



Federal Coordination Office
for the Protection of
Male Victims of Violence

**Protection of male
victims of violence**
and implementation of the
Istanbul Convention
in Germany
Current status

Imprint

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Protection of male victims of violence and implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Germany – Current status

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1. The Istanbul Convention as an instrument for combating violence against women* and domestic violence – Preliminary remarks

A press release by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) states that: “The Istanbul Convention is the most important instrument in international law for combating violence against women and domestic violence and offering protection and support to those affected”.¹ There can be no doubt that the Istanbul Convention is one of the most important instruments for addressing violence against women* and domestic violence against all people in a long-lasting way. In Article 1, it demands a coordinated strategy to prevent violence and protect its victims, specifically “a comprehensive framework, policies and measures for the protection of and assistance to all victims of violence against women and domestic violence”.²

The Bundesfach- und Koordinierungsstelle Männergewaltschutz (Federal Coordination Office for the Protection of Male Victims of Violence, BFKM) thus explicitly welcomes Germany’s move to sign the Istanbul Convention on 11 May 2011. Having been ratified by the German Bundestag on 1 July 2017, the Istanbul Convention has been legally binding since taking effect on 1 February 2018.

However, the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Germany is yet

to take the interests of men* affected by domestic violence into account. In the view of the BFKM, comprehensive implementation of the Istanbul Convention in accordance with Article 1 would mean establishing gender-sensitive prevention and assistance services to combat domestic violence for all sexes, taking into account the disparity between the sexes in terms of how they are affected by violence. Everyone affected by domestic violence must receive appropriate help and support – including men*. The BFKM thus considers it necessary to take male victims of domestic violence into account under the Istanbul Convention.

This report assesses how the Istanbul Convention has been implemented in Germany up to now from the perspective of men* affected by domestic violence. In it, the BFKM also gives its view on the results of the Federal Republic of Germany’s State Report and on the alternative report published by the Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention (German Istanbul Convention Alliance, BIK). Working together is the best way to curb (domestic) violence against people of any gender – so the BFKM aims to enter into and remain in dialogue with others in civil society working to combat violence and protect its victims.

¹ Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2021

² Council of Europe, 2011, p. 4

Definitions of violence

The Convention focuses on violence against women and domestic violence. According to its definition, gender-based violence against women includes all forms of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that are directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affect women dispropor-

tionately. Domestic violence refers to all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared a residence with the victim.³

³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 5

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 3

Disparity in how the genders are affected by violence

It is vital to note that women* suffer gender-based violence and are the victims of domestic violence and severely violent acts more frequently than men*.⁴ Violence against women* is ingrained in society, resulting from the unequal power structures between men* and women* that have grown through history. One of the motivations behind gender-based violence against women* is to maintain these power structures. Ensuring genuine and legal equality between women* and men* is a key way to prevent and protect against violence against women* and domestic violence.⁵

However, international research also indicates that there are gender-based differences in the way men* and women* experience violence.⁶ Men*

are more likely to experience physical violence, especially at the hands of (younger) men* outside the home, while women* are disproportionately represented among victims of sexual violence both inside and outside the home, as well as among victims of continued severe violence within relationships.⁷ The **Österreichische Prävalenzstudie zur Gewalt an Frauen und Männern** [Austrian prevalence study on violence against women and men] found that women* suffer violence more often than men*, are more strongly victimised, and experience more severe types and consequences of violence.⁸ Violence within relationships, for example, is not evenly divided between the genders when sexual violence and the severity of violence are taken into account.⁹

⁶ Cf. Schröttle, 2013, p. 2

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 2

⁸ Cf. Kapella u. a., 2011, p. 12 f.

⁹ Cf. Schröttle, 2013, p. 2

2. Men* as victims of domestic violence – Current data¹⁰

¹⁰ The available data relates to males aged 18 years and above. It does not address boys* affected by violence.

¹¹ Cf. Jungnitz, Lenz, Puchert, Puhe & Walter, 2004, p. 377

¹² Cf. Kapella u. a., 2011, p. 12 f.

¹³ Cf. Steffens, 2019, p. 8

¹⁴ Cf. Fiedeler, 2020, p. 62 f.

¹⁵ Kruber, Weller, Bathke & Voß, 2021, p. 1

¹⁶ Cf. Kolbe & Büttner, 2020, p. 535 f.

¹⁷ Cf. Bundeskriminalamt, 2020, p. 6

¹⁸ Cf. Landeskriminalamt Sachsen, 2020, p. 5

Little empirical material exists to describe the extent to which men* in Germany are affected by (domestic) violence. Academic studies on the topic are rare in German-speaking Europe. The explorative pilot study **Gewalt gegen Männer in Deutschland** [Violence against men in Germany], commissioned by the BMFS-FJ, revealed a broad spectrum and high prevalence of personal violence against men*.¹¹ The Austrian study also shows that men* are also among the victims of physical, psychological and even sexual violence.¹² In public, men* are more likely than women* to be victims of physical violence. Most of this violence is committed by other men*. In the project **G.M.G.R. – Gewaltbetroffene Männer: Gesundheit und Risikoverhalten** [Men affected by violence: health and risk behaviour], 29.8% of the 5,385 male patients surveyed reported having experienced physical, psychological or sexual violence at some point in their lives; 43.6% had been violent themselves. A quarter of the men* surveyed reported having been both the victim and the perpetrator of violence.¹³

Yet men* also suffer violence within families and relationships.¹⁴ In the pilot study **Gewalt gegen Männer** (266 respondents), one in four men* reported having suffered physical violence at the hands of their female partner. Even more reported psychological violence within partnerships. In the online study **PARTNER 5** (1,892 female, 1,433 male, 141 other), one in four men* and half of women* reported having experienced violence (verbal, physical, sexual) in a relationship. Five percent of the men* surveyed reported sexual violence in their current relationship.¹⁵ A meta-study

from 2020 drew on 17 relevant studies from various countries and showed that between 3.4 and 20.3% of men* were affected by physical violence, between 7.3 and 37% by psychological violence, and between 0.2 and 7% by sexual violence. The values were significantly higher where physical or mental impairments were involved. Many of these men* affected have also been violent themselves, with some even having served prison sentences for such crimes.¹⁶

The police criminal statistics published in Germany at a federal and state level also provide further indications of how men are affected by violence in the domestic environment and within current or former relationships – at least for the cases in which charges are brought. The German Federal Criminal Police Office's 2019 analysis of criminality statistics on violence in relationships [**Kriminalstatische Auswertung zur Partnerschaftsgewalt des Bundeskriminalamts 2019**] shows that 141,792 people in Germany fell victim to violence at the hands of a current or former partner in 2019. Of these, 114,903 (81%) were of the female gender and 26,889 (19%) of the male gender.¹⁷ The figures were similarly high for 2017 and 2018. According to an overview of domestic violence in Saxony [**Lagebild Häusliche Gewalt Sachsen**], 6,364 people aged over 18 years were affected by violence in the domestic environment (including by other family members, for example) in 2019. 29.5% of them were male.¹⁸ Here, too, the figures for the preceding years are at a similar level.

Studies on unreported cases are also a crucial point of reference. A 2020

study of unreported cases from North Rhine-Westphalia shows that 2,555 of the men* (22.2%) and 3,518 of the women* (28.9 %) surveyed had expe-

rienced violence in a relationship at some point in their lives.¹⁹ It is clear that the number of men* in Germany affected by violence is significant.

¹⁹ Cf. Landeskriminalamt Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2020, p. 47

3. Scope and demands of the Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention calls for “a comprehensive framework, policies and measures for the protection of and assistance to **all victims** of violence against women and domestic violence”²⁰ (see Article 1). Its particular focus on “domestic violence” includes victims of all genders. The preamble states, for example, “that domestic violence affects women disproportionately, and that men may also be victims of domestic violence”.²¹ In the explanatory report (I.1), domestic violence against men* children and the elderly is recognised as a “hidden phenomenon which affects too many families to be ignored”.²²

Article 2 explicitly encourages the signatories to apply the agreement to all victims of domestic violence.²³ In addition, the manual for parliamentarians calls on the signatories to “extend the scope to all persons at risk of or affected by domestic violence. This also applies to male, minor and elderly victims.”²⁴ Article 4 Clause 1 gives “**every-one**, particularly women, [the right] to live free from violence in both the public and the private sphere”.²⁵ The BFKM takes this to mean that the Istanbul Convention explicitly also applies to male victims of domestic violence.

The Istanbul Convention sets out clear demands and provides recommendations for action in the fields of coordi-

nated political action, violence prevention, victim protection and jurisdiction. Below, the focus is on the first three of these:

Coordinated political measures and data collection are important instruments in combating violence against women* and domestic violence (Articles 7 to 11). They rely on sufficient funding and the establishment of a state body to coordinate them and examine their effectiveness. In addition, data on gender-based and domestic violence needs to be collected systematically and researched intensively.

²⁰ Cf. Council of Europe, 2011, p. 4

²¹ Ibid., p. 4

²² Ibid., p. 38

²³ Cf. ibid., p. 5

²⁴ Council of Europe, 2019, p. 16

²⁵ Council of Europe, 2011, p. 6

Articles 12 to 17 of the Istanbul Convention focus on **prevention of and protection against violence against women* and domestic violence**. This requires people to be sensitised to the types of violence and to re-examine traditional, stereotypical roles assigned to women* and men* – something that can be achieved through educational projects and regular campaigns. A key focus here is on preventing violence among boys* and men*. In addition, the Istanbul Convention demands appropriate training for professional groups who work with children and young people, or with perpetrators and/or victims. Programmes for perpetrators are intended to prevent violence from occurring again and to break through generational cycles.

²⁶ Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2017, p. 47

²⁷ Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection & Federal Office of Justice, 2001

Protection and support are the focuses of Articles 18 to 28. Under these articles, the contractual parties undertake to introduce extensive measures to protect all people at risk of the types of violence described in the Istanbul Convention. All those affected by violence must have access to the information they need to use the support options available. A telephone advice line, for example, must be available around the clock and in a range of languages. There also need to be sufficient health-related and general assistance services, as well as specialised counselling services and secure refuges that are easy to access.

The Federal Government has stated that there is “great flexibility in executing measures for male victims in the

fields of [...] “prevention” and [...] “protection and support””.²⁶ Based on their formulation, Chapters V to VII, which relate to sanctions and jurisdiction, are to be implemented regardless of gender. The BFKM explicitly welcomes the principle that the legal basis for protection against domestic violence applies to all genders equally (see e.g. § 2 GewSchG²⁷). This reinforces our belief that the Istanbul Convention is a key instrument in protecting those affected by domestic violence of all genders and in all fields. Gender-sensitive prevention, protection and support measures must be put in place for men* affected, too, and their children where necessary, without losing sight of structural aspects of violence against women*.

4. Implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Germany from a men’s* perspective

Implementation of the Istanbul Convention and adherence to the obligations it presents is monitored and examined by the GREVIO commission of experts every five years. Germany submitted its first State Report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention to the European Council in September 2020.²⁸ The GREVIO commission is expected to assess this implementation in September 2021.

In Germany, the federal states [German Länder] and local district authorities are responsible for most of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, and played the main role in compiling the State Report. The main section of the report presents measures at a fed-

eral level along with examples from some of the 16 German Länder. Appendix 3 lists implementation measures taken in individual Länder in more detail. Below, this paper considers some aspects of the implementation of the Istanbul Convention so far from the point of view of men* affected by domestic violence. The examples chosen are selective and in no way exhaustive.

It is important to note that the State Report pays little attention to boys* and men* as victims of domestic and sexual violence. Mostly, they are mentioned in programmes for (potential) perpetrators of violence and in initiatives that question (traditional) masculinity/ies. This is reflected in the meas-

²⁸ Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2020a

ures at both federal and Länder level. The way boys* and men* are taken into account as victims of the types of

violence covered by the Istanbul Convention, varies widely between the 16 German Länder.

Coordinated political measures and data collection

The State Report stipulates a round table of federal, Länder and local governments entitled **Gemeinsam gegen Gewalt an Frauen** [United against violence against women], allowing them to work **together to further develop support systems**. The situation of male victims of violence under the Istanbul Convention has not been taken into consideration here. No representatives of the field of protecting men* against violence have yet been consulted. Male victims of domestic violence also barely feature in the Federal Government's latest action plan for combating violence against women, published in 2007. The federal government funding programme **Gemeinsam gegen Gewalt an Frauen** provides both investment and innovation solely to promote violence prevention and counselling facilities for women*.

In the State Report, the Länder and local governments point to the Länder specific plans for campaigns and measures to combat violence against women* and domestic violence. Some of these plans explicitly mention men* affected. However, the objectives and measures vary depending on the focus (e.g. limited to improving access for the target group, but usually without stating the establishment of gender-sensitive refuges and counselling services).

Generally speaking, it is clear that Germany's federal structure makes it more diffi-

cult to put uniform structures in place, as violence prevention measures and the associated (funding) guidelines and regulations vary widely between the 16 German Länder and responsibilities are not clearly divided between federal, Länder and local authorities.

When it comes to the **funding** available, the system for violence prevention and support suffers a chronic lack of funding overall. Here, too, the Länder have developed different funding guidelines. Many Länder do not plan to provide permanent funding for counselling services and refuges aimed specifically at men* affected by domestic violence. Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia currently fund men's* refuges through pilot and model projects. From 2022, Saxony will become the first state in Germany to operate permanent men's* refuges thanks to an amendment to the **Richtlinie zur Förderung der Chancengleichheit und zur Bekämpfung geschlechtsbezogener Gewalt** [Directive on promoting equal opportunities and combating gender-based violence].

Involvement of representatives of the interests of male victims of domestic violence, such as the **Bundesforum Männer e. V.**, the **Bundesfach- und Koordinierungsstelle Männergewaltschutz**, or the **Sozialdienst Katholischer Männer (Bundesverband) e.V.** has been the exception up to now. For example, such representatives were involved in implementing the campaign **Stärker als**

Gewalt. It is important to note that the Federal Government funds the project **Männer im Wandel** [Men in changing times] set up by the Bundesforum Männer e. V., which aims to overcome stereotypical roles, raise awareness of the issue, and reduce the number of men affected by violence either as victims or perpetrators.

The police statistics published at Länder and federal level and the criminal prosecution statistics are instruments that systematically bring together data on violence against women* and domestic violence. However, these merely provide an insight into the cases registered with the police, while a large proportion of cases of (domestic) violence see no charges brought. Data on use of the assistance system is also collected as part of funding controlling (e.g. numbers of clients in intervention and counselling services, statistics on the **Gewalt gegen Frauen** [Violence against women] telephone hotline), for example, and as part of the federal project **Bedarfsanalyse und -planung zur Weiterentwicklung des Hilfesystems zum Schutz vor Gewalt gegen Frauen und häuslicher Gewalt** [Demand analysis and planning for further development of the assistance system to protect against violence against women and domestic violence]. Unfortunately, these statistics usually contain little detail. Some counselling and intervention services, for example, do not record the extent to which boys* and men* use the services as victims or per-

petrators of domestic violence.²⁹ When it comes to researching violence against women* and domestic violence, the State Report refers to studies of unreported cases undertaken by some of the 16 German Länder, and to the 2004 unrepresentative pilot study **Gewalt gegen Männer** [Violence against men].

In addition to the measures stated in the State Report, it is worth noting that the BMFSFJ has funded the **Bundesfach- und Koordinierungsstelle Männergewaltschutz** since 2019, giving a boost to the protection of male victims of violence in Germany. As part of its remit, the BFKM is currently working together with existing men's* refuges to compile Germany-wide case documentation. The **Gewalt an Männern** [Violence against men] telephone helpline, set up in 2020, is also being evaluated and providing statistics to enhance understanding of how men* are affected by violence. The project **G.M.G.R. – Gewaltbetroffene Männer: Gesundheit und Risikoverhalten** [Men affected by violence: health and risk behaviour], funded up to 2019 by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the EU, the 2021 online study **PARTNER 5: Sexuelle Grenzverletzungen und sexualisierte Gewalt** [Sexual boundary violations and sexual violence], and **Weibliche Gewaltausübende** [Female perpetrators of violence], a research project initiated in 2021 by the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Täterarbeit Häusliche Gewalt e. V., are also worthy of mention.

Prevention of and protection against violence against women* and domestic violence

The State Report provides a detailed account of the **Stärker als Gewalt** [Stronger than violence] initiative, which is intended to sensitise people to violence against

women* and domestic violence. The campaign is also aimed at men* affected by domestic violence, with the **Gewalt an Männern** [Violence against men] tele-

phone hotline explicitly advertised on the campaign website. However, there is still a focus on stereotypical images of male perpetrators of domestic violence. Another information campaign mentioned is the **Kein Raum für Missbrauch** [No room for abuse] initiative, which sensitises experts to sexual violence against girls* and boys*. People in companies in the various states are also sensitised to the issues of violence against women* and domestic violence. Some of these strategies, e.g. in Hamburg, also explicitly target men* as victims of domestic violence.

When it comes to education, the State Report refers to the curricula of the individual Länder. Most of these curricula do include equality between women* and men*, gender diversity and non-violent communication (in relationships). However, as these topics are not compulsory, the way they are taught depends significantly on the level of interest and dedication from the school or even individual teachers.³⁰ The **Girls Day** and **Boys Day** initiatives challenge gender stereotypes in relation to chosen professions.

Responsibility for the wide range of training available in relation to the Istanbul Convention also lies with the individual Länder. It is worth noting that the Istanbul Convention and topics like violence against women*, domestic violence and gender justice are included as content of professional training for some relevant groups, albeit so far not with sufficient scope.³¹ Some advanced training on these topics is available, but is usually voluntary and subject to the time and financial constraints of the facility in question. The NGOs that often offer this kind of training also need to have the relevant staff, time and budget available.

When it comes to Germany-wide measures, the State Report refers to the interdisciplinary online course **Schutz**

und Hilfe bei häuslicher Gewalt [Protection and support in the case of domestic violence], which include at least some parts on counselling male victims of domestic violence. In addition, the **Männerfokussierte Beratung** [Men-focused counselling] training offered by Sozialdienst Katholischer Männer (Bundesverband) e. V. promotes gender-sensitive counselling.

The State Report also mentions support for programmes for perpetrators – with significant differences between the Länder when it comes to the prevalence and structure of such programmes.³² For example, not all counselling services working with perpetrators have committed to the standards of the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Täterarbeit Häusliche Gewalt e. V., which uses the term ‘those committing violence’ and thus includes perpetrators of all genders. The range of counselling services available is not yet sufficient to meet the demand, not least because accessing the services often means long journeys or logistical challenges for perpetrators.³³

In addition to the measures named in the State Report, the sensitisation measures offered across the 16 German Länder and Germany as a whole by the **Landesfachstelle Männerarbeit Sachsen** [Saxony State Office for Men’s Affairs] (**Mann gib dich nicht geschlagen campaign**³⁴) and the BFKM (sensitisation project **Bei Gewalt, Mann hol dir Hilfe**³⁵) are worthy of note, focusing specifically on male victims of domestic violence. However, a comprehensive, long-term strategy that goes beyond prevention in the form of information campaigns is inarguably lacking.³⁶

Many NGOs focusing on work with boys* and men* provide sensitisation programmes in the German Länder (including Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia and Bavaria) as part of advanced train-

³⁰ Cf. Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention, 2021, p. 41

³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 45

³² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 51 f.

³³ Cf. Karps & Popp, 2012, p. 58

³⁴ Landesfachstelle Männerarbeit Sachsen, 2019

³⁵ Bundesfach- und Koordinierungsstelle Männergewalt-schutz, 2020a

³⁶ Cf. Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention, 2021, p. 34

ing. This has been part of police officer training on domestic violence for many years, as well as training for teaching staff on gender justice, for example.

Here, too, whether training is provided often depends on the dedication of individuals and the time and funding available on the part of the provider.

Protection and support

³⁷ NDR, 2021

³⁸ An overview and ways to access the facilities can be found on the website of the Bundesfach- und Koordinierungsstelle Männergewalt-schutz, 2021a

³⁹ Cf. Karps & Popp, 2012, p. 58

⁴⁰ Bundesfach- und Koordinierungsstelle Männergewalt-schutz, 2021b

Men* affected by violence can find information about support and assistance services from the **Stärker als Gewalt** [Stronger than violence] campaign named in the State Report. Relevant support services are linked on the website (e.g. www.maennerberatungsnetz.de). The individual Länder are responsible for the local protection and support services, resulting in wide variation in the protection and support available for men* affected by domestic violence. The State Report names the **intervention offices against domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking**, most of which can also be used by men*. In addition, some states have their own specialised counselling services for men* affected by domestic violence, sexual violence or forced marriage. The same goes for victim drop-in centres for securing evidence following sexual violence. However, too few of these facilities employ male counsellors who have undergone gender-based training on how men* are affected. Non-gender-specific counselling services are also provided by victim support groups usually organised at Länder level and by Weisser Ring e. V. Some Länder offer male-specific counselling services for male victims of (domestic) violence, as well as appropriate refuges. How well the various bodies (e.g. police, child protection services, justice) work together often depends strongly on the individuals involved. Expansion is needed here, but is sometimes prevented by legal provisions.³⁷

There are currently nine men's* refuges in Germany as a whole, offering 29

places.³⁸ Most of them currently have only temporary funding from Länder or local governments as part of model projects. Not all are mentioned in the State Report. Accessing appropriate counselling and support services often means very long journeys or logistical challenges for men* affected by violence.³⁹ For men* affected by violence in Brandenburg, Berlin or Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, for example, the closest refuge is in Leipzig. The **Gewalt an Männern** [Violence against men] telephone helpline has also been available since 2020, funded by the Länder North Rhine-Westphalia, Bavaria and, since April 2021, Baden Wuerttemberg. During their opening hours from Monday to Friday, trained counsellors advise men* affected by violence in German or English. The SKM Bundesverband also provides a service entitled **Echte Männer reden** [Real men talk].

In summer 2021, the two latter services also introduced the option of contacting them via email or a chat function. The Bundesforum Männer e. V. and the BFKM are making efforts to bring together and provide access to the services for men* in the form of interactive maps. Information about what domestic violence means and how to find help can be found on the BFKM website, including in sign language.⁴⁰ An English version of the website is coming soon.

There is no doubt that, in the Länder that do have services for men* affected by violence, these services are used.

The men's* refuges are consistently well filled, regularly turning men* away due to lack of space. It is a similar story with the high level of use of the telephone helpline for men* affected by violence.⁴¹ The **Gewalt gegen Frauen** [Violence against women] telephone

helpline also regularly receives calls from men*, who can now be referred on to the **Gewalt an Männern** [Violence against men] helpline. In 2020, 2.5% of the 51,407 calls made to the helpline were from men*.^{42, 43}

⁴¹ Ministerium für Heimat, Kommunales, Bau und Gleichstellung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2021

⁴² Cf. Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth & Bundesamt für Familie und zivilgesellschaftliche Aufgaben, 2021, p. 28

⁴³ Calls are made by those affected, supporters, specialists and a very small number of perpetrators.

5. Alternative report published by the Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention

In general, more attention has been paid in recent years to the way men* are affected by violence, including domestic violence. Services explicitly targeted at men* are being created in some of the 16 German Länder, and men* are being recognised as victims of domestic violence just as women* are (with the relevant gender-based differences).⁴⁴ Many Länder are currently seeing the development of new projects aimed at improving the way men* are protected against violence. More and more, men* affected are able to find assistance and appropriate points of contact. Some of these services specifically for men* are being set up and funded as a direct consequence of the Istanbul Convention.

Some of those active in the field of violence prevention and victim protection are critical of these developments. The Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention (German Istanbul Convention Alliance, BIK) brings together more than 20 organisations whose work focuses on violence against women*. In its alternative report on the first German State Report, it analyses the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, critiques measures taken to implement it, highlights gaps, and suggests steps towards filling them. The alliance handed over the report to the GREVIO Commission in October 2020.

At the heart of the report is the BIK's criticism that measures to prevent violence (including domestic violence) and protect its victims are increasingly at risk of "de-genderisation", i.e. that domestic violence against men* is increasingly equated with that against women*.⁴⁵ The report goes on to claim that this "de-genderisation" implies that the forms of violence are equivalent and ignores the fact that the way women* and men* are affected by domestic violence differs significantly and that "violence against women is linked to control of women and an unequal power structure between the genders, which must be overcome just as violence must."⁴⁶ It lists various "negative examples" that indicate this process; for example, the BIK sees the **Stärker als Gewalt** [Stronger than violence] campaign, which as part of the BMFSFJ's programme **Gemeinsam gegen Gewalt an Frauen** [Together against violence against women] aims to outlaw violence against women* and sensitise the public to the extent of the problem, as problematic. As the campaign applies to all genders, they argue, its focus is skewed and the gender-based dimension of violence against women* neglected. This is counterproductive and not in line with the Istanbul Convention. Furthermore, they continue, intervention and counselling services for domestic,

⁴⁴ E.g. Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Familie, Arbeit und Soziales, 2021

⁴⁵ Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention, 2021, p. 14

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 15

sexual and other violence should be explicitly opened to all genders in some Länder. There is a general trend towards offering more gender-neutral services, especially in relation to domestic violence, with specific reference made to the Istanbul Convention.⁴⁷ This same reference to the Istanbul Convention, the BIK argues, is also behind the establishment of specific services for men* affected by domestic violence (e.g. in Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia). “Men and women [are perceived here] equally as victims and perpetrators.”⁴⁸ In addition, they claim, the term “domestic violence” means that gender-specific features and the way women* are particularly affected is lost.⁴⁹

The BIK recommends integrating a gender-orientated perspective into all violence prevention and victim protection measures, and not equating violence against women* with violence against men*.

While the BIK does not deny that men* can also be victims of domestic violence, it stresses the limits of the issue’s justification under the Istanbul Convention. For example, it questions whether the police criminality statistics should be used as the basis for assessing how men* are affected, as they include male children. Information from the Federal Criminal Police Office and some State Criminal Police Offices, however, shows that children are not usually included in analyses of violence in relationships. Adolescents are included in some cases where they are engaged or married before turning eighteen. Furthermore, if children were included in the statistics, this would also include female children.

The BIK goes on to criticise that the police criminality statistics do not include counter-charges by male perpetrators, as reported by counselling services for perpetrators, for example. According to

the Federal Criminal Police Office, it is not currently possible to use the police criminality statistics to determine which individual charges are counter-charges, for example by (ex)partners. The number of counter-charges brought by violent (ex)partners can therefore not be estimated.

As a result, no acceptable statement can be made on potential overestimation of male victims and female perpetrators. Instead, we perceive a danger that underestimating or ignoring the way men* are affected by violence could bolster anti-feminist positions on men’s* rights, which the BFKM is specifically against. Extending the police criminality statistics, as advocated by the BFKM, would improve the data available on this issue.

We are pleased that, in many German Länder, men* can now also find people to talk to about domestic violence at intervention and counselling services. At the same time, the BFKM agrees with the BIK that expanding to provide only “gender-neutral” counselling services – especially when this is used as justification for not providing separate, gender-sensitive services – must be seen as problematic. Opening up existing services to larger target groups without providing additional funding and staff is certainly a problem. In addition, it is important to note that many men* do not feel that “gender-neutral” services apply explicitly to them. Experience from men’s* refuges shows that gender-specific services appeal to different men* from the “gender-neutral” services provided by some intervention and counselling services. Some services, such as Opferhilfe Sachsen e. V., have introduced men’s* counselling times for precisely this reason. The BFKM is thus calling for additional gender-sensitive (counselling) services for men* affected by domestic and sexual violence.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 79

⁴⁸ Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Familie, Arbeit und Soziales, 2021

⁴⁹ Cf. Bündnis Istanbul-Konvention, 2021, p. 5

In the BFKM's view, it is appropriate to use the Istanbul Convention as the basis for providing gender-sensitive counselling and support services for men*. The Istanbul Convention states specifically that men* can also be victims of domestic violence and encourages the signatories to expand support services accordingly. The manual for parliamentarians specifically states: "This is intended to account for the fact that some of the types of violence covered by the Istanbul Convention also affect men* – albeit significantly less frequently and usually to a limited extent."⁵⁰ The term 'domestic violence' places the focus on the spatial context, as violence in close social proximity in particular is especially difficult for those affected of all genders, and emotional ties make it more difficult and complicated to remove oneself from the violent situation.

Establishing services for male victims of domestic violence does not negate the gender-specific violence inflicted on women* due to existing power and gender structures. Gender-specific differences in the way people are affected by (domestic) violence should certainly not be ignored. Taking into account the way men* are affected does not mean equating the way the different genders experience violence.

Gender-based differences in the way violence affects people must be examined in all their complexity in order to overcome these forms of violence. As bodies working to combat violence and its causes, we must not play our interests off against each other, but instead stand together in solidarity and offer help and support to all victims of violence.

⁵⁰ Council of Europe, 2019, p. 15

6. Our demands⁵¹

Based on our expertise and experience, we consider a "gender-neutral" or "de-genderised" approach counter-productive in the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. Instead, we would like to see gender-specific services. We are aware that assistance and counselling services for all genders are in need of further development. Services for one of the groups must not lead to limitations of services for other groups. That is precisely why we see the Istanbul Convention as a profound foundation for curbing violence against women*, just as it is for curbing domestic violence against men*. In our view, it is vital that the relevant links between domestic violence and its effects are taken into account. Services offered

under the Istanbul Convention should also be justified in line with it. We are thus calling for gender-sensitive prevention and support measures to be provided for boys* and men* too, on a sufficient scale and based on needs and requirements.

In our view, the core demand in equality policy over the next few years is further expansion of an interconnected assistance system to combat gender-based, domestic and sexual violence. The basis and framework for this must be permanent, legally binding and needs-based funding of gender-sensitive protection and counselling services, regardless of changing political majorities at local, Länder or federal level.

⁵¹ The demands are based on the Fachpolitische Empfehlungen Männer*gewaltschutz in Deutschland [Political recommendations for prevention of and protection against violence against men* in Germany] by the Bundesfach- und Koordinierungsstelle Männergewaltschutz, 2020b

Representative data collection

⁵² Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2020b

The Federal Criminal Police Office is currently planning a “gender-comparative survey on hidden cases of violence” in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI) and the BMFSFJ.⁵² It is essential that the survey contains representative data on how women*, men*, queer people and any associated children are affected by violence, in order to provide useful arguments for how to design the interconnected system of assistance in the future. Data collection is expected to begin in mid-2023, with the final report being published in early 2025. This also means that no representative data on needs in the field of protecting men* against violence will be available in the next four years.

We are therefore calling for the available data from the Länder studies on unreported cases to be analysed and for further studies of unreported cases and violence surveys to be set up in all 16 German Länder as a basis for permanent funding of places in men’s* refuges.

Together with all those involved in violence prevention and victim protection, proposals should be made to the Federal Criminal Police Office regarding

further development of the police criminality statistics, and these proposals must be acted upon. As well as broadening the structure of offences, this data is to serve as the basis for more detailed sub-division by age and gender. Overviews with the fields of gender-based violence, domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking should be standard in all German Länder.

Researchers, those active in violence prevention and victim protection, and political decision-makers need clear access to regional and national studies, qualitative and quantitative surveys and academic papers in a practical research database.

In order to understand varying needs in more detail, target group-specific data collection on how particularly vulnerable groups – such as those under 18 years, the homeless, people with disabilities, queer people, and people with refugee or migration backgrounds – are affected by violence must be commissioned and analysed. The goal must be to generate representative, reliable data and facts in order to assess vulnerability and the effect of violence in the medium and long term.

Violence prevention and sensitisation

Current sensitisation measures and campaigns are only slowly increasing awareness of male vulnerability. This process needs to be intensified in order for men* to be perceived permanently as also being victims of domestic violence. Furthermore, those in particular

professions (e.g. the health sector, legal practitioners) must be sensitized more to these topics. The Landesfachstelle Männerarbeit Sachsen [Saxony State Office for Men’s Affairs], for example, provides a course on the topic of domestic violence against men* to

young police officers during their initial training. Other services from a range of bodies, including intervention organisations, perpetrator-orientated counselling services and men's* counselling services pursue the same goal.

We are calling for the debate to be broadened beyond domestic and sexual violence, instead including considerations of how men* are affected by violence, in all forms, in expert circles and society as a whole.

Expansion of system of assistance against domestic and sexual violence

In 2020, the BFKM developed a concept for a "facilities initiative for men's* refuges". Over the next few years, we are calling for a "facilities initiative on the establishment, refurbishment and equipment of men's* refuges in Germany", funded by central government, to support the expansion of the system for helping men* affected by violence.

Long-term funding of men's* refuges and men's counselling services is particularly important here. So far, Saxony is the only state in which men's* refuges are to be permanently funded from 2022. The funding guidelines under equality policy in all Länder must now establish distinct funding items for this part of the system of assistance for combating domestic violence.

Men's* refuges should be established in line with demand, based on the size and population of the respective feder-

al state and on current data relating to men* affected by (domestic and sexual) violence. Establishing three to five men's refuges per state and providing additional funding for men's* counselling services would appear a sensible first step. Counselling for children and young people affected should also be established, along with services for violence prevention, sensitization and networking.

The Germany-wide men*s hotline currently receives funding from the Länder Bavaria, Baden-Wuerttemberg and North Rhine-Westphalia. It is open for limited hours on weekdays, and is already busy. Further Länder should get involved and give the project more stability and a greater regional base. In addition, the hotline should be made available 24/7 and provide counselling in a range of languages.

Networking and lobbying

Establishing points of contact for men's* policy and protecting men* against violence in all 16 German Länder is needed in order to improve networking and encourage the necessary framework conditions. There are currently no such

points of contact at the respective ministries responsible for equality policy.

The BFKM also considers it essential to enshrine specific measures for establishing men's* refuges in the Länder

action plans against domestic violence and in the local equality action plans (where these exist). This should be based on including those involved in protecting men* against violence in steering committees against domestic violence at Länder level and in working groups and networks against domestic violence at a local level.

Dresden, 31 August 2021

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