

YOUNG WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN CIVIL SOCIETY

The girls and young women interviewed have expressed the need to create civic spaces that are safe, welcoming and inclusive, including women-only spaces, aimed at exchanging experiences without any pressure to perform. "Creating an environment that is non-judgmental, open to dialogue, and, above all, willing to question even traditional mechanisms that were long considered effective but are no longer the right key to understand today's reality"



The study highlights that young women in Italy are deeply interested in civic engagement and activism. Yet, the survey reveals that just over half of the young women interviewed frequently participate in consultations or vote on social or political issues (54.8%), including in social media (52.2%).

MAIN FINDINGS

Obstacles

Structural inequalities, economic insecurity, and gender discrimination persist in both formal and informal civic spaces, often discouraging young women from taking on leadership roles. Due to intersectional exclusion, their voices remain underrepresented, particularly those of women with migrant backgrounds and girls from disadvantaged contexts.

Good local practices

Intergenerational mentoring activities, digital activism, inclusive spaces, accessibility and flexibility in participation models have a key role in promoting the engagement of young women, including those in more marginalized conditions.

Policy recommendations

To foster the participation of young women and girls in public life, it is essential to invest in safe, inclusive, and accessible civic participation spaces. Schools should promote Global Citizenship Education, and institutions remove structural barriers through policies that address gender discrimination, economic disparities, and intersectional exclusion.

THIS IS WHAT THE GIRLS SAY

"It's not that girls don't have charisma, you know, but socially, we're taken less seriously."

Introduction

The research, conducted in Milan, Bologna and Naples, was aimed at identifying the **intersectional inequalities** that hinder the participation of young women in social, economic, political and civic life locally, as well as **promoting good practices and recommendations** to enhance their active involvement. The study focused on the direct experiences of young women, placing their voices and stories at the centre. The field research took place in October and November 2024 in Milan, Bologna and Naples, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies: interviews and focus groups were conducted with 35 youth participation experts and 28 young women activists, along with an online survey conducted to 164 young women and girls aged 16 to 30.

Obstacles

Gender discrimination remains deeply rooted, even within associations and youth movements, where elevated levels of participation are recorded. The **adult-centric approach** often discourages younger generations from fully engaging, and **economic insecurity** forces many young women to prioritize financial stability and **caregiving roles** over activism. **Intersectional exclusion** is a significant challenge, particularly for young women with migrant backgrounds and girls from disadvantaged contexts. The **lack of safe, inclusive, and welcoming spaces**, free from an excessive focus on performance, where they can exchange, also through intergenerational discussions, represents a significant barrier for the young women interviewed. Additionally, the **lack of knowledge** about public issues, existing opportunities, and their rights risks further weakening participatory pathways.

Good local practices

Women-only spaces provide a safe environment where girls can speak freely, build support networks, challenge structural barriers, and envision new possibilities. Young women have expressed interest in moving beyond one-off training sessions or exchange events, instead favouring **medium - to long-term group pathways** that connect them with other initiatives and promote intergenerational mentoring to bridge knowledge gaps. **Accessibility and flexibility** in participation models play a key role in engaging those in more marginalized conditions, such as young women with migrant backgrounds, caregiving responsibilities, or financial constraints. **Digital activism** offers an alternative platform, particularly for those facing barriers to in-person participation. Moreover, balancing moments of reflection with **opportunities for socialization** helps foster personal connections as an essential element for meaningful engagement.

Policy recommendations

The creation of **safe, inclusive, and accessible civic spaces** must be a priority, ensuring they are **adequately resourced and self-managed**. Young women are asking for their engagement to be recognized, including through **accessible funding, reduced bureaucracy, and structured collaboration** between institutions and grassroots movements. **Cities should be co-designed with female representatives** to eliminate not only physical barriers but also social and cultural ones that hinder participation. **Schools must integrate the methods and tools of Global Citizenship Education** to encourage critical thinking and youth leadership. To address structural barriers, **institutions must implement public policies that contrast gender discrimination, economic inequalities, and intersectional exclusion** through investments, trainings to the public personnel, and awareness campaigns. At both local and national levels, it is essential to establish **structured, accessible, and meaningful processes** for young people's participation in decision-making.



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