



# Canada

POLICY REVIEW - A CASE STUDY



In focus:  
Calling Men and  
Boys In.



**MenEngage Alliance**

working with men and boys for gender equality

**fJ FemJust**  
Feminist Solutions towards Global Justice

**What we heard:**

## **Report from the Roundtables on Engaging Men and Boys to Advance Gender Equality**

Discourse on engaging men and boys varies across different provinces and territories in Canada. Social media, investigative journalism, and progressive public campaigns have elevated the public's understanding and drawn threads between harmful masculinities and gender-based discrimination. This has made patriarchy real, tangible, and visible. Currently, a federal policy on preventing and addressing GBV exists but a national policy, which entails a collaborative process and which provinces would be bound by, does not.



This is part of a series of policy reviews developed in partnership between MenEngage Global Alliance and FemJust.

Find out more about the methodology used to review this policy – and how you can use it to hold law-makers and policy implementing institutions accountable from national to global levels – at [menengage.org/advocacy](http://menengage.org/advocacy).

The policy was reviewed independently against a methodological framework that assesses the policy against a range of criteria. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from interviews, document reviews, and survey responses.

Interviews and respondents included feminist, LGBTIQ and youth activists, and people from government and UN officials, and academia. Find out more about the methodology and detailed results for Canada and other countries assessed at [menengage.org/advocacy](http://menengage.org/advocacy).

**NOTE:**

Because the policy process has not yet moved to implementation, we were not able to gather sufficient data develop a scorecard for this country, and as such, share only the case study below.

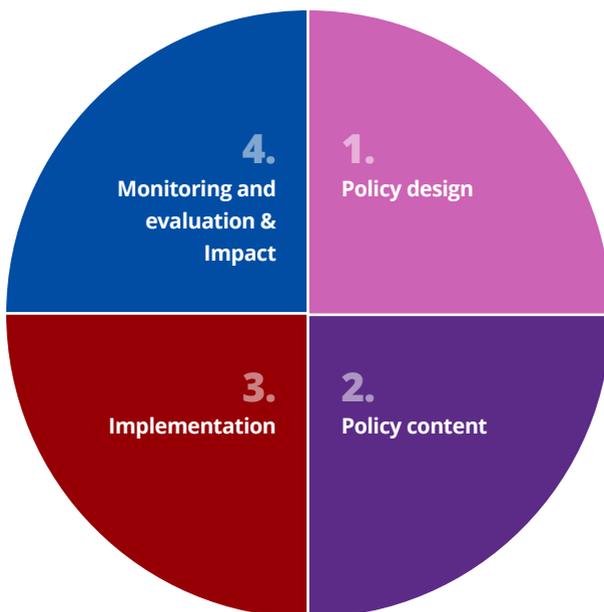
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# How has this policy been analysed?

The policy was analysed based on its alignment to the following frameworks through all phases of the policy process:

- 1. Intersectional Feminist analysis**
- 2. Human rights-based approach**
- 3. The socio-ecological model**

The policy's approach towards engaging men and boys through a feminist policy process is assessed across four areas:



## What makes a policy gender-transformative?

A gender-transformative policy aims to: dismantle harmful and oppressive social and gender norms, create new norms that affirm people of all gender identities and expressions, and redistribute gendered and other intersecting forms of power and privilege. It also puts into practice the human rights principles of participation, empowerment, accountability, transparency, and centering the most affected and the most marginalized, among others.

It appropriately conceptualizes and analyzes the problem in focus - for example, gender inequality or gender-based violence or adverse sexual and reproductive health outcomes. This includes identifying the power imbalances created by gender norms and stereotypes, and how these intersect with other forms of oppression. It does not perpetuate existing gender norms and stereotypes in its framing, assumptions or strategies.

It recognizes the leadership of feminist and queer movements and meaningfully engages them at all stages of the policy process, from design to implementation to evaluation. At its heart, a gender-transformative policy is accountable to all those who have been historically oppressed by patriarchal norms, discrimination and violence, including girls, women, trans, non-binary and queer people.

When a gender-transformative policy engages men and boys, it does so in service of the mission of achieving a gender just society, social and political institutions, and policy framework. Specific strategies call on and enable them to recognize and dismantle patriarchal power and privilege utilizing an intersectional feminist approach. Strategies to engage men and boys do not operate in a silo, rather form part of a comprehensive strategic framework to achieve gender transformation and equality.

**In 2017, Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE)<sup>1</sup> initiated a series of roundtable discussions that brought together over 200 participants to discuss engaging men and boys for gender equality as part of the government's initial steps towards developing a federal strategy. White Ribbon, an organization that engages men and boys in the prevention of GBV, supported the government to conceptualize and create a framework for the roundtable consultations. Unfortunately, inadequate time and financial resources to ensure that the guidance was the result of wider collaboration inhibited broad participation- including of feminist movement partners - in this conceptualization process.**

Although the consultations took place in 2017, it took two years to issue the report (released in November 2019), and even still, the government stops short of making any commitments in it.

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1. Women and Gender Equality Canada, formerly Status of Women Canada, is a federal department of the government of Canada.

**“Under the banner of feminism over the last 70 years, we’ve had a conversation about women’s roles and identity, but we’ve been missing that parallel conversation for, with, and about men.”**

**KEY INFORMANT**

## In what landscape did the policy emerge?

The historical legacy of the École Polytechnique massacre in Montreal, Quebec, the more recent #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, and other high profile instances of misogyny and domestic and interpersonal violence, such as the incel<sup>2</sup>-motivated Toronto van attack, the Halifax mass shooting, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, as well as growing calls for intersectionality and anti-racism vis-à-vis the Black Lives Matter movement have shifted the country's social consciousness and resurfaced many important discussions about GBV and gender inequality. While activists and advocates, civil society and government grapple with ways to advance gender equality in this new moment, there is a burgeoning sense that men and boys have a critical role to play in dismantling patriarchy and advancing efforts to achieve gender equality.

Discourse on engaging men and boys varies across different provinces and territories in Canada. Largely driven by the ideological orientations of provincial governments, diverse lenses and approaches to supporting male engagement and mobilization work have emerged (for example, a feminist-informed liberal progressive approach, a 'tough on crime' approach, or cuts in funding for social programs, resulting in very limited, if any, support). Meanwhile, social media, investigative journalism, and progressive public campaigns have elevated the public's understanding and drawn threads between harmful masculinities and gender-based discrimination. This has made patriarchy real, tangible, and visible.

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2. Incel refers to the online community of "involuntary celibate" people (predominantly young cisgender heterosexual men) united by their shared inability to find a sexual or romantic partner and their hatred of women.

The growing visibility of men engaged in this work within feminist spaces, as well as increasing numbers of men's groups receiving funds for work to engage men and boys has contributed to tensions. Women's rights and feminist organizations that have been chronically underfunded and undervalued for decades express concern that resources are pivoting towards the male engagement space while their organizations, which are leading violence prevention efforts, lack resources. There are also questions about who the responsibility to take on male engagement work rests with, and how this potentially shifts the narrative around violence prevention work in Canada. Beyond this, there are other tensions (for example, on the approach and language that is used), as well as a disconnect between academic theory and what is thought to actually work at the community level when engaging men and boys.

Activists working to engage men and boys join through diverse entry points (for example, mental health and wellbeing, arts and culture) and distinct approaches that speak to the experiences of diverse men have emerged with racialized and indigenous activists tending towards using racial equity and anti-colonialism lenses in their interrogation of 'manhood' and masculinity.



## How was the policy design process carried out?

In 2017, Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE)<sup>3</sup> initiated a series of roundtable discussions that brought together over 200 participants to discuss engaging men and boys for gender equality as part of the government's initial steps towards developing a federal strategy. White Ribbon, an organization that engages men and boys in the prevention of GBV, supported the government to conceptualize and create a framework for the roundtable consultations. As part of this process, a guidance paper was developed for WAGE, with many of the recommendations made by White Ribbon taken onboard by the government. Unfortunately, inadequate time and financial resources to ensure that the guidance was the result of wider collaboration inhibited broad participation- including of feminist movement partners- in this conceptualization process.

A wide range of stakeholders were convened during the roundtable discussions and included community-based organizations, the labor and private sectors, as well as community leaders, and advocates for the rights of LGBTQI, Indigenous, racialized people, immigrants, and young people, among others. The roundtables took place in eight locations across the country and advocates and activists working across these movements were welcome to participate in all locations to ensure a diversity of perspectives were integrated into all roundtables. Key informants agreed that the related process was deeply participatory and transparent although they questioned whether the power dynamics inherent in the government facilitating the roundtables could have affected how openly civil society participated.

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3. Women and Gender Equality Canada, formerly Status of Women Canada, is a federal department of the government of Canada.



## How are masculinities addressed in the content of the policy?

The roundtable sessions provided participants with an opportunity to share their experiences of engaging men and boys for gender equality and served to inform government strategy. Four key themes emerged, and were supported by key principles and findings based on the discussions:



### **A. IDENTIFY PERSISTENT BEHAVIORS CONTRIBUTING TO INEQUALITY TO START UNLEARNING THEM.**

#### **KEY PRINCIPLE:**

- Emphasize inclusiveness and respect for different experiences.

The key findings emphasize the need to compassionately hold men accountable by addressing harmful behaviors, while also ‘calling men in’ (via awareness raising campaigns, for example) to efforts to achieve gender equality. Participants highlighted that reaching Indigenous men and boys necessitated an approach that was rooted in culture and aligned with ongoing reconciliation work.



### **B. CHALLENGE AND CHANGE NEGATIVE NORMS, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND HEALING.**

#### **KEY PRINCIPLES:**

- Create room for healing and restorative approaches for individuals and communities.
- Efforts must be gender-transformative, which means challenging

and changing the attitudes and behaviors that cause harm. Working towards the goal of gender equality alone, or just holding workshops for men is not sufficient. Men and boys need to lead the transformation of those parts of masculinity that cause harm to others, and to men and boys as well.

The positive modeling of behaviors was identified as a best practice in efforts to challenge harmful norms and behaviors among corporate actors and young people. Participants also highlighted the significance of using healing and restorative approaches where desired (for example, Indigenous communities) as a means of addressing trauma and as a form of justice.

Key findings under this second theme include the need for long-term and sustainable funding that does not divert resources away from women and girls while also developing a differentiated funding stream for Indigenous men and boys and Indigenous communities, in recognition of the country's colonial legacy. A second key finding included the need to involve men to challenge harmful norms in the home, community, and workplace, with a particular emphasis on reaching young men and boys.



### **C. EFFORTS MUST BE SUSTAINED THROUGH BUILDING NETWORKS, SHARING KNOWLEDGE, AND TAKING ACTION.**

#### **KEY PRINCIPLES:**

- Promote collaboration and partnerships to leverage and expand knowledge and resources [in support of reaching achievable outcomes].
- Focus on evidence-based approaches and realistic outcomes.”

Participants noted that engaging men and boys will require time and sustained efforts while also highlighting that work can be modeled on the richness of work by movements in Canada that aim to bring about rights and equality. The government has an important role to play in supporting research and knowledge creation in order to nurture the work on engaging men and boys.

The key findings stress the need for federal leadership. This would include a whole-of-government approach in which laws, policies, and mandates

are changed or otherwise aligned so that they contribute to long-lasting gender equality. A key informant, however, lamented a missed opportunity as engaging men and boys in violence prevention work was not adequately reflected in this approach. Beyond this, participants also noted the role of the government in amplifying and sustaining the work of organizations by facilitating information sharing among government, civil society, and communities; and collecting benchmarks and indicators on perceptions, gender roles, and the benefits of gender equality to men and boys.



#### **D. ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESOURCE SCARCITY.**

##### **KEY PRINCIPLES:**

- Resources for engaging men and boys must not divert from resources supporting gender equality for women and girls, as well as efforts to support non-binary people.

Scrutiny of resourcing for male involvement work by roundtable participants raised concerns mirroring those of women's movements globally. While recognizing the need for long term sustainable funding, a key finding centered on the need for new investments rather than diverting resources from those working on the rights of women and girls. Moreover, efforts to engage men and boys need to be accountable to women and LGBTQI movements.

Overall, participants at the roundtable discussions were able to offer incredibly rich insight on how men and boys could be engaged for gender equality. However, key informants who principally work on male engagement voiced concerns about whether the consultations pushed the needle forward on male involvement work. Rather than taking a "we are here to listen approach" as was done during the consultations, one key informant highlighted that the government could play a role in facilitating difficult but productive dialogue or mediation. For example, citing their own work, a key informant offered that the government could fund opportunities that would bring together men steeped in male-focused trauma work and groups of men that are underserved together with feminists activists entrenched in gender equality and GBV work. This type of collaboration and dialogue can start to build a base understanding of historical trauma, accountability, and meaningful ways to involve men and boys. This approach could act as a

healing force for women, men, and LGBTQI people.

The process of developing the strategy supports rather than infringes on the government's significant financial commitments to promote gender equality. The 2019 Federal Budget allocated \$160 million Canadian dollars in new funds to women's rights organizations over five years, totaling \$100 million Canadian dollars per year by 2023-2024. The funds are intended to support women's rights organizations in their work to address the root causes of gender inequalities. The government funded the roundtable sessions as well as research from a separate budget that focused on engaging men and boys for gender equality, recognizing the need for this work not to interfere or compete with funding for women's rights work.



## Implementation and next steps

'Calling Men and Boys In' is intended to inform any potential strategy that might be developed and while the government is better positioned after the roundtables to move forward with its work on engaging men and boys, it is unclear what steps the government might undertake next. Although the consultations took place in 2017, it took two years to issue the report (released in November 2019), and even still, the government stops short of making any commitments in it. Key informants highlighted that the report mostly covered known ground (i.e. what organizations are doing) rather than sharing information about what the government will do, how they would coordinate work on GBV, and potential resources, among other points of interest. Instead the report broadly recognizes the importance of working with men and boys to achieve gender equality and the government's role as a leader, convener, supporter, and funder but does not expound on this.

Currently, a federal policy on preventing and addressing GBV exists but a national policy, which entails a collaborative process and which provinces would be bound by, does not. Feminist and women's rights activists have expressed concern about developing a strategy on engaging men and boys that is not embedded within a national policy on GBV. Similarly, male-identified pro-feminist activists agree that any potential strategy should be situated within a national policy on GBV.

Organizations and advocates working to engage men and boys express also ongoing concern with the government's focus on funding 'downstream' or secondary and tertiary prevention, rather than an approach that works across secondary, tertiary, and primary prevention. Although the government's investments in gender equality and women's rights organizations has substantially increased in recent years, one key informant noted that this has not meaningfully supported work to engage men and boys: funding has largely gone to women's organizations focused

on secondary and tertiary approaches. A second key informant added to this, noting that primary prevention efforts which are focused on moving 'upstream' (i.e. interventions that aim to stop violence before it starts, for example, by identifying root causes or drivers of violence), is where much of the work on engaging men and boys currently sits in Canada. Key informants also highlighted that an integrated and comprehensive approach that focuses on the entire prevention continuum would more holistically address violence prevention and dismantle work silos.

There has been some progress. In 2019, the government announced investments of over \$560,000 Canadian dollars for four projects focused on engaging men and boys for gender equality. As part of this investment, the government supported Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence and Next Gen Men to generate knowledge on what a partnership between male-identified pro-feminist leaders and feminist and women's rights organizations might look like and how their efforts across Canada could be coordinated, with the possibility that it will result in a recommendation of a national network of feminist and pro-feminist groups supporting the government in the development of a national policy on GBV. Unfortunately, although the government did fund this project, it has subsequently been unresponsive in supporting next steps.

There is no information available publicly, and key informants are also unaware of the government's next steps towards a strategy to engage men and boys.



There is no information available publicly, and key informants are also unaware of the government's next steps towards a strategy to engage men. For this reason, this case study does not have any information relating to Monitoring and evaluation, and impact.

# A closer look at the other case studies

As part of this initiative, we carried out a review of other national policies, including:

Costa Rica	Política nacional para la atención y la prevención de la violencia contra las mujeres de todas las edades Costa Rica 2017-2032 (National Policy for the Attention and Prevention of Violence against Women)
Czech Republic	Government Strategy for Equality of Women and Men in the Czech Republic for 2014 – 2020
Indonesia	Government Regulation Number 61 of 2014 on Reproductive Health
Mexico	Estrategía Nacional para la Prevención del Embarazo en Adolescentes (National Strategy for the Prevention of Teen Pregnancy)
Rwanda	National Policy against Gender-Based Violence, 2011
Sri Lanka	Policy Framework and National Plan of Action to address Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV) in Sri Lanka 2016-2020
Trinidad and Tobago	National Policy on Gender and Development: A Green Paper, 2018
Turkey	National Action Plan on Combating Violence against Women (2016-2020)

# Cross-Cutting Themes Across All Score Cards

Some key themes surface from the country scorecards:

Almost universally, **gender inequality** is not fully understood, particularly how patriarchal norms lead to social control of sexuality, sexual behavior, bodies and gender identities, and how this results in oppression and violence against not only women but also queer and trans men, intersex and nonbinary people.

Oftentimes there is a disconnect between a policy's stated intentions and the **implementation** on the ground, which may be poor, or even nonexistent. There is even an instance where a robust policy has been adopted but the government through its actions is actively undermining gender equality and the rights of women and LGBTQI people.

**LGBTQI groups and organizations** are largely absent from the processes of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies focused on gender equality, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health.

Across the board, **human and financial resources** are insufficient for the effective implementation of the policies assessed. Often national budgets lack the systems and/or the transparency required in order to track the funds allocated towards the implementation of specific policies.

Nearly all the policies include **gender-transformative strategies** to engage men and boys, with a focus on changing the knowledge, attitudes and behavior of men and boys; challenging oppressive social norms and stereotypes; adoption of gender-transformative programs and policies by social institutions; and strengthening the legal and policy framework in favor of gender equality.

A large majority of the policies have adequate accountability mechanisms in the form of **monitoring and evaluation** strategies; however, these are not followed through with sufficient funds or action. Moreover, indicators intended to monitor progress are often quantitative and focused on outputs or outcomes, rather than processes or impact.

# Would you like to carry out this methodological analysis for a national - regional - global policy?

The Policy Analysis Toolkit serves as tools which aim to support the efforts of MenEngage Alliance's members and other advocates to advance gender-transformative policies and programs.

The Policy Analysis Toolkit, as an accompaniment resource to the policy case studies and score cards, can further be utilized and adapted to analyze other national, regional and global policies.

The process and resources to replicate these efforts can be accessed at [menengage.org/advocacy](http://menengage.org/advocacy).

[www.menengage.org](http://www.menengage.org)

2021



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