



## Event Report: "Tackling Gender Inequality and Gender-Based Violence: Men and Boys as Agents of Change"



**Date:** November 12, 2024

**Location:** EU House, Sarajevo

**Number of Participants:** 50 - [link to the participants' list](#)

**Moderators:** Adnan Rondic, Rajnat Majstorovic

**Press Coverage:** [Press Clipping](#)

**Photo Archive:** [Event Photos](#)

**Men against violence visual identity:** UN agencies and our partners have developed a unified brand guideline for the "Men Against Violence" campaign. Partners interested in utilizing these guidelines can download them as needed: [Brand Guidelines](#)

**Social Media Highlights:**

- Facebook: [Post 1](#), [Post 2](#), [Reel](#)
- Instagram: [Post 1](#), [Post 2](#), [Reel](#)
- X: [Post 1](#), [Post 2](#), [Reel](#)



## Executive Summary:

The event brought together 50 participants, including representatives of partner ministries, UN agencies, media professionals, key community leaders, and influencers from various sectors. The discussions centered around the crucial roles men and boys play in combating gender-based violence (GBV) and promoting gender equality. Participants collectively agreed on the necessity of legislative reforms to enhance protection for survivors of violence and support women's shelters. They stressed the importance of integrating men into GBV prevention strategies.

During the event, strategic priorities were set for the next three to five years, focusing on improving the legislative framework, engaging men and boys through education, and redefining harmful gender norms and masculinity. Keynote speeches and collaborative discussions underscored the need for long-term, culturally sensitive initiatives that engage community leaders and utilize existing educational programs to foster social change and challenge entrenched stereotypes. The commitment pledge signed by the participants underscored a unified approach to nurturing an equitable society free from gender-based violence.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Participants agreed on several key priorities for the next three to five years:

- Improving legislative framework
  - There is a need for enhanced efforts to amend existing legislation, including both the criminal code and the welfare system, to provide better protection for survivors of violence.
  - Additional efforts are needed to support and sustain the network of women's shelters, given their critical role in providing services
- Engaging key community leaders
  - Participants welcomed the inclusion of men into GBV prevention efforts, especially those groups and individuals that influence public opinion at national, or local levels - such as sportspeople, artists and cultural workers, religious leaders, social media influencers and others



- Developing concrete joint initiatives
  - All participants concurred that social change is a gradual process. They emphasized that long-term strategies to reduce violence should involve educational initiatives that promote non-violent values and deconstruct harmful narratives about masculinity. This includes challenging and ultimately eliminating the stereotypical divisions between 'male' and 'female' roles in the workforce.

Additionally, the group identified some of the key principles we need to ensure when engaging men and boys in the efforts to reduce violence:

- Men need to actively and vocally resist and reject violence against women, going beyond just being allies.
- Behavioral change is a long-term process, requiring sustained commitment and readiness for ongoing actions.
- It is crucial to redefine masculinity by confronting and addressing toxic masculine behaviors to prevent GBV effectively.
- Men should consistently emphasize in both public and private spheres that toxic and violent behavior is unacceptable and contrary to the core values of true masculinity.
- Campaigning should focus on non-formal channels, tapping into local influencers who can make a significant impact.
- Encourage discussions among men, led by men, that highlight positive male role models to challenge prevailing stereotypes.
- Work towards destigmatizing traditional male roles in society to encourage a more inclusive understanding of gender roles.
- Leverage the lessons learned from others and enhance existing programs, particularly those in education, to further these goals.
- Increase awareness of the global media landscape that often perpetuates toxic masculinity and actively work to counteract these messages.





## Opening Remarks

**Adebayo Babajide, Deputy Head of EU Delegation**, emphasized the key principles of involving men and boys in promoting gender equality. He noted that men and boys must stand alongside women in creating a society with equal opportunities, though their role in ending GBV is often overlooked. Legislative and governmental support aligned with international standards, such as the Istanbul Convention, is also essential in the fight against GBV. Babajide added that the EU Delegation is currently discussing a new program with UN partners focused on gender-based violence and economic empowerment, providing critical support for safe houses nationwide and establishing social enterprises.

**Adnan Delić, Minister of Labor and Social Policy**, talked about the importance of legislative frameworks and societal measures in breaking stereotypes. He noted that men must be key allies in this process to convey the important message that equality is the foundation of every society. This event demonstrates that society is ready to overcome stereotypes and harmful social norms. Delić pointed out that change begins when both men and women question stereotypes that polarize roles and responsibilities by gender, emphasizing our duty to break them, as these stereotypes perpetuate injustice and inequality.

## Keynote Speeches

**Adnan Delić, Minister of Labor and Social Policy, Government of FBiH** - discussed legislative initiatives in BiH aimed at reducing negative social norms. He mentioned that BiH has certain laws that serve as a starting point, but often, laws remain mere words on paper. He hopes that amendments to the Criminal Code and Family Law will improve the status of safe houses. Delić also commended UN Women BiH for inspiring his institution to join the Global Alliance for Care, and stressed that events like these are key to breaking prejudices in the deeply patriarchal culture.

**Saša Magazinović, Member of BiH Parliament** - noted that CSOs often view government institutions as adversaries, which is a harmful and unproductive narrative since the fight against gender-based violence (GBV) requires as many allies as possible. He emphasized that combating GBV requires collaboration between experts,



politicians, and the judiciary to pass laws and allocate funding. Magazinović highlighted that women's rights, once considered secure, are now under threat, making alliances crucial.

**Nikola Vučić, presenter, N1 TV station** - presented key challenges related to toxic masculinity and cultural stereotypes that contribute to gender inequality. He noted that it's crucial to eliminate any narratives that normalize, relativize, or justify violence. This requires inclusive dialogue that avoids hostility. Advocacy for progress must demonstrate tolerance and patience, listening to opposing views, and using reasoned arguments, as these arguments favor justice over the abuser. He emphasized the encouraging fact that politicians from various parties are taking a unified stance on GBV, showing that it should not be viewed through political or partisan divisions but approached as a matter of civilization.

**Srđan Ostojić, director, CSO Perpetuum Mobile** - emphasized the importance of engaging men as allies in the fight against violence toward women. He said that no one has a magic wand - neither CSOs, the media, nor the authorities alone. International organizations can make a significant contribution by empowering local partners for long-term action. It's important to note that only long-term programs can yield substantial results, as short-term projects are merely tools with a beginning and an end. Ostojić also discussed the 'Budi muško' youth program in BiH, where both girls and boys come together to challenge stereotypes. He emphasized that changing behavior patterns requires time and patience, which is often lacking. He believes there is plenty of space and willingness to work together as a coalition, as fragmented efforts lead to sporadic and limited progress. A strategy is essential and must include everyone.

### **Ideathon – Collaborative Discussion**

This segment allowed participants to actively engage in idea exchange. Moderator organized the discussion into three main topics:

- **Breaking stereotypes in everyday life:** The discussion focused on identifying stereotypes and the changes needed in family and societal settings;
- **Engaging religious leaders, athletes, and cultural figures:** The conversation explored how community leaders can influence the change of gender norms;



- **Mobilizing men and boys as allies:** The discussion focused on concrete steps to involve men and boys in violence prevention.

Journalist **Slađan Tomić** said that violence has always existed, but now there is more talk about it. He often speaks with older women, and it doesn't happen that they don't mention being physically abused by their husbands. This is because it used to be shameful to be a victim and return to your parents, but it's not shameful when a man is the abuser. Culturally, women are seen as there to meet men's needs. Tomić also emphasized the importance of the involvement of religious leaders due to the trust that citizens place in them.

Expert Associate from Gender Centre FBiH **Zlatan Hrnjčić** pointed out that the causes of violence are rooted in transferred behavior patterns, and unlearning them takes time. However, significant changes are being made. In 2010, for example, it would have been impossible to hold an event on GBV or find an audience. He also noted that in 2010, there were only around ten protective measures proposed by police, while in 2023, the number has increased to about 1,300. Improvement is also seen in the education of employees working in institutions that support survivors, with social research being conducted, a strategic framework for fighting GBV in place, and regular progress evaluations. Entrepreneur **Dragan Močević** from Pro Educa said that the greatest responsibilities in fighting GBV lie with politicians and the media. He also noted that it's important to introduce the topic in schools to empower girls from elementary to high school. Significant change would occur if sexual education and reproductive health programs were part of school curricula. Fitness instructor and influencer, **Nedim Babić**, said that networks, although very often a source of negativity, also present a great opportunity for action. Youth organizations are limited in number, whereas social networks have significant power. Additionally, action can be taken within families through the education of boys and girls. Although it is challenging to influence older generations, they too need to be reached. Program Analyst **Samid Šarenkapić** from UNFPA mentioned three phases of working on GBV that were undertaken in BiH: the first is introducing the topic into public discourse, the second phase involves the victim and the perpetrator, and the third phase concerns the witnesses (silent observers). In BiH, we are currently focusing on the third phase, creating space to teach people how to



react in cases of violence, a concept that is still being developed. In the context of long-term goals, this will lead to stabilization.

### **Commitment Pledge and Signing**

At the end, participants signed [a joint charter committing to preventing gender-based violence](#) and promoting gender equality, symbolically taking responsibility for further actions in this area.

### **Closing Remarks and Networking**

Finally, Jo-Anne Bishop, UN Women Representative, and Justine Coulson, UNFPA Representative, delivered closing remarks, highlighting the importance of collective action in promoting gender equality.

**Jo-Anne Bishop (UN Women)** - highlighted that the UN focuses on capacity building across multiple sectors. Through specialized training, law enforcement, judicial bodies, and healthcare professionals are equipped with survivor-centered approaches to ensure compassionate, effective support for survivors of GBV.

The UN is also committed to providing support for survivors through safe spaces, shelters, and access to vital resources such as economic empowerment programs and psychological support.

**Justine Coulson (UNFPA)** - highlighted the importance of engaging men and boys in the fight for gender equality and against gender-based violence. She underlined that gender equality requires the active involvement of both men and women, and that addressing harmful stereotypes and promoting positive masculinity are essential steps toward fostering respect and equality. She also pointed out that this is not an issue happening somewhere far away, but one that requires our active involvement. We must engage with everyone around us – our colleagues, neighbors, and family members – and be part of the process to bring about real change. She encouraged participants to transform the ideas discussed into actionable plans and assured that the UN and their partners will continue to support these efforts.