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UNDERSTANDING THE OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES FACED BY BOYS AND YOUNG MEN IN PROMOTING AND ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

STUDY REPORT

OVERVIEW

Achieving meaningful gender equality in Albania depends on the active and engaged involvement of men and boys as partners for change. This document summarizes the key findings of a comprehensive study conducted with 626 boys and young men (ages 15–29) across 12 municipalities in the country. In addition to the quantitative survey, the study was further enriched through qualitative analysis, which included 9 in-depth interviews and 3 focus groups.The analysis reveals a critical paradox between the widespread stated support for gender equality and the strong, often invisible, barriers that hinder meaningful action.

KEY FINDINGS: THE PARADOX OF PROGRESS

THE GAP BETWEEN AWARENESS AND ACTION

The study reveals that while an overwhelming majority of young men (71.8%) verbally support gender equality, their actions remain constrained by traditional norms. Their primary responsibilities are still viewed through the lens of the traditional male role (such as financial provision), rather than through transformative actions like actively challenging gender stereotypes.

CULTURAL BARRIERS AND SOCIAL STIGMA

The greatest obstacles to active engagement are not a lack of interest, but deeply rooted cultural norms, peer pressure, and a widespread fear of social stigma—particularly the fear of being labeled as "less masculine." This pressure is further reinforced by the negative influence of social media and "toxic public figures."

THE UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF POLICIES

Family-friendly policies, such as paid parental leave for fathers and flexible working hours, are identified as essential for driving change. However, these policies are poorly known and rarely implemented, especially in the private sector, representing a significant missed opportunity to promote progress

LIMITED ACCESSIBILITY OF PROGRAMS

Despite calls for more programs, 41% of young people consider current initiatives to be "somewhat inaccessible" or "completely inaccessible." This suggests that existing programs may be geographically concentrated or are failing to effectively communicate with the target audience.

URGENT PRIORITY: ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

When asked about their vision for the next five years, young people expressed a clear priority: "reducing gender-based violence and harassment against women and girls" was the most desired change (320 votes). This provides a clear mandate for future actions.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS: A WAY FORWARD

1 TRANSFORMING NORMS THROUGH EDUCATION AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

- **Targeted awareness campaigns should be designed to go beyond abstract slogans. These campaigns must explicitly link restrictive masculine norms to negative social outcomes (such as gender-based violence) and actively promote men's roles as empathetic, collaborative, and engaged caregivers.**
- **Change should be institutionalized by integrating mandatory modules on "positive masculinity," consent, and gender equality into the national education curriculum at all levels.**

2 IMPLEMENTING POLICIES FOR STRUCTURAL REFORM

- **Paid paternity leave should be advocated for, legislated as mandatory and non-transferable, and effectively implemented, alongside flexible work policies—with a focus on ensuring compatibility within the private sector. This should be accompanied by a public awareness campaign to destigmatize men's use of these benefits.**
- **The economic roots of inequality must be addressed by continuing to invest in the empowerment of women and girls through education and employment opportunities, especially in non-traditional sectors.**

3 BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE ECOSYSTEM

- **Localized, context-specific programs should be designed and funded that are culturally relevant and physically accessible to young people outside major urban centers.**
- **An enabling environment should be fostered by institutionalizing support mechanisms through sustainable partnerships between government, civil society, and local communities. This includes creating and promoting safe networks for boys and men as allies to share experiences and strengthen their collective voice.**

For detailed analysis, methodology, and data, please refer to the full report. For contact: albyouthvoice@gmail.com

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