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Contemporary forms of young women's participation: priorities, challenges and ways forward?

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Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – UN convention (1979)
CSOs	Civil society organisations
EU	European Union
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex persons
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health rights
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNV	United Nations Volunteers

Glossary

Gender	The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, features, expectations attributed to women and men
Gender equality	Gender equality "entails equal rights for women and men, girls and boys, as well as the same visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation, in all spheres of public and private life. It also implies equal access to and distribution of resources between women and men" (Council of Europe 2018: 6)
Gender identity	The gender to which individuals feel they belong, which may differ from the one assigned at birth
Intersectionality	Intersectionality is both an analytical and theoretical framework for understanding the experience of people simultaneously exposed to multiple discriminations, such as age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, socio-economic background, disability
Political participation	Political participation is any activity that shapes, affects or involves the political sphere (EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2020)
Sex	The biological characteristics that define human beings as female or male
Youth political participation	The active, voluntary engagement of young people from their citizen perspective in any activity that shapes, affects, or involves the political sphere (Bárta et al. 2021)

INTRODUCTION: YOUNG WOMEN, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Gender-based discrimination continues to pose critical barriers to the full participation of young women in democratic life. UN Women (2022) estimates that, at a current rate of progress, it will take another 300 years to achieve gender equality. For many young women, political participation remains challenging and foreclosing. According to the State of the World's Girls report 2022 (Plan International 2022), 94% of the girls and young women surveyed globally recognised that their participation in political life entails challenges. Young women continue to face persisting barriers to their participation vis-à-vis their male counterparts. Although female representation in formal politics such as in parliaments and local councils is increasing, the figures are far from achieving full gender equality. On the other hand, young women are currently at the forefront of the mobilisation and campaigns around climate change, reproductive and gender rights, social and racial justice, among others. These differences in types of engagement highlight the persistence of gender roles and stereotypes which influence the type of participation young women (and men) engage with.

Although addressed by an increasing number of studies, the role of gender in youth participation along with the specificities of young women's political engagement remain underexplored in both, policy and academic literature. In order to fill this gap and bring our knowledge of young women's participation forward, this research presents an overview of the concepts and processes useful to understand the factors at the basis of gender inequality in youth political participation, as well as an illustration of the key topics addressed in this area, such as safe spaces, digital technologies and online gender-based violence, autonomy of young women, intersectionality and patterns of participation of young women from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The study takes stock of existing knowledge on young women's participation and the gender gap in youth engagement in politics. Along with acknowledged changes in young people's political behaviour, increasingly detached from institutional and representative politics, there are visible signs that the gender gap in political participation among youth is closing, especially if compared to previous generations. However, differences in challenges and opportunities for young women's and men's participation remain, highlighting the role of gender as a structure of power and source of inequality. In light of this, it remains crucial to examine the following questions: What role does gender play in the participation of young people? What are the opportunities and challenges for young women in conventional and unconventional participatory processes? On which topics and campaigns are young women more interested and involved?

Background and existing research

This study on young women and political participation builds and expands on the long-standing work of the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership in the area of young people's political participation. Previous works on this topic include the outcomes of the symposium "The future of young people's political participation: questions, challenges and opportunities"

held in 2019 (Bacalso 2019; EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2019), including the report from the event, the *Compendium of practices* (Yurttagüler and Martinez 2020) and *Literature review on youth political participation* (Galstyan 2019). Further studies in this area include *Shrinking democratic civic space for youth* (Dezelan and Yurttagüler 2021), *Meaningful youth political participation in Europe: concepts, patterns and policy implications* (Bárta et al. 2021) and *New forms of political participation. Statistical survey* (Yurttagüler and Pultar 2023). The aforementioned studies have helped develop our knowledge on youth political participation by bringing forwards discussions and findings on young people's access to rights, how to identify meaningful youth participation for young people in different democratic environments, best practices and recommendations to promote and integrate conventional and unconventional types of participation, along with major challenges and patterns of inequalities underlying participatory processes and mechanisms.

Additional studies providing relevant background information about young people's participation have looked at the intertwined issues of autonomy and access to rights. As discussed in the "Perspectives on Youth seminar: Young people's autonomy", young people are one of the primary groups who experience risks regarding their autonomy due to their transition status (adulthood, employment, housing), their low percentage of labour market participation, and their low paid and precarious jobs (Rokicka and Kłobuszewska 2016; Șerban 2022). Moreover, young people are, generally, more strongly affected by the effects of the economic crisis and associated austerity measures (Busch et al. 2013; Dietrich 2013; McKee 2012; Theodoropoulou and Watt 2011), ranging from promoting flexible labour market schemes (Jessoula et al. 2010; Madsen 2013) to cuts in state support for students in higher education (Callender 2012). Young people have been also strongly affected by the economic turbulence during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Although economic crisis, austerity measures, or the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have a negative impact on young people's autonomy, certain groups, such as young women, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, NEET young people, young people living with disabilities and minority groups, become more vulnerable as a result of the barriers they face in accessing the labour market and due to the insecure employment conditions (EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2022). According to the European Parliament's report on women's poverty, "the pandemic has disproportionately affected women in the socio-economic sphere, has deepened existing discrimination and resulted in even more inequalities between women and men in the labour market" (European Parliament 2022). The report states that young women between 18 and 34 have been most likely to lose their jobs and/or reduce their working hours to care for children and family. As analysed in section 3.4 of the present study, the worsening of structural conditions as a consequence of multiple crises affecting the lives of young citizens and, among them, disproportionally young women, have infringed on their autonomy and consequently raised further costs and barriers to their political participation.

Overall, among the key findings, the above-mentioned body of research has highlighted the need to address and overcome the democratic paradox, that is, the gap between young people's idealist notions about how democratic participation should be and the reality on the ground, through renewed mechanisms of participation. This would imply, above all, making

room for a practice of democracy that differs from the established one and that guarantees the fair participation of young people who have different lived experiences.

The work of the European Commission and the Council of Europe on gender equality

The importance of young women's participation in political, economic and social life and of gender equality is also stressed through the work of both partner institutions – the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

Gender equality is at the core of the Council of Europe work, as demonstrated by the remarkable number of conventions and recommendations put forward by the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly covering multiple issues such as sex-based discrimination, the elimination of sexist language, gender-based violence, gender balance in political and public decision making, gender mainstreaming in the media, among others (Council of Europe 2018b). The work of the Council of Europe in this area is guided and reflected in a series of international instruments, among which the ground-breaking, unique and comprehensive Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. Although no specific legal instrument currently exists to address violence against women at the EU level, the EU commitment to combat violence against women is demonstrated by relevant directives and recommendations.[1] Remarkably, on 8 March 2022 the European Commission adopted a new legislative proposal for a directive on combating violence against women to enshrine minimum standards in EU law (European Commission 2022a).

In addition, both the Council of Europe and the EU contribute to achieving the goals set in relevant international instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – UN convention (1979) (CEDAW) and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which girls' and young women's rights to political participation are enshrined. Moreover, in October 2021, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the independent monitoring mechanism of the Istanbul Convention prepared its first General Recommendation on the application of the Istanbul Convention to the digital dimension of violence against women (Council of Europe 2021c).

Important for the context of this study, the new Council of Europe Strategy on Gender Equality 2018-23 sets the goals and priorities of the Council on gender equality, outlining six strategic objectives (Council of Europe 2018b). Specifically, "Strategic Objective 4: Achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making" acknowledges women's under-representation in public and political life whereby "political activities and public decision-making remain male-dominated areas. In order to promote the full

1. For detailed regulatory framework of the EU, see: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/regulatory-and-legal-framework/eu-regulations.

participation of women and young women to the public and political life, the Council of Europe promotes the implementation and monitoring of Recommendation Rec(2003)3 of the Committee of Ministers on the Balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making and Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of citizens in local public life" (Council of Europe 2018a).

Equally important, the European Commission is currently working under the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-25, pursuing "a dual approach of gender mainstreaming combined with targeted actions" in different policy areas. Importantly, the strategy attempts to be implemented through an intersectional perspective. Furthermore, it aims at achieving gender balance in decision making and politics, promoting the participation of women as voters and candidates in the 2024 European Parliament elections and pushing to reach gender balance of 50% at all levels of the European Commission by the end of 2024, while also promoting strategies to increase the number of women in decision-making positions across the member states.

The present study is built on an extensive literature review and desk research combining academic works, grey literature and existing policy documents, as well as the findings of the survey on new forms of youth participation conducted by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership. The first section provides an overview of the literature on political participation, gender and youth, setting the conceptual framework to understand which factors have an impact on different patterns to political participation among young women and men, such as young women's access to rights and their autonomy, socialisation processes, the role of family and significant others, and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes through social role theory. It also offers a brief overview of existing works conducted in the framework of the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership on young people's political participation, as well as the broader context of the work of the European Commission and the Council of Europe on gender equality.

The second section provides a concise picture of young women's participation in contemporary times, including issues, priorities and types of engagement.

The third section goes into the substance of challenges and opportunities for young women's participation in four areas that we deem crucial: 1) sexual and reproductive rights, 2) spaces of participation and particularly the creation of safe spaces, 3) online political participation and 4) intersectionality and inclusive participation.

The final section provides key recommendations for the promotion of young women's participation, based on the findings highlighted in the study, for different actors.

SECTION 1: AN OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, GENDER AND YOUNG PEOPLE

When we analyse the gender gap in young people's participation, we usually refer to two dimensions: the first is to what extent young women participate vis-à-vis young men, namely how much do they participate. The second dimension refers to how they participate, meaning through which forms and in which types of fora or organisations.

In this sense, research (Grasso and Smith 2021; Lavizzari and Portos 2021) has shown that young women are far from being apathetic in political terms. They do participate and increasingly so, reaching levels of participation similar to their male counterparts. However, many studies have found that young women participate differently from young men. For instance, young women are more likely than men to participate in so-called unconventional types of political participation and processes, that tend to be informal, grass roots and include also private forms of actions – examples include volunteering, participating in social movements, engaging in political consumerism and even artistic performances (Stolle et al. 2005) (cf. section 2.1). Young men instead have a preference for conventional types of participation, such as formal politics through political parties and organisations, or through confrontational types of action in the context of protest politics. These differences reflect gendered stereotypes and gendered socialisation processes concerning the supposedly different roles women and men should have as citizens in the public sphere while confirming the persistence of multiple barriers to political participation for young women.

1.1. The role of gender in youth participation

Existing research that looks at gender differences in young people's political engagement (i.e. Hooghe and Stolle 2004; Coffé and Bolzendhal 2010; Pfanzelt and Spies 2018; Lavizzari and Portos 2021) has documented that a gender gap exists between young women and men, indicating that young men are generally more interested and active in politics, with higher levels of engagement across different forms. At the same time, studies have also suggested that besides the level of participation, young women and men tend to participate differently, showing different preferences for the issues around which to get involved (cf. section 2.2), a different taste for the forms of engagement (cf. section 2.1), as well as different patterns of participation based on the socio-demographic characteristics, economic, social and cultural background.

Considering the role of gender in young people's participation, mainstream explanations have highlighted the role of three main sets of factors:

- situational-structural factors
- political socialisation
- social role theory.

These explanations help us understand how important variables and their overlapping – such as social capital, resources, political skills and knowledge – may vary for young women and men and contribute to shaping different patterns of participation (Sartori et al. 2017; Lavizzari and Portos 2021; Grasso and Smith 2021). Structural and situational factors often determine women's exclusion from the public sphere. Among these we find barriers related to the socio-economic status of women, such as domestic workload, parental status, but also legal and political obstacles depending on the national context. In this sense, opportunities for participation through institutions can also result in inequality in contexts where the political culture is dominated by men, especially at the elite level (Norris 2002).

Political socialisation too is anchored in gender differences and calls into question cultural and historical factors affecting "those individual resources, such as their self-esteem, motivations, skills and opportunities, which are essential to a full, active and informed participation" (Sartori et al. 2017: 224). Socialisation happens through the mediation of peers and significant others in multiple contexts, such as the family and the school environment, among others. Regular and informal exchanges about politics with friends and peers are also predictors of political involvement for both young females and males. Moreover, political socialisation in the form of civic engagement and education might emerge in schools and universities, where youth can be taught specific classes on politically relevant topics, or may have the chance to take part in different student and politically oriented organisations (Pfanzelt and Spies 2018). Finally, socialisation can also take place outside family and educational environments, particularly through direct engagement in political, volunteering or community-oriented groups and organisations, as well as religious, cultural and sports clubs, among others.

Finally, social role theory points to the role of gender stereotypes in shaping young women's and men's political behaviour (Cicognani et al. 2012). In this sense, young people would behave in different ways in order to meet the gendered expectations associated with different social roles. Most notably, confirmation of gendered roles may have an impact on the opportunities that have been provided to gain specific types of social and political skills and knowledge, along with young women's perception of their political efficacy and trust (Jost and Kay 2005). Linked to the above considerations on socialisation, research has already shown that family and parents, in particular, as well as teachers, are significant figures that may spark a process of confirmation of gender roles. For instance, young men are more easily supported by parents to engage in more and different forms of activities, especially competitive ones. Conversely, young women are often discouraged from taking part in activities that are considered more unsafe or risky, such as participation in social movements and protest politics, while being pushed in adult-controlled environments, such as caring organisations. Therefore, "such finding supports an explanation in terms of social capital: male adolescents, more involved in a larger network of formal and non-formal community organisations and groups, have greater opportunities to learn and practise skills and play significant roles" (Cicognani et al. 2012: 574). It is also worth noting that these sets of explanations are often causally linked (Sartori et al. 2017: 223): "situational factors look at current characteristics and social roles of individuals, structural features stretch back into individual histories

encompassing outcomes that refer to economic (labour market) and social (school, family) institutions (Jennings 1983). The socialisation hypothesis pushes back even further the roots of different participative roles that might be resistant to intervening structural (education) and situational (familiar transitions and arrangements) factors."

SECTION 2: CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Young women are increasingly at the forefront of many fights for social change and social justice, being the faces, founders and leaders of contemporary social movements, including in the fourth-wave feminist movements, in the climate justice movement or the racial justice movement. For example, research has shown that the Fridays For Future movement has an exceptionally high share of young women (over 60%), also as leaders of the movement (Wahlström et al. 2019). The context of the recent years, which has seen a widespread backlash against gender rights and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), evidenced by many examples across European countries and beyond – as illustrated by the successful overturning of Roe v. Wade ruling on legal abortion in the United States – has drawn the participation of increasing numbers of young women to engage with these issues, through youth movements and collective action. Young women are active participants in the democratic life of our countries. Indeed, the 2022 State of the World's Girls reports that 97% of the young women and girls surveyed think that participating in politics is important and 63% of them are involved in some form of group or organisation engaged in civic and political participation (Plan International 2022). However, and despite the fact that young women clearly acknowledge the importance and the will of participating in the political life of their communities, only 24% see themselves standing for political office, and one in five of them has been personally discouraged from engaging in politics. As illustrated in the following sections, several economic, legal and sociocultural barriers persist to young women's participation, whether in conventional or unconventional forms.

2.1. Forms of participation

On a general level, research has amply demonstrated that young people are increasingly more likely to participate in politics through unconventional and alternative forms, such as protests and grass-roots activism, individualised and personal forms of political action, social media and online activism, and less through institutional and formal political venues. Studies have indicated how engagement in conventional forms that are time-consuming, highly skilled and based on competitive norms and behaviours can be more challenging for young women (Burns 2007). Therefore, young women's preference for non-institutional forms is above all determined by the greater barriers to participation in formal politics, but also by a preference for less formal approaches, centred on horizontal, inclusive, power-sharing, decentralised and community-oriented practices and groups/organisations rather than regulated, vertical and centralised power structures and organisations.

Overall, institutional political environments, leadership and processes remain male-dominated, with a persisting gender gap both in terms of age and gender: women are significantly less represented in national governments and parliaments. Indeed, figures concerning the gender gap in women's and girls' political involvement confirm that, largely, the level of participation and representation in decision-making processes, formal and informal bodies is consistently lower than for men and boys. For instance, the UN Women gender snapshot on the progress on the Sustainable Development Goals identifies that in July 2022, women held only 26.4% of parliamentary seats globally (UN Women 2022), while the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) figures show that only 2.2% of parliamentarians are young people under 30 years and less than 1% are young women (IPU 2021). Similarly, according to a survey conducted by the European Commission in 2017, women are more likely than men to think politics is dominated by men who do not have sufficient confidence in women (66% versus 56%), and they are also more likely to think women have less freedom because of their family responsibilities (71% versus 63%) (European Commission 2017).

This lack of representation and visibility of women in formal politics is problematic and holds several implications, barring them from institutional decision-making processes. For instance, the absence of female political role models has a dampening effect on young women's participation, pushing them to think that they are less qualified to run for political office and be in positions of leadership. Similarly, gender-based violence and harassment against female politicians along with stereotyped media narratives about women who are in political office – such as misogynist and sexist comments about dress code, physical appearance, disclosure of details about private life, lack of consideration and trust in their actions and words, continuous undermining of their credibility and legitimacy – constitute enormous deterrents, affecting young women's perception of political engagement as well as their leadership ambitions. According to an IPU study in 2018, 85.2% of female MPs across European countries claimed that they had suffered psychological violence in the course of their term of office, of which up to 47% received death threats or threats of rape or beating, 58.2% online sexist attacks, 67.9% comments relating to their physical appearance based on gender stereotypes, while up to 24.7% suffered sexual and physical (14.8%) violence. Importantly, MPs under the age of 40 were more frequently subject to psychological and sexual harassment (IPU 2018).

Among other reasons for young women's rejection of formal politics, this type of gender gap reflects a traditional public/private divide, according to which young men tend to engage in activities that are more explicitly public and more confrontational – such as protests, political meetings, collective actions – while young women are more often engaged in activities taking place in the private sphere, such as boycotting products, and are more often represented in non-confrontational types of activities (Giugni and Grasso 2019). Although the increasingly higher share of young women's participation in social movement and protest activities in recent years should make us question or be careful with absolute interpretations of the public (male)/private (female) divide, a preference for individualistic and private actions, rather than public and collective ones, may be driven by a lower level of socio-economic resources, making time-consuming and expensive activities (i.e. campaigning) less accessible to young women.

Moreover, a preference for non-confrontational activities is linked to the political socialisation process wherein a more supportive environment for young men, nurturing competition (such as in sporting activities), leadership and other skills will enhance the sense of political efficacy required to take part in confrontational activities (Pfanzelt and Spies 2018). In general, a differentiated access to material and symbolic resources may lead young women and men towards different forms of participation, making some activities less costly and more attractive to young women (Sartori et al. 2017).

Volunteering is often mentioned as an example of young women's preferred forms of participation (Anderson et al. 2016). The United Nations Volunteer programme defines formal volunteering as "voluntary activity undertaken through an organization, typified by volunteers making an ongoing or sustained commitment to an organisation and contributing their time on a regular basis" (UNV 2015: xxv). Informal volunteering, on the other hand, is defined as "voluntary activities done directly, unmediated by any formal organisation that coordinates larger-scale volunteer efforts" (UNV 2015: xxv). According to the State of the World's Volunteerism Report 2018, overall, women (57%) participate in formal and informal volunteering processes more than men (43%). Although formal volunteering is relatively evenly distributed (51% women and 49% men), women account for a larger share of informal voluntary action (nearly 60% worldwide) (UNV 2018: 102).

Another report by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership (Moxon and Bárta 2023) analysing the participants of the EU Youth Dialogue, shows that young women are overrepresented across the EU-27 countries (59.85% of female participants) and increasing over time. This trend may reflect some of the factors mentioned above concerning young women's taste for politics, including a widespread feeling among women that they lack influence over formal political processes (compared to young men), but it also shows the role of participatory mechanisms in providing young women with a pathway into formal politics. As mentioned, a lack of engagement of young women in formal and conventional politics does not mean a lack of interest in influencing the decision-making process, but rather a lower sense of political efficacy. For instance, the "New forms of youth political participation survey" by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership (Yurttagüler and Pultar 2023), covering 35 countries of the Council of Europe and including youth aged 15-35, shows that only 23% of young women think that their say will be considered by their governments, compared to 31% of young men.

Yet, the gender gap in young women and men's participation is not always confirmed by existing studies in terms of forms of participation, showing instead a greater diversity between young women and men. For instance, a study of Italian youth (Lavizzari and Portos 2021) found that young men engage in online political activities to a larger degree than young women (contrary to the idea that online participation may involve more young women as a way to bypass the barriers of conventional activities, cf. section 2.3); the degree of engagement in political consumerism is higher among young women than men, but that there are not very substantive differences between young women and men's engagement in confrontational activities. Similarly, another research paper exploring youth participation across Europe

(Grasso and Smith 2021), found that gender inequalities were not as marked as previous studies predicted insofar as young women were more active in some unconventional activities but not all (petitioning, boycotting, community volunteering) and young men tend to be higher represented in conventional activities but not all of them (political meetings, contacting politicians).

Among its key findings in terms of gender differences, the Flash Eurobarometer survey gathering young people's attitudes and behaviours in politics conducted in 2021, provides a similar picture (European Parliament 2021). In fact, young women are more likely than men to vote, volunteer, boycott or buycott products, create or sign a petition, post online and use hashtags while young men are more likely to contact a politician, join a youth organisation and take part in a public consultation. However, according to the Youth and Democracy in the EU survey during the European Year of Youth conducted in 2022, young women are more likely to think that voting in local, national or European elections is an effective type of action (41%), followed by volunteering and charity/campaign organisations (27%) (European Commission 2022b). Some of the trends outlined above are also confirmed by this survey, as young women are more interested in participating in meet-ups and exchanges (35% versus 26% of young men), festivals, artistic performances or concerts (31% versus 23%), while young men are more interested in engaging directly with national, regional or local politicians (23% versus 18% of young women). Similar results are displayed in the new forms of youth political participation survey, confirming the higher voting rate for young women (37% versus 33%), yet a higher involvement of young men in formal political processes and/or decision-making processes, including contacting politicians (15% versus 11%), participating in consultation processes (16% versus 12%) and lobbying activities (8% versus 6%) (European Commission 2022b).

2.2. Issues and priorities

In addition to gender differences in the preferred forms of engagement, we also need to look at the topics, issues, campaigns in which young women are more interested and vested. As mentioned, young women have been at the forefront of several mobilisation efforts in the past years. For instance, in terms of issues and values the Youth and Democracy in the EU survey shows that young women accord more importance to the protection of human rights (60% versus 52%), gender equality (48% versus 29%) and minority groups (19% versus 17%), along with the environment (43% versus 36%), poverty and inequality (46% versus 38%), and unemployment (39% versus 36%).

Similar data are also identified by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership survey on new forms of youth participation (Yurttagüler and Pultar 2023). The findings indicate that young women are more interested than men in all social issues and that they are most interested in the following areas: health, mental health and well-being issues (84%), human rights (83%), women's rights and gender equality (82%), access to education and learning (81%), employment and labour rights (78%), and poverty and inequality (78%). Significantly, the most remarkable difference with young men is found in the interest in gender equality (57% versus

82%), suggesting that women's rights and gender equality – even among younger generations – are a matter of concern mostly for women. Gender equality being often at the top of the list is an important sign of how much young women are aware and continue to perceive and personally experience persistent systemic discrimination based on gender. It is also important to point out, and especially in reference to younger generations, that too much of a difference exists between young women and young men in their interest in gender equality issues – thus somehow confirming the stereotyped narrative that gender issues are women's concerns. Certainly more should be done to raise awareness among young men too, that this is a fight for a better, healthier, just and equal society for all, not only for women.

Finally, young women, especially through feminist and racial justice movements, have been able to link together different issues, defying once again the idea of a hierarchy of priorities on which to mobilise. The concept of intersectionality praised and practised by the feminist and other movements helps us understand how when young women mobilise for women's rights, they also mobilise for climate justice, for racial justice and so on as all these issues are closely linked and interdependent on each other.

SECTION 3: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The growing presence and visibility of young women in political participation processes has to be contextualised vis-à-vis a series of challenges that continue to foreclose or hamper their access to participation opportunities. The following sections focus on four main areas that are crucial to understand such challenges as well as opportunities for young women's participation. The areas are closely linked to many of the issues presented above, most notably in relation to assigned gender norms and roles to young women and their implications for young women's equal participation. On these premises, the first section addresses the traditional public-private divide which, as seen in previous paragraphs, stems from the basis of gender differences in forms and spaces of participation. The second section focuses on the concept of safe spaces, which has gained increasing traction and remains crucial to build alternative spaces able to guarantee more inclusiveness and safety for young women's participation. The third section tackles the area of digitalisation and online participation, increasingly at the centre of young people's participation in general, yet often lacking a comprehensive gender analysis showing the additional challenges young women are facing through this type of participation, most notably in terms of online gender-based violence. The last section presents important insights on the topic of multiple inequalities, by looking, in particular, at difficulties arising from differences in socio-economic status while advocating for the implementation of an intersectional perspective in order to understand how to provide young women coming from different backgrounds a more inclusive participation.

3.1. Public-private division: from volunteering to sexual and reproductive rights

This section focuses on two particular topics that are surrounded by gendered values and have been historically associated with the private sphere:[2] sexual and reproductive rights and care politics. It explores issues linked to sexuality, reproduction and care due to their complex influence on the female lifecycle and, accordingly, young women's political participation.

In various societies, gendered values differ according to cultural, historical and structural differences. Nevertheless, the gender roles and stereotypes are mostly based on a dichotomic perspective, which identifies womanhood and manhood in a binary gender model (Hyde et al. 2019; Morgenroth & Ryan 2018) and in a hierarchical order within the pair that assigns a superior or valued position to one of the parts (Prokhovnik 1999).

This type of dichotomic thinking extends to the traditional public-private divide,[3] incorporating an "essentialist" narrative regarding gender roles whereby a constant reference back to biological differences between the sexes is perpetuated. Assigned characteristics regarding "being a woman" or "being a man" are considered intrinsic, universal and fixed due to the biological attributes. While women are considered emotional, corporeal and caring, men are associated with reason, rationality and thinking (analytic). The essentialist narrative regarding gender roles develops a hierarchical order for binary groups in combination with dichotomous thinking. The "fixed" characteristics that are associated with men (such as mind, reason, culture and public) are considered superior to the characteristics associated with women (such as body, emotion, nature and private). As a result, the dichotomic and essentialist narrative instils a hierarchical perception of gender roles and their relationships.

The dichotomic thought on gender roles has reflections on the concept of citizenship and individuals' political participation processes. Siim added that citizenship conceptualisation is mainly formed around the rights of men (Siim, 2000: 13). According to Richardson and Yuval-Davis, citizenship is regarded as gendered when citizenship rights and obligations are different for men and women (Richardson 1998; Yuval-Davis 1997; Werbner and Yuval-Davis1999).[4] Carole Pateman argued that the social contract between the citizens and state has a sexual side, which was historically designed based on male principles and "sexual division of labour" (Pateman, 1988). According to Pateman, politics is narrated as a part of the public sphere and conducted with a rational mind, which is embodied in man. Meanwhile, women are situated in the private sphere due to their attributed roles as primary care-givers and as the symbol of family. Accordingly, while institutional politics is considered a man's job, women are associated with care work. For instance, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) research shows that men and women volunteer in different organisations, perform different roles and conduct

2. The private sphere is positioned in opposition to the public sphere as part of dichotomic thought.

3. Dichotomies such as mind-body, active-passive, rational-irrational, culture-nature, public-private, reason-emotion, subject-object and self-other.

4. While Richardson emphasized the inclusion and/or exclusion of citizens on the basis of their sexuality. More recently, recognition has been given to the ways in which gendered citizenship can also operate to include or exclude individuals on the basis of their sexuality (for example, Richardson 1998), ethnicity, nationality and/or territorial location (for example, Yuval-Davis 1997; Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999).

different activities (UNV 2018). Both in formal and informal volunteering, women tend to commit their time to "caring roles" such as caring for children or the elderly, which is associated with traditional and appropriate gender roles (UNV 2018). According to a 2019 survey conducted in Türkiye, young women have the tendency to volunteer for children and aid associations, while young men prefer to volunteer in rights-based and professional organisations (Yurttagüler 2019).[5]

The repercussions and influences (as cultural norms) of public-private division can be seen in women's daily practices ranging from labour relations to the domestic division of labour. Furthermore, it has also found a place, either explicitly or implicitly, in the laws and policies that regulate the public sphere alongside the private spaces (such as the regulation of female bodies, the regulation of motherhood and parenthood, or the regulation of in-house dynamics).[6] On the one hand, laws and policies institutionalise gender-based inequalities by either remaining gender-blind or gender-biased vis-à-vis women's needs. On the other hand, these laws and policies grant rights, opportunities and privileges to men since they are prepared by "male" decision and policy makers, who have similar (or connected) experiences.

Women's daily practices are not only regulated through public policy. Extensions and implications of these attempts can be followed through the practices that are associated with the private sphere, such as on female bodies and in households. Particularly, violence against women, sexual and reproductive rights (United Nations Human Rights Council 2021) and the politics of care have become debatable subjects. The "personal is political" motto of the 1970s and 1980s women's movement was revived with restrictive changes regarding their sexual and reproductive rights, budget cuts affected public care services and processes granting (implicit) impunity to violence against women in public policy and legislation in some countries, in the last decade. Young women use tools for self-expression to communicate their political ideas while they participate in organised social acts (Fominaya 2015). Thus, they vocalise the political character of private issues such as sexuality, sexual orientation, abortion and sexual division of labour in the household.

In March 2021, Türkiye withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, which aims for gender equality and protects women from violence (Council of Europe 2021b). Feminist and women's organisations organised street protests, online campaigns in parallel to the legal fights against the government's decisions. Young female activists were involved in the activities of several women's organisations and played significant roles, particularly in organising social media campaigns (Amnesty International 2021). In Poland, young women marched and drove in April 2020 against the ban on sex education in schools and organised massive protests in October after a court decision to ban abortion in the country (Bárta, Boldt and Lavizzari 2021: 69; Mamacash 2020). In November 2021, the protests rose after a woman's death, with the involvement of young women activists (Politico 2021).

5. See https://knowledge.unv.org/theme/gender-and-volunteering.

6. Gendered dichotomies can be seen in every area of life, including academic and scientific circles. For the effects of gendered research designs, methodologies, data collection and interpretation of results, see, Harding, 1986; Scott, 1986; Haraway, 1991.

As demonstrated by the examples, first of all, young women carry topics such as sexual and reproductive rights, violence against women and care politics which are restricted to the private sphere in the conservative narratives, into public and political debate. Second, although young women (as activists) encounter discriminatory actions due to gender and age-related stereotypes, they participate in social and political movements, which are directly linked to the private sphere (UN 2020; UN 2019).

3.2. Safe spaces and participation in democratic life

As neatly said by Amy Ibold and Anna James (2018) "think back to your younger years – was there someone in your life who encouraged you to take on challenges? Did you have a place where you could gather with friends and openly speak your mind or get information? [...] Safe spaces help fill this gap" (Devex 2018). The conceptual tool of "safe space" emerges to address the need for meeting, discussing and participating for those who most commonly feel excluded from social settings. Indeed, in many societies, the space for women to meet is limited, as the public space remains largely dominated by men. Further, many contexts in urban cities or communities are perceived as unsafe, where young women step into fear, dangers and discomfort, directly curtailing their ability to move freely in such spaces. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Women and Girls Safe Spaces Guidance (2015: 5), "a safe space is a formal or informal place where women and girls feel physically and emotionally safe. [...] It is a space where women and girls, being the intended beneficiaries, feel comfortable and enjoy the freedom to express themselves without the fear of judgment or harm." From an intersectional point of view, this perception varies along the axes of gender, age, racialisation and working conditions, among others. Perceptions of safety/unsafety depend on social conditions and vary across time and space. Thus, safe spaces are oriented to develop forms of participation both in physical places and in virtual places, where people experience feelings of discomfort or unease, due to their social condition. In this sense, it is a key concept to understand and promote young women's potential for participation. At the international level, the UN Women's Global Flagship Initiative "Safe Cities and Safe Spaces for Women and Girls" supports local and national governments to address local forms of sexual violence against women and girls in public spaces and to promote women's and girls' rights to enjoy public spaces free from violence (UN Women 2021).

The idea and practice of safe space come from two different contexts: one from feminist movements and the other from the educational setting. The former refers to the women's movement of the late 20th century and the creation of separatist spaces in feminist, LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex persons) and anti-racist communities (Kenney 2001). In feminist, queer and civil rights movements, safe spaces have developed to keep marginalised groups free from violence and harassment. The latter has developed within the context of inclusive spaces in educational institutions and student bodies (The Roestone Collective 2014). Historically, the term appeared in pedagogical communities, classrooms and teaching activities, as a way to produce anti-oppressive education (Kumashiro 2000). Since the 1960s, spreading from the United States to mainly northern European countries, classrooms'

safety has been addressed as a sort of "ethical obligation" for teachers and school administrators (Ludlow 2004).

Many mechanisms produce the expulsion of young women from the public space, such as the victimising idea of reducing them to potential objects of violence, the rhetoric about urban decay and urban decency, securitarian discourses and policies (Hanhardt 2013). Many societies already suffer from the absence of spaces for young people to meet, share and participate in political activities, producing instead an increasingly individualised urban life, in which youth find themselves in conditions of isolation.

Fortunately, public spaces develop from practices of those who live in certain area and use public spaces. . The city can also be a space of re-appropriation, legitimisation and freedom. Thus, young women can experience practices and spaces for democracy beyond exclusion and marginalisation. In this sense, the creation of safe spaces favours interaction with the urban space, making them protagonists of the city.

The choice of creating separate spaces, that is, young women's only spaces, adds an element of experimentation. They can be temporary or serve in continuity, and allow certain groups to approach civic engagement, otherwise much more difficult to achieve. This indicates the importance of considering the specific conditions and path of creating spaces (The Roestone Collective 2014) that are experienced as safe. The perception of safety, and thus the capacity for political participation, is often facilitated by practices such as active listening, respectful and affirming exchanges, and honest communication. Importantly, additional steps need to be taken to include the most marginalised young women. For instance, the I'm Here approach, developed by the Women's Refugee Commission and the Population Council, provides useful advice on how to include vulnerable young women in safe spaces (Women's Refugee Commission and the Population Council n.d.).

3.3. Online/digital participation

3.3.1. The gender gap in digital skills and online participation

According to the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, digital participation can be considered empowering insofar as it promotes innovative and alternative forms of engagement in the democratic life of our societies (European Commission 2018). Digital technologies have been recognised as important tools in the youth sector to include more people from different social, geographical, economic and cultural backgrounds, while recognising the need to understand and promote social inclusion as a complex and multidimensional concept (EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2021). Along these lines, participants of the Symposium "The future of young people's participation: questions, challenges and opportunities" hosted by the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership in 2019, assessed the need to better understand the potential of digital technologies for engaging young people and the ways they are used by young people themselves to access and participate in politics, which is neither consistently

positive nor negative. Crucially, there is a need to address digitalisation with an explicit and clear gender perspective, focusing on young women's needs and experiences of online participation.

The gender gap in the digital field crosses the experiences of (young) women at different levels, most notably in terms of access, skills and learning. At the global level, research has documented that (young) women are less proficient in how to use technological devices such as smartphones and computers, manage digital media and information, or engage in coding computer software. Along with the lack of digital skills, young women face multiple barriers to digital access, such as financial costs of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, parental control on the use of digital devices and, most importantly, cyber safety. According to the World Economic Forum, men are 21% more likely to have access to the internet than women (WEF 2022), with a global internet gender gap at 17% (ITU 2020). These barriers are heightened for young women who are living in rural or peripheral areas, are less educated, poorer than their peers. On a general level, the patterns of discrimination faced by young women in education, social justice and political participation are perpetuated in the digital sphere as well. Overall, there are gendered aspects to the use of technology, and ICT is still considered a male domain, driven by rational thought and technical expertise. Especially in education, where women constitute less than one third of students in ICT studies, there is "a gender disparity without parallel in other disciplines, including traditionally male-dominated fields such as medicine and science" (EQUALS 2019, p. 25).

In terms of online political participation, research has advanced two major explanations. On the one hand, it has been argued that digitalisation and social media, in particular, may reduce inequalities, especially for marginalised youth, as the inclusive and participatory nature of social media facilitates the political activation of previously disengaged groups (Ahmed and Madrid-Morales 2021). More broadly, digital skills may empower women to participate in social movements, by bypassing restrictions on freedom of speech in repressive contexts, the gathering and sharing of information concerning collective mobilisation, political events, as well as through online campaigning on gender-related issues (EQUALS 2019). Prominent examples, such as the #MeToo movement and the Black Lives Matter campaign showed how individual experiences and activism at the local level can quickly spread into a global movement through social media. Moreover, the exposure to representations of women and examples of political activism coming from different cultural contexts can also increase young women's self-confidence, raise gender awareness and spark active engagement. Digital technologies can therefore offer multiple opportunities for activism, building and spreading solidarity and mobilisation efforts through new forms of spatiality that connect distant communities. In particular, digital activism has become an integral part of social movements' activities, including feminist ones.

On the other hand, researchers have stressed the fact that notwithstanding social media, offline inequalities and/or privileges are reproduced online, or even amplified (Ahmed and David-Morales 2020). Among the factors affecting the gender-based digital divide, other than the already mentioned disparities in the levels of access and digital proficiency, cognitive

aspects such as self-efficacy and, once again, socialisation dynamics can also affect young women's engagement online. For instance, young men are more likely to share content online, to look for information, read news about politics, while young women more often go online for social interaction and relationship maintenance (Bode 2017), thus reproducing gendered patterns in (offline) communication activities and preferences. As gathered in the new forms of youth participation survey (EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership 2023), young women prefer to acquire information from social networks (73% for women and 60% for men) and from friends and relatives (41% for women and 33% for men).

3.3.2. Cyberbullying, online gender-based violence and barriers to participation

Young women still face major challenges in digital participation, as they are disproportionately exposed to online violence and harassment (UN Women 2022): "Girls continue to face cyber bullying and threats, and a lack of access [to technology]due to digital divide", said UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed (UN News 2022). Among the threats that young women continue facing online, besides cyberbullying, are cyberstalking and tracking, privacy breaches, sexual harassment, revenge porn, the unauthorised use and manipulation of personal information, hacking, among others (Digital Watch 2022). In 2018, the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences has pointed to the emerging forms of violence that are perpetuated online, such as trolling, doxing and sextortion (OHCHR 2018). In this sense, while technology, as mentioned above, may empower the participation of young girls in several ways, it also transforms different forms of gender-based violence that are inflicted across borders and physical distance (Digital Watch 2022). Crucially, digital technologies can be co-opted to perpetuate gender-based violence at both the individual and structural levels (Montesanti and Thurston 2015, cited in Barter and Koulu 2021). At the structural level, gender-based violence is built in the structure and manifests itself in the form of unequal and oppressive power relations, while at the individual level it reflects and, as mentioned, reinforces structural dynamics such as sexism, racism and cisnormativity.

In a comment on violence against women and girls in the digital world, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights stresses how this type of violence can be used to discredit women's collective power, most notably for women's rights defenders, public figures and women involved in politics. Talking about gender-related issues, women's rights and especially sharing experiences of violence and abuse in the digital sphere can expose young women to more violence through sexist jokes, threats and trolling – which, in turn, can lead women to leave social media platforms or to self-censoring, limiting their right to express themselves freely and safely and therefore, hampering their digital participation in political and social terms. As in other realms and issues outlined in this study, the impact of gender-based abuse is amplified through the attack on their multiple identities, such as sexual orientation and race for young women of colour and LGBTI youth. In addition to individual and structural forms of online gender-based violence, we have witnessed the rise of misogynistic online harassment

communities and campaigns, such as the #Gamergate campaign, targeting women in the game industry through rape threats, doxing and trolling. Within the rather unregulated character of the online culture, marginalised groups including young women are especially vulnerable and exposed to harassment (Barter and Koulu 2021).

Feminist organisations have mobilised against gender-based online violence in multiple ways and settings, most notably to promote the well-being of survivors and the safety of young women online, through the collection of evidence, the testimonial of voices of survivors but also by stigmatising perpetrators. For instance, the political activist Lucina Di Meco coined the term "gendered misinformation" to talk about the "spread of deceptive or inaccurate information and images against women political leaders, journalists and public figures" (Di Meco and MacKay 2022). In 2006, Take Back the Tech[7] was one of the first global campaigns to address gender-based online violence, which culminated in the development of the Feminist Principles of the Internet, "a series of statements that offer a gender and sexual rights lens on critical internet-related rights".[8] The #HerNetHerRights[9] Campaign launched in 2017 and 2019 by the European Women's Lobby, analysed the state of online violence against women and girls in Europe, coming up with solutions and policy recommendations, and a training with practical digital safety tools (EWL 2022).

3.4. Socio-economic status, intersectionality and inclusive participation

3.4.1. Socio-economic status and equal access to rights

Forms of online and offline participation of young people, and more specifically young women, vary considerably depending on their socio-economic status. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality the category of "disadvantaged groups" refers to people that are more likely to be exposed to social exclusion, violence and discrimination, poverty and thus lack of rights and social inclusion. The category includes different racial groups, migrants and persons without full physical, mental or capacity to choose, such as elderly people, persons with disabilities and children. But the category can be further expanded to include all persons who, with respect to social structures, encounter obstacles of various kinds in accessing civil, social and political rights and thus in enjoying full citizenship. Full and equal membership in society (and consequently participation) cannot be established only through civil and political rights but also through access to social rights, following the indivisibility of rights (Ben-Ishai 2008). When one category of rights—civil, political, or social—is inaccessible or violated, an individual's ability to exercise other categories of rights is hampered.

On the one hand, researchers developed the concept of vulnerability to understand the exposure and capacity to sustain losses and dangers coming from actual or potential hazard event, as well as the ability to recover from those losses (Schmidtlein et al. 2008). Social

7. See: https://takebackthetech.net.
8. See: https://feministinternet.org.
9. See: https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/hernetherrights_resource_pack_2017_web_version.pdf.

vulnerability depends on the limited access to social capital, resources and political participation, beliefs and behaviours, physical or mental limitations, and the characteristics of the environment, such as infrastructures. On the other hand, the autonomy of individuals is defined as the freedom and independence to make their choices in the daily practices, as well as, in their political preferences (Ben-Ishai 2008). In the literature, autonomy and vulnerability are discussed in relation to individuals' socio-economic status, especially economic independence and participation in the labour market. Feminist research has long emphasised the relation between gender equality and employment outside the home in the money economy (Spain 2014). Unpaid work and reproductive work as caregiver are major determinants of the extent to which women can engage in any other type of activity, "therefore, women's employment in the labour market outside the home is the fundamental basis of their ability to be economically independent, increase their resources and reorganize their time" (Lavizzari and Portos 2022: 7). Hence, the groups who have limited access to the labour market and work in precarious jobs, carry the highest risk of losing their livelihood, becoming dependent on supporting mechanisms and, consequently, losing their autonomy.

In cases where social rights are not guaranteed by the social welfare state via formal support mechanisms, such as public services and economic support, the fundamental needs of individuals (such as accommodation, health, or education) are left to the market to be provided if they have the necessary means to purchase them. If not, informal social support mechanisms such as family or charity organisations become the main providers for individuals' fundamental needs. In all formulas except the formal support mechanisms, individuals are bound by the conditions of the main providers.

Whereas welfare programmes in some countries (mostly in the northern and central European countries) use highly formal support mechanisms, some countries (in the southern and eastern countries) include families as an actor in the process as a "safety net" for citizens, including young people. In circumstances where young women cannot afford their needs and do not receive additional formal support (public support), families turn to primary actors, who provide for young women.

In cases where individuals purchase their fundamental needs from the market, they are bound by their employment conditions. A good example of dependency on market conditions is violations of individuals' "right to association" in trade unions. If individuals' fundamental needs are provided by their families, then they would be restrained by the conditions and demands of their families. Last but not least, if their needs are met by charities or civil society organisations, the uncertainty of provisioning may have a negative impact on them. Furthermore, they may be forced to follow certain conditions (such as following certain beliefs or behaving within the limitations of certain codes) asked by the aid organisations as a prerequisite to benefiting from the services. In sum, if individuals' rights are not protected and guaranteed by state institutions (the social welfare state), their choices, their independence and their autonomy will be at risk.

3.4.2 Intersectionality and inclusive participation

Women and girls around the world often belong to disadvantaged groups because of the educational availability, geographical location (urban peripheries or rural areas), bodily conditions (disabilities, HIV/AIDS, drug addiction), family constrains (e.g. forced marriage), displacement and migration, class origin. While violence against women and girls is a structural condition of society, those who belong to disadvantaged groups are more at risk of violence, and especially physical and psychological abuse. Gender norms related to these groups often create an increased tendency to tolerate abuse. Because of this, an intersectional perspective is essential to assess conditions of vulnerability along with the multiple forms of agency of young women belonging to disadvantaged groups, for example, intersectionality raised from Black women's activism, challenging the misleading idea of a universal concept of women. Indeed, gender is not the only factor of discrimination, but other dimensions coalesce the condition of disadvantage, such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, disability and age.

According to the report of the Online Consultative Meeting of the Council of Europe "Mainstreaming intersectionality in the youth field" (Council of Europe 2021a), intersectionality is both an analytical and theoretical framework for understanding the experience of people exposed to multiple discriminations and an approach to policy making and analysis. It sheds light on the dynamics of power that influence expectations, behaviours, but also norms and policies. Quite often, an intersectional approach allows the invisible to be unveiled. One of the most difficult aspects of intersectionality is how it works in practice and how it can be translated into strategies. In terms of analysis, the difficulty of applying an intersectional perspective is to grasp the connection between different disadvantages not only in additive terms, but also in how their intersection produces specific conditions of inequality, including in political participation processes.

Researchers argue that higher income groups and the better educated take part more actively in politics, but, for instance, class differences have less influence with regard to conventional politics, such as voting. Usually, people with greater resources and privileged identities (i.e. white, heterosexual, middle class men) have greater opportunity to participate. The high status and social environment that encourage participatory norms and civic norms enhance participation, while, for instance, lower levels of education prevent active citizenship behaviours (Almond and Verba 1963). Intersectionality broadened the education/class analysis, and included gender as well as race and ethnicity, revealing that, for instance, women of colour have different access to the benefit of citizenship and to public space, because of racism and sexism, and these inequalities decrease the engagement of participation for minority women. Further, as mentioned in previous sections, studies have shown differences between young men and women in forms and levels of political participation. If the overall finding is that in most European countries 18–24-year-olds tend to show the highest levels of

participation in a demonstration (Giugni and Grasso 2021), the exposure to sources of inequalities other than gender complicates the access to such forms of participation. For instance, young women who live outside urban settings, that is, in rural or peripheral areas, participate less in demonstrations and protest events than young women living in urban centres, while this difference does not hold for their male counterparts in both settings (Lavizzari and Portos 2022), thus showing that in addition to age and gender, the urban/rural divide reinforces patterns of political exclusion for young women.

Some practical examples of the attempt to include an intersectional perspective at the policy level are the recommendations adopted by the Council of Europe, the Action Plan 2017-2019 on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children that looks at the intersection of age and migration (Council of Europe 2017b), the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 (Council of Europe 2018b) and the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 that develops an intersectional understanding of gender, based on the intersection of ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity. Moreover, according to the toolkit for local authorities and civil society organisations of the Council of Europe (2020), young women can influence policy and political processes through tools of public influence or as community representatives elected to a local council. The representation of women coming from disadvantaged groups affected by multiple discriminations can be increased by legislative measures and practical measures, for example, through direct involvement in political processes. The more young women are involved, the more they might enhance inclusive political processes, target discrimination and develop the welfare of the community while making policies representative of their needs.

Another example, according to the Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2017 (Council of Europe 2017a), is the inclusion of young women by providing information and access to key documents both offline and online, conducting consultations, maintaining the dialogue between disadvantaged groups and social and political actors, establishing platforms for ongoing dialogue and participation, promoting the active involvement of citizens (through co-development of documents, the establishment of working groups and so on). Education and correct information play a strategic role in the increase of inclusive participation, and this inclusion should be coalesced by various mechanisms, such as the establishment of groups and associations that protect the right of women coming from disadvantaged groups, supporting programmes in urban and rural contexts to counteract discrimination and implementing good strategies to enhance rights of women.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The systemic barriers to meaningful political participation that young women face must be addressed on individual, institutional and sociocultural levels. Barriers to young women's political participation can be overcome with a holistic approach between micro-meso and macro levels, and collaborative efforts among different actors, from lawmakers to politicians, civil society organisation (CSO) activists and youth workers. Policies and activities to enhance young women's participation are listed below.

1) Formal, conventional participation and decision-making processes

Effective measures to enhance young women's participation in formal and institutional politics should start at an early stage, equipping them with a comprehensive set of skills while guaranteeing a safe environment for participation aimed at countering sexist and discriminating political cultures. The major barriers faced by young women in this context result from both a lack of representation, in terms of the number of women present in institutional bodies and decision-making processes, the functioning of these institutions that continue to be male-centred, the lack of access in terms of resources (i.e. funding) and the prejudice, sexism affecting young women's confidence and internal political efficacy. The following steps can facilitate engagement of young women in conventional political processes:

- introducing and promoting effective youth and gender quotas that can guarantee systematic balanced representation in all conventional political mechanisms and bodies, including youth-oriented such as youth parliaments and youth councils;
- political parties working at the local level to include and reach out to young women, providing them with key knowledge on electoral systems, democratic processes and governance;
- attention should be given also to forms of participation that are inclusive of the preferences of young women, such as horizontal practices and deliberative democracy;
- mentoring and outreach activities of older female MPs and politicians, as the impact of role-modelling has been demonstrated as key for young women to enhance their motivation to participate in formal politics, as well as fostering inter-generational exchanges and political trust;
- ensuring the presence of economic and financial resources, i.e. funding, for young women running for office as well as equal opportunities for career development, including access to leadership positions;
- given the higher presence of young women in social movements and CSOs, the establishment of platforms for exchanges and collaboration between movements at the grass-roots level and political parties and government's institutions, as well as transparent channels for the institutionalisation of young women's agency (from the grass-roots level to the electoral and institutional arena).

2) Policy monitoring, implementation and gender-sensitive legislation

Gender equality and mainstreaming play a key role in the work of the Council of Europe, European institutions and international organisations, and local authorities across member states. Actively promoting gender mainstreaming and gender legislation is crucial to combat gender stereotypes, violence against women and to guarantee the political, social and economic rights of young women. Monitoring and implementation are fundamental steps to ensure that the policy aims of any given programme or process are in line with gender equality promotion and that, conversely, they are not correlated with gender inequality patterns (Esposito and Daaji 2019).

- Several instruments can be used to assess the gender dimension of internal decision-making processes and functioning, programmes and policy framework. Consider developing and using gender impact assessment tools and gender audit tools to systematically analyse and strengthen the gender equality dimension of the activities proposed by your organisation, institution or department.
- Strengthen gender-responsive youth policies and programmes through legislation directly promoting gender equality and through targeted budget allocation based on the needs and preference of young women.
- Develop a gender-sensitive language in all policy documents at the local, national and European level through specific guidelines.
- Implement the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the Plan of Action for Gender-sensitive Parliaments and the joint UN and IPU Call to Action on Young Women's Political Participation.

3) Unconventional and civil participation

Young women are more likely to join in civil and grass-roots initiatives, social movements and CSOs than conventional types of organisations and processes. Often, young women are at the forefront of progressive movements working on climate change, gender equality and feminism, peacebuilding and racial justice. Thus, empowering young women to start civil initiatives and participate in CSOs is one of the upcoming measures for inclusivity in public and political dialogues, adding a significant value to the traditional political processes. The lack of co-operation between formal political structures and institutions and social movements and CSOs in some contexts can be therefore problematic both as diminishing young women's representation and knowledge, ideas and values, as well as worsening already worrying trends of lack of trust and increased detachment between young people and formal politics. Some of the steps that could support young women's unconventional and civil participation are:

- providing support processes, i.e. training and workshops, to young women's initiatives, movements and organisations in order to develop their organisational capacity (such as fund-raising, advocacy, campaigning, communication and social media use);
- providing access to stable, flexible, long-term funding at local, national and European levels, particularly for young women's organisations;

- creating joint platforms (spaces) for young women's initiatives to exchange information and experience regarding their demands, organisational capacity and organisational needs, and participating in the decision-making processes, such as through democratic laboratories and workshops;
- establishing consultation mechanisms, structured dialogues, with youth organisations and CSOs working with young women in order to grasp a clear understanding of their needs, priorities and strategies for the implementation of policies affecting their lives.

4) Education, training and information

Civic and democratic education must be initiated both in formal and informal settings (i.e. through youth work, by organising political camps, etc.), starting early in young people's lives. Education and skill attainment are fundamental to build own's political efficacy already at an early stage. Information concerning available political opportunities is also crucial as young women tend to be less aware than young men of venues for engagement, especially at the European level. Effective communication and dissemination of information about participation opportunities taking into consideration young women as a primary target group is key, as well as the provision of funding schemes to access training and education for young women, especially from disadvantaged groups to enhance the inclusiveness of educational programmes.

5) Gender-based and sexual violence, harassment and safe spaces

Gender-based and sexual violence, physical and psychological harassment constitute one of the major barriers to (young) women's participation in politics. The elimination of sexist cultural trends and practices which endanger young women's presence in formal and informal political settings is of utmost importance. Several legal instruments exist that aim at the elimination of all forms of violence against women which should be systematically implemented and monitored, such as the Istanbul Convention.

- On top of the adoption and implementation of protective legislation and policies to eliminate all forms of violence against women, ensure that a fair, accessible, confidential monitoring and reporting mechanism is in place.
- Undertake initiatives aiming to eradicate gender stereotypes, sexist attitudes and discrimination against women, taking into account the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism.
- Refer to relevant EU legal instruments relevant for victims of violence against women, such as Directive 2012/29/EU – Victim's Rights Directive.
- Provide accessible information to young women about existing mechanisms and legal venues to exercise their rights in cases they are violated through harassment and discrimination.
- Promote the creation of safe spaces, physical and online, in which young women can engage. Consider ways to diminish or eliminate young women's safety risks when organising political meetings and events thinking about which times of day, which

venues, and so on, along with establishing crisis intervention groups during political demonstrations or events with significant amounts of people.

- Build and strengthen awareness concerning online gender-based violence and cyberbullying against young women. Implement the GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women and the Commission Digital Services Act.
- Promote the inclusion of online safety in formal curricula and at all levels of education.
- In order to tackle underreporting trends, promote initiatives and mechanisms aiming at establishing trust and transparency between victims of gender-based and sexual violence and law enforcement institutions.

6) Intersectionality and inclusion of disadvantaged groups

There is an urgent need to systematically collect evidence in the form of gender-disaggregated data as the basis for the formulation of public policies. Moreover, there are still too few data available on the participation of vulnerable young women from disadvantaged backgrounds. Hence, there is a need to conduct elaborative research on the participatory processes of vulnerable young women coming from disadvantageous socio-economic backgrounds such as NEET young women, young women living with a disability and young women from minority communities. Vulnerable young women from disadvantaged backgrounds participate less both in conventional political processes and in civil initiatives. Thus, youth work can support young women from disadvantaged backgrounds to form civil initiatives and to participate in civil society organisations. An effective course of action would be to begin enhancing opportunities for participation in public and political processes at local level, in the communities where these young women and girls live.

As advised in the Council of Europe report on mainstreaming intersectionality in the youth field (2021: 39), “Intersectionality should be taken into account in the process of planning, designing, organisation, implementation and evaluation of educational activities. In practice, it means asking and analysing along this process, how an activity affects different sub-groups of young people (young women, youth from minority backgrounds, young people who experience discrimination), and deciding what (if anything) can be done differently to involve and hear the voices of some beneficiaries which are not evident when taking a very broad approach.” From this perspective, it implies the capacity building of youth leaders, youth workers, youth organisations and policy makers to apply an intersectional approach to the design and implementation of their activities, improving diversification of membership and leadership and guaranteeing power-sharing and accessibility among different groups of young people and consequently, of young women.

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