

# UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Questionnaire on girls' and young women's activism – Answers from Norway

## Introduction

The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, in preparation for its thematic report to be presented at the 50th session of the Human Rights Council in June 2022, has been researching the topic of girls and young women's activism focusing on accomplishments, challenges and opportunities for change. The scope of this questionnaire will cover the various aspects of girls and young women's participation and activism in the political and public life at different levels.

In this regard, the Working Group would like to seek inputs from States and other stakeholders to inform the preparation of the report in line with its mandate to maintain a constructive approach and dialogue with States and other stakeholders.

## I. Nature, modalities and trends of girls' and young women's activism

1. What is the normative framework related to participation of girls and young women in civic space and their activism?

Answer: The normative framework consists of several features:

- Norway has a high degree of youth participation in organised spare time activities. This includes sport and culture, as well as political, religious, and other organisations. Nine out of ten teenagers have participated in an organisation. Girls and boys participate to almost the same extent. Participating in different kinds of organized activities is considered as important to strengthen social ties and inclusion, create experience of meaning and mastery, contribute to learning and increased influence.
- The government supports organisations and activities in several ways, through allocation of funds from gambling funds, compensation of VAT and through several subsidy schemes. Children and youth organisations receives annual grants, and there are several other subsidy schemes earmarked for children and youth activities and organisations.
- The government also gives funding to organisations promoting the rights for lgbtq-people, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities, this also includes youth organisations.
- The National Council for Norway's children and youth organizations (LNU) is an umbrella organization for 97 Norwegian children and youth organizations, with around 450,000 members. The member organizations are democratic and voluntary children and youth organizations. LNU promotes the common interests of the young volunteers to the governing authorities and important social institutions, offer courses, guidance and competence-enhancing measures to their members and manages a number of support schemes that contribute to the development of children's and youth organizations and activities in Norway.
- The municipalities have a duty to facilitate children and youth spare time activities.
- It is mandatory for all Norwegian municipalities to have a youth council. The youth council is supposed to represent the youth perspective in the municipality and county and has a right to be heard in all cases concerning children and youth. The council must have a representation of at least 40 percent of each gender.

- All schools have a student council where each class is represented by two elected students (down to six years of age). The norm is that one girl and one boy is elected from each class.
- All the larger political parties have youth organisations.
- One of the large national newspapers, Aftenposten, has a debate section where children and youth up to 21 years old are invited to write. In addition, Aftenposten has a newspaper targeting children.
- Although girls and boys participate to almost the same extent in organisations and activities, there are some challenges. For instance, girls with ethnic minority background participate in sports to a lesser extent than others. This means they miss out of a chance for inclusion in this kind of social network, and a chance to participate in and influencing democracy and inclusion in the sports arena.

**2. What are the main features of girls' and young women's activism/participation in political and public life in your national context? Please describe, in particular, in terms of:**

- i. Specific issues (thematic areas) on which girls and young women are mostly engaged

Answer:

Although boys and girls participate about equally in organized activities and organisations, there are differences regarding the *type* of activities and organizations they are involved in. Girls are to a larger extent than boys active in the political civil society (e.g. youth parties and environmental organizations).

- ii. Political actors and authorities they mostly engage with

Answer:

Local authorities (municipalities), youth parties, as well as national authorities.

- iii. Levels of engagement (grassroots, local, national, international)

Answer:

All of the above-mentioned levels. Although it is most common to get involved locally (school, youth council and local municipality).

Since 1971, LNU has sent "youth delegates" to the UN in Norway's delegations. The delegate scheme is a collaboration between LNU and the Norwegian authorities. The delegates are sent to the UN General Assembly and current UN processes related to topics such as human rights, gender equality, youth participation, education, climate and environment, sustainability and urbanization.

A youth delegate is a representative of Norway's children and young people in an official Norwegian UN delegation. The delegate works on behalf of LNU and LNU's member organizations into the delegation. The youth delegates shall be an included part of LNU's and the ministry's work on relevant topics throughout the year.

- iv. Main spaces for engagement (e.g. schools, community, media, online platforms, etc.)

Answer:

Social media, schools, local community, social movements, youth parties, local association of national organizations.

- v. Cross-movements cooperation and solidarity

Answer:

LNU plays an important role in spreading knowledge and learning between the youth organizations. The School Student Union of Norway – Elevorganisasjonen – plays an important role in strengthening the local school democracies. Operation Day's Work is the largest solidarity campaign in Norway - by, with and for young people.

- 3. What are the forms and modalities for girls' and young women's activism/participation in your national context? Please provide information about any structures in place (formal and informal) and how they operate?**

Answer:

See question 1.

- 4. What are the main trends and drivers influencing their activism/participation in your country or region?**

Answer:

Local, national and international movements and debates regarding personal and political questions such as environmental issues and climate change, #metoo, the-black lives matter protests, questions regarding gender identities and gender expressions, as well as debates regarding for example negative social control.

Media, both social media and traditional media, such as national and international tv-shows.

- 5. What are the positive and inspirational examples of girl's activism in terms of:**

- i. Social mobilization and change

Answer:

Some examples are the Norwegian BLM protests and school strike for climate. Another story is about three girls who in 2019 put sexual harassment in the schoolyard on the national agenda through a newspaper debate article in Si;D. The girls were invited to the Storting, they gave a speech at the national 8 March parade, and the children's ombud Inga Bejer Engh asked for concrete Metoo measures at schools. The article led, among other things, to greater awareness of sexual harassment in schools.

- ii. Influencing policies and legislation

Answer:

Each municipality and each county municipality are obliged by law to establish a youth council or other participation body for young people. The purpose of the youth council is to help ensure a broad, open and accessible participation in matters concerning young people. All matters concerning young people shall be submitted to the youth council. The council can also raise issues on its own initiative.

- iii. Personal development and empowerment (of girls and young women)

Answer:

There are several examples of young girl's personal empowerment through youth organizations.

## II. Enabling factors and good practices

1. What solidarity and support frameworks are available in your national context to enhance girls' and young women's activism? Please provide concrete examples on any positive role of:
  - i. Legal/policy and institutional frameworks
  - ii. Social, cultural, religious institutions
  - iii. Collaborative initiatives, human rights and/or women's movements
  - iv. Technological infrastructures/means
  - v. Other frameworks

Answer: See section I.

2. What are the ways the State promotes and supports girls' participation/activism? Please provide concrete examples and good practices with respect to measures taken by the State, in particular:
  - i. to address discriminatory social norms, gender stereotyping and stigma against girls' public participation and activist roles;

Answer:

The government develops and disseminates knowledge concerning hate speech. In Norway, we have a number of relevant provisions both in the Penal Code and in the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act that prohibit hate speech, discrimination, harassment, reckless conduct and invasion of privacy.

- ii. to ensure gender and age-responsive protection from attacks against girl activists;
- iii. to assess and support girls' evolving capacities to fully and freely participate in all spheres of public decision-making.

Answer: See section I.

3. What are the particular issues and platforms, if any, in which the State encourages girls and young women's engagement? How is the diversity of girls' activism and inclusion in all human rights activism initiatives ensured (e.g. gender equality, disability, environment, LGBTI issues, etc.)? Please share specific positive practices.

Answer: See section I.

4. How do other stakeholders promote girls' and young women's engagement and activism in your national context? Please describe which stakeholders are active in this area and what role they play.

Answer: See section I.

5. What are the achievements at the national level in the implementation of laws, policies, plans and/or programs and practices relevant to promoting girls' and young women's engagement/activism? Please provide examples of good practices and any innovative initiatives taken, and lessons learnt.

Answer: See section I.

### III.Challenges and structural barriers

1. What kind of gender and age specific barriers are affecting girls' and young women's participation/activism in your national context? Please indicate concrete examples of direct and indirect as well as formal and informal factors posing threats and risks for girls and young women engaging in the public space (examples of these can include stereotyping based on gender and age, restrictions on freedom of expression, speech, assembly, liberty, etc., legal restrictions to capacity to provide legal consent, legal age of marriage, etc.).

Answer:

- (Sexual) harassment, both online and physical, is a challenge and barrier affecting girls' and young women who are engaged politically – either organized (through e.g. media articles) or unorganized (through e.g. engagement on social media). Sexual harassment and abuse within political movements and political organizations have been put on the agenda through the Norwegian #metoo campaign, leading to greater awareness.
  - There are also examples of right-wing terrorist attacks, violence, and threats against parts of the political youth movement (especially the social democrats and the green youth). Young women with ethnic minority background seem to be more prone to these threats.
  - Girls and boys, lgbtq-youth and young people with disabilities from families and/or belonging to communities where they do not experience respect for who they are, their opinions or their interest as result of strong degree of negative social control.
  - Economic conditions also affect young women's opportunities to get involved in organized activities (membership, time and traveling). A main challenge is to make sure that children from low-income families have the same opportunities as others to participate in spare time activities, organisations and public space.
  - Lack of facilitation is a barrier for girls and young women with disabilities who want to participate in organised activities
2. What are the groups of girls and young women who are most affected by these barriers and why?

Answer:

- Girls and young women with disabilities
- Girls with ethnic minority background
- Young transwomen or transgirls
- Girls from low-income families

3. Are there any specific laws, policies and practices that place obstacles to girls' and young women's participation, activism or collective action? If yes please specify

Answer: No.

4. What are the threats girl and young women activists in your country or region experience in relation to their work as activists? In particular, in terms of:
- i. being prosecuted and punished for their activism
  - ii. facing intimidations, harassments, and attacks (direct or indirect, online or offline, sexual or physical)
  - iii. lacking access to justice and reparations for violations of their rights

Answer: See above.

5. What are the particular concerns that may arise with respect to girls' and young women's access to technology and other infrastructures? How does the digital divide impact girls' activism?

Answer:

Girls and boys have a relatively equal access to digital devices and platforms. Girls and boys however, do not participate to an equal extent in the different digital platforms. Boys use more time playing online games than girls, and girls spend more time on social media platforms. Digital platforms are arenas for youth to use their voice, read news etc. but also an arena where youth are exposed to harassment, unwanted sexual attention etc. that can be a barrier for participating and activism.

6. What are the challenges, in your national context, in the recognition and protection of girls as human rights defenders? What negative trends undermine their evolving capacities and interests at the family, community, and State levels?

Answer:

See above.

7. What are the main challenges in ensuring the following?
- i. Safe space for engagement
  - ii. Inclusion of diverse groups of girls and young women and those from marginalized communities
  - iii. Access to resources, infrastructures, networks and platforms
  - iv. Collaborative programs with different stakeholders

Answer:

See above.

## IV. Emerging issues

1. Are there new emerging issues related to girls' and young women's engagement at community, national and international levels? If yes please specify.
2. What are the impacts of digital advancements and major shifts in digital activism on girls' and young women's engagement/participation?

Answer:

In a country like Norway, with large geographical distances and relatively small population, the increase in digital activities means that it is possible for more people to reach out to and gather more young girls, despite factors such as geography. However, not everyone has access to digital tools, sufficient internet connection and safe physical spaces.

3. What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' and young women's activism/participation?

Answer:

- Quick decisions have contributed to fewer opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making processes during and about the pandemic. Youth councils, student councils, and democratic children's and youth organizations could have been involved to a greater extent, both locally and nationally.
- Young people who have poor connection to school or family seek the youth club, leisure activities or organizations to experience belonging. Lack of such arenas increases the risk of exclusion. For groups such as LGBTQ people and people with disabilities, the consequences of the pandemic become especially noticeable when several social arenas for meeting peers disappear at the same time.
- A survey conducted by LNU among its member organizations, showed that the 56 organizations that participated, have lost a total of 20,000 members in the past year. The organizations fear that the members who drop out first are the ones with the least resources, and that it will be demanding to recruit these back to the organizations. These challenges also apply to leisure clubs. If the dropout persists after the pandemic, it could lead to a number of young people losing community and contact with society, which is important, among other things, for democratic participation and trust in society.

4. Please provide information on other recent developments and concerns with respect to girls' and young women's movements.

Answer:

See above.

## IV. Recommendations/ the way forward

1. What concrete measures should States adopt and implement to ensure girls' and young women's meaningful participation, activism and collective action at all levels?

2. What concrete measures should States adopt to address systemic genderbased/age-based discrimination and challenges affecting girls' and young women's engagement in the political and public life?
3. What concrete measures should States introduce to improve solidarity, support, collaborations towards creating a safe and enabling environment for girls' and young women's participation/ activism?

Answer:

- States should support a strong civil society so that children and youth have platforms to participate through.
- Create and support arenas for youth participation and involvement (locally, nationally and internationally). E.g. youth councils.
- Support measures for networking and learning across organized volunteering - nationally and internationally
- Encourage youth to participate in political youth organisations
- Encourage initiatives within the organisations to recruit girls and ensure girls equal opportunity to take leadership roles.