75

50. The EU Presidency is responsible for setting the priorities for the Council of Ministers, and is held for a six month period by every Member State in turn.

51. Varanka J., Narhinen A., Siukola R.(2006) *Men and Gender Equality: Towards Progressive Policies*, Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Report 2006: 75

52. In March 2001, Sweden organised an EU conference on 'Men and Gender Equality' in Örebro, as part of their EU Presidency.

53. The Council of Ministers is the EU's principal decision-making body, and each Member State government has a seat on the Council.

54. The Council of Europe should not be confused with the Council of Ministers of the European Union. The Council of Europe is a distinct organisation with a wider membership than the EU, focussing on the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy. The European Convention on Human Rights, now incorporated into UK law, is the most important instrument developed by the Council of Europe.

55. These include: Recommendation No.R(96) 5 on reconciling work and family life; Recommendation No. R(98) 14 on gender mainstreaming; and Recommendation Rec (2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making.

Within the Council of Europe (CoE),<sup>54</sup> a range of recommendations have also been developed to assist Member States in moving towards gender equality;<sup>55</sup> whilst these are not legally binding, they have significant political weight. Particularly relevant to the current report, recent recommendations have addressed violence against women,<sup>56</sup> gender mainstreaming in education,<sup>57</sup> the inclusion of gender differences in health policy,<sup>58</sup> and gender equality standards and mechanisms.<sup>59</sup> Whilst there has been a limited focus specifically on men and gender equality within the CoE's activities, a compilation of CoE texts on this theme highlights that the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men has devoted specific attention to the question of men and gender equality: *'The main objective of its activities around this issue is to draw attention to and initiate a debate about the fact that gender equality cannot be achieved by women alone, but by women and men working together.'*<sup>60</sup>

Among European countries, there is considerable difference in approaches to gender equality law and policy, and in the extent to which they have explored men and masculinity issues. These have been categorised<sup>61</sup> into three broad groups: former Eastern bloc countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Poland) that are in the process of developing their gender equality strategies, but with very little specific emphasis on men; established EU Member States (e.g. Ireland, Italy, Germany, the UK) that have developed equal opportunities and gender equality policies within the EU framework, with some specific emphasis on men; and the Nordic nations (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) that have, since the 1980s, developed gender equality mechanisms and some focused policies in relation to men (especially within the context of the Nordic Council of Ministers).

Some of the most innovative approaches in relation to policy on men and boys have come out of the Nordic region (see boxes below and overleaf).

In **Finland** there has been a Men's Section (the 'Subcommittee on Men's Issues') at government level since the late 1980s. Its remit is to: act as an expert discussion forum; initiate public discussion on men's issues; prepare and introduce initiatives; and produce reports. The membership comprises male and female activists, researchers and representatives of interested groups – from gay rights to fathers' rights groups. The Subcommittee has been an important forum for those with differing opinions and interests in politics around men. In addition, since 1995, an amendment to the Act on Equality between Women and Men has required all state committees, commissions and appointed local authorities to have a minimum of 40 per cent membership for both women and men; in 2005 this was extended to all organisations involved in municipal cooperation.<sup>62</sup>

56. Recommendation Rec (2002) 5 on the protection of women against violence. In addition, a CoE Task Force has produced a draft final activity report on *combatting violence against women, including domestic violence*, which will be considered by the Committee of Ministers later in 2008.

57. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)13 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on gender mainstreaming in education.

58. Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)1 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the inclusion of gender differences in health policy.

59. Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on gender equality standards and mechanisms.

60. Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men, 'Promoting gender equality: a common issue for women and men', Compilation of Council of Europe texts dealing with the question of men and gender equality 1995-2000, EG (2002) 7

61. Hearn J., Pringle K. (eds.) (2006) *European Perspectives on Men and Masculinities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

62. See Hearn J., Niemi H. (2006) *Men's movements and feminism in Finland: organisations, networks and social relations*, in A. Moring (ed.) *Democracy and Gender*, Nytkis/Otava, Helsinki and Hearn J. and Niemi H. (2006) *Is there a "men's movement" in Finland?: The state of men's gender-conscious organising*, Norma. *Nordic Journal of Masculinity Studies* Vol. 1(1)

In 2007, the Government of **Norway** set up a 'Men's Panel', with the purpose of contributing to debate on men, boys and gender equality and coming up with some new policy proposals. This has stimulated a stronger focus on men and gender equality issues in the media. The panel's proposals are not binding, and it is not yet clear which recommendations will be followed up by the Government. In addition to the panel, a large survey was undertaken, focusing on men (but with both male and female respondents). The Government recently drafted a White Paper on men and gender equality to send to the Parliament. The White Paper proposes concrete measure in response to a range of topics, including: perspectives on masculinities; boys' education; career choices and the labour market; men as fathers and partners; masculinities, health and lifestyles; and masculinities and violence.

## UK Government structures and mechanisms

Influenced by the EU approach, considerable changes have occurred in formal equality mechanisms at UK level since the advent of the Labour Government in 1997. These include the introduction of: Ministers for Women; a Government Equalities Office; Public Service Agreements; a Gender Equality Duty (and Race and Disability Duties); the Equalities Review; and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Below, we describe these structures, mechanisms and initiatives in more detail, and highlight the extent to which they address men and masculinity issues.

### Ministers for Women

In 1997, the Cabinet post of Minister for Women was established (with a second Minister in support) to lead across government on issues facing women. Although some critics argue that the Government has not made sufficient progress in tackling deep-seated inequalities (including those facing many women), a range of policies and programmes over the past decade have benefited women in particular, including: the introduction of a National Minimum Wage and a National Childcare Strategy; increases in child benefit; new family-friendly leave arrangements; measures to tackle violence against women; and establishment of the Sure Start and Children's Centres programmes.

In 2007, the Ministers for Women set out their priorities as:<sup>63</sup> supporting families, particularly as they bring up children and care for older and disabled relatives; tackling violence against women, and the way women who commit crimes are dealt with; and empowering black and ethnic minority women to build cohesion. Whilst these headline priorities do not mention men specifically, the supporting paper highlights that many fathers say they would like to be more involved in caring for their children, and sets out a desire to work with employers, trade unions and others to give fathers a right to take up to 26 weeks additional paternity leave. In relation to the second priority on tackling violence against women, men who are violent are an important implicit target of policies in this area.

Following the expansion of the portfolio, the Minister for Women was retitled Minister for Women and Equality. An 'Inter Ministerial Group on Equalities', which met for the first time in January 2008, has also been established to progress equalities and human rights issues which cut across departmental boundaries. This is especially necessary as different departments lead on different aspects of the equalities agenda.<sup>64</sup>

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63. Priorities for the Ministers of Women, Cm 7183, July 2007

64. For example, the lead on race and faith policy is the Department for Communities and Local Government; on disability and on age policy the Department for Work and Pensions; on some aspects of discrimination law in the workplace (religion, belief, sexual orientation) the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform; on education policy the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills; on human rights law and policy the Ministry of Justice.

## Women's Unit/Government Equalities Office

A Women's Unit was set up by the incoming Government in 1997 to advise on initiatives, consider policies across government and support the development of 'joined up' thinking. In 2001, the remit of the Unit was widened so that it had lead responsibility within Government for policy on women, gender equality, sexual orientation and the co-ordination of equality.<sup>65</sup> Drawing on experience at EU level, a core aspect of the work of the Women's Unit has been on mainstreaming gender across government policies and activities. Although the Unit has published guidance on assessing gender impact,<sup>66</sup> the approach across government departments has not been systematic, tending to focus only on the problems facing particular groups.<sup>67</sup>

In October 2007, the Unit was incorporated into a new department – the 'Government Equalities Office' (GEO) – reporting to the Ministers for Women, reflecting a desire to address a broader 'equalities' agenda, including not just gender, but also age, race, faith, disability and sexual orientation.<sup>68</sup> Key current priorities for the GEO include: updating the legislative framework with a new Equality Bill;<sup>69</sup> delivering on the priorities of the Ministers for Women; taking forward the cross-Government Equality Public Service Agreement for 2008-2011 (see below); developing a cross-Government Strategy with other departments; building an improved evidence base; and helping public services to promote equality and diversity.<sup>70</sup>

Over the past decade, men and boys have not featured as a specific work stream within the work of the Women's Unit, nor are they explicitly addressed within the GEO Business Plan 2008-2009. This is partly due to lack of resources, but probably also to the relative invisibility of masculinity as a gender issue. However, as a result of a mapping exercise that was conducted to inform the UK position for the 2007 UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Government stated its intention<sup>71</sup> to review its progress in this area. This commitment forms the basis for the current report.

## Public Service Agreements

An important related initiative is the establishment of equalities objectives in some of the 30 'Public Service Agreements'<sup>72</sup> (PSAs) (and an accompanying National Indicator Set) for government departments set out in the conclusions of the 2007 Treasury-led Comprehensive Spending Review; a new three-year spending period against these objectives began in April 2008. PSAs are a good example of a new kind of equality lever and of cross-departmental working on equality issues.

Several of the new PSAs are directly relevant to men and masculinity issues. Although it does not lead on all equalities strands, the GEO is responsible for overseeing the 2008-11 'Equality PSA' – PSA15 – the first time there has been a cross-governmental equality target. This seeks to '*address the disadvantage that individuals experience because of their gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief*'. This PSA will focus on '*reducing inequalities in pay, independence and choice, discrimination, fair treatment and civic participation*'.<sup>73</sup> A number of other PSAs are

65. This was reflected in a new title, the 'Women and Equality Unit'.

66. Women and Equality Unit (2002), *Gender Impact Assessment*, London: Department of Trade and Industry

67. Lister, R. (2001) *New Labour: a study in ambiguity from a position of ambivalence*, Critical Social Policy, 21

68. The GEO has a budget of £84m for 2008 – 2009; the bulk of the expenditure is a £70m grant to the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

69. The aim of the Equality Bill, among other things, is to streamline and strengthen anti-discrimination measures and to move away from individuals fighting for their rights to a more systematic approach to discrimination.

70. Government Equalities Office (2008) Business Plan 2008-2009

71. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Sixth periodic report to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/UK/6, 14 June 2007

72. Public Service Agreements (PSAs) were introduced in the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review in order to set aims and objectives for public service delivery and drive improvements in outcomes.

73. Government Equalities Office (ibid.)

also relevant to equality and to men and masculinities, in particular in relation to employment, business success, health, criminal justice, older people, community empowerment and child welfare. For example, PSA18 on promoting *'better health care and well-being for all'* highlights suicides among young men.

This PSA and indicators process is mirrored at local level, with local authorities across England agreeing new three-year 'Local Area Agreements' (LAAs), which will include objectives relevant to equalities issues in their areas. LAAs will have to demonstrate an understanding of the makeup of their area and any particular issues facing specific groups that are affecting their take-up of services, drawing on the knowledge and experience of community organisations. Local targets will be included in the LAA, based on the national PSA and indicators framework.

### The Gender Equality Duty<sup>74</sup>

A significant new mechanism in relation to gender equality in particular, both at central and local levels, is the introduction in April 2007 of the Gender Equality Duty;<sup>75</sup> this imposes a statutory duty on 'public authorities'<sup>76</sup> to promote equality between men and women, and to pay 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment between men and women in all of their functions (e.g. policy-making, service provision, employment matters).<sup>77</sup> The duty requires public authorities to draw up 'Gender Equality Schemes' (GESs) that set out specific objectives, reporting against them every year, and reviewing them every three years; in establishing the objectives authorities will have to consult fully with employees and other key stakeholders. Authorities will also have to assess the impact of their current and proposed policies and practices on gender equality, and disaggregate data by gender in order to identify areas of concern. Although it is rather early to assess the impact of the Duty, there are indications that implementation has been variable so far.<sup>78</sup> Understanding of the need for action to address the specific disadvantages faced by men or women – rather than providing the same treatment for both – is also weak. In future, implementation will be monitored by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (see below).

The Equal Opportunities Commission's Code of Practice for the Gender Equality Duty argues that gender roles and relationships structure men's and women's lives: *'Women are frequently disadvantaged by policies and practices that do not recognise their greater caring responsibilities, the different pattern of their working lives, their more limited access to resources and their greater vulnerability to domestic violence and sexual assault. Men are also disadvantaged by workplace cultures that do not support their family or childcare responsibilities, by family services that assume they have little or no role in parenting, or by health services which do not recognise their different needs'*.<sup>79</sup> The Code goes on to cite some specific examples of gender issues affecting men, that

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74. Since 2001, a Race Equality Duty has required public authorities to take the lead in promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations, and preventing unlawful discrimination. The Disability Equality Duty (2006) also requires public authorities to carry out their functions with due regard to: the need to eliminate unlawful disability discrimination and disability-related harassment; promote equality of opportunity for disabled people; promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and encourage the participation of disabled people in public life. There is no comparable duty on public authorities in relation to gays and lesbians.

75. The Duty follows from the provision in the 2006 Equality Act allowing for the creation of a public duty to promote equality on the ground of gender.

76. The Duty also applies to a public authority in relation to services and functions which are contracted out, and to private and voluntary bodies which are carrying out public functions.

77. At present the Specific Duties on gender for Scotland are stronger than in England and Wales; for example, Scottish public authorities are required to produce an equal pay statement.

78. The Women's National Commission has argued, for example, that while some public bodies and central government departments have shown strong leadership, commitment has been inconsistent. See UK Women's National Commission (2007), 'Submission to the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination'

79. Equal Opportunities Commission (2007) *Code of Practice for the Gender Equality Duty*, Manchester: EOC

could be addressed by the Duty. These include: fathers receiving greater support for their childcare responsibilities from public services and employers; separate provision to encourage men to increase their low take-up of primary healthcare services; and addressing men's under-representation in the caring professions, such as nursing or childcare.

In **Finland** all employers with more than 30 employees have been legally obliged to have a 'Gender Equality Plan' (GEP) for some years (similar arrangements exist in Sweden). The Plan should include a report on how women and men are distributed in different tasks and on wage differentials by gender. However, in a survey of the 100 largest companies in the early 2000s, one-third said they did not have a GEP. In 2005, the Equality Act was revised and there are now some sanctions, such as fines, whereas previously there were none.<sup>80</sup>

## Equalities Review

The Equalities Review was set up to analyse the causes of disadvantage, make recommendations on key policy priorities, and inform the modernisation of equality legislation. The final report<sup>81</sup> was published in 2007, and called for a range of steps towards equality, including: an agreed definition of equality and consensus on the benefits of equality; increased efforts to measure progress; targeted action on specific inequalities; and a simpler legal framework. Although the Foreword to the review criticises '*the complacency that consigns women and men to preordained roles in life*' and the main report highlights some key statistics on men and boys, the review contains no over-arching analysis of gender equality or masculinity issues.

## The Equality and Human Rights Commission

The shift towards an equalities agenda has been reinforced by the establishment in 2007 of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), replacing the former Equal Opportunities, Racial Equality, and Disability Rights Commissions and extending the remit to include three new strands of age, faith and sexual orientation. The EHRC, sponsored by the GEO within government, is the first organisation of its kind in Britain. It heralds a major shift in efforts to tackle inequality and human rights, seeking to prevent discrimination by addressing the causes that lie behind it, and encouraging systemic change rather than relying on legal remedies after the event. It also provides the opportunity to bring together the various equalities strands and help to address the circumstances of those who experience multiple disadvantages.

The EHRC has four strategic priorities for 2008-2009:<sup>82</sup> to analyse, define and target key equality and human rights challenges; to change policy and organisational practice to provide better public services alongside an efficient and dynamic economy; to engage, involve and empower the public, especially people from disadvantaged areas and communities; and to anticipate social change, develop new narratives and reach new audiences in ways that strengthen equality and human rights. Its core themes and programmes include narrowing the poverty gap and reducing social exclusion, ensuring care reform promotes equality and human rights, increasing social mobility among disadvantaged groups and strengthening community relations.

Ambitious though the vision and plans for the EHRC are, there have been some concerns that the specific focus on gender equality (and on other equality strands) may be diluted. In recent years, the

80. Hearn J., Piekkari R. (2005) *Gendered leaderships and leaderships on gender policy: National context, corporate structures, and chief Human Resources managers in transnational corporations*, Leadership, Vol. 1(4)

81. *Fairness and Freedom: The Final Report of the Equalities Review*, February 2007

82. Equality and Human Rights Commission (2008) *Bringing People Together*, Business Plan 2008/9

Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) had played an increasing role in exploring issues in relation to fathering, generating new research and stimulating public debate. The argument put forward in July 2008 by EHRC Chief Executive, Nicola Brewer, that the rights of fathers to leave provision should be improved, suggests that the EHRC does intend to build on this legacy (see section on 'Fatherhood', page 65).<sup>83</sup>

More recently, the EHRC has also made clear its desire to contribute to efforts to tackle violence against women. Specifically, it has stated that it will target over 100 local authorities with the threat of legal action over their failure to provide specialised services for women who have experienced violence. The Commission and the End Violence Against Women coalition have also called on the Government and other relevant public bodies to develop funding strategies for women's support services, and have highlighted a 'regional postcode lottery' which leaves many women without support.<sup>84</sup>

## Welsh Assembly

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)<sup>85</sup> has a statutory duty to '*make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people*'.<sup>86</sup> Gender mainstreaming approaches are currently being applied to policy development and service delivery; this involves, for instance, the development of gender-disaggregated statistics, gender budgeting,<sup>87</sup> gender impact assessment and research and evaluation of gender equality initiatives.<sup>88</sup> A Strategic Equality and Diversity Unit provides support, advice and guidance on mainstreaming equality into WAG's policies, strategies, programmes and practices. And a system of 'Equality Champions' ensures each department has a nominated Champion who has a seat on its management team.

Within the Welsh Assembly, an Equality of Opportunity Committee audits the work which both the WAG and the National Assembly for Wales have done to promote the principle of equality for all people, and to address discrimination against any person on grounds of race, sex or disability.

In April 2007, the general duty to promote equality of opportunity between men and women came into force in Wales. The duty has potentially far-reaching implications for the development of policy in Wales, emphasising the need for consultation, encouraging the use of impact assessments, and the use of gender budgeting.<sup>89</sup> The WAG has developed a Gender Equality Scheme which ran from 2007 to 2008; a Single Equality Scheme is now being established combining all the equality duties.

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83. Nicola Brewer's speech at the launch of 'Working Better' consultation, Immarsat Conference Centre, London, 14 July 2008

84. Coy M., Kelly L., Foord J.(2009) *Map of Gaps 2: the postcode lottery of Violence Against Women support services in Britain*, End Violence Against Women/Equality and Human Rights Commission, [www.mapofgaps.org](http://www.mapofgaps.org)

85. WAG has tightly defined powers under UK statute, however it has a £15 billion budget and powers in relation to key areas of social policy, in particular health, education, housing and social services. After May 2007, the WAG gained powers to develop primary legislation under the Government of Wales Act 2006.

86. Section 120 Government of Wales Act 1998

87. An audit method analysing the level of spending on public policy in relation to women and men respectively.

88. Chaney P., *The Substantive Representation of Women in Post-Devolution Wales: Challenges, Progress and Prospects*, Paper to the Political Studies Association Annual Conference, University of Bath, 12 April 2007

89. Chaney P.(ibid.)

## UK Government policy: an assessment

Government policy-making over the past decade has sought to address men and masculinity issues across a number of areas,<sup>90</sup> the most high-profile being fathering and boys' education.<sup>91</sup> These developments were initiated following a Ministerial Seminar in 1998 on 'Boys, young men and fathers',<sup>92</sup> led by the Home Office, which identified some key areas of concern.<sup>93</sup> Below, we highlight some key aspects of the Government's approach, drawing upon the more detailed analyses set out in sections 4-9 of this report.

In relation to the domestic sphere, there is evidence that, rather than seeking to achieve greater equality between men and women, the overriding aim of policy has been to invest in children and improve outcomes for them. Important though this aim is, this emphasis can result in mothers and fathers being treated solely as conduits for children's welfare, obscuring the parents' own needs and diverting policy attention and resources away from adults without children.<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, Labour has struck a positive rhetorical tone on involving fathers in the care of children, yet concrete policy measures to promote shared parenting have not gone far enough. For example, two weeks paternity leave was introduced in 2003, and there is a current commitment to implement 'Additional Paternity Leave' (APL) for fathers up to 26 weeks. But making unused leave entitlements transferable from the mother to the father, as APL does, is a poor substitute for a dedicated 'daddy month' (see section on 'Fatherhood', page 65).

Measures to reconcile work and caring responsibilities must be set within a context where paid work pressures have been intensifying. It is disappointing, therefore, that the Government has not ended its opt-out to the European Working Time Directive. Whilst other moves to widen flexible working arrangements are welcome, there is a role for Government, working with other key stakeholders, in ensuring that these are taken up more readily by men. This could help to retain jobs and provide flexibility for workers in riding out the current recession. Failure to pursue this action is likely to entrench existing inequalities and the endurance of the gender pay gap. Recent unemployment figures have shown increases in rates for both men and women, with job losses in sectors where men predominate (e.g. manufacturing and construction) alongside job losses in the retail and service sectors where more women than men work (see section on 'Work', page 45).

Tackling inequality, particularly based on social class, has been, and remains, an important theme for Labour's health policy – more important than gender. As the Deputy Leader of the party recently put it: '*class trumps gender when it comes to life expectancy*'.<sup>95</sup> But over the past two years, there have also been moves to tackle and improve men's health, especially following the introduction of the Gender Equality Duty. For example, policy-makers and practitioners are increasingly aware of men's reluctance to seek medical help and treatment, and of the importance of improving their access to information and services. As yet, however, the overall Government approach tends to be fragmentary, concentrating on some health issues (e.g. cancer, sexual health, suicide) but not others of comparable importance (e.g. cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes). There is, so far, less evidence of gender being 'mainstreamed' across health policy, although efforts to close this

90. Whilst boys and men have been explicitly addressed in social policy by previous governments, this has tended to be mainly or exclusively in the area of youth crime.

91. Scourfield J., Drakeford M. (2001) *New Labour and the Politics of Masculinity*, Working Paper 13, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University

92. Home Office (1998) *Boys, Young Men and Fathers, A Ministerial Seminar*. Seminar Report, London: Home Office Voluntary and Community Unit.

93. This work in Government built on previous interest when Labour was in opposition. See Estelle Morris M.P. (1996) *Closing the Gender Gap*, Labour Party consultation document

94. Featherstone B. (2009), *Contemporary Fathering: Theory, Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Policy Press

95. Harriet Harman MP, speech to Compass conference, 14 June 2008

gap are emerging in the Department of Health (e.g. the publication of a study on the different ways men and women access healthcare, and production of guidance for the NHS on developing a Gender Equality Scheme). Understanding among health professionals of how men's health connects to men's socialisation and their risk-taking behaviour is also underdeveloped; and, at the local level, men's health remains a largely marginal issue (see section on 'Health', page 83).

Where young men are concerned, the emphasis has been on getting more of them into work (e.g. through programmes such as the New Deal). While the New Deal has contributed to, and indeed accelerated, a fall in the numbers of long-term unemployed 18-24 year olds,<sup>96</sup> the economic circumstances of some young men – especially those facing multiple disadvantages – remain poor<sup>97</sup> (see section on 'Work', page 45).

In relation to the issue of men's violence, there has been a trend towards increasing social control and punishment (particularly of working-class men), through a range of measures including a massive growth in the use of incarceration. Despite the huge over-representation of men in the statistics on interpersonal and other forms of violence, there has, however, been less engagement in terms of policy with the gendered nature of violence (including pornography, prostitution and child sexual abuse). Insufficient attention has also been given to tackling the links between men's violence, increasing sexual stereotyping and objectification in the media and the growth of pornography and the sex industry. However, there is some acknowledgment of this within Government, and moves to address the issue. For example, ways of shifting the predominant culture and challenging male demand for sexual services (and/or criminalising their use of them) are currently being explored (see section on 'Violence', page 123). But overall, action is as yet unco-ordinated and lacks a coherent vision.

A particular focus of concern in relation to violence has been the rising death toll among young men as result of gun and knife crime. In 2007, the Home Office launched the Tackling Gangs Action Programme (TGAP), to help neighbourhoods in London, Liverpool, Birmingham and Manchester develop innovative approaches to dealing with gangs. Further measures were set out in the 2008 'Violent Crime Action Plan', and other initiatives have been established (e.g. a marketing campaign to tackle knife crime, a good practice guide for local agencies, and guidance for schools).<sup>98</sup> However, it has been argued that significant gaps in policy and practice remain (see 'Young men, gangs and violence', in 'Violence', page 123).<sup>99</sup>

Interest in bolstering boys' achievements in school and beyond has focused to some extent on the needs of boys from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. In 2006, the Government commissioned the independent 'REACH' report<sup>100</sup> on raising the attainment and achievement of black boys and young men. The report recommended, among other things, the introduction of a 'national role model programme', which the Government has supported in its response to the report. This reliance on theories of role modelling has been criticised as insufficient to explain and respond to the complexities of young men's identities, experiences and practices.<sup>101</sup>

Whilst attention has also focused in recent years on tackling the differences in attainment between boys and girls, in fact social class differences are far greater; research shows that, on average,

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96. Hasluck C., Green A.E. (2007) *What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department of Work and Pensions*, Institute for Employment Research for DWP, Research Report 407

97. Meadows P. (2001) *Young men on the margins of work: An overview*, YPS: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

98. For a more detailed discussion, see NCVCCO/NCVYS(2008) *Gang, Gun and Knife Crime: Seeking Solutions (Part 2)*, Speaking Out Briefing No 10

99. Firmin C. et al. (ibid.)

100. REACH (2007) *An independent report to Government on raising the aspirations and attainment of Black boys and young Black men*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government

101. Featherstone B. (ibid.)

children who are less able but better off overtake those who are poorer but more able, by age six. Government approaches to boys' education have centred on improving educational practice generally, and promoting some 'boy-friendly' teaching strategies (e.g. boys' literacy schemes, male mentoring, role modelling, greater use of IT). However, attempts to shift the prevailing culture of 'laddish' masculinity, sexism and anti-school peer group attitudes are less developed. Such strategies would involve, for example: placing exploration of identity, relationships and equality at the heart of sex education; focusing more on social and emotional aspects of education and learning; and teaching about gender equality and the damaging effects of inequality more generally (see section on 'Education', page 105).

Beyond specific issues such as those outlined above, perhaps the most noteworthy features of Labour's approach are the changes in institutional arrangements and mechanisms that it has introduced. The Gender Equality Duty (and associated Race and Disability Duties) in particular serve as useful policy 'hooks' and provide important methods for benchmarking progress. The proposals set out in the 2008 Equality Bill signal the desire to make further progress on these issues, and especially on the integration of the various equality strands.

The Equality Bill will introduce a single 'Equality Duty' which will *'require public bodies to consider the diverse needs and requirements of their workforce, and the communities they serve, when developing employment policies and planning services'*. It is envisaged that this will in time replace the existing duties in relation to gender, race and disability. This reflects a trend in public policy towards recognition of the interconnection between gender equality and other social divisions – what has been termed 'intersectionality'. Whilst there is a risk that the focus on gender equality may be diluted, this move will draw attention to the complex interplay of gender and masculinities with other equalities strands which we highlight in this report.

In addition, in June 2008, the establishment was announced of a new 'National Equality Panel', which will investigate the available evidence on the relationship between the existing equality 'strands' (gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion), and other dimensions of equality such as class, tenure and geography, and employment, income and wealth. The panel will look at the evidence, and provide analysis for the development of policy around equality issues, by the end of 2009. One proposal, suggested by the Minister for Women and Equality, is to place a legal duty on public sector organisations to reduce inequality between socio-economic groups. Although it is unclear how such a duty would be implemented in practice, potentially it could have an important impact on the inequalities faced by men and women on low incomes.

## Future trends?

Despite some of the weaknesses in current government policy outlined above, Labour has led the way among political parties in putting gender equality – and to some extent, men and masculinities – more firmly on the political agenda. Given the possibility of a Conservative administration coming to power at the next election, we highlight below some elements of the Party's emerging approach to gender equality issues. Whilst there are signs of some reassessment, there are also suggestions of continuity with previous policies.

The Conservative leader, David Cameron MP, has accused the Government of presiding over a 'broken society', exacerbated by 'top down' policies.<sup>102</sup> Echoing long-standing themes, he has reaffirmed the Party's commitment to 'the family' and to marriage, and to supporting (and keeping together) married couples through the tax and benefits system. But at the same time, the Party

102. See, for instance, David Cameron MP, 'Fixing our Broken Society', speech in Glasgow, 07/07/08

now plans to offer all parents 12 months' parental leave, to be shared by mother and father as they choose (including, interestingly, both step-parents and lesbian partners). It has also proposed to extend the right to request flexible working to all parents of children aged 18 or younger. This represents a considerable advance on the Party's previous scepticism towards family-friendly leave arrangements, and signals a more inclusive attitude to different family forms.<sup>103</sup>

In relation to young men, and in particular the growth in knife and gun crimes, the Leader of the Opposition has called for fathers to be compelled, through more state powers, to look after their children in order to tackle gang culture. Whilst Cameron acknowledges the impact of discrimination and economic disadvantage, he argues for the re-establishment of a greater sense of personal responsibility, backed by 'bottom up' solutions. However, it is not clear exactly what additional powers and policies he believes are necessary, and how these will have an impact upon the deep-rooted problems involved.

Setting this issue in a wider context, Chris Grayling MP, now Shadow Home Secretary, has recently argued<sup>104</sup> that many young men are '*alienated and drifting without a purpose in life*', lacking 'father figures' and secure employment, and without underpinning community structures. He recommends policies to promote positive male role models (both at home and in schools), bolster team sports, develop social entrepreneurs and combat family breakdown, worklessness and poor educational opportunity. But overall there is no fresh thinking in terms of encouraging men to develop more caring forms of masculinity; instead, what is emphasised is the need to shore up traditional social supports, and in effect, re-establish respect for (paternal) authority.

In relation to men's violence against women, a review of all aspects of policy has been undertaken, and the Conservative Party has stated that it will ensure long-term, stable funding for rape crisis centres.<sup>105</sup> More specifically, it has pledged to build 15 rape crisis centres across the UK; welcome though this is, such a programme appears insufficient in relation to the scale of need. It has also stated that it will make the 'teaching of consent' compulsory in the sex education curriculum to 'empower young people to say no'. There are fears, however, that in practice this move will place primary responsibility on young women to control young men's behaviour, and may, in some circumstances, jeopardise women's safety.<sup>106</sup> Other useful proposals include: ensuring all police recruits receive training in domestic violence, stalking, female genital mutilation, rape and forced marriage; and encouraging schools to tackle violence and bullying, and issuing clear guidance to teachers on specific forms of violence against women.<sup>107</sup>

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103. Recognition of the increasing diversity of family structures and less traditional public attitudes is long overdue; for example, only one in four (28 per cent) think married couples make better parents than unmarried ones, according to the latest British Social Attitudes report. See Duncan S., Phillips M. (2008) *New families? Tradition and change in modern relationships*, British Social Attitudes 24th report, National Centre for Social Research, SAGE

104. Chris Grayling MP, *The Jeremy Kyle Generation*, Speech at Demos, 14/2/08

105. David Cameron, *The need to end sexual violence against women*, Address to the Conservative Women's Organisation in London, 12/11/07

106. '*This advice presupposes that men who persist in making unwanted sexual advances are genuinely confused, and will be happy to have their confusion dispelled by a simple, firm 'no'. It does not allow for the possibility that men who behave in this way are not so much confused about women's wishes as indifferent to them. Confronting a violent and determined aggressor is not necessarily the safest option...'*. See Deborah Cameron (2007) *The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do men and women really speak different languages?*, Oxford: OUP

107. Conservative Party Strategy Paper (2008) *Ending Violence Against Women*

## Conclusion

There is emerging interest among politicians and policy-makers in men and masculinity issues; this reflects, to some extent, the development of relevant international, European and UK frameworks and mechanisms. But despite the helpful introduction of the Gender Equality Duty, existing approaches lack coherence and an in-depth understanding of this terrain.

Although the interest can be regarded positively, public positions are not drawing to any significant degree upon the findings of the extensive research base which exists. Indeed, it is striking how little connection there is between the available research and UK government policy, and how rarely men and boys are 'named' in official documents.<sup>108</sup> Instead, the analysis upon which policy recommendations are based tends to be limited.

Overall, however, there is insufficient analysis or discussion of the continuing dominance and enjoyment of positions of power and privilege by (white) men in the top echelons of business, the public sector and government itself. Politicians are, however, forced to tread carefully here. When the Deputy Prime Minister recently announced a set of relatively mild and non-compulsory proposals to allow employers to take positive action to address the under-representation of women and ethnic minorities in their workforces when deciding between equally qualified candidates,<sup>109</sup> the *Daily Express* misleadingly reported this as a 'Jobs Ban for White Men'.

What emerges from the brief outline of existing and proposed policy initiatives, above is a limited attempt to respond to much deeper shifts in the economy and society which are impacting upon men and gender relations. What is generally missing, however, is a clear recognition of the way that masculinities are constantly renegotiated by men and boys, and the part that these processes play in defining how men and boys see themselves and how they relate to others.

In practice, it appears that policy tends to be developed because 'something must be done about men and boys', resulting in parallel policies that fail to address sufficiently the relations between men and women, or between different groups of men. Often they appear to be based on essentialist notions of who men and boys are, and what they need. What is needed instead is closer attention to the existing critical scholarship, and improved understanding among policy-makers of the dynamic nature of 'masculinities' and of the relations between men and between men and women.

'As this recession bears down on thousands of communities and families we must again be open to reinventing ourselves. Many men will be forced to let go of their earlier identities and try something new – like the unemployed car worker in the West Midlands who explained on Newsnight last week that he was retraining to become a social worker. And many women may become the only family breadwinner for the first time. For many couples this will be unsettling and deeply disruptive to the settled patterns of life, work and marriage. A new flexibility in which men and women are supported in reinventing themselves will be vital in helping many thousands of families through this recession.'

Nick Clegg MP, leader of the Liberal Democrats, *The Times*, February 17, 2009

108. Pringle K., *United Kingdom*, in Pringle K., Hearn J. et al.(2006) *Men, Masculinities and Europe*, London: Whiting and Birch

109. *Harman: Equality essential for Britain: age discrimination to be banned*, Cabinet Office press release, 26 June 2008