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Motion

Becoming an 'Alpha Male': Tackling the Masculinist Threat to Youth

Signed by: Forum des Jeunes (FJ)

Co-signed by: Council of the German-speaking Youth of Belgium (RdJ), European Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA Europe), Flemish Youth Council (VJR), Portuguese National Youth Council (CNJ)

1. Background and context

Recent years have seen the emergence and rapid spread of masculinist, anti-feminist and misogynistic ideologies across Europe, particularly among young people, both online and offline. These ideologies, which present the advancement of women's rights as a threat to men, are documented by the European Commission (2021) as a growing driver of radicalisation.

The violence they can generate is not theoretical. The 1989 École Polytechnique attack in Montreal, in which a man killed 14 women after separating them from their male classmates, remains the first mass femicide of the modern era explicitly claimed in the name of antifeminism (INA, 1989). More recently, in June 2025, an incel terrorist plot was thwarted in Saint-Étienne, France (Boursier, 2025), and the first identified case of incel-related violence was documented in Switzerland in 2026 (RTS, 2026). Beyond such attacks, the manosphere shapes everyday attitudes towards gender: according to a study covering 32,469 respondents in 27 EU Member States, young men aged 18 to 29 are the group most likely to perceive advances in women's rights as a threat to men's and boys' opportunities (Alexander, Alexander & Charron, 2022), while Flash Eurobarometer 544 shows that 15% of young men consider it acceptable for a man to slap his partner, five times the rate among older adults (European Commission, 2024).

Despite this reach, the concept remains poorly understood. The Forum des Jeunes' consultation (2026), involving over 2,000 young people and 3,000 testimonies in the French-speaking part of Belgium, reveals that while three out of four young people have heard of masculinism, definitions remain vague: some perceive it as a mere "defense of men's rights", while others wrongly equate it with feminism, viewing both as the defense of each gender's respective interests. A study led by the University of Gothenburg (2022) asked 32,469 people in 27 EU countries if they believed that "*promoting girls and women's rights had gone too far because it threatens men and boys's opportunities*". The results show that men aged 18 to 29 most often agree with the statement in the survey. This feeling is higher in regions where unemployment has risen the most in recent years.

Masculinism is a social and political movement increasingly used to describe a conservative or reactionary ideology (Forum des Jeunes, 2026). According to political scientist Francis Dupuis-Déri (2026), the term refers to a movement claiming that men suffer from an identity crisis because women, and feminists in particular, allegedly dominate society and its institutions. The Cambridge Dictionary similarly defines a masculinist as "a person who believes that men are treated unfairly in society and that they should have more power than women" (Cambridge University Press, 2026). Masculinism is part of the broader "manosphere", which includes distinct groups:

- Pickup Artists (PUA), acting as seduction coaches teaching men how to manipulate women into sexual relationships;
- Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), advocating voluntary celibacy as a protest against feminism;
- Men's Rights Activists (MRA), focusing on fathers' rights and perceived legal discrimination against men;
- Incels (Involuntary Celibates), who blame women and society for their lack of sexual or romantic success and often express misogynistic and violent ideologies (European Commission, 2021).

Social media plays a decisive role in the dissemination of these ideas: platforms do not merely allow their propagation, they actively reinforce it. Recommendation algorithms tend to promote engaging and polarising content. A 2024 European study on digital content toxicity found that TikTok accounts belonging to 16- and 18-year-olds received manosphere-related recommendations within 9 to 15 minutes, without ever searching for such content (FUJO Media, 2024). This passive and repeated exposure normalises these narratives and accelerates their dissemination, including among young people who never intended to encounter them.

It is essential to underline that the young people drawn to these ideologies are, first and foremost, young people in search of answers. Rapid social and cultural change has left many young men with a sense of loss of bearings, as traditional ideals of masculinity become less relevant (Forum des Jeunes, 2026). Masculinist discourses offer simplistic answers to genuine existential questions such as belonging, self-worth and social recognition, while online influencers use commercial techniques to attract young male audiences and turn their insecurities into a source of income. This dynamic is not uniform: while some young men embrace masculinist ideologies, others reject traditional gender norms, reflecting a broader divide highlighted in the European Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 (European Commission, 2026). Any effective response must therefore combine firm action against misogynistic and violent content with open dialogue with, and outreach to, the young people concerned, rather than stigmatising those who encounter these narratives.

Ultimately, the manosphere fills a void left by society and democratic institutions. Where progressive structures fail to offer positive narratives of emancipation for young men, reactionary ideologies provide ready-made answers.

2. Policy and Political Context

The emergence and spread of masculinist discourse in Europe must be understood within a broader political and institutional framework addressing gender equality, online radicalisation, and democratic resilience. Masculinist narratives, often rooted in anti-feminist ideologies, directly undermine gender equality, social cohesion and democratic values, particularly among young people. To effectively counter this phenomenon, this motion builds on existing policy commitments at the local, national, European and international levels.

At the European Union level, the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 serves as a cornerstone for addressing the structural roots of masculinist ideologies (European Commission, 2026). The strategy integrates gender equality into all aspects of life, both online and offline, explicitly targeting modern threats such as cyberviolence, AI-related risks and online misogyny. It calls on the European Commission and Member States **to mainstream a gender perspective across all policies**, including the digital and educational sectors, and to implement targeted actions against cyberviolence and online hate speech.

The European Democracy Shield (EDS), introduced in November 2025, offers an additional framework for action (European Commission, 2025). While its primary objective is to protect democracy against disinformation and foreign interference, its three pillars (strengthening democratic institutions, boosting citizen engagement and reinforcing information integrity) can be extended to masculinist propaganda as a form of gender-based disinformation. The European Centre for Democratic Resilience, established under the EDS, has the operational capacity to monitor and counter misogynistic and masculinist content online, as well as to support Member States in developing national action plans against online radicalisation (European Commission, 2025). The Digital Services Act (DSA) further requires online platforms to address illegal content, including hate speech and incitement to violence, which often overlaps with masculinist rhetoric (European Union, 2022). This points to a shared responsibility: platforms, as amplifiers of

these narratives, have a central role to play in preventing their spread, alongside regulators and civil society.

The Council of Europe addresses this issue through Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism, which offers a comprehensive framework for tackling sexist hate speech and gender-based discrimination both online and offline (Council of Europe, 2019). The recommendation draws an explicit link between sexism and violence against women and girls, and calls on member states to adopt legislative and policy measures to criminalise sexist hate speech, promote gender equality in education and the media, and strengthen the role of men and boys as agents of change. The Guidelines on the place of men and boys in gender equality policies, adopted in June 2023, further emphasise the critical involvement of men and boys in achieving gender equality, including combating resistance to gender equality and promoting non-stereotypical models of masculinity (Council of Europe, 2023). These instruments align with the motion's objectives by addressing the structural roots of masculinist ideologies. The Council of Europe's work on masculinities also highlights the need to challenge hegemonic and toxic forms of masculinity, which are often reinforced by masculinist movements.

Finally, at the United Nations level, the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech (2019) provides a global roadmap for combating hate speech, including violent misogyny and masculinist rhetoric (United Nations, 2019). This strategy calls on member states to adopt legislative and technical measures to combat online gender-based violence.

3. Strategic Alignment

This motion addresses a major societal challenge that intersects several of the European Youth Forum's key priorities. It first responds to the challenges posed by digitalisation. Masculinist discourses, widely spread through social media and algorithms, exploit gaps in media literacy to reach a young audience in search of meaning. By promoting media education and critical thinking competencies, this motion contributes to strengthening young people's resilience against disinformation.

It also tackles growing polarisation and democratic backsliding. Masculinist influencers fuel a binary vision of the world, pitting an “us” against a “them” (feminists, women, or minority groups). This polarising rhetoric undermines social cohesion and threatens democratic values, particularly among young people. By exposing these mechanisms, the motion supports the YFJ's efforts to combat extremism and promote pluralism.

Furthermore, this motion adopts a youth rights perspective. Masculinist discourses often target minorities as a whole, including LGBTQIA+ people, young migrants and refugees, who are portrayed as threats to “traditional” gender roles or as rivals in a perceived competition. By addressing this dimension, the motion reinforces the YFJ's commitment to inclusion and to combating all forms of discrimination.

Finally, it highlights a public health dimension. Namely, the mental health of young men. Masculinist influencers exploit psychological difficulties such as loneliness and lack of self-confidence to attract and radicalise. By underscoring this link, the motion connects to the defence of the right to health and the right to quality information, two essential pillars of young people's well-being.

4. Recommendations

The European Youth Forum calls on:

1. EU institutions to:

- **Integrate masculinist radicalisation into the European Democracy Shield** (EDS) by:

  - Developing guidelines for Member States to monitor and counter the spread of masculinist disinformation on digital platforms, in collaboration with the European Centre for Democratic Resilience.

  - Including masculinist propaganda in the enforcement mechanisms of the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), in coherence with future measures under the Digital Fairness Act (DFA), so as to strengthen the accountability of platforms hosting and amplifying such content.

- **Strengthen the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030** by:

  - Supporting actions to combat online misogyny and masculinist narratives as part of its cyberviolence and AI-related risks framework.

- **Promote media literacy and critical thinking** by:

  - Supporting the development of educational programs on gender equality, digital literacy, and disinformation resilience for schools and youth organizations.

- **Encourage cross-sectoral cooperation** by:

  - Facilitating dialogue between EU agencies, civil society, and tech companies to develop best practices for countering masculinist disinformation and online hate speech, and reaching out to the young audiences concerned through open discussion rather than top-down sanction.

2. National governments to:

- Integrate gender equality and media literacy into national education curricula by:

  - Including critical thinking, gender stereotypes and digital citizenship in school curricula, with a focus on deconstructing masculinist narratives;

  - Training teachers, educators and parents to identify and address masculinist disinformation, and to open constructive dialogue with young people exposed to these narratives.

- Support mental health and social inclusion by:

  - Funding programs that address the root causes of vulnerability to masculinist radicalisation, such as loneliness, lack of self-esteem, and societal pressures.

  - Strengthening support systems for school counsellors and youth workers, including one-to-one guidance for young people showing signs of disengagement or exposure to extremist narratives.

  - Promoting positive and plural masculinities through public campaigns and community engagement.

  - Encouraging the establishment of youth-led discussion and support groups in schools, universities, and community centers to foster critical reflection on masculinity.

3. Youth organisations and mobility programmes to:

- Develop peer-led initiatives to:

  - Create safe spaces for young people to discuss gender equality, masculinity, and the dangers of masculinist ideologies, using participatory and non-formal education methods (e.g., role-play, theatre, facilitated reflection).

- Train youth leaders to recognise and counter masculinist narratives in online and offline spaces.

- Amplify youth voices by:

  - Organising campaigns to raise awareness about the dangers of masculinist radicalisation, particularly on social media platforms.

  - Promoting reporting tools for illegal content and online harassment, including by raising awareness of trusted flaggers.

- Advocate for policy change by:

  - Monitoring and reporting on the spread of masculinist content in digital spaces, providing evidence-based recommendations to EU institutions and national governments.

4. The Council of Europe and the United Nations to:

- Strengthen international frameworks by:

  - Updating the Istanbul Convention to explicitly address the link between masculinist ideologies and gender-based violence, ensuring that Member States are legally obligated to counter such narratives.

- Promote global cooperation by:

  - Encouraging Member States to share best practices on countering masculinist radicalisation, particularly in digital spaces.

  - Supporting research on the intersection of masculinist ideologies, far-right movements, and democratic backsliding, in collaboration with academic institutions and civil society.

- Advance gender equality by:

  - Integrating a masculinity perspective into gender equality policies, as outlined in the Council of Europe's Guidelines on the Place of Men and Boys in Gender Equality Policies.

  - Addressing relational drivers of radicalisation by developing policy measures that target social belonging, recognition, and inclusion, including constructive and plural masculinity.

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