DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT WITH MEN AND BOYS

Findings and recommendations for engaging men and boys for gender equality

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Men behave the way they do because culture allows it, not because biology requires it.

— Matthew Gutmann, 2020

Objectives

This document provides a brief overview of the intersections between gender, masculinity and disability, based on research conducted on behalf of the UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office. It offers recommendations for disability-inclusive approaches that meaningfully and sustainably engage men and boys for gender equality, including in conflict and post-conflict settings.

It is important to note from the outset that this is not a well-developed area in either disability studies or the field of engaging men and boys, and the UNFPA Regional Office and Country Offices should be commended for recognizing this as a key gap in advancing both gender equality and disability-inclusive development. Further attention to the important issue of working with men and boys for disability-inclusive gender equality should be encouraged through funding, programming, policy and legislation, communication and monitoring activities.

Overview

“Leave no one behind” is the core transformative pillar on which the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development rests, and it entails “combating discrimination and rising inequalities within and amongst countries, and their root causes” (UNSDG, 2022). To ensure that no one is left behind, it is imperative not only to reach the furthest behind first but also to increase the number of hands pulling others up. This means determining who can help others and who is in need of being reached themselves.

Men and boys

Gender inequalities, including gender-based violence, have devastating consequences for women and girls, and the majority of extreme violence is perpetuated by men (including against other men and boys). Rigid gender norms, however, wreak havoc on all members of society. Men, and the boys who become them, are not born indoctrinated with these norms. They are learned — and supported and reinforced by the systems that perpetuate patriarchy and other forms of oppression — and so they are not inevitable and there are alternatives.

Patriarchal norms refuse men and boys

- a full range of emotional expression beyond a narrow range of anger or silence
- empathy and compassion
- meaningful platonic connection with others
- safe spaces to express vulnerability, uncertainty and fear
Instead, men are incentivized to exist within a prescribed "man box", which includes the following:

- physical and mental "toughness"
- assertiveness
- risk-taking behaviour
- emotional expression limited to anger or silence
- use of violence as a mechanism to assert dominance
- normalization of male-perpetrated violence through families, peers and the media
- sexual prowess

Living within this man box, not surprisingly, breeds disconnection, ill health and isolation among men — and the dehumanization of those society tells them are "inferior" to them, including women, minorities, racialized populations and persons with disabilities.

Because of traditional gender norms and the man box — and the systems that reinforce them — men and boys are not doing very well. There is an increasingly devastating mental health crisis among men and boys globally, with alarming rates of depression, despair and suicide. Men who adhere to rigid gender norms are also more likely to abuse alcohol and substances in an effort to cope, develop chronic conditions that lead to poor physical health, and engage in risky behaviours that lead to ill health, injury and premature death. For example, interpersonal violence, unintentional injuries and suicide are among the top causes of premature male deaths in the region (World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2018).

> 40% of men in the Republic of Moldova believe there are justifications for beating a woman (Pascoe and Arsenjeva, 2023a).

In the European Union, 22% of women with disabilities are at risk of poverty, compared with 20% of men with disabilities and 16% of women without disabilities (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

In South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, girls with disabilities are exposed to violence earlier in childhood than girls without disabilities (26.6% of girls with disabilities against 20.3% of girls without disabilities) (UNFPA, 2020).

In Germany, according to 2017 statistics, 17% of all women with disabilities have been sterilized, compared with 2% of women nationwide (German Institute for Human Rights, 2020).
However — and this must be clear — while men and boys pay a high price for adhering to harmful patriarchal norms, it is women and girls who bear the brunt of violence, inequality and deprivation stemming from patriarchal attitudes towards the family and society under the guise of traditional family values. This is manifested as a gender pay gap, the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, and higher rates of engagement on the part of women in informal work as well as their vulnerability to trafficking and abuse. Women and girls with disabilities experience what is known as "double discrimination": they are deprived of equitable access to resources on account of their gender and their disability, and they are disproportionately affected by violence and exploitation that is exacerbated in emergencies. Women with disabilities are also more likely than their male peers to hold negative stereotypes about their own disabilities and perpetuate self-stigmatization (UNFPA, 2020).

Encouragingly, we have evidence that there is an alternative that is good for everyone: in countries where gender norms are more flexible and adaptable, particularly for men and boys, the outcomes are better for all. Indeed, both women and men want alternative pathways, a place where they can live as whole and loved and loving humans.

Engaging men and boys is a key gender-transformative strategy on the path to achieving gender equality. Rather than being cast as a “problem” getting in the way of equality, men should be seen as co-beneficiaries and stakeholders in the fight for gender and social equality, and perceived as a necessary part of efforts to achieve durable solutions. Rather than assuming that men’s risky, damaging and violent behaviours are inevitable, we need to do more to illuminate concrete and compelling alternative pathways that enable men and boys to live whole, healthy and resilient lives. This includes raising awareness, building skills to enact desired behaviours, and creating an enabling environment to support and reinforce the changes we wish to see.

Disability

Why disability? According to global estimates, persons with disabilities comprise approximately 16 per cent of the world’s population (WHO, 2022). This is not a small minority: in fact, most people will be affected by disability at some point in their lives, either as a person with a disability or as a parent of a disabled child or as a carer for an elderly parent with a disability, for example. As such, any action plan to bring about genuine equality for all will fail unless persons with disabilities are considered in a meaningful and inclusive way. The global consensus to “leave no one behind” in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals is the ultimate compelling reason to make a targeted effort towards including children, women and men with disabilities in all policy and programmatic actions aimed at achieving gender equality.

In the context of gender equality and the rights of persons with disabilities, much remains to be done to increase collaboration and the integration of these two important issues. Leading organizations for persons with disabilities that usually occupy agenda-setting spaces are traditionally led by men with physical disabilities, who may not possess an understanding of or the skills necessary to advance gender equality. On the other hand, organizations led by women with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities work tirelessly to tackle the hardest, most deeply entrenched manifestations of discrimination.

Persons with disabilities

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

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of exclusion, and by doing so they advance gender equality. Understandably, the difference in the way organizations for persons with disabilities work and the issues they focus on can mean that there are at times tensions where there could be solidarity among men and women with disabilities. Furthermore, women's rights groups could often do more to ensure that their spaces are accessible to persons with disabilities so that shared agendas could find more solidarity and collective momentum.

The intersections between masculinity and disability present unique challenges and opportunities for engaging men and boys. For example, many men and boys with disabilities struggle with conflicting expectations about what it means to be a man (e.g. strong, independent) and the reality of having a disability (e.g. assumed to mean weakness and dependence). This conflict leads to unique mental, social and physical challenges for men and boys with disabilities, as well as for fathers of children with disabilities. Men are impacted by experiences of disability, whether personally or through their children, partners or other people in their lives, and now is the time to better understand disability-inclusive approaches for engaging men and boys for gender equality.

Finally, the evolving nature of disability should not be forgotten: it changes based on a combination of internal aspects (evolution of physical or mental impairment) and external circumstances (existence or removal of barriers) and is influenced by socioeconomic factors such as poverty, education or military conflict. Further, disability may affect the lives of individuals who do not identify as having a disability today: past childhood disability may impact a person’s life in the present; fathers of children with disabilities may feel discriminated against as a result of their association with their disabled children; old-age impairment may cause disability in some cases but not all. These nuances must be taken into consideration when designing the optimal course of action for engaging men and boys around disability.¹

Methodology and limitations

The research for this brief was conducted in two phases during 2022 by a team of two consultants: one with expertise in disability and working to advance the rights of persons with disabilities, the other with expertise in masculinities and engaging men and boys for violence prevention, gender equality, and the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The first phase of the project (Pascoe and Arsenjeva, 2023a) explored the available evidence on the interplay of masculinity and disability for the purposes of developing disability-inclusive approaches for engaging men and boys in gender equality.

The second phase (Pascoe and Arsenjeva, 2023b) grew out of recommendations from the first, namely in response to the new realities triggered by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and the issues emerging from the conflict. It focused on the intersections of men and disability in the contexts of war and its aftermath. The goal for the second phase of research was to understand how to better prepare and support the UNFPA Regional Office and Country Offices in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in reducing gender-based violence and advancing gender equality in conflict and post-conflict settings, including determining how to engage men and boys as co-beneficiaries, stakeholders, agents of change and allies.

Both phases of the project comprised primary and secondary research. They included a desk review of global literature on men, masculinities and disability using agreed search terms. This was complemented

¹. For more information on disability-inclusive gender equality across the lifespan, see Appendix B of Disability-Inclusive Development with Men and Boys: Mainstreaming Disability Equality in Approaches to Engaging Men and Boys for Gender Equality (Pascoe and Arsenjeva, 2023a).
by consultations with UNFPA Country Offices in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region (for the first phase) and with organizations active in the area of disability, women’s rights and humanitarian relief (for the second phase).

The research has limitations. The external circumstances did not allow for a more extensive consultation with stakeholders active in the field of masculinity, gender, disability and humanitarian action in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. In the second phase in particular, attempts to contact individuals directly affected by past and ongoing wars were not always successful due to uncertainty, a lack of safety and trauma associated with conflict as well as ethical considerations.

The research was also limited by the lack of tested interventions on issues such as men with disabilities, men as partners of persons with disabilities, and men as actors of change for disability-inclusive gender equality in conflict and post-conflict settings. We hope this research inspires more funding and piloting of evidence-informed interventions to fill these gaps.

Regional context

The findings of the present research should be interpreted in light of the sociodemographic context of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. Eastern Europe has experienced decreases in fertility rates coupled with ageing populations, leading to net population decreases in all countries and territories in the region. On the other hand, Central Asia and Türkiye still have relatively young populations, with above-replacement fertility rates, leading to net population increases (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2023). While the average lifespan of both women and men has been increasing in the region, as elsewhere, the latter are still more likely to be in poor health and to die prematurely. This leaves women at an increased risk of facing poverty in their old age in the context of social and structural gender inequalities (Fillo and Negruta, 2020).

Traditional family values and the underlying harmful notions of toxic masculinity are responsible for the pervasive stigma experienced by people who do not fit in the man box in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region. Such people include persons with disabilities, migrants, the LGBT community and anyone else who is not perceived as tough, strong or dominant.

Persons with disabilities, in particular, have historically been both invisible and stigmatized in this region, which is characterized by a culture of segregation and institutionalization as the preferred way of “dealing with the undesired” members of the population, such as children and adults with disabilities, and an emphasis on “fixing” or “curing” a disability instead of accommodating human differences.

Indeed, while global estimates indicate that persons with disabilities comprise approximately 16 per cent of the population (WHO, 2022), official prevalence of disability in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region is often much lower, ranging from 3.3 per cent in Georgia (2014) to 6 per cent in Belarus (2018), according to periodic reports presented by States Parties to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Disability-related prejudice, complex and inaccessible disability determination processes, and a lack of individualized support services in the community all contribute to these lower-than-average estimates. Paradoxically, the actual numbers could be higher than the global estimate, and traditional harmful notions of masculinity may be a factor contributing to impairments stemming from violence, accidents or substance abuse, particularly in men. The recent destabilization in the region, including Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, will increase the number of war veterans, refugees and civilians with war-related trauma and disability.
Findings and recommendations

For each cluster, we have identified three mutually reinforcing enabling conditions that must be realized to achieve gender equality:

- Reshaped cultural context
- Robust political commitment
- Programmatic readiness

Engaging men and boys with disabilities

Engaging fathers of children with disabilities

Engaging men as agents of change

Key findings and messages from the research

- Men and boys with disabilities are often situated in an inherent conflict between “being a man” and “being disabled” (Hahn, 1989; Asche and Fine, 1988).
- Various coping strategies have been observed, from continued reliance on archetypal masculinity ideals by overemphasizing some of its aspects, such as financial wealth or sexuality, to rejection and reformulation of masculinity configurations to fit one’s identity and capacities (Pini and Conway, 2017, p. 267).
- Men with disabilities may struggle to conform to the conventional features attributed to masculinity, such as being “tough” or the “breadwinner”, due to environmental barriers to finding stable employment, accessing public spaces and information, and participating in leisure activities and sports with and without their children. Barriers also significantly hamper their access to support networks available for parents and fathers specifically.
- Men and boys with disabilities, particularly intellectual disabilities, are subjected to detrimental stereotypes surrounding their sexual and reproductive health. Labels such as “dangerous”, “sexual deviance” and “inevitable problem that must be dealt with” are not uncommon and result in denial of positive information about sexual expression, safe sex and reproductive choices (OHCHR, 2019).
Men with disabilities acquired in armed conflicts, many of whom experience psychological distress such as post-traumatic stress disorder, may struggle with both the practical elements of the transition to civilian life (as the result of environmental barriers to transport, infrastructure, information, housing) and its interpersonal aspects (tensions with family and friends, societal stigma, fear or, on the contrary, unwanted reverence). At the same time, they often find themselves unable to relate to the activities of the mainstream disability community.

Why this needs to change

- Men and boys with disabilities should not feel that their very being has an internal contradiction. Men and boys should have a more expansive set of options for feeling proud of who they are and should embrace gender-equitable norms and behaviours, and persons with disabilities equally have the right to embody a diverse and complex set of realities that reject stereotypes.
- Men with disabilities are a key group to engage in gender-transformative approaches to advancing gender equality, and they can leverage their influence among peer groups to motivate other men to change.

Priorities for action

Reshaped cultural context

- Challenge the social norms that see men and boys with disabilities as inherently violent, uneducable or sexually deviant by improving their visibility through engagement, awareness-raising and the provision of support.
- Support lasting strategic partnerships between associations of veterans and the mainstream disability movement.
- Facilitate cross-pollination of the working agendas of the disability movement and the gender equality movement to achieve mutually reinforcing and inclusive priorities.

Robust political commitment

- Improve understanding of the needs of men and boys with disabilities through investment in participatory evidence-based research with men and boys with disabilities.

Programmatic readiness

- Ensure that programmes aimed at engaging men are designed and implemented in close cooperation with organizations for persons with disabilities. This will make sure that men and boys with disabilities are not forgotten in programme activities and that accessibility costs are taken into consideration in the programme budget.
- Invest in and prioritize access to accessible evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education for men with disabilities so that they can express their sexuality in healthy, safe and consensual ways.
Engaging fathers of children with disabilities

What we know — key findings

- Masculinist social norms, bolstered by stigma surrounding disability, that are pervasive in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region condone and sometimes actively encourage fathers to abandon their children with disabilities and to try to have “healthy” children with a new family. Those who stay are often hailed as “courageous” and “heroes”.
- Failure to involve fathers in perinatal processes, including the identification and discussion of the child’s disability and support needs, makes fathers feel ignored, irrelevant and incompetent.
- A lack of support for fathers reduces their coping strategies and negatively affects the socioemotional adjustment of their children with disabilities and the well-being of the second parent.
- Fathers of children with disabilities are often coerced into complying with the expectations of a masculinist society by prioritizing work over family time to cover the extra financial costs of raising a child with a disability. At the same time, many of them will find themselves in perpetually precarious employment situations due to the lack of family-friendly workplace policies.

Why this needs to change

- We know that positive fatherhood is not only a key primary prevention strategy, but it produces measurable and positive outcomes for men, their partners and their children (Hansen, Pascoe and Wells, 2022).
- Research suggests that the better a father understands his child’s disability, the more likely he is to actively participate in activities and engage with his child. This, in turn, has a tremendous impact on the child’s development, ability to form healthy attachments and sense of self-worth (Mitchell and Hauser-Cram, 2010; Al-Yagon, 2011).
- Gender-responsive family policies have proven to have a beneficial effect on fathers’ participation in family life and the well-being of their children, while also reducing the gender pay and pension gaps for women (COFACE, 2022).

Positive fatherhood

"Positive fatherhood" programmes and initiatives are those that encourage fathers to promote "their child’s well-being and security by taking an active role in caring for their child’s social, emotional, cognitive and physical health, and by having a respectful, equitable relationship with the child’s mother or co-parent" (Pascoe and others, 2022).
Priorities for action

Reshaped cultural context

• Showcase evidence that the engagement of men in the early phases of parenthood is beneficial for families and increases the likelihood of long-term positive engagement on the part of fathers.

• Work closely with organizations for persons with disabilities to destigmatize disability, facilitate exchanges with experienced and new parents of children with disabilities, and improve the quality of the services families of children with disabilities receive.

Robust political commitment

• Lead by example by adopting disability-inclusive policies, programmes and communication activities and by involving persons with disabilities in decision-making processes.

• Advocate the adoption of gender-responsive family policies, including equal, paid, non-transferable parental leave for all parents with additional time and flexibility for parents of children with disabilities; a flexible working schedule; affordable support services; and a gender-transformative social protection and pension system.

Programmatic readiness

• Develop sufficient services in the community to support the implementation of family-friendly workplace policies. These services may include inclusive and affordable early childhood education and care for all children with disabilities.

• Improve the skills of professionals to help them understand and address the specific needs of fathers of children with disabilities. This may include helping fathers understand the needs of their child with disabilities, building their capacity to cope with stress and ascertaining their communication preferences.

• Put in place mental health support networks, including respite care services, information support hubs, accessible and available leisure facilities, and peer exchange platforms for fathers, in safe, accessible and non-judgmental places that are easy for fathers to reach.
What we know — key findings

• The buy-in to gender equality issues on the part of mainstream disability organizations in the region is limited, and work in this area is driven mostly by smaller niche organizations of women with disabilities.

• The efforts to engage men to support and fight for the rights and empowerment of women will have limited efficacy if men are engaged only insofar as they are instrumental to women’s empowerment.

Why this needs to change

• There is evidence that when men understand and critically examine the damaging impacts of patriarchal systems on their own lives they become intrinsically motivated as co-beneficiaries of gender and social equality.

Priorities for action

• Identify compelling reasons why men as politicians and leaders should advance gender and disability equality.

• Provide communication and programming support to put issues relevant to gender equality, work–life balance and children with disabilities on the agenda of disability organizations led by men with disabilities.
What we know — key findings

• Men are the primary perpetrators of violence against everyone: women and girls as well as other men and boys.

• Disability is a factor that significantly increases one’s vulnerability to all forms of violence (Dammeyer and Chapman, 2018). This is particularly true for people who are deprived of their liberty in residential institutions, dependent on third parties for care and support, and economically disempowered. Women and girls with disabilities are at a higher risk than other cohorts of experiencing violence perpetrated by men: violence can manifest itself as economic deprivation; exploitation; sexual violence, including forced impregnation, sterilization and abortion; physical violence; and human trafficking.

• Women and men with disabilities who report violence are often considered unreliable witnesses and are not believed.

• Experiencing violence in childhood — regardless of disability status — is often a factor that contributes to experiences of violence in adulthood, and violence tends to be passed down from one generation to another. Men in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region are more likely than women to have witnessed intimate partner violence as children (Hughson, 2018).

• Violence against women and men always escalates during wartime (United Nations, Security Council, 2008). Once again, women and girls with disabilities and others in vulnerable situations are at the highest risk of violence at the hands of militia, military personnel or police (CEDAW, 2013). Wartime gender-based violence against women is often perpetrated for the purposes of ethnic cleansing and eugenics, and it includes crimes such as selected killings, removal of children, rape, forced impregnation and sterilization. Gender norms attributed to traditional masculinity may expose men and boys — especially those who are not considered masculine enough — to sexual harassment, assault and rape in conflict settings, with such acts perpetrated most frequently in places of detention (IASC, 2015, para. 11).

• Associations for women with disabilities have extensive expertise on issues concerning violence against women and girls with disabilities; there is little cross-over between issues such as sexual and reproductive health rights or accessible sexual education and the agendas of larger mainstream disability organizations, which are usually led by men.

Why this needs to change

• There is evidence that boys who witnessed their fathers contributing to caregiving and domestic duties are more likely to grow up to be non-violent and gender-equitable men themselves.

• Raising awareness of persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls with disabilities, as equitable, capable and contributing members of society breaks down the stereotype that persons with disabilities are weak, helpless and silent objects, which makes them less susceptible to violence (OHCHR, 2019).
Priorities for action

Reshaped cultural context

• Improve the visibility and positive image in society of adults and children with disabilities, particularly women and girls, while steering clear of clichés such as “inspirational”, “heroic” or “survivor”.

• Emphasize violence prevention rather than post-violence services by investing in efforts that reduce the likelihood of adverse childhood experiences and sexual abuse experienced by children with disabilities.

Robust political commitment

• Advocate legislation (including ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, wherever applicable) criminalizing all forms of violence perpetrated by men and boys against women and girls, and entitling its victims and survivors to redress.

• Make the law enforcement and justice systems accessible to women and men with disabilities by training professionals in disability awareness, improving the accessibility of infrastructure and communications (including the use of sign language and the provision of easy-to-read materials) and providing support. Particular attention should be paid to places where violence is known to occur, including places of detention and psychiatric institutions.

Programmatic readiness

• Create opportunities to strengthen interest on the part of the disability movement and the women’s rights movement in the issue of gender-based violence against persons with disabilities by organizing collaborative activities.

• Train military personnel in how to use tools for the prevention and recognition of gender-based and disability-specific violence in armed conflicts.
Thematic focus 2: engaging men for disability-inclusive gender equality in conflict

What we know — key findings

• The notion of “militarized masculinity” sees war, combat and military service as the epitome of manhood. As such, it juxtaposes able-bodied men alongside other populations, including men with disabilities, women, children and the elderly.

• While war is conducted mainly by men, its short- and long-term impacts are disproportionately felt by women, who must navigate displacement, material deprivations, exposure to indiscriminate attacks and violence, and bear the burden of care amid broken-down infrastructure and support systems.

A military that is made up predominantly of men is likely to be representative of the traditional gender and disability norms in society and to perpetuate or allow — even if unknowingly — the cycle of exclusion and discrimination experienced by women and persons with disabilities.

• There is often a reliance on masculinized culture in the aftermath of war and a push to “reconstruct” traditional gender roles in efforts to return to “normal”. Women are known to be removed from positions of economic independence and forced back into the home and coerced into fulfilling their “reproductive function”. At times, this regression in women’s rights is manifested in the most extreme ways, such as child marriage and polygamy.

• The manner in which war-inflicted trauma or impairment are recognized and the compensation packages conferred can be a manifestation of indirect gender-based discrimination. Veterans, most of whom are men, will often get more generous benefits than civilians, most of whom are women, even if their experience has resulted in an identical disability with identical support requirements.

• Veterans with war-related trauma and/or disabilities may struggle to adapt to civilian life. Without support, negative consequences may include increased domestic violence, substance abuse, exacerbated pain, long-term mental health problems and suicide for veterans as well as an undue burden on their family members.

Militarized masculinities

Acquiring and proving one’s masculinity through military action and combat (Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 2022)

87% of all refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine are women and children (UNHCR, 2022a)

Around 12 million persons with disabilities were forcibly displaced in 2020, although the real figures could be even higher given the difficulties collecting disability-specific information on conflict contexts (UNHCR, 2022b).

In some crisis settings, gender-based violence affects over 70% of women (WHO, 2013).

Between 1992 and 2016, women constituted on average 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators and 6% of signatories in major peace processes (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).
Why this needs to change

• The drive to reinforce traditional gender norms in an attempt to restore the demographic balance and national stability is not an effective tool for building a secure and thriving nation. Demographic resilience strategies that are based on principles of universal human rights, gender equality and non-discrimination are much more sustainable in the long run.

• There is evidence that the communities that are able to embrace more flexible gender roles in conflicts and preserve them in post-conflict contexts are more likely to recover and, eventually, thrive.

• Shifting perceptions of militarization where women take on more leadership roles in the military and civilian positions create an opportunity for a more sustainable, inclusive and gender-transformative reconstruction process.

Priorities for action

Reshaped cultural context

• Design and implement media campaigns that challenge and redefine traditional gender norms and build an inclusive post-conflict society.

• Destigmatize mental health issues by making services available for persons affected by conflict, building the capacity of health providers and introducing appropriate communication strategies that engage leaders and key influencers.

Robust political commitment

• Support the adoption of national legislation that
  - recognizes the heightened risk of exposure to war crimes on the part of people in vulnerable situations, including women and girls and persons with disabilities, and that provides equitable and fair protection to all survivors
  - implements an inclusive definition of disability that is compliant with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Introduce gender-transformative recovery policies that include
- family-friendly workplace and social protection policies, and accessible childcare
- equitable access to gender-responsive sexual and reproductive health services for women and men, including those with disabilities, injuries and trauma
- leadership and economic empowerment programmes for women

Programmatic readiness

- Create and maintain safe and accessible spaces for men to connect in meaningful and pro-social ways with other men, including spaces for men to practise and envision healthier and positive versions of masculinities.
- Support investment in young people and build a new resilient generation by
  - ensuring that children and young people, including those orphaned by war, grow up in family-like environments and not institutions
  - investing in inclusive and gender-transformative education for all
  - providing leadership opportunities for young people, including youth with disabilities and those with migrant and refugee backgrounds
- Ensure that all humanitarian relief programmes are inclusive of persons with disabilities, particularly the most invisible representatives (women and girls, persons with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities). One of the best ways to achieve this is to establish close cooperation with local associations of persons with disabilities and involve recipients of humanitarian relief services in designing, implementing and monitoring these services.
- Support making mainstream population services, including health-care, social protection, education, justice and victim protection, fully accessible for persons with disabilities, and invest in expanding these services to account for migrant and refugee populations using them.
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Additional sources
