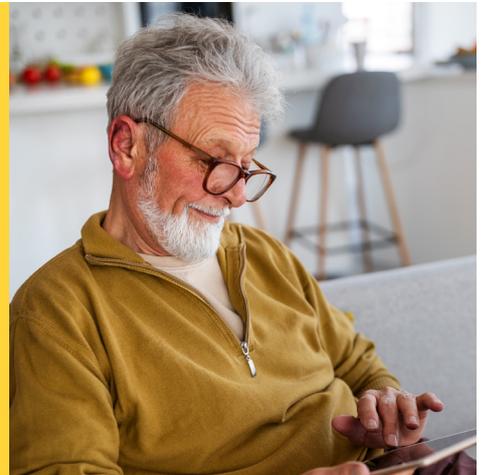# The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on work with men and boys in Europe
Stephen Burrell and Sandy Ruxton

November 2020

MenEngage
EUROPE
boys and men for gender equality

About the authors

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Dr. Stephen R. Burrell is currently undertaking an Economic and Social Research Council-funded postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Sociology at Durham University (United Kingdom). His work focuses on critical studies on men and masculinities, and he completed his PhD on engaging men and boys in the prevention of men's violence against women in 2019. He has also recently carried out research with Prof. Nicole Westmarland and Sandy Ruxton for the Government Equalities Office about the impacts of masculine gender norms in the United Kingdom today. Stephen is actively involved in Durham University's Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse and is a member of the MenEngage Alliance.

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Acknowledgments:

Suggested Citation

Burrell, S.R. and Ruxton, S. (2020) The impact of the Covid-19 crisis on work with men and boys in Europe. Durham: Durham University.

About CRiVA:

Based within the Department of Sociology at Durham University, the Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA) is dedicated to improving knowledge about interpersonal violence and abuse, and professional and societal responses to it.

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About MenEngage Europe

MenEngage Europe is an alliance of 95 organisations from 33 European countries. It works across borders and cultures to support boys and men to reflect on how their ways of being men influence their wellbeing and the people around them. MenEngage Europe is part of the global MenEngage Alliance of more than 700 civil society organisations. Throughout the world, MenEngage Alliance members work towards advancing gender and social justice as well as human rights to achieve a world in which all people are equal and free from discrimination.

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Executive Summary

This report shares the findings of a survey conducted with 36 members of MenEngage Europe to find out how work with men and boys to build gender equality has been affected by the Covid-19 crisis. The survey was carried out between 4th May and 19th June 2020, so represents a snapshot of a moment in time during the relatively early stages of the pandemic, when strict lockdowns were in place in most European countries. Respondents were based in 19 countries throughout Europe, with most completing the survey on behalf of organisations working with men and boys, and a minority representing individual researchers, consultants and practitioners in the field.

Delivering work with men and boys during the Covid-19 crisis

The survey respondents' work had been severely impacted by the pandemic. The majority were operating at a reduced service; only 17% were able to carry on working as normal, at a time when many of the issues that work with men and boys addresses (such as violence and abuse, and health and wellbeing) have become more urgent than ever. Indeed, some of the respondents, such as those running helpline services, described their workload as increasing during the pandemic. For others, important activities such as delivering education, training and group work had had to be cancelled. Several organisations had found innovative ways to adapt their work and move activities such as workshops, gatherings and meetings online, and in some cases had developed new initiatives in response to Covid-19, including creating internet forums, providing emotional support, tackling domestic violence, and devising new training and toolkits. However, this wasn't always feasible, and even where it was, respondents suggested that it was often a lot more challenging to engage with men and boys online than face-to-face. It's important to note that some men and boys are marginalised by moving work online too (such as those with fewer economic resources or technological skills). This can also involve additional costs and efforts for organisations, and can be highly demanding for practitioners working from home.

Concerns about organisational survival

The vast majority of respondents (86%) were worried about their organisation's funding during the Covid-19 crisis, with 20% being very concerned. Many were unable to engage in fundraising activities, or had lost income sources due to programmes or funding schemes being cancelled or postponed. Some were also unable to apply for funding from coronavirus-related schemes, as their work was not deemed to be sufficiently essential or urgent. In addition, there were broader concerns that funding would become even more scarce and tackling gender inequality would be further deprioritised as a result of the pandemic and the ensuing recession, even though it is playing a substantial role in many different aspects of the crisis. Indeed, some were anxious that the backlash against gender equality initiatives in Europe could intensify during and after the pandemic, as reactionary and anti-feminist groups seek to exploit the crisis. Most of the respondents (77%) said they were making efforts to support organisations working with women and girls, demonstrating that values of accountability and allyship with the feminist movement were not being lost during the pandemic – indeed, this could be seen as more vital than ever in this time of crisis.

Detrimental impacts of Covid-19 compounded by harmful masculine norms

The respondents expressed high levels of concern about the impacts of the pandemic on men and boys. This related both to men's behaviour towards others, such as the exacerbation of violence and abuse in the home (about which 88% were very concerned and 12% were reasonably concerned), and direct effects on men and boys themselves, such as increasing emotional and mental health problems (79% very concerned, 21% reasonably concerned) and the loss of livelihoods (76% very concerned, 24% reasonably concerned). This demonstrates how important it is to support work with men and boys to address these gendered issues during this time, with masculine norms potentially worsening many of the harms of Covid-19. Furthermore, it was underscored that the detrimental consequences of the pandemic are particularly significant for men and boys who

are already marginalised, have fewer resources, or are more likely to be exposed to the virus (for example at work), such as those from working class and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Failing to take gender and masculinity issues into account in policymaking

It was recognised that the pandemic has encouraged some men and boys to make positive changes in their lives, too. Particularly notable in this regard was that many respondents felt that fathers are more present in children's lives now, with 68% agreeing and 9% strongly agreeing that this was the case. This does not necessarily mean that fathers are taking on a greater share of childcare and housework than before, as for many women these tasks have increased even more. However, for at least some fathers having to work from home and spending more time with children whilst schools have been closed may lead them to become more actively involved in their children's lives in the longer term. Covid-19 could therefore lead to shifts in masculine norms towards more caring practices in some contexts.

Failing to take men and masculinities issues into account in policymaking

A highly concerning finding was that most respondents (56%) disagreed that their government was addressing gender equality in its response to the crisis, with only 25% agreeing with this statement. Numerous respondents described how Covid-19 decision-making was being dominated by men, and was failing to sufficiently take into account gender issues, such as the amount of additional care work that has fallen on women, who have also been losing jobs in

greater numbers. It was pointed out that few policymakers have engaged with issues around men and masculinities either, even though men appear more likely to die from Covid-19, less likely to take up infection control measures, and facing specific mental health issues influenced by masculine norms. Some of the respondents did describe how governments in their countries had taken steps to support victim-survivors of domestic abuse, but this was typically seen as being not nearly enough to seriously tackle an already hugely pervasive problem which has been substantially compounded by Covid-19. Meanwhile, it was pointed out that in some cases, political leaders have themselves reinforced harmful models of masculinity in their response to the pandemic.

The need to address gender inequality in Covid-19 responses

The respondents therefore called for policymakers from the local to the European levels to urgently apply a deeper gender analysis in their responses to the Covid-19 crisis, to ensure that gender equality does not lurch backwards in Europe as a result of the pandemic. Indeed, it was highlighted that the rapid social change brought about by coronavirus presents a pivotal moment for creating more caring and sustainable societies as we rebuild in its wake. Work with men and boys has a vital role to play in this.

56%
disagreed
that their government was addressing gender equality in its response to the crisis

1. About the survey

After Covid-19 took hold in Europe, the authors were keen to understand what impacts the pandemic was having on work with men and boys, and how organisations in this field see government responses to the crisis in relation to gender equality across the continent.[1]

We therefore carried out an online survey with members of the European regional network of the global MenEngage Alliance (which the authors are also members of), to find out more about their views, experiences and practices during the pandemic. It appeared that there was some research and analysis being carried out by feminist researchers and activists to assess how the women's sector in different countries was being affected, but we struggled to find anything addressing the experiences of organisations working with men and boys to build gender equality and transform masculinities, so we sought to address this gap.

The survey was completed by 36 respondents who were either members of, or members of organisations or networks that belong to, MenEngage Europe. We were pleased with this response rate (which represents over a third of the 95 members of MenEngage Europe), given the pressures that organisations were under during this time (and indeed which they face all the time). Whilst this does represent a small survey sample, it is, as far as we know, the only pan-European survey of its kind that has been undertaken. It is also important to remember that in most cases, respondents were answering on behalf of organisations, who in turn work with many men and boys in their respective communities and countries. A minority of respondents were individual members of MenEngage Europe, such as researchers or consultants.

Methodology

The survey contained a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions, and we were eager to give as much space as possible for respondents to express their own voices and views, given their considerable expertise on the subject matter. We have included as many quotes from respondents as possible in this report, and have named the organisations that they came from so these are properly credited, but have kept respondents' individual identities anonymous for privacy reasons. The survey was open for seven weeks, from 4th May to 19th June 2020. This period was already past the first 'peak' of Covid-19 in Europe in terms of mortality rates, but national lockdowns were still strict in most countries during this time, although some measures were starting to be eased.

It's important to note that this reflects a 'snapshot' of a specific moment in time during the pandemic; the situation with Covid-19 across Europe has already changed considerably since then (although at the time of writing, the virus is spreading fast again and many countries are re-applying stricter Covid-prevention measures). However, we have tried to consider what the respondents' experiences might mean for work with men and boys more broadly during (and beyond) this period, too.
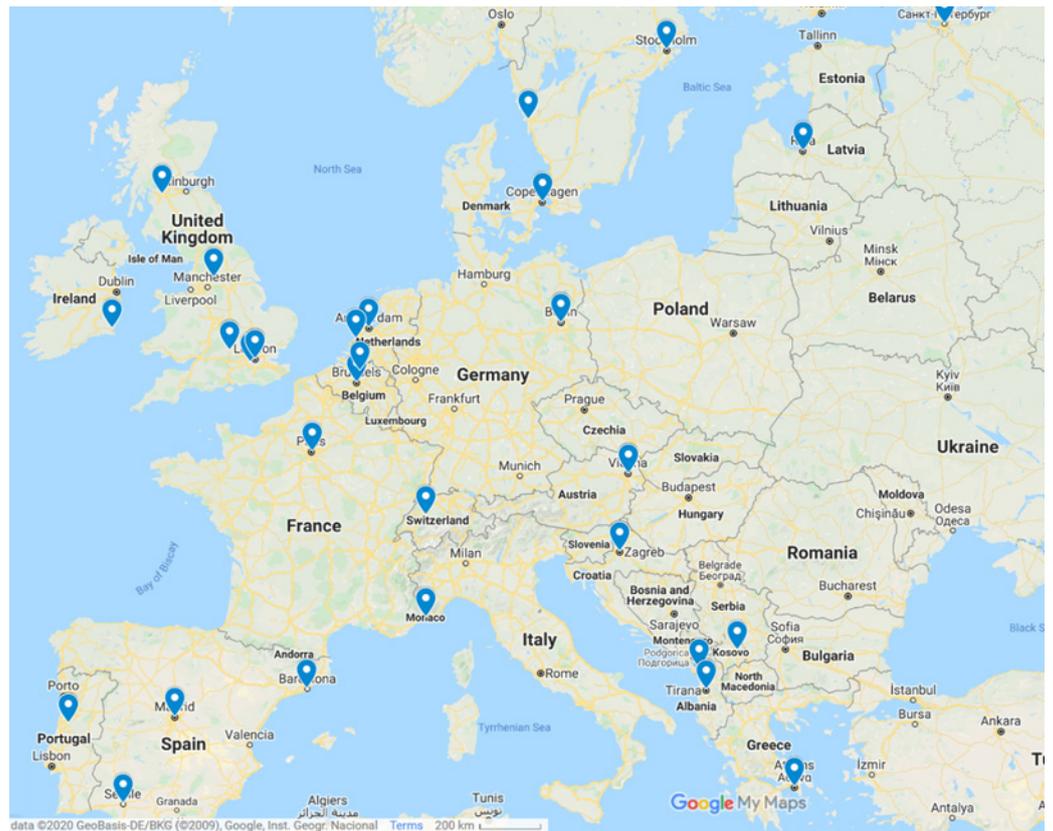
About the respondents and their work

The participants were split almost evenly by sex, with **19 being women (53%)** and **17 being men (47%)**.

As can be seen in the map in Figure 1, respondents were based in 19 countries across Europe

Please note: a full list of countries and participating organisations can be found in Appendix 1.

Whilst the sample reflects a relatively good spread of European countries, it's important to note that not every nation is represented among the respondents, with there being fewer from Eastern Europe in particular. This is notable as Covid-19 and responses to it have varied significantly in different contexts, even within Europe. In the first 'wave' (roughly March to July) many Central and Eastern European countries did not suffer the high death and infection rates that Western European countries such as the UK, Spain, France, and Italy did, however rates have risen substantially in Central and Eastern Europe in the second 'wave' (since September).

The survey respondents and their organisations were involved in doing a wide range of different types of work, with the most common forms being training (75%), advocacy/campaigning (72%), education/youth work (67%), networking (67%), and information-sharing (61%). Other types of work they undertook included: face-to-face group work (58%), research (53%), resource development (42%), media (39%), capacity-building (33%), individual counselling and personal development (31%), and consultancy (31%). One respondent also specified that their organisation provided "Helpline advice and support".

There was diversity in the issues that respondents and their organisations primarily focused upon. The most common of all was gender equality and women's rights (92%), followed by violence and abuse (83%); this makes sense given that MenEngage seeks to bring together organisations working with men and boys for gender justice. Other common issues of focus were education (53%), fatherhood and care (47%), mental, emotional and/or physical health (42%), sexual and reproductive health (42%); racism, xenophobia and minority rights (25%), and LGBT+ rights (25%). Less common issues of focus were militarism and peace-building (11%), media and culture (11%), and environment (8%). A few additional issues were mentioned here too, including "Addressing period inequality and period poverty", and "Corporeal education and dance".

For the majority of respondents (53%), the main target group for their work was men and boys in general, however sizable numbers did focus on specific groups; most commonly young men/boys (42%). Other specific target groups for organisations included: men/boys who use violence (36%); fathers/male carers (31%), male victims of violence (25%), ethnic minority men/boys (25%), men/boys from religious/faith groups (19%), refugee and migrant men/boys (17%), gay, bisexual and/or transgender men/boys (14%), men/boys in disadvantaged areas (14%), older men (8%), and men/boys with disabilities (6%). 39% of the organisations also did work with women and girls, showing that for a sizable minority, work with men and boys was not their only focus.

The responses to these questions indicate that many organisations in this field focus on multiple issues and groups at the same time, and that their work typically takes on several different forms. Next, we will discuss in more detail the findings from the survey.

2. The effects of Covid-19 on work with men and boys

Significant reductions in services

We were keen to find out about the extent to which organisations have been able to function during the pandemic. As can be seen in Figure 2, **only a minority (17%) were able to work as normal at the time of responding. Almost two thirds (64%) were operating at a reduced service, whilst 11%** **were only able to provide a basic service, and 8% were not running any services at all.** This is at a time when work with men and boys is needed more than ever, as a result of the numerous economic and social issues that Covid-19 has created.

Figure 2 *To what extent are you able to function as an organisation at the moment?*

Number of responses
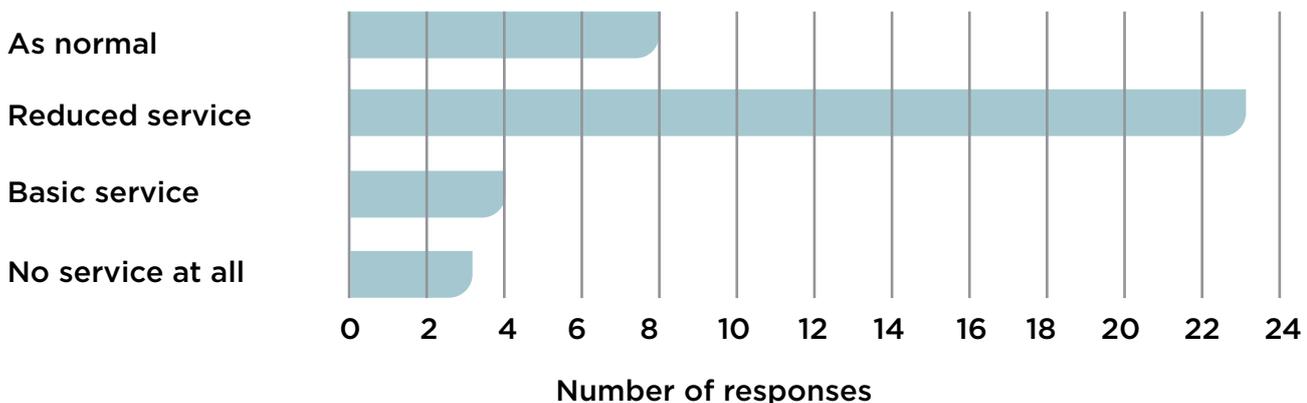
Adapting during challenging times

Some organisations appear to have been well-placed to adapt to the new environment caused by the pandemic, particularly if their work could transfer online relatively straightforwardly:

I think our organisation has turned out to be very agile and flexible on the one hand and on the other hand we were very lucky that our funded projects could start out as online. We have been good at using digital solutions and introduce new ways of social gathering online for young men (online men's groups and morning cafe every week for our volunteers).

DareGender, Denmark

For others, however, the dislocation caused by coronavirus was much harder to deal with:

"The pandemic was a bad time for us, because nobody was interested in talking about prostitution. We could not organise meetings and seminars."
Zéromacho, France

We asked the respondents to describe in more depth the work they were doing in the midst of the pandemic. Most of the organisations had tried to move their programmes online in some form or another, and were carrying out their work from home where that was possible:

"Since the first week that Kosovo went in lockdown, YMCA have started to do a contingency plan. All our youth centers were closed and we started working online with young people. Our training and curriculums firstly were adopted by our staff and in the second week, we have started our weekly meetings with young people through the Zoom platform."
George Williams Youth Association, Kosovo

In some cases, organisations were developing new ways of delivering their work, which could also be utilised in the longer term as innovative ways of engaging men and boys:

"As much as possible we have shifted our in-person work to online spaces - with some groups of boys/young people we were delivering online educational sessions. We started developing online workshops which Ministry of Education could include in their 'out of school online curriculum' to replace group work we would usually do in schools we are working in (that are sessions targeted at our usual beneficiaries); also we are developing program of podcasts with volunteers and experts for fields (such as professors, to talk about mental health in time of isolation, pornography.) The advocacy we are doing involving in communication of networks we are in as well as taking part in online sessions, consultation meetings and similar."
Status M, Croatia

A further range of initiatives and activities were mentioned by respondents as promising ways of engaging with men and boys that they had developed or observed during the pandemic. These are set out in Appendix 2.

In a few cases, organisations were still delivering work in person, where this was essential:

"The vast majority of our services have moved online (apart from some delivery from Youth provision that has remained to provide essential practical support such as food/care packages and IT donations delivery and Toy/Educational resource library) the rest of our work supporting Boys and Young Men has gone to a one to one support advocacy info and advice service. Where possible we are still taking referrals for this where appropriate mostly with Fathers and at-risk Young Men. This is essential and based on good relationships with service users before lockdown, much harder to engage people not known before lockdown but we have had some successes, however this does not replace human interactions and actual face-to-face work. We are developing online versions of some of our resources and trialling online video conferencing of some of our group work particularly Future Dads, expectant fathers courses however these are shortened light versions and a bridging exercise and not a replacement for in person groups or work."
Future Men, UK

This quote highlights that whilst lots of organisations have found ways to adapt their work online, many do not see this as a long-term solution or an adequate replacement for face-to-face, in-person interventions. For example, given the challenging and sensitive nature of much work with men and boys, it may be much harder to build rapport and relationships with members of a group; create a supportive, safe and trusting atmosphere; and get participants to engage meaningfully in online spaces.

"Since a lot of the work I do is training on gender, most of it (more than 90%) has been cancelled. This is because it is hard to do online, the trainings need to be done face to face. All of it is cancelled. The problem is also that too many organisations look at gender issues as being a luxury topic that you only tackle when enough funding and time. They don't see how there is a systemic link between gender and the horrors the world is facing now. So for them, working on the topic of gender is not part of the short term solutions they think they need. That is a pity."
Nesma Consulting, Belgium

Some of the respondents reported that their workloads had increased due to the pandemic, for example if they provided counselling or helpline services where demand had risen, or were involved in community support and mutual aid activities:

"We do trainings online. Networking and advocacy take place online and via social media. Counselling have increased. Many meetings are carried out but online and in adjusted forms (length, number of participants etc)."
MÄN, Sweden

"The number of requests and the load on our specialists has increased. We are trying to adapt to new realities and automate our internal work processes wherever possible. We have increased the number of supervisions for our employees."

▬

M21,
Russia

Difficulties delivering the work

Many of the respondents also provided explanations about why they were not able to deliver aspects of their work during the pandemic. These revolved around lockdown restrictions and social distancing rules closing their workplaces and prohibiting the kinds of activities they would normally engage in, such as meetings, workshops, education, training, group work, public events, and other in-person interactions:

"We are not able to deliver our youth work because it is strictly based on face-to-face interaction with youngsters. We can't organize our public events like discussions, workshops etc. as currently public gatherings are forbidden."
MARTA Centre, Latvia

This was also the case in Sweden, where a lockdown had not been imposed, and where the response largely relied on voluntary social distancing guidelines, including working from home where possible, avoiding public transport, restrictions on visiting care homes, and table-only service in bars and restaurants:

"Public events and participation in conferences and trainings have mostly been cancelled. Some groupwork with youth is not taking place because it is difficult to create good conditions online. Physical counselling is not offered at the moment. Certain internal trainings and change processes have been postponed due to increased workload and lack of focus of staff."
MÄN, Sweden

This quote highlights that even work which could go ahead in theory had sometimes been cancelled due to other coronavirus-related pressures, or because it simply wasn't possible to recreate it online to a similar standard. One issue was that many of the places in which respondents would normally deliver their work, such as workshops in schools or training for businesses, was not possible as these organisations themselves were currently closed. Even when host organisations were still operating, as was mentioned above, some respondents felt gender was not currently one of their priorities. This shows how gender equality can fall off the agenda in times of crisis because it is not seen as sufficiently urgent, even though inequalities are often exacerbated in such periods, and have a significant bearing on the crisis itself (Smith, 2019).

In some cases, organisations that respondents would normally collaborate with or provide services for did not have the capacity for this due to the dealing with the immediate outcomes of the pandemic itself, such as health services and professionals.

"In-person meetings have been cancelled due to safety measures and travel restrictions. Some organisations, mainly victim support services, which we were planning on collaborating with have been overwhelmed by work and will not be able to work with us this year."
European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP)

It was not just direct engagement work that organisations were not able to do to the same degree, but other crucial activities too, such as network-building events and fundraising, which could have longer-term implications for their work, not least economically:

"Organisations we work with do not have the capacity at the moment. We have a significant decrease in funds raised for us. We have furloughed 2 members of staff."
White Ribbon UK

In some cases, respondents found it difficult to continue with their work because of their own increased personal commitments and caring responsibilities at home:

"We are not able to hold our workshops (companies or schools) as they have to be in-person. Our work on the Red Box Project and addressing period inequality in Monaco has practically stopped for the moment. It's not on schools or companies' priority list at the moment. It's also difficult to work with young children at home."
SheCanHeCan, Monaco

> ## "It wasn't easy sometimes to work from home. We missed our friends who we work with".
>
> **Gender Alliance Initiative,** Greece

Similar obstacles applied for volunteers, ambassadors and other associates that organisations work with in order to reach out to men and boys:

"In terms of the groups we work with to engage men and boys to play their part in helping to end violence against women the main impact is that the restrictions on their personal and working lives are such that these are likely to require to be addressed first before they return to working with our organisation."
White Ribbon Scotland

This also highlights that both for practitioners and service users, working on gender equality issues (such as violence and abuse) at home (for example, through online meetings) can be highly challenging and exhausting.

"It has also created a lot of anxiety and a breakdown of the boundaries between work and personal life, with many of us working out of hours, weekends, without having to think twice about it".
Respect, UK

Whilst there can be benefits to teleworking, the lack of separation between work and homelife could exacerbate the potential for vicarious psychological harm to practitioners that can be caused by working on traumatic issues or engaging empathically with people who have experienced trauma. Engaging with service users in their homes could present additional risks to them too, such as if they are living with an abusive family member.

However, one respondent did mention that there had also been some unexpected positives as a result of lockdown, such as being able to engage with larger numbers of professionals than before due to moving events and activities online:

"Well, schools are closed, to name one. So delivering workshops in schools is not working now. However, it seems sometimes even easier now to reach education and youth work professionals now with our online trainings. Reaching youth is way more difficult, but reaching the professionals is not necessarily more difficult."
Emancipator, Netherlands

More than one respondent also commented that Covid-19 had had the unexpected effect of making contact between staff members more regular, even if this was online:
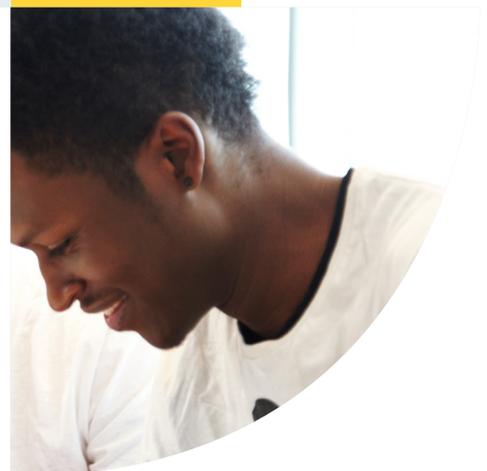
"The pandemic has forced our organisation to adapt very quickly and staff are working more closely together, despite the social distancing."
Respect, UK

It has created a new sense of urgency for dealing with domestic abuse and cohesiveness in the task by forcing the team into regular online team meetings.

Restored, UK

3. Concerns about organisational survival during and after Covid-19

Figure 3 demonstrates that the vast majority of respondents **(86%) reported being concerned about their organisation's funding** in the wake of coronavirus; only **11% said they were not worried at all.**

20% said they were very worried, 46% were moderately worried, 20% were slightly worried, and **3% were uncertain.**

This highlights a less-discussed issue regarding the gendered fallout of Covid-19; that many organisations working to build gender equality may struggle to survive the recession brought about by the pandemic without rapid government support. This could in turn contribute towards the entrenchment of gender inequality in some countries.

86%

reported being concerned about their organisation's funding in the wake of coronavirus;

Figure 3 *How worried are you about your organisation's funding currently?*
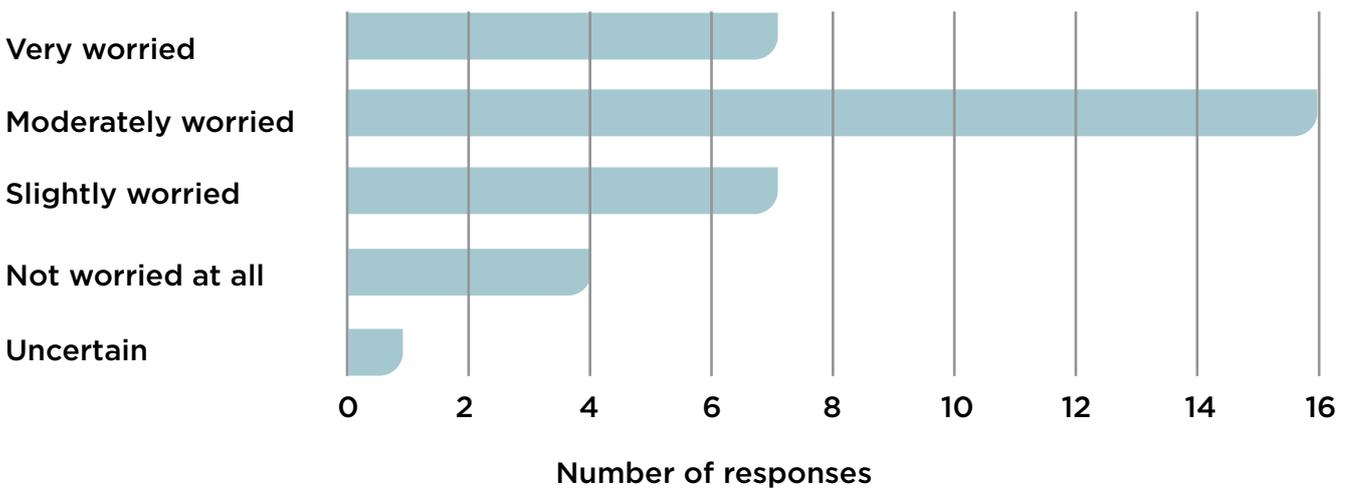
Several replies highlighted the negative impact of coronavirus on their fundraising, for a variety of reasons:

"It will highly impact our fundraising and our ability to hold workshops (a source of income) in 2020 and the government is not providing any financial help to non-profits."

SheCanHeCan, Monaco

"We had hoped to submit an application to our main funders for an increase in our current grant which would permit us to grow the core of our organisation. This has now been postponed until September 2020, however our current grant has been confirmed as continuing until that time."
White Ribbon Scotland

In some cases, it appears that the work of respondents' organisations was not considered sufficiently critical by governments and other funding bodies to receive Covid-related funding, which is concerning given the role of work with men and boys in preventing major social issues such as violence and abuse:

"We feel our approach is really vital but we are unable to apply for any funding associated with the crisis because we are not 'frontline' this is really frustrating."
White Ribbon UK

"NGOs/CSOs in Croatia were not eligible for any support funding provided. We are part of civil society that took part in response (open letters, lobbying) but nothing has been achieved."
Status M, Croatia

One respondent also felt that the emphasis of funding was becoming even more short-termist, and missed out various key groups:

"We are concerned that the acute crisis is steering resources and focus away from long term gender

transformative work. The lack of resources for work with adult and older men in Sweden have become very obvious."
MÄN, Sweden

It was also noted that funding problems for civil society pre-dated the crisis in some regions, and had simply become more evident now:

"We also think it is also part of structural destruction of civil society in this region (central/ eastern Europe) which with corona crisis became even more visible and tangible."
Status M, Croatia

The additional demands of moving work online

There was a mixture of responses when we asked participants if they thought their organisation would need to make changes to survive through the Covid-19 crisis. A few reported feeling relatively confident that they were ready to adapt to the changed environment it has created. Many felt that they would need to find ways to deliver more of their work online – not only during the pandemic itself, but also in the longer term:

"Yes. During - shift to online. After - maintain online offer. Diversify offer to include non-group work things"
Good Lad Initiative, UK

"It looks as if there will be long term impacts on the ways in which people take part in events and training. We will need to do more online and our partner organisations will need to find new ways of awareness raising."
White Ribbon UK

It was pointed out that this in itself would take up additional resources, because delivering work online effectively requires dedicated planning and preparation, as well as appropriate equipment and software:

"As an organisation we basically work in the field by experiential, vivid workshops. Right now with the social distancing we have to reform our workshops. We have to invest new ways through internet platforms and long distance education methods."
Gender Alliance Initiative, Greece

Another respondent expressed concern about what this would mean for their service users, some of whom may not easily be able to access and use the Internet and information and communications technology (ICT) equipment due to economic constraints or a low level of technological experience. It was noted that working online can create considerable difficulties for vulnerable clients:

"Some men in vulnerable positions find themselves unable to engage online for support - probably those who need it most".
Men's Development Network, Ireland

It was also mentioned that the increased reliance on technology means that security and privacy online were becoming even more important issues for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which again requires additional resources to address. This is a particularly significant issue for women and people from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds, for whom online harassment and abuse has increased during the pandemic, including in work-related contexts (Glitch UK and EVAW, 2020).

> "Some men in vulnerable positions find themselves unable to engage online for support - probably those who need it most".
>
> **Men's Development Network,** Ireland

Uncertain times for gender equality work

One respondent mentioned that a lot was dependent on how long the pandemic would go on for and whether stricter lockdowns and other coronavirus-prevention measures would need to be reintroduced, which continues to be uncertain (and is already taking place in several European countries):

"We can survive one lockdown … if new lockdowns will follow we will have to make a shift into more online tools and counselling".
Vzw Zijn, Belgium

Some organisations had also sought to apply the content of their work to the pandemic in some way, to address the numerous issues related to gender that it has brought up:

"We have been making changes in the way we work, such as adapting our advice to make it more relevant to Covid-19, increasing hours to enable service users to access support at times it suits them, providing coordinated advice and support to our members and starting to make our training available online."
Respect, UK

Several respondents described how their organisations had already lost funding or had to let members of staff go due to the economic implications of coronavirus, which meant, for example, that they were becoming more dependent on volunteers:

"Yes, it is already happening. We are letting some people go because of funding shortage and insecurity."
MÄN, Sweden

"Yes, we have already reduced our salaries (it was 4 people full time), also we employed 1 person part time - that is now 3 full time, 1 part time. We would also have at

this part of year at least 2 students employed, which we now don't have. Also, we have lost our admin assistant which is 1 more person reduced from team. We are also not well prepared for producing online contents and also we can not influence how many people will actually take part in our online workshops or any other content we are producing."*
Status-M, Croatia

A few were concerned that they might not be able to continue making a living from doing this work at all:

"I am in fact thinking of giving up my business and have started to apply for paid jobs in organisations because I have no idea how I will survive and have 3 daughters at university, so no idea how I will continue to pay for that."
Nesma Consulting, Belgium

It is important to put these issues into context; gender equality work

was already, in the words of one respondent, "precarious" prior to the pandemic: often underfunded, under-prioritised and, in some contexts, under threat. Indeed, some respondents described how they had recently had to let staff go or reduce their operations before Covid-19 had even arrived. One articulated how survival was already a major struggle beforehand:

"We have always been in survival mode and probably will continue to do so. There is much more demand of our kind of work to engage boys and men in gender justice than there are resources available to make all that work happen. And most likely the upcoming Covid-induced economic crisis is going to make finances an ever bigger challenge, when governments will have to scrape everything everywhere for their survival. Another thing that is very threatening, is the ongoing backlash that now under Covid lockdown in

many countries has led to repressive laws regarding gender rights and the growing right-wing movement that wishes societies and gender relations to go back to what they consider 'god given' or 'natural' orders. These threats will in the long run very much influence the chances of survival for all gender equality organizations, including ours."
Emancipator, Netherlands

These comments point to a danger that the pandemic could be used as an excuse to further diminish and de-prioritise gender equality efforts, such as on the pre-text that there is a need for austerity measures from government. There is also a risk that reactionary social and political forces, such as far-right and anti-feminist groups, could gain ground in the wake of Covid-19, by exploiting people's sense of anger, pain and injustice in relation to the pandemic and its subsequent economic fallout, and placing the blame on certain 'Othered' social groups for this, including feminists and LGBT+ communities (Hope Not Hate, 2020). There is thus a danger that the ongoing backlash against gender equality work could intensify during this time.

However, for many people the pandemic is also raising fundamental questions about the way that society is run and the injustices which have been allowed to persist for so long. This could, in the eyes of one respondent, lead to more people challenging gender inequality and dominant gender norms:

*"Surviving Covid-19 has a different meaning for me, other than surviving: not going back to the old normal, but positively using the crisis to move the work on men and boys and gender justice in general to a higher plan system change, to address the root causes of harmful masculinities, patriarchy, neoliberalism, and all the other injustices also underlie Covid-19 and the effect it has on specific sectors*

4. Supporting the feminist movement

Over three quarters **(77%)** of the organisations and individuals responding to the survey **indicated that they were making efforts to support organisations working with women and girls during the pandemic**. One respondent noted, however, that ensuring the survival of his organisation's work with men remained the focus.

Figure 4 *Is your organisation doing any work to support feminist and/or women and girls' organisations in response to the pandemic?*
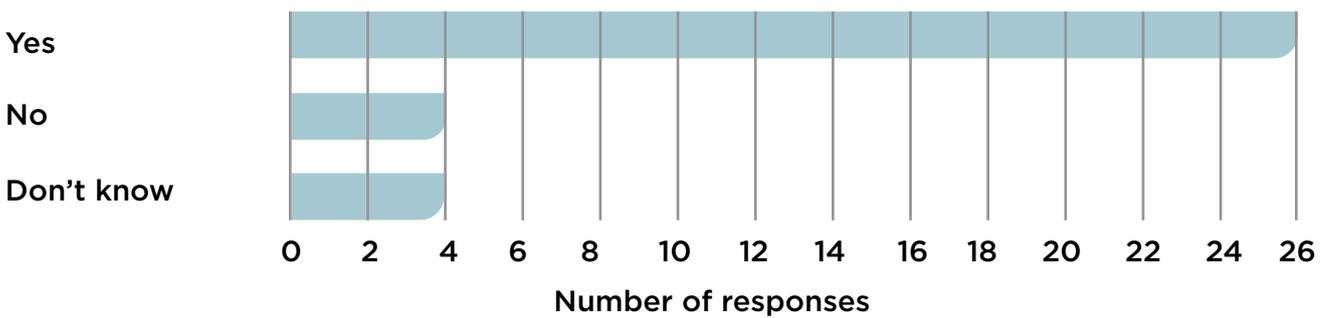
Some of this work was of a practical nature:

"I am doing all sorts of voluntary work now like being a bike courier at the foodbank, delivering food to families and I make sure to always check on the women and children in these families".
Nesma Consulting, Belgium

An important focus for several respondents was education and awareness-raising about issues affecting women and girls, and 'signposting' victims of gender-based violence to support services:

"I designed a programme on sex education and porn literacy (pilot study and education project)"
Individual member, Spain

"We are working to enhance the public's knowledge of on-going services during the lockdown period. We are also calling on men and boys to do what they can to support such organisations."
White Ribbon Scotland

"We are taking part in focus groups and lectures. We are writing articles and we try to inform the public via our social networks about gender equality."
Gender Alliance Initiative, Greece

"We are sharing info about how/ where to seek help in case of domestic violence".
SheCanHeCan, Monaco

"We are supporting all activities any time being asked from our partners - especially raising awareness about domestic violence and patriarchy..."
Status M, Croatia

"Our main work is with victims and survivors of abuse and church leaders and influencers to decrease abuse or provide appropriate information and safe havens".
Restored, UK

Others were more involved in advocating for increased resources for women's organisations and other social services:

"Our organisation is supporting two women's shelters in Kosovo with food, laptops, bedsheets, clothes, etc."

George Williams Youth Association, Kosovo

In many cases, engagement with women and girls' organisations existed before the pandemic, and was continuing during it. Several respondents said they co-operated with other public and private sector organisations and were discussing the consequences of

the crisis for gender equality with partners and/or with government ministries. But this did not necessarily mean that specific initiatives had been developed in response (although they may have since the survey was completed):

"We are liaising with the Ministry for Women's Rights in Monaco encouraging them to provide solutions for parents (mothers especially) who need to return to work, while the primary schools have decided not to open until September..."
SheCanHeCan, Monaco

"We always have close collaboration with feminist and women and girls' organisations and projects, also during the pandemic. Together, we continue our efforts for violence prevention and promotion of work/care balance. And together, we initiate and develop new ideas..."
Emancipator, Netherlands

"We are part of several sector networks and we support various campaigns that they have run - social media and letters of support etc."
White Ribbon UK

There are challenging questions about how organisations working with men and boys can best support and be accountable to the feminist movement at a time of crisis, when their own survival may be under threat too. However, for many of the respondents they nevertheless appeared to be finding ways to put this into practice, typically based around existing collaborative relationships.

"We have together with women's organisations highlighted the need for increased resources for support of victims of violence. We have also stressed the importance of increased resources for social services during and after the pandemic."

MÄN,
Sweden

5. Detrimental impacts of Covid-19 related to men and boys

We wanted to find out what the respondents thought about the different ways in which men and boys in their respective countries have been detrimentally affected by the pandemic, including in relation to their behaviours towards others. These views could have been shaped by respondents' interactions with men and boys that they work with, or their observations about the situation in their country more broadly. Whilst some factors were a source of particularly high levels of concern, all of the issues we suggested appeared to be seen as important, demonstrating the range of social problems that Covid-19 has created or compounded. Some of the respondents summarised several of these:

"Experiencing or perpetrating more violence and abuse; uncertainty/confusion as to what services are available and where to get help from; resigning to the perceived fact that, due to Covid-19, there is no help and support; making decisions based on such perception, i.e. 'taking law into own hands'; long-term mental health problems as consequence of pandemic and uncertainty around accessing help - also, not having accessed similar help before, not feeling that there is need to or not fitting with perception of self (e.g. sense of masculinity not 'allowing' for talking about these problems)"
Respect, UK

"I work for the Youth Center for Sexual Health (CJAS) in Barcelona. Regarding the boys this organization works with, the impact of the pandemic would be:

- *lack of information on sexual health and rights*
- *mental health and lack of resources*
- *increased online sexual activity (sexting, porn consumption)*
- *unemployment".*

Individual member, Spain

The second quote demonstrates that the reduction in information and education for young people around issues such as sexual and reproductive health during the pandemic could have detrimental consequences both in the short and long term. This highlights the need to find ways to ensure that relationships and sex education can continue to be delivered even during lockdowns (such as online) (Hillard, 2020).

Violence and abuse

The issue respondents were most worried about of all was the exacerbation of violence and abuse in the home (such as intimate partner violence and child abuse) during the pandemic, about which 88% were very concerned and 12% were reasonably concerned.

"The increase in domestic abuse during lockdown. The difficulties in undertaking work at home at the same time as caring for children."
Restored, UK

"GBV is very high in Albania now"
Act for Society, Albania

Violence in the home is primarily perpetrated by men against women and children. It is closely connected to masculine norms, through which some men may feel an expectation and a sense of entitlement to have power and control over their partners and/or children, and use violence and abuse in an attempt to attain and implement this. In some cases, these motivations may have intensified during the pandemic, which has led to feelings of powerlessness and a loss of control for many, perhaps leading some men to seek to reaffirm masculine dominance. However, some men and boys will also have been experiencing these forms of abuse as victims themselves during the pandemic. Any victim of violence in the home will have become even more isolated and less able to escape or reach out for support as a result of lockdowns and other coronavirus-prevention measures (Mahase, 2020; UN Women, 2020).

In addition, there were high levels of concern about the perpetration of different forms of harassment and abuse online during the pandemic (such as bullying, sexual harassment, and image-based sexual abuse), with many of us spending more time than ever on the Internet. 53% were very concerned about this and 34% were reasonably concerned, with one respondent stating:

*"Break down of in person social networks and support
Loss of space outside of home
Potential for isolation and bullying increased (ubiquity of online abuse)".*
Good Lad Initiative, UK

Connected to this, some respondents highlighted worries about increases in the use of pornography among some men and boys whilst spending more time at home, which could help to further normalise male dominance and aggression in sex and relationships (and in online interactions more broadly) given the content of much pornography, and its pervasiveness on the Internet (Bridges et al., 2010; Mestre-Bach et al., 2020).

"The excessive use of pornography, lack of self-care, social isolation, depression, the potentiation of toxic masculinity."
**University of Coimbra, Portugal**

There was less certainty about the issue of pornography use than for some of the other issues raised, with 31% very concerned, 29% reasonably concerned, 23% slightly concerned, and 17% not sure. However, one respondent felt that these issues had received less attention from wider society during the pandemic:

"We are most concerned with behaviours that have not had any prominence, such as increase in pornography and coercive soliciting of sexual images".
White Ribbon UK

Figure 5 *Level of concern about the impact of the pandemic on violence and abuse*
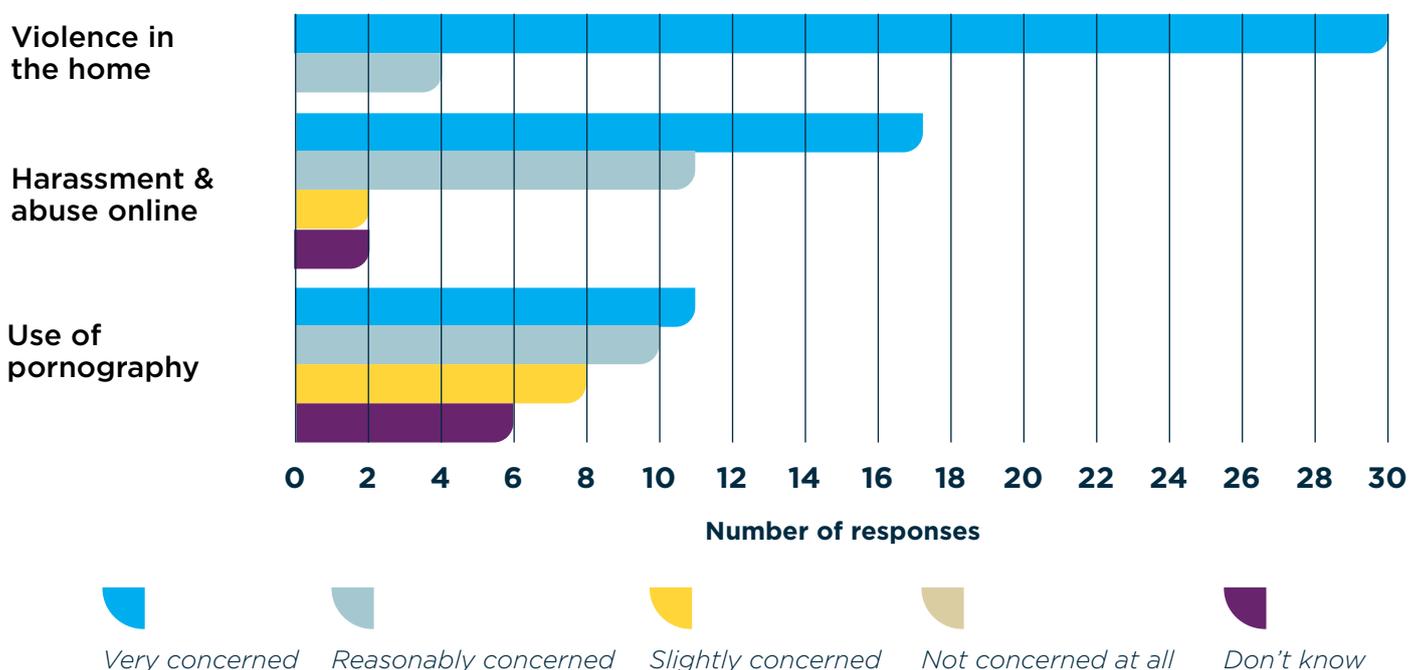
Mental and emotional health and wellbeing

The second largest issue which respondents were worried about was emotional and mental health problems being experienced by men and boys during the pandemic, with 79% being very concerned about this and 21% being reasonably concerned. Several emphasised the stress and anxiety created by Covid-19 itself and resulting public health measures such as lockdowns, and the harmful effects this could contribute towards both for men and boys themselves and for the people around them:

"Social and emotional isolation and stress in combination with inadequate skills to cope in constructive ways."
MÄN, Sweden

"The high level of stress and anxiety which will be shown with violence."
ZDB, Albania

"Emotional and mental health problems, lack of social contacts and support networks, resulting aggression and increase in domestic violence."
MARTA Centre, Latvia

Many respondents were worried about what one called "The lack of contact possibilities" (Dissens, Germany) and the loss of face-to-face support networks for men and boys (such as friendship and community groups, work colleagues, school peers, and team mates, in addition to more formal support services), with 61% being very concerned and 24% being reasonably concerned about this. This suggests that the difficulties many men experience in reaching out for help and support when experiencing personal difficulties (something which they may fear will be seen as weak and 'unmanly') have been further hampered by the seclusion and loneliness imposed by social distancing and lockdowns:

*"Most of all isolation and feeling of lack of network and friends."*
DareGender, Denmark

"We are especially worried about the social isolation and mental health of boys and men".
VZW Vijn, Belgium

For some, making use of green spaces has been a vital way of improving mental health and wellbeing during lockdowns, with some people doing this more than ever since the pandemic began. However, many people do not have easy access to such spaces, especially those from lower income backgrounds who may not have large gardens, public parks or nature reserves close by. 16% were very concerned about this and 44% were reasonably concerned, although it was not seen as quite as urgent as some of the other issues we asked about, with 19% slightly concerned and 13% not concerned at all. In 'normal' times, men are generally more likely to drive, and women are more likely to walk or use public transport (Maffii et al., 2014). New engagement with green spaces during Covid is therefore particularly significant for men.

Figure 6 *Level of concern about the impact of Covid-19 on men and boys' mental health*
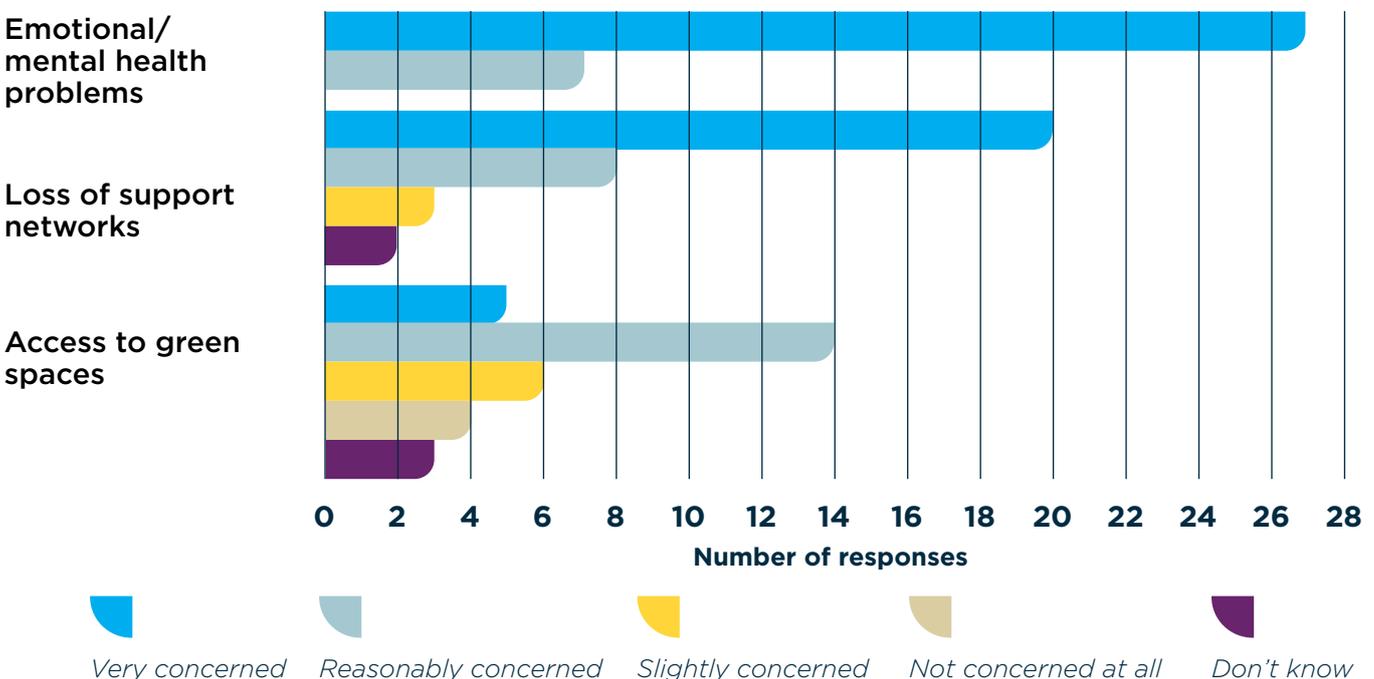
Economic consequences

The third issue that respondents were most concerned about was the impact on men's livelihoods, with thousands of people across Europe losing their jobs and incomes due to the recession brought about by Covid-19. Three quarters of respondents (76%) were very concerned about this and 24% were reasonably concerned. This of course has significant material consequences and is likely to push many more people into poverty (Eurostat, 2020). However, it also has harmful implications for mental health and wellbeing, perhaps especially for men who feel a sense of masculine expectation to be the family breadwinner and 'provider', and whose gendered identities may be tied very closely to their occupations:

"Loss of safety; loneliness; perplexity; scarcity; fear; fear of unemployment and safety; fear of insecure future; fear of coming economic crisis; fear of getting sick; fear of death".
Individual member, Spain

"The main negative effects are the deterioration of mental health (mostly anxiety and depression) and the negative economic consequences and impoverishment that increases the risk of violence".
Dom Duga-Zagreb, Croatia

As one respondent pointed out, Covid-19 has created a substantial sense of uncertainty about the future, and lack of control over our lives and livelihoods. Masculine ideals of stoicism and invulnerability may make it difficult for some men to feel able to communicate such feelings to others:

"Lack of future planning tools; uncertainty; being left behind in society."

Poika,
Austria

Figure 7 *Level of concern about men's livelihoods*

Number of responses
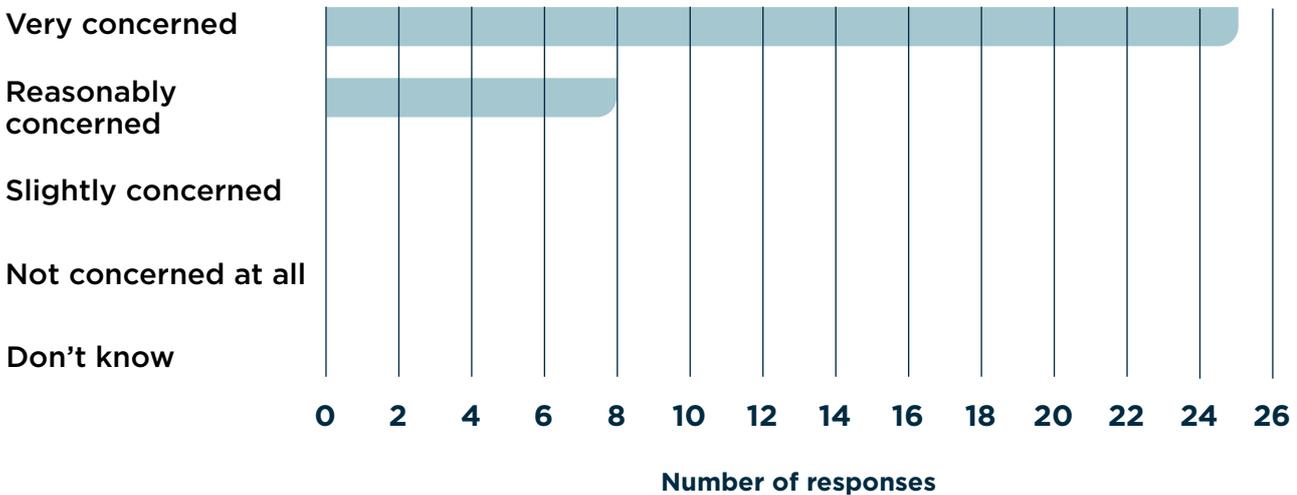
Lack of contribution to care and backward steps for gender equality

The fourth largest worry expressed by respondents was extra responsibilities being placed on women and girls as a result of Covid-19, such as additional care work brought about by school and childcare closures, and men not contributing sufficiently towards this. Over two thirds (70%) were very concerned and 15% were reasonably concerned about this.

"Backlash in terms of equal share of caregiving, lack of social life, keeping fathers away from the maternity delivery process, violence use."

Promundo,
Portugal

Figure 8 *Level of concern about responsibilities placed on women and girls*
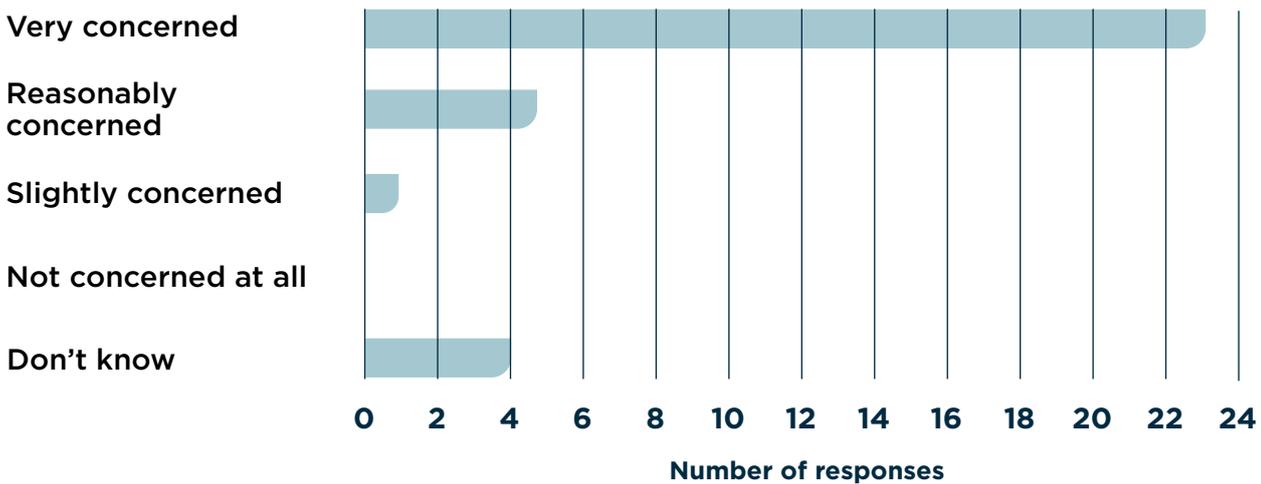
Furthermore, some respondents felt that the anxieties created by the pandemic, and the shaking of social norms and people's social positions (Le Masson et al., 2016) that it has led to, could actually fuel retrogressive attitudes and behaviours towards gender equality among some men, either in the home or more broadly in society (or both):

"I think the greatest risk is that boys and men will want to revive their entitlement when going back to normal, and will not be wanting to be confronted with their privileges and responsibilities because their needs and vulnerabilities have been so triggered."
Emancipator, Netherlands

"Backlash in terms of equal share of caregiving, lack of social life, keeping fathers away from the maternity delivery process, violence use."
Promundo, Portugal

The latter comment demonstrates how societies can revert to regressive gender norms in times of crisis too, such as in how fathers have often been unable to attend childbirth and antenatal appointments during the pandemic (Regan, 2020). One respondent pointed out that attachments to harmful masculine norms were being aggravated by far-right, reactionary groups in some contexts, who may be exploiting the pandemic and the discontent and confusion it has brought about to garner more support:

"There is a lot of toxic masculinity among men in Belgium, also pushed by the far-right political parties and politicians who spread misinformation."
Nesma Consulting, Belgium
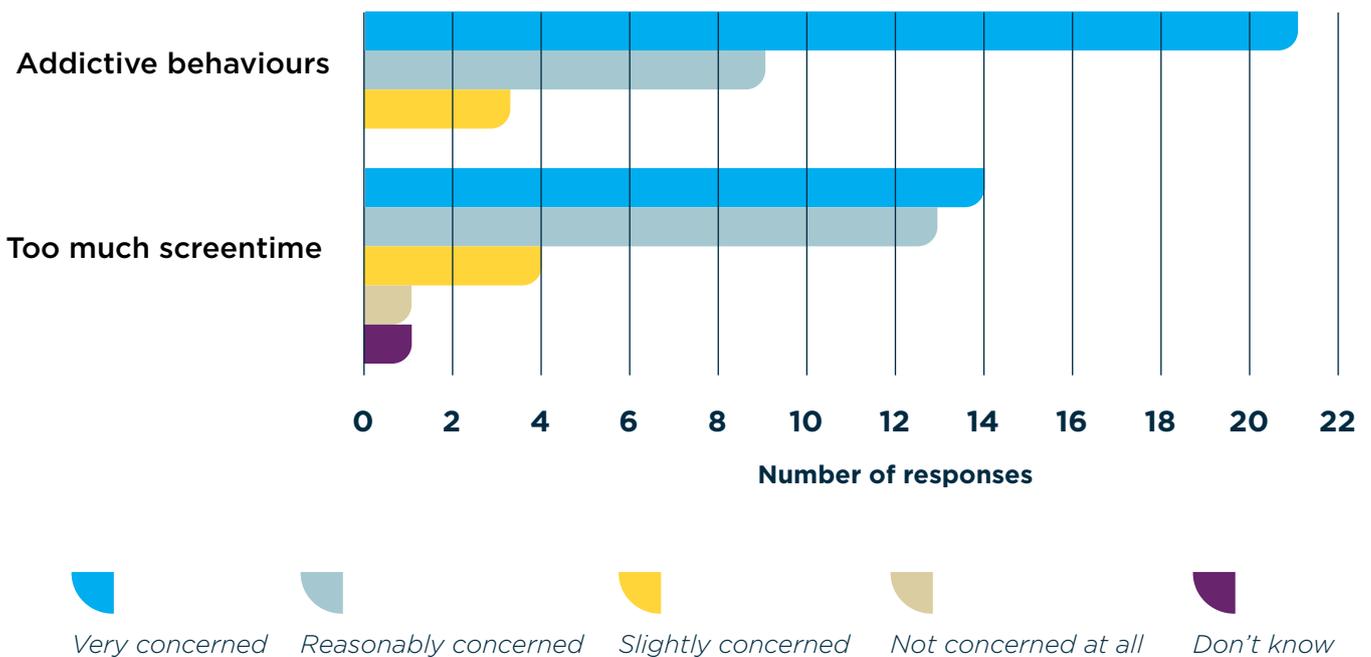
Harmful and addictive behaviours

The fifth largest concern among respondents was a potential increase in risk-taking and addictive behaviours such as drinking, smoking, drug consumption or gambling (all of which are more common among men – WHO, 2018), due to rises in stress and anxiety and being at home more. Just under two thirds (64%) were very concerned about this and 27% were reasonably concerned.

Another harmful issue, which respondents appeared to see as less urgent but still concerning (especially for children) was that of too much screen time, with Covid-19 making us more reliant than ever on computers, tablets, phones and televisions for both work and entertainment; 42% were very concerned about this and 39% were reasonably concerned. Boys tend to engage in higher levels of screen time than girls (Schwarzfischer et al., 2020), and this has the potential to have a detrimental impact on a range of factors, such as children's exercise, development and mental health.

"Too much online time and radicalization; domestic violence towards both women/men and children; not seeking (any kind of) help; drug abuse; poverty."

Status M, Croatia

Figure 9 *Level of concern about addictive and harmful behaviours*

Number of responses

Very concerned   Reasonably concerned   Slightly concerned   Not concerned at all   Don't know

Physical health related to Covid-19

Interestingly, the issue about which there was the lowest level of concern was men and boys contracting COVID-19 itself; 16% were very concerned about this, 41% were reasonably concerned, 31% were slightly concerned, 3% were not concerned at all, and 9% were not sure. This is despite the fact that in most European countries where sex-disaggregated data is available, it appears that more men are dying and suffering severely from Covid-19 than women (Global Health 50/50, 2020). However, this response may be because many of the respondents work with young men and boys, who they may view as being at less risk. It could also be shaped in part by an unconscious perception even among some of our respondents of men and boys being tough and impregnable. Or it could simply be that respondents were even more concerned about the numerous social issues that Covid-19 has brought to the surface than the virus itself.

Respondents did express higher levels of concern about men and boys failing to engage in preventive health behaviours during the pandemic however, such as not seeking medical advice when needed (38% very concerned, 50% reasonably concerned, 13% slightly concerned), or insufficiently adhering to social

distancing (19% very concerned, 39% reasonably concerned, 29% slightly concerned). Men not taking care of their own health, or treating Covid-19 in a cavalier way, is likely to be influenced by ideas of masculinity which expect them to act brave, self-reliant and invincible at all times – and has a knock-on effect on the wellbeing of those around them, for example if they don't wear a mask or wash their hands regularly (Ragonese et al., 2019).

The respondents also expressed concern about wider social factors which can put some groups of men and boys (and women and girls) at more risk of the virus than others. It was emphasised that many of the problems created by Covid-19 have simply intensified inequities which already existed in society - with those who are already disadvantaged suffering most from its fallout:

"Much of our cohort are already considered marginalised so this compounds many of the issues they already faced. Issues related to race, cultural disparity, socioeconomic hardship and inability to secure legitimate income. Access to housing and education. Relationships and the role of fathers being diminished particularly for non-resident fathers."
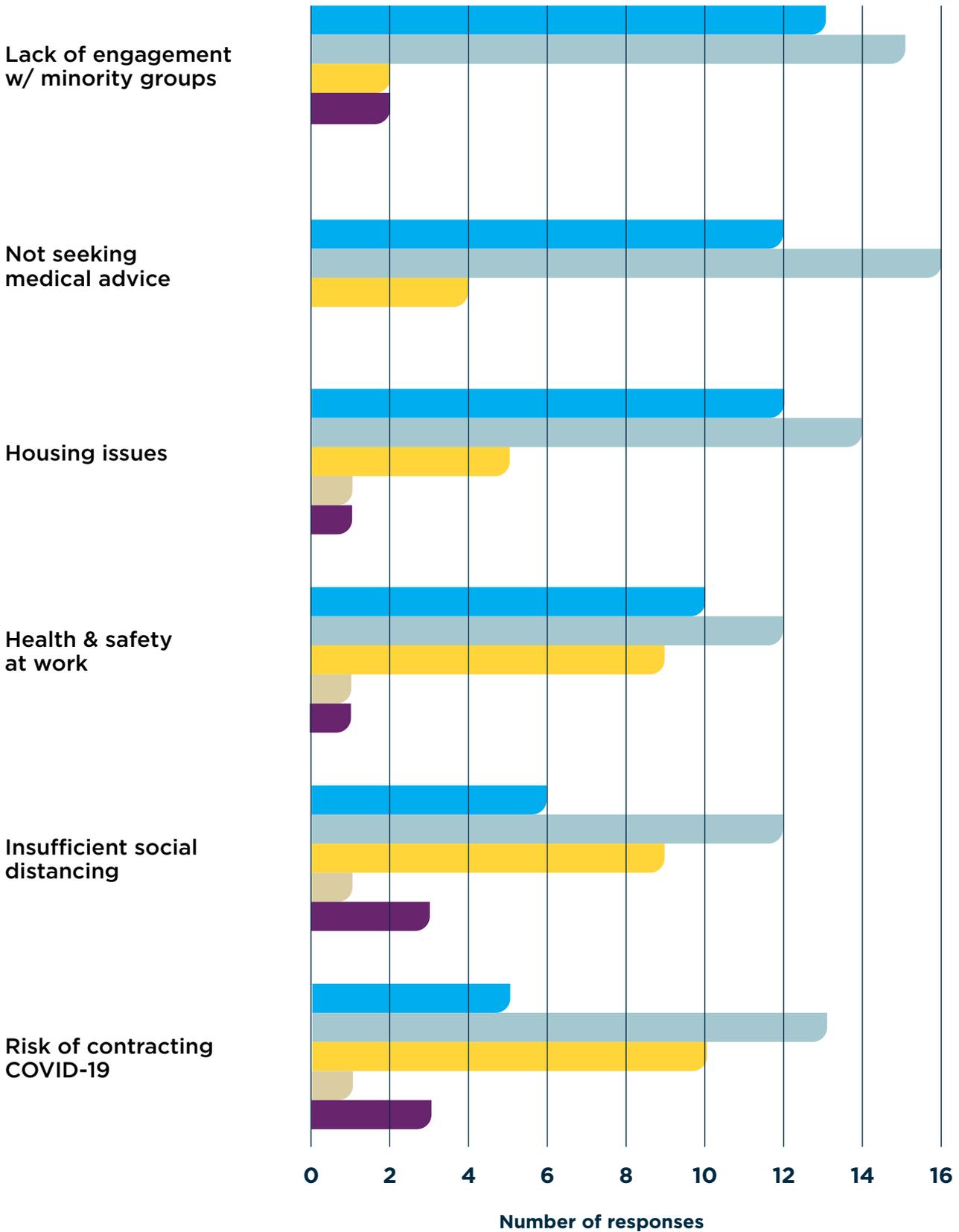**Future Men, UK**

Respondents were especially worried about a lack of information for or engagement with minority communities about Covid-19 (such

as the provision of guidance in different languages); 41% were very concerned about this, 47% were reasonably concerned, and 6% were slightly concerned. Housing issues such as overcrowding and homelessness are also putting people who are on lower incomes or in ethnic minority groups at greater risk of the virus, especially as they tend to have larger families too (Duque, 2020); 36% were very concerned about this, 42% were reasonably concerned, and 15% were slightly concerned.

Finally, the pandemic has underscored the importance of health and safety at work. Women are highly exposed to Covid-19 in this regard, due to making up 70% of the health and social care workforce globally (Boniol et al., 2019) as well as forming a high proportion of workers in sectors such as retail and education. However, there are also high-risk sectors in which men – especially those from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds – predominate, such as security, public transport, and emergency services (UK Office for National Statistics, 2020); 30% of respondents were thus very concerned about men's health and safety at work, 36% were reasonably concerned, and 27% were slightly concerned.

Figure 10 *Concerns about issues connected to physical health*

Number of responses

Categories (top to bottom): Lack of engagement w/ minority groups, Not seeking medical advice, Housing issues, Health & safety at work, Insufficient social distancing, Risk of contracting COVID-19

Legend:
- Very concerned
- Reasonably concerned
- Slightly concerned
- Not concerned at all
- Don't know

6. Positive changes made by men and boys

We also wanted to find out more about the extent to which the pandemic may have led to men and boys making positive changes in their lives. There was a significant degree of uncertainty among respondents in relation to this. One said she wasn't sure there were any. Several said that it was not yet possible to know the effects, and that the impact could be positive or negative over time. One respondent underlined these reservations, stating that his positive answers were "*very much wishful thinking*". He went on to note:

"I really don't know for the whole population nor for the men and boys we mostly target indirectly through working with the organisations and professionals that work with them. I see the possibilities that men and boys open up their ideas and practices of masculinity through this life changing and mind opening experience. But it might just as well turn out the other way…"
Emancipator, Netherlands

Another acknowledged the many varied contributions that the men and boys they work with were making across many of the categories in this question. But he felt it was hard to quantify these, and that "many are coping with a lot of challenge as well, and we hear and are concerned more by these" (Future Men, UK).

The positive activities that men were participating in, which are elaborated below, appeared to have increased during Covid-19. But it was not possible for respondents to say whether this reflected sustainable change, or whether they were just more involved in these activities because of lockdowns, and would revert to previous arrangements afterwards. This uncertainty mirrors recent research which suggests, for example, that it is unclear whether the ability for men and women to work from home more currently is

likely to generate lasting changes in the division of household labour (Sevilla and Smith, 2020).

Care, housework, and fathering

In most categories in this section of questions the number of respondents replying 'neither agree or disagree' to the proposed positive impacts was relatively high, hovering between around a third and a half of answers. This may reflect that respondents were either, as suggested above, uncertain about the longer-term impact, or that they felt the pandemic had so far had neutral effects in these areas. In some cases, they may have felt that they were unable to say as they did not have sufficient information to enable them to make such judgements.

In the case of 'fathers being more present in children's lives' there was more certainty, with over three quarters stating that they strongly agreed (9%) or agreed (68%) that this is occurring. Of course, this increased engagement has been largely enforced rather than chosen, and this finding does not explore what fathers have been doing in practice, merely that they have been more present. But the comments from respondents paint a largely positive picture of greater involvement and improved or strengthened relationships. They also point out that fathers may be becoming more aware of household tasks and what needs to be done at home. Some answers suggest that men are participating more in care and housework, others express the hope that this is happening:

"The thing I hear mentioned often is that 'telework' has a breakthrough, also among men. They enjoy it and want to continue working from home. However, that does not

automatically mean they share more of the mental load and to-do list of household chores."
Nesma Consulting, Belgium

"Fathers (from middle class at least) can spend more time with their children and perhaps experience how much work needs to be done when it comes to household chores".
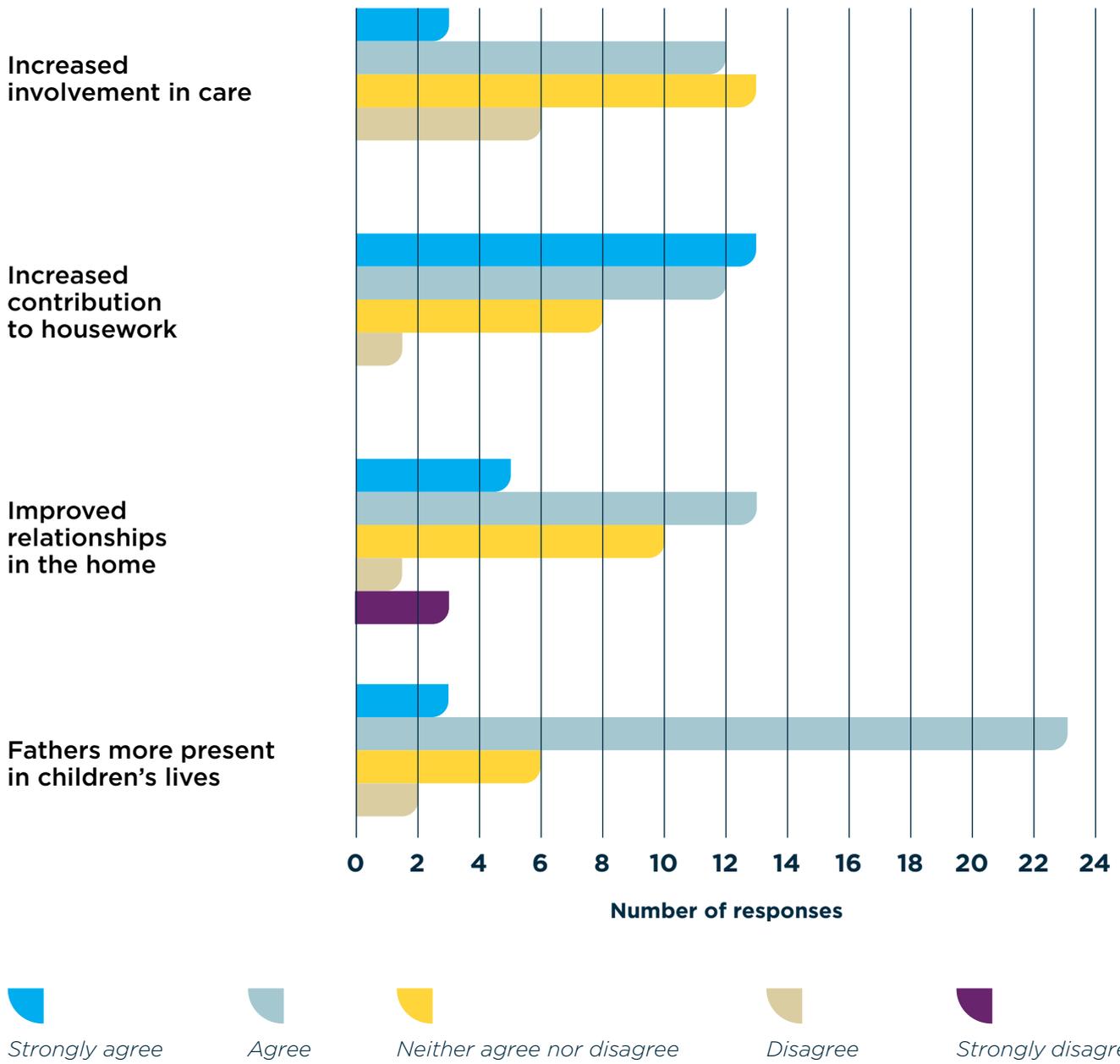**Individual member, Sweden**

An important point, highlighted in this last response, is that fathers are not a homogenous group and there are likely to be significant differences between them in terms of whether their practices change as a result of the pandemic. These will be influenced by a range of factors affecting them and their partners, including pre-existing gender norms, shifts in employment status, the feasibility of working from home, and the age(s) of the child(ren). One respondent said his staff had discussed a lot whether the pandemic would foster more male/paternal care involvement. They concluded that the effects are likely to be variable:

"Overall, we don't expect either a backlash or a boost. More probable seems some kind of polarisation within the group of men: men with care engagements engage even more – others don't".

Männer.ch, Switzerland

Figure 11 *Positive changes in the home*

Increased involvement in care
Increased contribution to housework
Improved relationships in the home
Fathers more present in children's lives

Number of responses

Strongly agree *Agree* *Neither agree nor disagree* *Disagree* *Strongly disagreee*

that the young boys they work with "*are being more engaged in housework, they are being more connected with nature*" (George Williams Youth Association, Kosovo). Similarly, another expressed the hope that "*they get more in contact with care work at home, that they will appreciate outdoor activities more than before and that they took the chance to spend quality time with their families*" (Individual member, Spain).

Another took a broader perspective on environmental issues, arguing that those in his immediate circle see this crisis as "*an opportunity to address real issues like the environment, the country's growth model, more local production of foods and essential goods, even if at higher prices*". (Individual member, Netherlands)

Figure 12 *Positive engagement with exercise and environment*

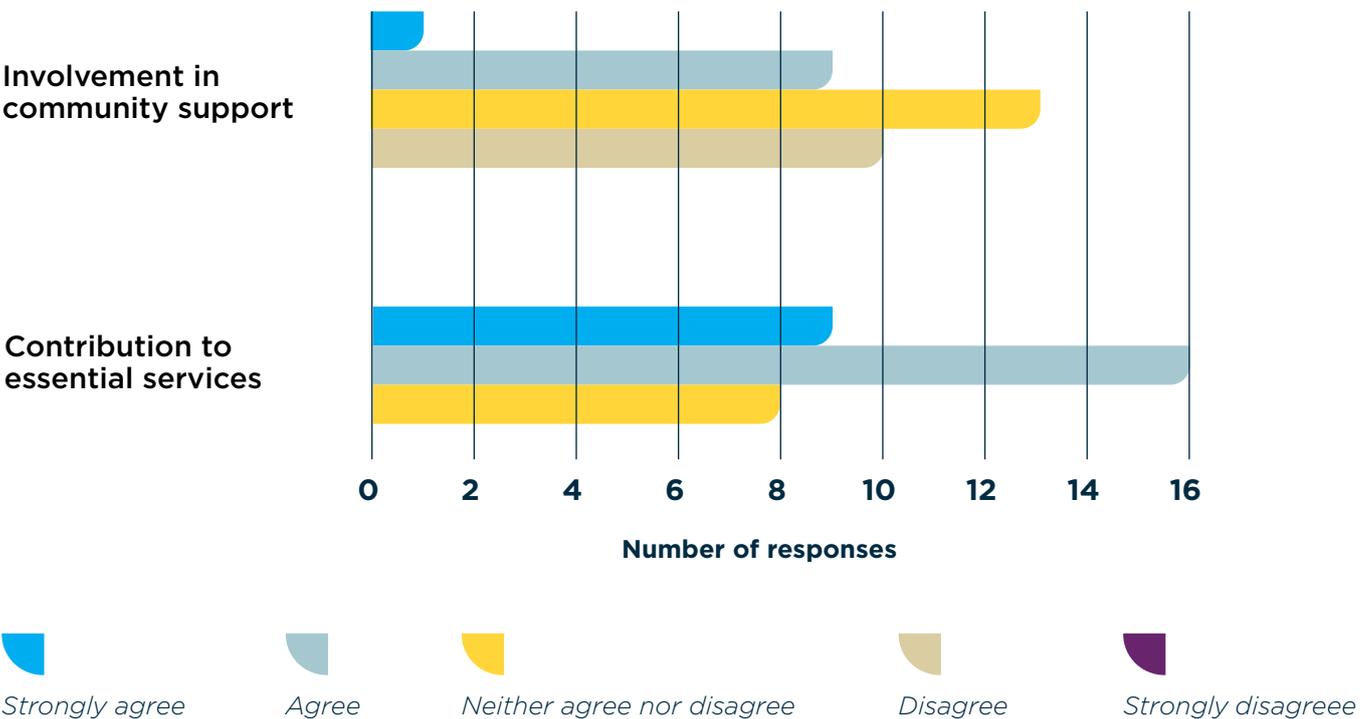**Strongly agree** **Agree** **Neither agree nor disagree** **Disagree** **Strongly disagreee**
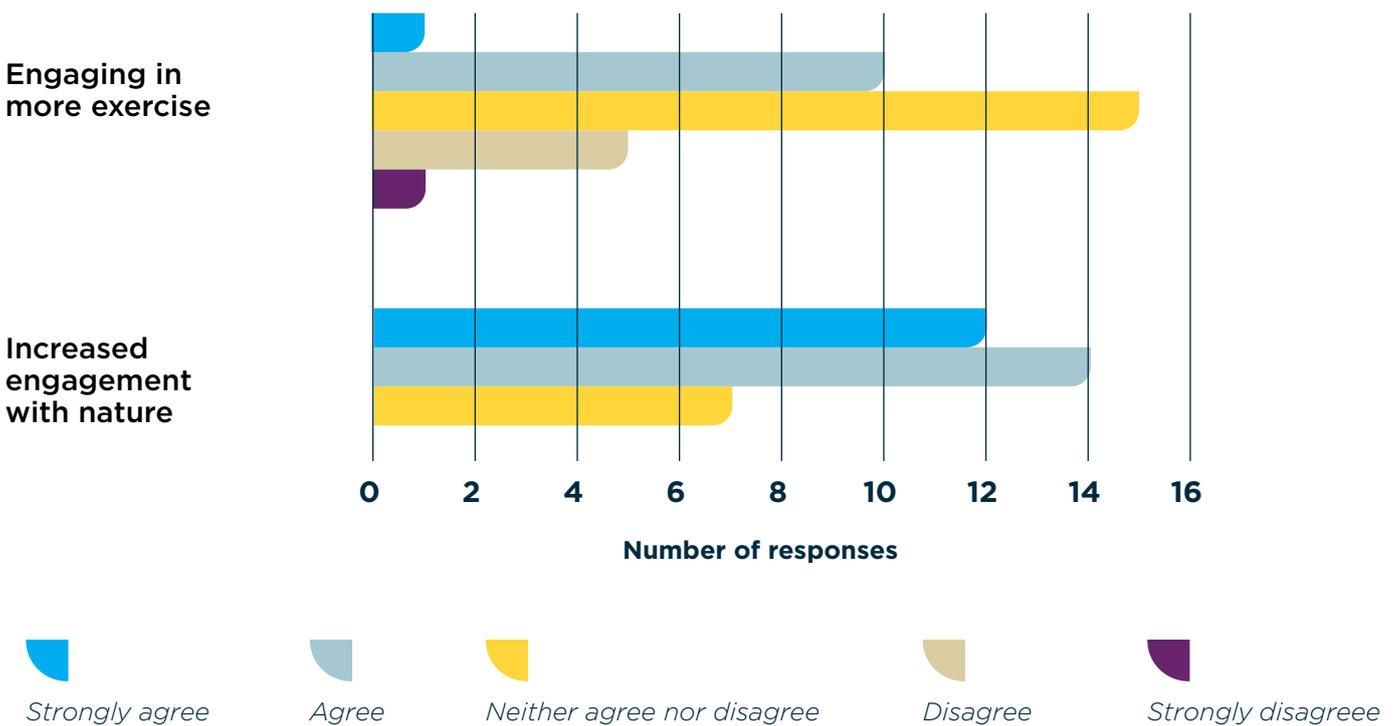
Community support and essential services

The findings in relation to these issues were not clear-cut, and relatively few comments mentioned them. However, it is clear that many men and boys have been involved in different ways in contributing to community support and essential services during the pandemic (such as healthcare, emergency services, logistics and delivery services and maintaining infrastructure), even if many of these activities have been led by women. One respondent felt that a general sense of 'community' was inspiring greater resilience in men and boys (Men's Development Network, Ireland). Another, that "*there has been an eagerness to be more involved from our core volunteers*" (White Ribbon UK). A third was hopeful that men and boys within many of the organisations they work with, such as colleges, "*will develop a greater sense of community and that this may transpose into other aspects such as opposing violence against women*". (White Ribbon Scotland)

Figure 13 *Positive contributions to the community*

Number of responses

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagreee

Social networks online

A significant number of respondents agreed that online networks had provided a greater degree of connection for men and boys and had been strengthened. As one suggested: "*There is an increase in online activities that men, boys, families, children and partners can engage with*" (Restored, UK). This was not only within families, but also in the workplace: "*We've been able to link people across the country better, giving us an escape from the bubbles that form due to geographic proximity*" (Good Lad Initiative, UK). That said, it is important to consider the extent to which some men will have felt confident enough or able to attempt to reproduce face-to-face friendship networks online.

Figure 14 *Men strengthening their online social networks*
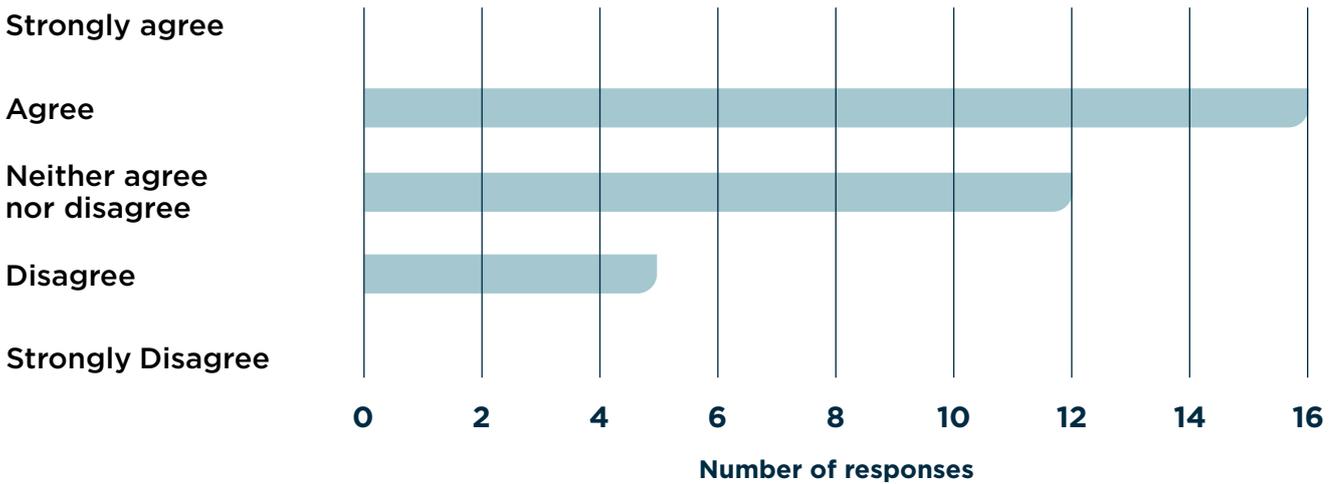
Other positive changes

Some respondents mentioned other actual or potential positive impacts that were not covered by the survey questions. It was felt that some men and boys were showing signs of being prepared to address emotional issues, which are often taken to be areas that they avoid, owing to prevailing gender norms of men having to be 'strong' and 'silent'. As a result of fears engendered by the pandemic, they could be "*more open about feelings of anxiety and isolation*", according to one respondent (DareGender, Denmark). Although he felt the evidence was extremely limited, another argued that "*some are reaching out for help*" (Respect, UK). One possibility is that spending more time at home and less time in masculine peer groups is enabling some boys and men to open up more about their emotions, either to other family members or to friends individually.

It was also suggested that men had had time to slow down and "*to think about what is actually important*" in their lives, and what next steps to take – whereas in 'normal' times men tended to run away from emotional topics and hide behind their work (Good Lad Initiative, UK).

From a different angle, one respondent highlighted that a significant positive impact of the pandemic is the reduction in the numbers of men buying sex, owing to the forced closure of brothels and massage parlours (Zéromacho, France). This effect has also been evident in other key locations in Europe, such as Amsterdam (Agence France-Presse, 2020). It is possible, however, that some of this trade has gone underground, increasing risks for the women involved. Alternatively, some men may be engaging in coercive behaviours at home instead, and/or increasing their use of online pornography.

7. Problems with government responses

The absence of gender

We also wanted to investigate respondents' perceptions of how policymakers had been responding to the pandemic. Alarmingly, as can be seen in Figure 15, most respondents (56%) did not agree with the statement that 'My government is addressing gender equality in its response to the Covid-19 crisis'; 11% strongly disagreed that this was the case and 44% disagreed. Only 19% agreed and 6% strongly agreed, whilst 19% neither agreed nor disagreed. This suggests that across Europe, decision-makers are not doing enough to take into account or address the different ways in which gender inequality is both intensifying, and being intensified by, Covid-19 and its social fallout. However, at the same time it does at least indicate that in a minority of cases, some governments may be taking steps to address gender issues in the pandemic.

Figure 15 *To what extent would you agree with the following statement: 'My government is addressing gender equality in its response to the COVID-19 crisis'*
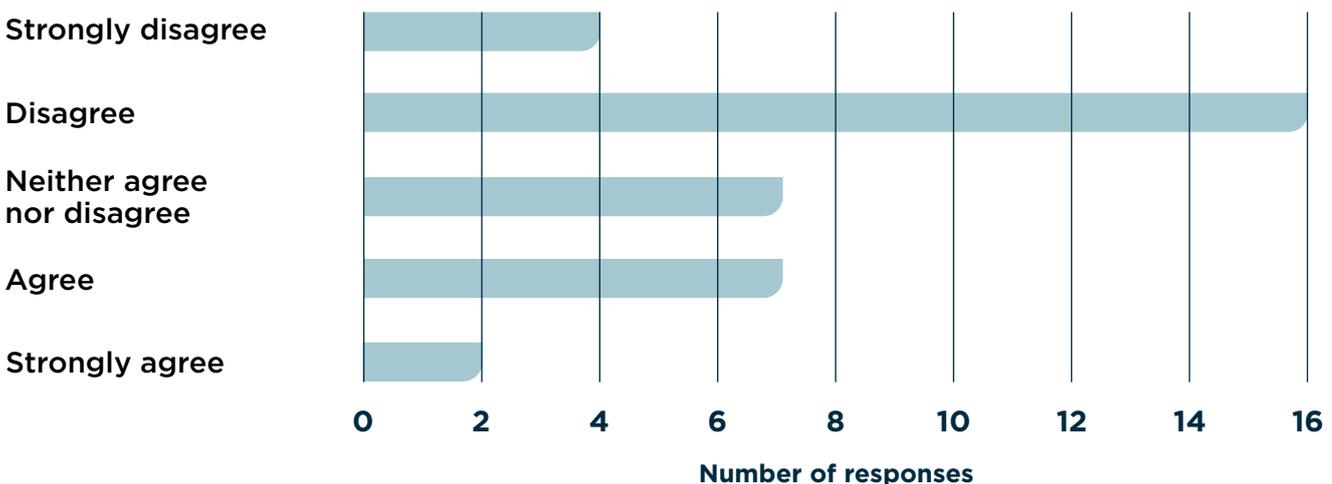
Deprioritising care

There were a number of specific issues that respondents were concerned about in relation to government responses to Covid-19. Several felt that there had been a failure to consider "the increased burden of care work for women" (Promundo, Portugal) that the pandemic was creating (as a result of schools being closed for example), because "Care labour and unpaid domestic work remains mostly women's work" (Individual member, Spain). One German respondent felt that domestic violence was the only gendered issue their government had taken into account, and that problems such as care inequities were being ignored:

"Aside from domestic violence, Germany has not addressed the gendered issues brought to light during the pandemic. There has been no discussion on shared care or how women are supposed to deal with workplaces opening while kindergartens and schools are still closed. During discussions on state-wide measures to alleviate the effects of COVID on the German population, the women's minister wasn't included."

European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP)

Another issue pointed to was that governments have been paying little attention to the increased caregiving that some fathers have been doing during the pandemic, even though this could provide an important opportunity to boost men's contribution to care work in the longer-term, if encouraged:

"No focus on household is gendered and it has been women who took most care of household. On the other hand a new survey shows that fathers has experienced more connection to their children and they have taking more parts of childcare during the lock down."

DareGender, Denmark

One respondent highlighted that the crucial role of care work was being neglected in wider discussions about the economy too, despite Covid-19 illustrating the fundamental importance of care to society's survival:

"Even though we have a progressive government committed to equality between women and men, the issue of care remains not a prioritization and all efforts are being put into the recovery of the productive economy outside the home. However, schools remain closed so many families are living a real dilemma."

Cepaim, Spain

Meanwhile, it was argued that the vital contribution of care work to the economy and to society during the pandemic (and more broadly) should not only lead to applause and gratitude, but also to concrete improvements to conditions in the health and social care sector, such as better pay for workers (who are predominantly women):

"To remember all the poor women whose work was essential. We are applauding them every evening at 8pm but applause is not enough: they need to be paid more."

Zéromacho,
France

Failing to take gender-based violence seriously

Many of the respondents felt there had been insufficient recognition or understanding among policymakers about how violence and abuse in the home could be exacerbated by the pandemic, and how lockdowns could create an "inability for anyone in a violent situation to 'escape' that setting, whether kids, adolescents or adults." (Individual member, Netherlands) This is despite research indicating that gender-based violence often gets worse in the wake of disasters or crises (IFRC, 2015). For instance, one respondent reported being concerned about "the lack of attention to the growth of poverty and violence." (Nesma Consulting, Belgium) Some argued that governments were not doing enough to ensure that already under-funded organisations and services tackling gender-based violence had enough resources to respond effectively during the pandemic, where they are experiencing increased demand but face more obstacles to delivering support and to fundraising:

"Funds are not reaching women's refuges and these are still having to close despite the increased need."
Restored, UK

"Yes - lack of structured application for funding and lack of accountability in terms of "no DV occurs here" - the gov hasn't researched it further (if there are no reports, it's not happening). Lack of training of government officials working on gender issues (there's no gender expert within government entities). For example, Monaco had no recorded cases of rape in 2019 ... so there's no rape in Monaco?!"
SheCanHeCan, Monaco

Other responses pointed to problems beyond funding too, suggesting that policy and practice responses to Covid-19 had failed to take into account the range of ways in which coronavirus prevention measures could compound the difficulties faced by victim-survivors of different forms of gender-based violence, and make it easier for perpetrators to enact coercion and control:

"If there is another lockdown, the Ministry of Social Welfare should provide better protocols for admitting victims to shelters (urgently testing on Covid-19 and ensured self-isolation space before placing the victims in the shelter, if there is no such space in the shelter)."
Dom Duga-Zagreb, Croatia

"During this time lots of protection orders were not monitored by social services."
ZDB, Albania

Neglecting issues relating to women and gender

Several respondents also raised broader concerns about governments insufficiently taking into account how gender inequality was influencing the Covid-19 crisis, with one commenting that "Gender equality has not been considered, nor the pandemic's impact on gender issues." (Respect, UK)

For instance, it was argued that governments were not recognising the disproportionate social and economic impacts that the pandemic was having on women's lives, which could in turn diminish their power and positions in society:

"Lack of realisation how much the burden has been falling on women, women most likely to lose jobs, women often the people supporting home schooling etc. Ultimately this is reinforcing gender roles and long term will have an impact on women's economic independence which makes them more vulnerable to abuse".
White Ribbon UK

One respondent pointed out that women's voices were often absent or underrepresented in government responses to the pandemic, which could lead to more 'masculinist' approaches being taken, and the

marginalisation of women's needs and experiences (in relation to, for example, domestic violence):

"No women involved in the crisis management or recovery planning."
Emancipator, Netherlands

Another was concerned that Covid-19 and its economic fallout could lead to gender equality issues being further side-lined among policymakers and the wider public, and not seen as a significant enough priority to invest in during a public health emergency and period of recession:

"On September 27th we will have a federal vote about introducing 10 days of paternity leave for all fathers in Switzerland (as legal right). That costs approximately 200 million Euro a year. We are afraid that public discourse considers that as too expensive with regard to the costs of the pandemic."
Männer.ch, Switzerland

Ignoring the impacts of masculine norms

One respondent also felt that there had been little engagement with issues around men's health and wellbeing during the pandemic. This is despite so many men dying from Covid-19 (seemingly due to a mixture of biological and social factors), men appearing less likely to take coronavirus prevention measures seriously (Capraro and Barcelo, 2020), and facing specific mental health challenges such as difficulties in help-seeking:

"The problems of negative portrayals of men and their roles very traditional picture of breadwinner in the main. Not enough targeting of men's health needs (physical and mental) as they are more at risk and less likely to engage with messaging."
Future Men, UK

This comment also highlights the restrictive and harmful representations of masculinity that have been modelled by some male leaders during the pandemic, with claims to macho

toughness, invulnerability and individualism both personally and politically seeming to shape some politicians' responses to Covid-19. The pandemic has therefore demonstrated the urgent need to engage with more men and boys about the positive role they can play in shifting limiting masculine norms and building gender equality:

"We have to create more safe spaces for women and girls and also we have to start working with men at a national level."
Gender Alliance Initiative, Greece

"We have to create more safe spaces for women and girls and also we have to start working with men at a national level."

Gender Alliance Initiative, Greece

8. Positive lessons from government actions

We were also keen to find out about participants' views on positive aspects of government responses to the pandemic in relation to gender issues.

Measures to tackle men's violence against women

Most of the respondents pointed to gender-based violence in this regard. It was suggested that whilst there was a lot more that could be done, steps their governments had taken to address violence and abuse were some of the main positive actions they had witnessed in relation to gender equality in their country. For example:

"The danger of more domestic violence has been addressed."
Dissens, Germany

"The increase of gender-based violence is very much discussed, at least in the comparison to other countries".
Individual member, Sweden

"It has been immediate support of the government for women's shelters and the government has also supported many campaigns organized by various organizations, including UN agencies."
George Williams Youth Association, Kosovo

"Increase of shelters and information on gender-based violence awareness. Creation of a written message number for those who cannot speak. Dissemination of guidelines in several languages."
Center of Social Studies, Portugal

"Courts, police and all public services did not stop emergency interventions in cases of domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic protection

measures. Additional facilities for the reception of victims are provided due to the self-isolation period."
Dom Duga Zagreb, Croatia

"Contingency Plan against gender based-violence in COVID-19 context: http://observatorioviolencia.org/ el-ministerio-de-igualdad-impulsa-un-plan-de-contigencia-contra-la-violencia-de-genero-en-atencion-a-la-crisis-por-la-covid-19/"
Cepaim, Spain

In some cases this included increases in funding to help organisations and services tackling violence against women to survive, and deal with the increases in demand they were facing:

"There has been a recognition of the increase in domestic abuse and this has been reflected in some funding becoming available."
White Ribbon UK

"The government has also responded to the increased risk of GBV during the pandemic by granting an extra ten million euro to women's shelters and LGBTQ movements, which is good and symbolically important."
MÄN, Sweden

"The Scottish Government has highlighted additional funding is available to ensure the continued availability of services to women subject to VAW. They have also confirmed all VAW targeted charities will receive on-going funding (due to end 01.07.20) until 01.10.2021. The Government has also used time during their daily virus updates to emphasise services are still available and clearly confirmed that steps taken to leave an abusive relationship during lockdown will not be subject to the general restrictions."
White Ribbon Scotland

"Yes there has been allocated more funding to shelters and counselling services during the lock down."
DareGender, Denmark

Some of the respondents also noted that their governments had instigated campaigns to raise public awareness about domestic abuse during the pandemic and the support services that are available:

"The help lines for GBV worked better and there was a big campaign for the shelters."
Gender Alliance Initiative, Greece

"Public campaign on national TV to encourage people to report domestic abuse cases: https://policija.gov.hr/ vijesti/iza-ovih-vrata-zivi-mia/4591".
Status M, Croatia

One respondent described proactive steps being taken within communities by different services, organisations and individuals, too:

"Teachers, neighbourhood police and also young people themselves socially check on kids missing from on-line classes, or not playing outside to make sure they are safe, adequately contacted. Helplines for GBV/domestic violence publicly announce that social SMS, WhatsApp can also be used to ask for help if calling is impossible with the perpetrator under the same roof."
Individual member, Netherlands

These measures point to the achievements of feminist movements in Europe in getting violence against women onto political agendas in the first place. However, some of the respondents appeared to suggest that such positive steps ("A little more money against domestic violence." Poika, Austria) were relatively piecemeal, and far from sufficient to seriously address the massive consequences of domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence during the pandemic:

"Information about domestic violence.. but lack of follow-up (apparently, there's been no cases of DV during the pandemic… no comment..!)"
SheCanHeCan, Monaco

Addressing other aspects of gender inequality during Covid-19

A few respondents mentioned that their governments had taken some steps to support those who provide unpaid or paid care work, too:

"Increase of victim support facilities; funds to carry out the gendered impacts of Covid-19. Family support for those who need to stay home taking care of children."
Promundo, Portugal

"The Spanish government have also approved an economic aid for domestic workers."
Cepaim, Spain

A Swedish respondent noted that because their government had never implemented a strict lockdown to control the virus, this had potentially reduced the unequal gendered social impacts of the pandemic (even if it may have increased the risks posed by Covid-19 itself):

"I believe that the moderate restrictions have made negative effects less severe than in other countries."
MÄN, Sweden

Rather than detailing any specific policies, one respondent highlighted that they felt their government had responded to the crisis more effectively because they had avoided macho, masculinist discourses or approaches in relation to Covid-19:

"Less a gender issue but a response in dealing with communication that is balanced and mature and direct - no military metaphors, no ducking uncertainty, not rigidly masculine".
Men's Development Network, Ireland

Another wanted to highlight that much of the positive work being done to tackle Covid-19, such as supporting and caring for people and saving lives, was being done by women:

"The essential works for survival are made by a vast majority of women: everybody could see it."
Zéromacho, France

However, several respondents felt unable to come up with any positive examples of how their government had addressed gender issues in the pandemic, perhaps because they were failing to recognise gender inequality as an important factor in the first place:

"Neither negative nor positive. Government simply didn't address the issue at all (as far as we can perceive it)".
Männer.ch, Switzerland

"Some small recognition of the needs of Women and some areas that are important but these seemed half hearted and paint men as risks to be managed as opposed to assets to be supported. So mainly No."
Future Men, UK

"The government is totally gender blind. I don't see any accidental positive things either."

Nesma Consulting, Belgium

9. Taking action at the European level

Finally, we wanted to find out from survey participants what they felt should be done more broadly at the European level to address the gendered dimensions of the Covid-19 crisis.

Bringing in a gender analysis

Several emphasised that European institutions and governments need to start taking into account and addressing gender inequality much more proactively as part of their responses to the pandemic, especially if there was going to be a significant second wave of Covid-19:

"We have to be prepared for the next outbreak of the virus. And to start thinking for our next steps."
Gender Alliance Initiative, Greece

"Stay aware of gendered impacts and implications and incorporate these understandings in the response".
Good Lad Initiative, UK

"This [gender] is something which should be taken into account when the responses to Covid-19 are studied and should be recognised in future planning for responses to future pandemic situations."
White Ribbon Scotland

Some of the respondents felt that it was particularly important for research to be conducted on the gendered impacts of the crisis, and ensure that when data is being collected, this is broken down by sex and other social categories to understand how the pandemic is interacting with different inequalities:

"Further focus on data collection on all groups and sub-groups to better inform need and future distribution of resources. Lead on setting agenda and sharing information on the effects by area and how differing cultural responses impacted on managing the pandemic."
Future Men, UK

"An analysis and evaluation and comparison from European countries. But also a follow up to see what would be the long-term consequences of COVID-19."
DareGender, Denmark

"Research and funding projects that address the 'new normal'".
White Ribbon UK

One respondent pointed out the need for European institutions to ensure that good quality data is being gathered by each European country, as contextual differences are affecting how gender plays out in relation to Covid-19, as evidenced by the varying disparity in deaths between women and men across different countries:

"Research on country level, and providing recommendations for our government."
Act for Society, Albania

Fostering gender justice during and beyond the pandemic

Several of the respondents considered how a more gender equal society could be built in the wake of Covid-19, and the role that European institutions and governments could play in enabling this. Prioritising care in different ways was particularly emphasised in this regard:

"The transition our society needs should be made gender sensitive, the EU is not enough aware of that systemic change that is needed."
Nesma Consulting, Belgium

"Increased focus on gender equality and violence prevention. Help use the Covid crisis to change societies to more focus on care, welfare and environmental sustainability and less focus on business as usual."
MÄN, Sweden

"Press political institutions to put gender, care, caring activities and professions, on a much better position in social life. Lobbying for Gender Equality politics."
Individual member, Spain

One respondent argued that the focus of societies should not solely be on finding vaccines or treatments for Covid-19, but also addressing the power inequities that are exacerbating the pandemic and undermining responses to it:

"Show that the intersectional systemic patriarchal practices that underlie gender-, economic-, environmental-, trade-, cultural-, religious-, military might-, etc. injustices also underlie the cause and the response to Covid-19 and need to be addressed systematically, rather finding and selling vaccine or medicine."
Individual member, Netherlands

Some respondents also focused on economic recovery, highlighting the need to avoid austerity policies (which tend to affect women disproportionately; Elomäki, 2012) and instead investing more in care work, and providing more support for families and for caregivers:

"Reject austerity measures; value informal caregiving tasks; more time for families."
Promundo, Portugal

"Focus on care work, focus on the relations: economy (work, labour, unemployment, youth)-social stress-populism-gender relations-sexual and reproductive rights".
Individual member, Spain

"Better pay for women".
Poika, Austria

A few respondents also felt that the current moment presents an important opportunity to challenge harmful models of masculinity and encourage more caring practices among men and boys at the European level, pointing to the problems that masculinist leadership has created whilst many women leaders have responded quite effectively to Covid-19:

"Commentary on the rigidity of the responses across the globe - how masculinity and rigidity controlled the process and the possibility of doing it otherwise - there has been commentary on the way some women leaders did it who else did it in a way that seemed outside the masculine norm".
Men's Development Network, Ireland

"Further promotion of caring masculinity notion".

Individual member, Sweden

Prioritising gender-based violence in the wake of Covid-19

Several respondents underscored the need for more to be done at the European level to support services and campaigns to tackle men's violence against women during and beyond the pandemic, and prevent it from happening at the first place, to build on the awareness that has been raised about the pervasiveness of domestic abuse during this time:

"Continue to pay attention to the fact that isolation leads to an increase in domestic violence and can be dangerous for victims. Help develop online counselling and hotlines for both victims and abusers."
M21, Russia

"Campaigning - changing laws of processing violence cases (especially protecting the victims); fundraising (creating emergency funds for crisis situations)".

Status M, Croatia

Similar to the previous point, one respondent underlined the importance of EU funding for organisations addressing violence and abuse and other gender inequalities, at a time when other sources of income for vital services are drying up:

"It is imperative that the EU doesn't cut funding for REC and DAPHNE grants to ensure that organisations working on gender issues can continue applying for projects. Additionally, the EU should allow organisations to claim overhead/ indirect costs. This is one of the ways to ensure that the non-profit sector makes it through the crisis. Additionally, the EU should listen to the calls for gender mainstreaming of its budget. Beyond that, the EU should lobby for extended paternity leave, equal pay across Europe and women's quotas".
European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP)

"Work on further sensitizing the public to the problem of domestic violence".

Dom Duga Zagreb, Croatia

10. Conclusion: The role of organisations working with men and boys

The issues raised in the survey pose a range of short- and long-term challenges for organisations working with men and boys. We asked how a network like MenEngage Europe should respond, but in many ways the answers are relevant to all organisations working in this field.

On the political level, it was suggested that the members of the network should work towards keeping key gender issues, such as care and women's rights, high on the public agenda. They should also maintain pressure on governments to fund frontline women's services such as refuges, and seek to ensure funding is available to maintain and expand the capacity of organisations working with men and boys.

At the level of networking, it was argued that exchange of practice is essential. This should involve compiling lessons learned from members, holding meetings to discuss the issues arising, and developing flexible strategies and practices to respond to the unfolding challenges of the pandemic. More research was also seen as important, for example to explore further the consequences of Covid-19 for the mental health and social skills of men and boys.

Ultimately, however, respondents warned that the aftermath of the pandemic is likely to herald economic crisis, social division, and xenophobic backlash. In the face of these huge challenges it was seen to be crucial to take a strong stand and collaborate with civil society organisations and networks across Europe to build and sustain grassroots movements for gender equality and social justice.

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Appendix 1: Countries and organisations represented in the survey

- Albania x3 (Act for Society Center x2; ZDB – Office for Men and Boys)

- Austria x2 (Poika x2)

- Belgium (x2) (Nesma Consulting; Vzw Zijn/MenEngage Network Flanders)

- Croatia x2 (Dom Duga-Zagreb; Status M)

- Denmark (DareGender)

- France (Zéromacho)

- Germany (x2) (Dissens - Institut für Bildung und Forschung; European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence)

- Greece (Gender Alliance Initiative)

- Ireland (Men's Development Network)

- Kosovo (George Williams Youth Association)

- Latvia (MARTA Centre)

- Monaco (SheCanHeCan)

- The Netherlands (x2) (Emancipator; Individual member)

- Portugal x2 (Center of Social Studies, University of Coimbra; Promundo)

- Russia (M21)

- Spain x3 (Cepaim Foundation; Individual member x2)

- Sweden x2 (MÄN; University of Gothenburg)

- Switzerland (Männer.ch)

- UK x7 (Future Men; Good Lad Initiative; Individual member; Respect; Restored; White Ribbon Scotland; White Ribbon UK)

Appendix 2: Promising practice with men and boys

A range of initiatives and activities were mentioned by respondents as promising ways of engaging with men and boys that they had developed or observed during the pandemic. These are divided below under the following themes: Internet forums; Emotional and psychological support; Tackling domestic violence; and Training and Toolkits.

The authors have not sought to assess these materials, but simply present them here without comment. We note, however, the remark of one respondent who felt that the materials he had seen so far (not necessarily those outlined here) were *"too focused on what social justice people think is right, not what will actually be engaging to young men and boys."*

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Internet forums

"Public debates on the internet about feminism and masculinities." Individual member, Spain

Emotional and psychological support

"We started a webpage for Men's Counseling ('Mannenberaad', analogous to the 'Maennerberatung' in German speaking countries), still very much under development, to create a place where men can find support and guidance and advice (help without it being called help, care without it being called care) to help them prevent building up stress to the extent that they will start causing problems for either themselves and or their partners, children and/or wider surroundings. www.mannenberaad.nl".

Emancipator, Netherlands

"www.maenner.ch/corona-survival-kit/

That was really a cool collaboration between three countries and nine professionals of the field (GBV)".
Männer.ch, Switzerland

"https://www.maenner.at/gewaltpraevention/wenn-der-stress-zu-viel-wird/".
Poika, Austria

"The centre I work for https://centrejove.org/ developed an online psychological coaching service for emotional and mental health (not specifically addressed to boys though): ConfiCures (care in lockdown)".
Individual member, Spain

Tackling domestic violence

"Information about seeking help in domestic violence situations:

https://dfm.mc/evenement/dispositifs-pour-prevenir-les-violences-conjugales-pendant-le-covid-19/"
SheCanHeCan, Monaco

"We adapted the recommendations based on the recommendations of the WWP-EN network. And we ourselves took an active part in their preparation. We wrote articles about how to work during this period and what to consider. Distributed materials in social networks. We have organised support groups in four regions of Russia."
M21, Russia

"Adapting our helplines' work to the current pandemic, focussing on managing crisis."
Respect, UK

"Adapting our helplines' work to the current pandemic, focussing on managing crisis."

Respect,
UK

Training and toolkits

"Training for educators (men): Facilitator course for men's groups for the prevention of gender-based violence

http://cepaim.org/event/online-curso-facilitador-de-grupos-de-hombres-para-la-prevencion-de-la-violencia-de-genero/".
Cepaim, Spain

"We published a Dutch toolkit for professionals in and around education, aimed at promoting the exploration and development of the care talent potential in boys and men. This toolkit was due long before so not Covid related. http://www.emancipator.nl/werkendetoekomst/talentontwikkelingjongens/".
Emancipator, Netherlands

"We have translated in Greek two tool guides for prevention of gender based violence from the Men Engage Europe Network."
Gender Alliance Initiative, Greece

"We are finishing the development of new tools to face the contigencies of social isolation. We have developed guidelines on how to maintain healthy and non-violent family relationships here: https://parent.ces.uc.pt/activity/covid-19/".
University of Coimbra, Portugal

"Not available yet, but we carried out groups of fathers and trained health professionals using digital platforms."

Promundo, Portugal

"We are taking some time to engage with sessional training staff to develop new workshops and presentations which can be made available for use by our volunteers when campaigning to help end VAW. These are in draft format at the moment and are not available for sharing."

White Ribbon Scotland

"Restored is responding to Covid-19 by providing Printable Toolkits, Training Videos, and One-to-One Support for Church Leaders. We also have a blog with useful information about working from home and domestic abuse. https://www.restored-uk.org/".

Restored, UK