

POLITIK-HER

YOUNG WOMEN DESIGNING THE FUTURE

Policy Recommendations from the Politik-Her Project

Project No: 2023-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000158279





Project Partners



Centrul Parteneriat pentru Egalitate, Romania



Initiative for Youth Future, Sweden



Reset, Cyprus



Project School, Italy?











Prime Minister, Italy

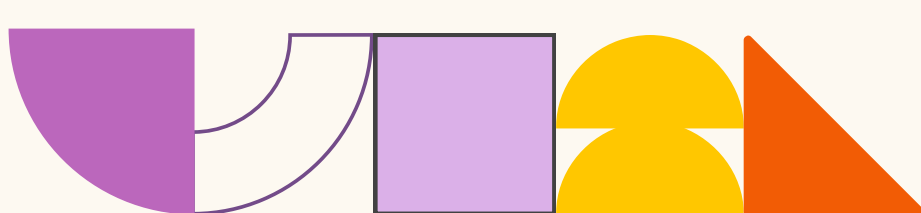
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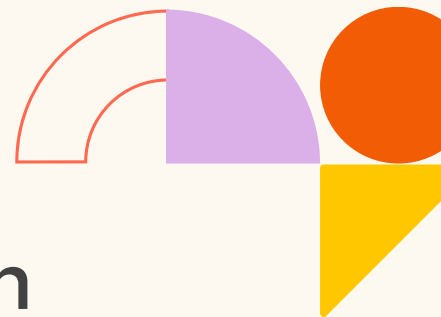


Introduction

The Politik-Her project emerged from the urgent need to empower a new generation of young women leaders across Europe and ensure their voices are reflected in policymaking. Through training, mentoring, and locally designed pilot actions in Romania, Italy, Sweden, and Cyprus, participants developed the skills and confidence to critically address structural inequalities and propose solutions. Building on this work, the **Politik-Her International Forum** (held online) provided a **transnational space** where participants shared their experiences, pilot actions, and visions for gender equality. These exchanges were complemented by desk research and national context analyses carried out by partner organizations, which grounded the discussion in the realities of each country.

The policy recommendations presented here are the result of this combined process of dialogue and research. Structured around three thematic areas—gender and education, gender, health and reproductive rights, and gender and climate change—they articulate both country-specific insights and cross-cutting priorities. Together, they call for reforms to integrate gender equality into curricula and leadership opportunities, guarantee universal access to youth-friendly health and reproductive services, and mainstream gender perspectives in climate action and decision-making. By centering the lived experiences of young women and anchoring them in evidence from national contexts, the Politik-Her project demonstrates that advancing gender equality is both a matter of democratic legitimacy and a cornerstone for building inclusive, resilient societies across Europe.





Gender & Education

Based on the participants' experiences and input, the gender-based inequalities remain a persistent issue in Europe, taking on different forms within educational institutions. It shapes directly and indirectly, not only the opportunities, but also the experiences that young women face.

One area in which the inequalities are evident, is the **gender division of academic fields**: women are often overrepresented in disciplines such as humanities, education, and nursing, while men dominate fields STEM-related, creating stereotypical curricula.

The inequality also affects **leadership** within the academic field. Despite the high female participation in the academic environment, men continue to occupy the great majority of leadership roles, both in administrations or in student collectives.

Finally, it was brought to the attention that even something so subtle as the choices of the **language** that is used in the educational setting perpetuates inequality. For instance, the frequent use of the masculine pronouns to address the class can have the effect of making the female component feel invisible and excluded, and also reinforce a culture where the male experience is the default.

CYPRUS

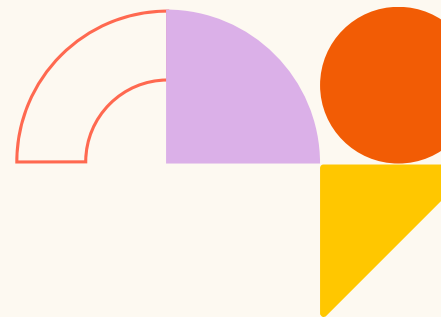
Context

Communities in Cyprus face significant challenges when it comes to gender equality. With a score of 60.9 out of 100, Cyprus has been ranked 20th in the Gender Equality Index of the European Union (Gender Equality Index 2024).

Inequality is evident in the content of the **educational materials**, indeed, the current curriculum does not adequately address gender issues, and the level of participation.

Recommendation

There is a clear need for a comprehensive reform of school **curricula** to integrate gender-sensitive perspectives through an intersectional lens. This should reflect the diverse realities of all women and girls, including victims of gender-based violence and those from migrant backgrounds, who are often excluded from mainstream education and policy despite facing higher risks of femicide, rape, and other forms of violence and discrimination. In parallel, **awareness-raising campaigns** should be launched to challenge stereotypes and promote inclusive, equitable educational environments for all students.



➤ ITALY

Context

The Italian education system continues to reflect the deeply rooted and persistent gender-based inequalities. Despite all the effort, there is still a strong **gender-based association of the academic fields**, leading women to be underrepresented in the STEM-related ones. Even educational material and the whole structure of the **curricula** frequently lack gender-equal perspective, on the contrary, often they reproduce stereotypes. In addition to this, the academic environment **reflects the labour market and current political scenario**: the positions of greater visibility and decision-making power in the student representation and leadership are male, discouraging women to take on roles of responsibilities.

Recommendation

To address these inequalities, Italy recommends a comprehensive and **cross-sectoral approach**. This includes making mandatory modules on gender-quality and violence prevention in every level of the education system. Moreover, it is necessary to introduce a series of initiatives to promote women's participation in STEM fields, such as targeted scholarships and mentoring programs that can connect women with passionate of these fields. It is also important to address, starting from the educational environment, the female representation in roles of leadership by introducing gender quota to ensure women's participation in decision-making contexts.

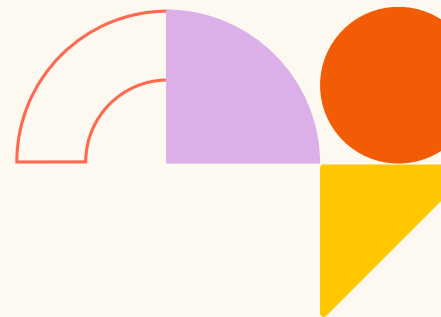
➤ SWEDEN

Context

Despite all the progress made on improving the gender equality policy, Sweden still has to face persistent challenges common in most Europe, for instance, the underrepresentation of **women in STEM** fields. Although girls typically outperform boys academically and have higher rates of university enrollment, strong gender segregation in educational choices continues to shape a gender-divided labor market. While Sweden's gender equality index is high, disparities persist in power, influence, and economic equality, with men holding more leadership positions and women earning less, partly due to more part-time work and higher rates of unpaid care work. Initiatives like the **Gender Mainstreaming Approach** aim to integrate gender equality into all policy-making to address these systemic issues, including those contributing to gendered educational choices.

Recommendation

For this reason, Sweden underlines the importance of continuing to implement **targeted inclusion strategies**, extending and focusing them to the objective of increasing female participation in technical and scientific sectors within both education and employment, to ensure that young women are encouraged and supported in pursuing careers in STEM.



ROMANIA

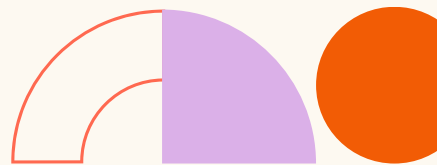
Context

In Romania, gender equality remains insufficiently addressed within the formal education system. Although a 2020 UNICEF study revealed that 92% of Romanian youth would like to discuss gender equality in school, only 25% of students in pre-university education benefited from sex education in 2022, offered as part of the optional subject “health education”. The lack of structured and **mandatory modules** on gender roles, stereotypes and prevention of gender-based violence limits the potential of education as a tool for social and cultural change.

Recommendation

To address this problem, Romania suggests the introduction of educational modules on gender equality, gender roles, stereotypes and the prevention of gender-based violence in the mandatory curriculum, a public policy absolutely necessary for preventing gender discrimination and gender based violence, for promoting equal rights, for increasing trust and autonomy among young people.

Moreover, the significant underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions, followed by the reluctance of all political parties towards the introduction of **quotas**, brought Romania to propose the **testing of a public policy pilot** aimed at promoting equal participation in youth and decision-making structures through adoption of gender quotas or balance measures in student councils, student organizations, youth advisory councils. It could potentially demonstrate the benefits of the quota system as a way to balance voices in the decision-making process, but also by creating role models, encouraging girls to get involved in politics and civic engagement and break the circle of 'lack of experience', one of the main arguments used against promoting women to leadership positions.



Cross-cutting analysis

Recommendations from the partners

The partners demonstrate a shared understanding of the need to **integrate gender equality education into the formal curriculum**. For instance, Romania and Italy both propose the introduction of mandatory modules on gender quality, gender roles, and the prevention of gender-based violence. These measures aim not only to inform on the challenges, but also to shape cultural change starting in the educational system.

Another shared concern regards the promotion of **women in STEM** fields, priority for Sweden, Italy and Cyprus. Countries proposed target initiatives such as scholarships, mentoring programs, and inclusion strategies to encourage young women to challenge traditional gender academic divisions by pursuing scientific and tech studies.

To address the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, Romania and Italy, propose the introduction of **gender quotas** or balance measures in student decision-making structures. According to the partners, this would serve both a pragmatic purpose, by making space for women's voices to be heard; and a symbolic one, by creating visible role models that could gradually challenge the status quo.

Cross-cutting recommendation

Bringing together insights and experiences from four different countries, has made it possible to identify shared challenges and outline a set of common recommendations to address gender equality in education.

First, it is crucial to reform the curricula via the introduction of **compulsory modules** on gender equality and violence prevention at all levels of education. A measure that aims to raise awareness by informing, but also challenge stereotypes, and promote respect and inclusion from a very early age.

A further step involves offering students a diverse education by **revising the syllabi**, increasing the visibility of female authors, scientists and leaders, or, for instance, addressing that the limited presence of women is not due to a lack of talent or contribution, but rather to systemic barriers. This effort should go beyond the content itself: schools and educators should also be encouraged to adopt **inclusive teaching practices** and use gender-sensitive language, ensuring that the learning environment does not reinforce gender-biased narratives. Lastly, to address gender imbalance in representation and decision-making, it is crucial to support and actively promote **female leadership** within student councils and governance structures, helping young women to develop confidence and experience that can be later reflected in the labour market, and making sure that their voice is heard in decision-making spaces as active participants whose contributions shape environments that directly affect their lives.



Gender, Health & Reproductive Rights

Many European countries share common issues in granting access to sexual and reproductive health services, making young women and vulnerable groups most affected.

Sexual education in schools remains a taboo subject and is therefore either underprioritized or actively opposed. As a result, programs are often weak, underfunded, or entirely absent, undermining prevention efforts through information and education.

Access to **safe and affordable abortion services** remains limited with a high prevalence of conscientious objection among medical staff, often leading to healthcare migration that is not accessible or affordable for vulnerable groups. **Modern contraception** is also often inaccessible, especially for young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Women living in rural areas face additional barriers, including the lack of transportation to medical facilities. Overall, services related to women's health and reproductive rights are rarely designed to be youth-friendly. Cultural taboos, regional disparities, and inadequate legal protections further worsen young women's access to essential care, including mental health support.



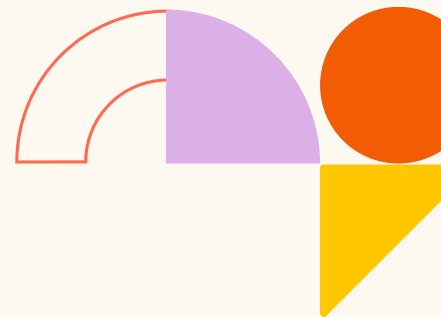
CYPRUS

Context

Despite the legal progress made, including the decriminalisation of abortion in 2018, many doctors still refuse to perform the procedures by declaring themselves as conscientious objectors, even when legally permitted. This puts women at **risk of surpassing the legal timeframe** of 12 weeks, as they often need to be placed on a new waiting list for another doctor appointment. **Maternity care** also remains limited, as the 22-week maternity leave introduced in 2024 is still considered insufficient to fully support the physical and mental recovery of new mothers.

Recommendation

In case the doctor refuses to perform the procedure for non-medical reasons, they should be obliged to immediately inform the patient of another competent doctor in order to guarantee prioritised access to the service within the legal timeframe. Additionally, Cyprus proposes the extension of the already existing maternity leave to up to 1 year, to reflect the time needed for the care of a newborn child.



➤ ITALY

Context

Young women in Italy continue to face significant barriers in accessing essential health services. Although a **territorial network of counseling** centers exists, they have been progressively weakened and remain unevenly distributed across the country. Sexual and reproductive health is still heavily influenced by cultural taboos and by an inconsistent implementation of the Law 194 for the voluntary termination of pregnancy, since in some regions, over 60% of doctors are objectors.

Meanwhile, the **mental health emergency** is intensifying, especially among young women, but the service network is fragmented and difficult to access.

Recommendation

The existing network of counseling centers represents a **key infrastructure** that needs to be strengthened through funding, trained personnel, an inclusive approach, and also through afternoon openings and digital services for young people.

At the same time, it is crucial to provide adequate **prevention** at an early age making relationship and sex education an integral part of school curricula, with a clear focus on rights, consent, gender equality, and mental health.

Lastly, there is a clear need for a **national mental health plan** that should include permanent psychological support services in schools and counseling centers.

➤ SWEDEN

Context

Sweden ensures strong protection of health and reproductive rights through progressive legislation, comprehensive SRHR education, and guaranteed access to contraception and abortion services up to 18 weeks of pregnancy. Building on a longstanding commitment to these rights, Sweden has established itself as a global leader in SRHR development cooperation, with policies that prioritize equitable healthcare access, gender equality, and targeted support for vulnerable populations.

Recommendation

There is a broad consensus in Sweden in favour of preventing unwanted pregnancies through the use of birth control. The primary goal is not to reduce the number of abortions, but rather to ensure that all children who are born are wanted. Statistically, the number of abortions follows the overall number of pregnancies. Compared to other Nordic countries, Sweden has a relatively high abortion rate and a low number of young parents, even though the pregnancy rate in relation to the total population is largely similar across the region.

In this context, the Swedish government should reduce the number of young parents.



This can be addressed by improving **awareness** of contraceptive use, and by making sure that **legislation** supports access to abortion services for young people, including after 18 weeks of pregnancy.

For **healthcare personnel**, **prenatal consultation sessions** should be used as an opportunity to identify unwanted pregnancies and to provide information about the possibility of voluntary abortion.



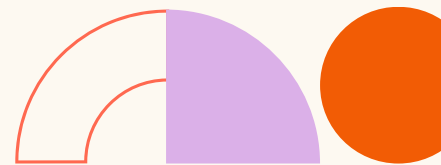
ROMANIA

Context

Youth-friendly services related to sexual and reproductive rights, mental health and gender issues are almost entirely absent in rural and small urban areas. Even in bigger cities, such services remain limited and are typically available only where strong and active non-governmental organisations operate, reflecting a significant dependency on **NGOs initiative** in the **absence of public services**.

Recommendation

It is considered crucial to initiate a public policy aimed at developing **community centers** with integrated **counseling services** that can provide information, psychological and legal counseling in an accessible, confidential, respectful, and non discriminatory way. Youth-friendly health services should be tailored to the specific needs of young people. These centers could be hosted by local municipalities and operate through partnerships with public institutions and other local actors, with funding coming from the local budget and/or from the governmental funds specifically allocated for the implementation of the national youth strategy.



Cross-cutting analysis

Recommendations from the partners

Across different national contexts, partners share several priorities when it comes to gender, health, and reproductive rights. There is a clear recognition of the importance of accessible, **youth-friendly services** that are **rights-based**, inclusive, and sensitive to the specific needs of young people. Countries like Italy and Romania emphasise the role of counseling centers as a key entry point for health and psychological support. Italy focuses more on strengthening its existing network through increased funding, extended hours, and trained personnel; while Romania calls for the creation of community-based centers that provide integrated legal, psychological, and informational services in a non-discriminatory and confidential manner.

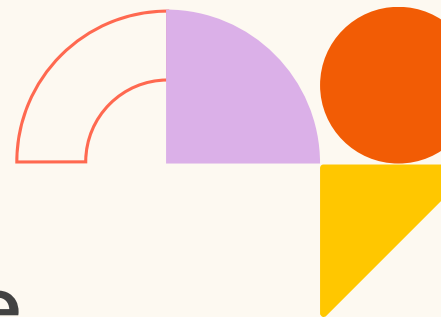
Another common theme is the importance of early prevention and education. Italy highlights the need to introduce relationships and sexuality in school curricula, with a focus on rights, consent, gender equality, and mental health. Similarly, concern about early and unwanted pregnancies are present in the Swedish context, where broad public consensus supports the use of contraception as a preventive tool.

A more legal and procedural concern is raised by Cyprus, where access to abortion can be compromised when doctors refuse to perform the procedure for non medical reasons. In such cases, information should be instantly provided to the patient ensuring access to abortion within the legal timeframe. Sweden pushes for legislation that supports access to abortion services for young people, including after 18 weeks of pregnancy.

Despite the national differences, from service delivery models to legal frameworks, the partners share the need for a **systemic, well-funded, and inclusive approach**.

Cross-cutting recommendation

To face the issues in granting access to sexual and reproductive health services to women, it's required an immediate and systemic action. **Universal access** to youth-friendly, gender-sensitive sexual and reproductive health services must be guaranteed as a baseline standard, with a particular attention to accessibility, confidentiality, and inclusiveness. These services must be available in all regions ensuring **territorial coverage**, and adequately funded. In parallel, **psychological support** should be extended in both schools and community settings to respond to the growing mental health crisis. Addressing regional disparities means investing in localised and community-based care models that ensure equal access regardless of geography or socio-economic status. Finally, **legal protection** must be reinforced to prevent medical conscientious objection from obstructing timely and safe access to abortion services. When a doctor refuses to provide care for non-medical reasons, clear options must be placed to guarantee access within the legal timeframe.



Gender & Climate Change

Climate change has a disproportionate impact on women. **Overconsumption**, driven by targeted advertising and patriarchal norms, pressures women into unsustainable consumer habits that reinforce a cycle of unnecessary consumption, fueling climate change and pollution.

In many regions of the world, longer distances to access water due to climate-related scarcity increase women's **exposure to gender-based violence**. These issues are often overlooked, especially from a Western perspective, where the effects of climate change don't look like this yet. A gender-just climate response must address these inequalities and decolonise the dominant narrative by including women in environmental policy and decision-making.



CYPRUS

Context

Cyprus faces a unique combination of environmental, social and political challenges, shaped by its geographical location and ongoing political division. Being in the eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus is a **climate change hotspot**, facing rising temperatures, prolonged droughts and threats to its biodiversity and water resources. In economic and energy terms, the country's dependence on **mass tourism** and fossil fuels complicates the just transition to green energy and climate neutrality. Women in Cyprus from all communities have been active in addressing the abovementioned challenges, playing crucial roles in peacebuilding and reconciliation, environmental and social grassroots movements. Even though Cyprus has a poor record in including women in environmental and social policies, their organised presence and action are well documented. The **National Strategy on Gender Equality** approved by the Council of Ministers in 2024, aims at horizontal gender mainstreaming in government policies, including climate and environmental policies. The Strategy mentions six recorded actions aimed at integrating gender considerations in environmental policies, including "rural development, environment, climate change, energy and transport.". The specific goals include enhancing the **visibility of rural women** and women in agriculture, developing **gender-sensitive transport systems** and recognising the **gender impact** of climate and energy crises. While this is a positive first step in policy, a major gender gap still exists, as gendered injustice in national policies overall is likely to go hand in hand with climate injustices, such as energy poverty, lack of access to food and more exposure to the effects of climate change. In 2023, the energy poverty indicator for women was 18.1 per cent, while for men it was 15.3 per cent. When discussing the Cypriot employment rates, it is important to note that poverty of women and disadvantaged groups remain challenges to overcome within the Cypriot economy. Young people, third-country nationals and women experience significant difficulties within the labour market, resulting in a gender pay gap above EU average.



This poses women and people from marginalized communities at higher risk of not being able to mitigate the rapid impacts of climate change, including wild fires, droughts, water scarcity, and energy poverty. To achieve a feminist climate policy more research is needed that fully takes gender disaggregated data into consideration particular to the national context.

Recommendation

To achieve gender equality within the climate change context, equal access to training and resources must be prioritised by developing targeted programmes that provide **technical education in renewable energy**, financial support mechanisms and leadership development opportunities for women, particularly in rural and marginalised areas. Climate policies must also adopt a **gender-responsive design**, ensuring that women are meaningfully included in policymaking and implementation phases to reflect diverse societal needs and mitigate gender disparities. Promoting women-led energy communities and supporting women in setting up, organising and running energy community initiatives can address both climate and gender inequalities, creating a more resilient and inclusive climate policy in Cyprus. Also, bicomunal energy communities in Cyprus present a transformative opportunity to foster collaboration between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot women, which could drive inclusive solutions and serve as a platform for **peacebuilding**. Indeed, the creation of feminist policies focused on climate and energy justice is the only way forward for Cyprus.

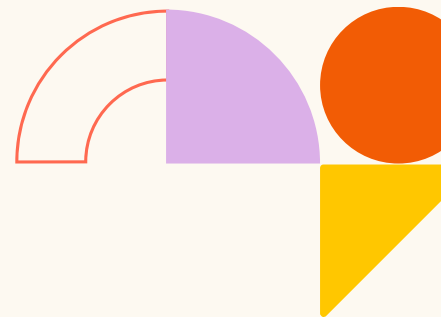
➤ ITALY

Context

The impacts of the climate crisis are not felt equally across the population, they affect men and women in different ways and they burden more on women. In sectors such as agriculture and tourism, where employment is seasonal and precarious, women face a **higher risk of job loss** as a result of extreme climate events. During environmental emergencies, the responsibilities of **caregiving** within families and communities increase significantly, a burden that continues to fall disproportionately on women. Natural disasters also intensify existing inequalities, leaving women more exposed due to **reduced access to essential resources** and support services. Furthermore, women remain significantly **underrepresented** in environmental decision-making spaces at both national and local levels, limiting the inclusion of gender-sensitive approaches in climate adaptation strategies.

Recommendation

It is crucial to integrate the gender perspective into the National Energy and Climate Plans and into local adaptation strategies, making **gender impact assessments** mandatory for every measure adopted. Additionally, dedicated **funding** should be introduced to support the active participation of young women in ecological transition projects, such as energy communities, circular economy programs, and renewable energy projects. To further strengthen inclusivity, the creation of **youth and gender advisory bodies within the relevant Ministries** would help ensure that young women have a role in shaping environmental policy.



➤ SWEDEN

Context

In 2022, Sweden continued its focus on integrating gender equality into environmental policies through initiatives like a **Nordic cross-sectoral program** and the implementation of gender-impact assessments. Although specific legislative actions were not detailed for 2022, government efforts were geared towards gender-mainstreaming climate policies, ensuring that both women and men participate in and benefit from the green transition. Reports highlight the need for more gender-sensitive approaches to climate action, emphasizing the distinct and disproportionate ways the climate crisis affects women and marginalized communities.

Recommendation

To promote gender equality in the context of climate change, Sweden should enhance women's participation by creating conditions that ensure the participation of women in shaping policies, taking part in negotiations, and participating in decision-making processes related to climate action. It's also crucial that climate funding and development assistance are used to advance gender equality through measures like education and training. Moreover, Sweden should make **climate-gender-conflict** in its engagement and development assistance. Furthermore, support for women's organisations working on climate issues should be strengthened by increasing funding opportunities and adopting more flexible funding mechanisms to meet their specific needs.

➤ ROMANIA

Context

In Romania, the intersection of gender and climate change is gaining increasing attention, particularly in the context of rural communities. Women, especially in rural areas, where 46% of the population lives, are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change due to their roles in agriculture, household responsibilities, and caregiving. In urban areas, issues related to air quality, extreme temperatures, lack of green spaces and poorly adapted infrastructure disproportionately affect women, since they are responsible for taking care of children and they are the main users of public transportation. However, gender perspectives remain largely underrepresented in environmental and climate-related policies. Moreover, there is a **lack of data and political interest** in understanding and addressing the challenges faced by women. This lack of recognition, both in the data and in the involvement of women, sets back the development of effective public policies and long-term solutions.



Recommendation

As a first step, it's mandatory to start the collection of **gender-disaggregated data** showing how women are affected by climate change and also to conduct research on how climate change affects domestic and care work which often disproportionately falls on women. Further on, it's crucial to increase **women's participation** in local administrations and in consultation groups so that their voices are heard and their needs are taken into account and also to integrate the gender perspective into climate policies and adaptation plans.

Cross-cutting analysis

Recommendations from the partners

All countries agree on the need to systematically integrate a gender perspective into climate policies, with a particular emphasis on inclusive decision-making, targeted funding, and institutional initiatives that ensure women's participation. A shared priority is the collection and use of **gender-disaggregated data** as a foundation for evidence-based policymaking, as highlighted by Romania, while Italy and Cyprus stress the importance of mandatory **gender impact assessments** and **gender-responsive policy designs** at both national and local levels. Sweden and Cyprus underline the importance of promoting environments for women's leadership, with tailored training, financial support, and the strengthening of women's organisations. Moreover, the proposals from Italy and Sweden emphasise the role of **climate financing** and **youth engagement**, calling for gender and youth advisory bodies with flexible funding mechanisms. Cyprus introduces a unique dimension by linking gender equality and climate action to peacebuilding efforts through bicomunal energy communities, suggesting that climate policy can serve as a platform for broader social cohesion. While each country reflects its specific context, there is a shared understanding that climate justice cannot be achieved without gender justice, and that concrete, inclusive, and intersectional approaches must be included in the transition.

Cross-cutting recommendation

To try to achieve a gender-just climate transition, gender must be fully mainstreamed in both adaptation and mitigation strategies, making sure that all climate policies are designed through a gender lens. Not only women's participation in green sectors and decision-making bodies must be actively increased, but also local and women-led climate initiatives need direct funding and institutional support. Finally, **targeted education and campaigns** must challenge gendered patterns of consumptions, dismantling the market logic that pressures women into overconsumption.



Conclusions

The policy recommendations presented in this brief emerge from the combined process of dialogue held during the **Politik Her International Forum** and from the **desk research** carried out in Sweden, Romania, Italy and Cyprus. This joint effort has made it possible to ground the proposals both in the lived experiences of young women and in the evidence collected through national analyses. The recommendations cover three main areas: education, health and reproductive rights, and climate change. They converge on the urgent need for systemic reforms that integrate gender perspectives into curricula, ensure universal access to youth friendly health and reproductive services, and embed gender justice into climate strategies. These priorities are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, and together they contribute to strengthening democratic legitimacy, social equity and resilience. To move from commitments to tangible change, European and national institutions must dedicate adequate resources, put in place effective accountability mechanisms, and acknowledge young women not only as beneficiaries but also as key actors of transformation. By turning these shared recommendations into action, Europe can take decisive steps towards building more inclusive, sustainable and gender equal societies.





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