Chapter Six

The Impact of Targeted Interventions on Political Empowerment and Gender Stereotypes Among Young Women and High School Students in Slovenia

Andrej Naterer
University of Maribor, Slovenia
andrej.naterer@um.si

Miran Lavrič
University of Maribor, Slovenia
miran.lavric@um.si

This chapter aims to evaluate the impact of targeted interventions conducted under the project 'Empowering Women in Active Society (EWA).' These interventions included implementing a comprehensive educational program for the political empowerment of women, workshops for high school students, and developing an online tool and materials for women interested in political engagement or pursuing a professional career in politics. We assessed the effects of these interventions through a quasi-experimental study using a separate sample pre-test-post-test design. The pre-test included surveys and focus groups; the latter was conducted with 30 young women in three groups and 37 high school students in four groups. Surveys were conducted both before and after the EWA activities. Comparative analyses of the pre-test and post-test groups revealed that most indicators measuring political engagement and gender stereotypes did not differ statistically significantly between the two groups. Furthermore, the observed statistically significant differences were predominantly in the undesired direction. On the other hand, participants from both target groups expressed very high levels of satisfaction with EWA activities. The implications of these results are discussed.

Keywords: women's empowerment, political engagement, gender stereotypes, high school students, pre-test and post-test design

Introduction

Including women in politics and pursuing gender equality is one of the central themes within the social and political space of the numerous democratic countries in the 21st century. After Slovenia gained independence in 1991, significant strides were made in promoting gender equality, yet still more remains to be done in promoting gender equality and active inclusion of women in politics. This chapter examines the impact of the project EWA – Empowering Women in Active Society, with particular emphasis on their perceptions before and after the execution of project activities.

To establish a solid basis for the results presented at the core of this chapter, a review of key elements from historical context, legislative framework, political participation, and challenges women face in Slovenian politics is needed. Regarding the historical context, women's political participation in Slovenia is rooted in the broader socio-political changes in the region, particularly Yugoslavia. During that period, women were encouraged to participate in the workforce and political life. However, traditional gender roles persisted, limiting the extent of their political influence (Rener, 1985; Ramet, 1999). With the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, Slovenia faced the challenge of integrating gender equality into its new political framework. The initial years of independence saw limited female representation in political institutions, thus reflecting broader societal attitudes towards gender roles (Antić Gaber, 2002). Until 2000, the situation remained relatively unchanged, but since then, Slovenian women's political representation has improved, with gender quotas increasing the number of women in elected positions and changing attitudes towards women as leaders (Antić Gaber, 2019).

A suitable legislative framework was particularly important, and Slovenia has implemented several legislative measures to promote gender equality in politics. The Constitution of Slovenia guarantees equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of gender (Republic of Slovenia, 2023, p. 7):

> At the national level, the principle of equality before the law is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (RS), and gender equality legislation includes, inter alia, the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act (amended in 2019), the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2008), the Protection against Discrimi-

nation Act (2016) and the Act Ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2015).

Additionally, Slovenia remains invested in these issues by ratifying numerous international conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, according to numerous authors, one of the most significant legislative measures remains the introduction of gender quotas. According to Lukšič (2010), for example, the 2006 Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men mandates that at least 40% of candidates on electoral lists must be women, and this system has been instrumental in increasing representation of women in political bodies. Indeed, studies have shown that introducing quotas has led to a significant increase in the number of women elected to the National Assembly and local councils (Krašovec & Johannsen, 2016). For instance, the percentage of women in the National Assembly increased from 13.3% in 2004 to 36.7% in 2018.[1] With Nataša Pirc Musar, Slovenia got the first woman president in 2022. Yet, despite these gains, women remain underrepresented in higher political offices. The number of women holding ministerial positions and serving as mayors is still relatively low, highlighting the need for continued efforts to promote gender equality at all levels of political decision-making (Antič Gaber & Kovačič, 2014).

One of the primary obstacles could be attributed to the persistence of traditional gender norms and stereotypes. According to Lukšič (2010), these societal attitudes often discourage women from pursuing political careers. Additionally, Antić Gaber (2002) describes the political culture in Slovenia as exclusionary, with male-dominated networks and practices that marginalise women, with the lack of mentorship and support for female politicians further exacerbating these issues. Another significant challenge appears to be the work-life balance. The demands of political life, combined with traditional expectations of women's roles in the family, create an additional burden for women politicians, deterring them from entering or remaining in politics (Krašovec & Johannsen, 2016).

Based on the recognition of the importance of these issues, continued legislative efforts, societal change, and support for women politi-

[1] https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking

cians are visible within Slovenia, all striving towards gender equality in politics. Currently, there are various initiatives addressing challenges faced by women in politics. Due to the specific focus of this chapter, we will concentrate solely on the programs and approaches relevant to the project EWA. Current key initiatives in Slovenia include:

- Gender mainstreaming was introduced into Slovenian national legislation through the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act in 2002. It presents a key legislative framework for promoting gender equality in various sectors, including politics (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022)
- National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030, a program which is part of Slovenia's legislative and policy framework to promote gender equality. It includes initiatives that support women's participation in various sectors, including politics (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.)
- Gender quotas for elections. These were implemented to ensure a minimum representation of women in political bodies (United Nations, 2023)
- Support for non-governmental organisations (NGOS) through development aid, including initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in decision-making processes (Republic of Slovenia, 2024)

Current Interventional Programs and Projects within the EU

The inclusion of women in politics has been a focus of various interventions and projects across Europe. These aim to address gender disparities in political representation and empower women to participate actively in political processes. Initiatives include the European Women's Lobby,[2] Women Political Leaders,[3] and Parity Democracy Project. Similar initiatives are also found at the level of EU member states and other countries within the region, such as the Political Mentoring Programme by the German Women's Council (European Women's Lobby, 2017), Forum 50%[4] from the Czech Republic, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF, 2021) or the 50/50 Campaign by Women

[2] https://womenlobby.org
[3] https://www.womenpoliticalleaders.org
[4] https://padesatprocent.cz

for Election from Ireland.[5] These often include interventions targeting a macro level of women's inclusion, for instance, by advocating for policy changes (e.g. lobbying for legislative reforms such as gender quotas) and organising awareness campaigns, all with positive results. However, these projects often also include -micro-level interventions, and due to the specific nature of the EWA project, these present a priority in our current review.

A review of the reports mentioned above shows that women's reluctance to actively enter politics often stems from self-reported incompetence and a perceived lack of necessary skills. These findings have been consistently supported by numerous studies, and there is now a broad recognition among scholars, politicians, and activists for the need for capacity-building interventions. Based on this recognition, the projects mentioned above have offered numerous activities to their women participants, with the best results attributed to:

1. *Training and capacity building* (e.g. workshops on leadership skills and public speaking),
2. *Mentorship and networking* (e.g. by pairing aspiring women politicians with experienced mentors to provide guidance),
3. *Peer learning and exchange programs* (e.g. job shadowing).

Support for the importance of these elements is strong. For instance, CLGF (2021) explored the role of mentoring in enhancing women's political involvement, highlighting several key aspects and successful practices of mentoring programs. According to their report, mentoring, particularly its face-to-face format, goes beyond traditional guidance to encompass a transformative model focused on building solidarity, mutual learning, and long-term relationships. This approach aims to foster personal and professional growth, social change, and political advancement. However, mentoring can be additionally strengthened in combination with other practices, most notably (1) *collaborative learning* (e.g. group mentoring sessions that help build skills and confidence by allowing mentees to share experiences and work on projects together) and (2) *learning by doing* (e.g. shadowing and participation in public engagements, which enhance visibility and practical knowledge). Another illustration can be provided by the Fawcet Society (2019). Focusing on developing women's political leadership in the

[5] https://5050parliament.co.uk

UK, their report evaluates the impact of interventions such as training programs, networking opportunities, and advocacy campaigns. Apart from crucial political reforms and the promotion of cultural change, the report recommends establishing formal mentorship programs, support networks, and capacity-building initiatives, all essential for empowering women in politics. The report also stresses that when striving towards the political activation of women, an individual approach to their needs and capacities is necessary to realise their full activation and potential.

These reports collectively provide robust evidence supporting the effectiveness of various interventions in enhancing women's involvement in politics. They highlight a multifaceted approach that includes capacity building, mentorship, advocacy, and policy reforms to create an enabling environment for women's political participation.

The Current Study

The current study is undoubtedly comparable to the projects and programs mentioned above. However, it is also unique since it is, to our knowledge, the only study using a quasi-experimental approach to assess the impact of interventions focusing on improving political and civic participation. In this respect, project EWA rests on two general assumptions, namely that targeted interventions can positively influence:

1. women's activation and empowerment in the sphere of political and civic participation and,
2. sensitisation of Slovenian youth in recognising and actively mitigating gender stereotypes within the sphere of political and civic participation.

These assumptions are structured through the following specific sub-assumptions, namely:

1. Targeted interventions have the potential to positively influence women's perceptions and self-assessment of skills needed within the sphere of political and civic participation.
2. Targeted interventions have the potential to positively influence the motivations of women for political and civic participation.
3. Targeted interventions should be based on the provision of knowledge, skills, and other tools to address the reproduction of be-

havioural patterns fostering gender inequality and to actively support women's political and civic participation.

4. Interventions should include a plethora of approaches and methods (e.g. mentoring, job shadowing, workshops, online toolkits), enabling the targeting of specific issues at the individual level and providing a basis for proper alignment of project goals with uncovered issues.

The main objective of the current study is to evaluate the impact of targeted interventions conducted within the EWA project. These interventions included implementing a comprehensive educational program for the political empowerment of women, workshops for high school students, and developing an online tool and materials for women interested in political engagement. The project was based on a three-phase approach. The first phase focused on the analysis of the current situation among young Slovenian women and youth regarding political and civic participation. This was executed in the form of a pre-test among participants, and the results were used to develop specific interventions that targeted issues identified within the pre-test. The second phase was dedicated to the execution of the following interventions:

1. Series of roundtables with national women politicians intended to bring active politicians closer to project participants.

2. Series of workshops on gender mainstreaming for state officials, with the main aim to raise awareness on integrating gender perspectives into all stages of policymaking, program design, implementation, and evaluation.

3. Online course on gender mainstreaming with the main aim to provide online access to the topics related to gender mainstreaming with particular focus on (1) promotion of equality, (2) improvement of political effectiveness, (3) enhancement of social justice, and (4) capacity building for political and civic participation.

4. A series of mentoring opportunities in the form of job shadowing with national women politicians or visits to the national parliament and related institutions.

5. The online toolkit (EWA online platform) as a main information and communication hub.

The successful execution of these interventions enabled the begin-

ning of the third phase, namely, testing the results. This phase was conducted in the form of a post-test, with the main goal of assessing the impact of the project interventions among participating women and youth.

Method

Project EWA had a quasi-experimental design based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the purpose of this chapter, we will focus on survey results and focus groups.

Surveys

The project was based on four surveys, divided into pre-test and post-test of two target groups:

1. Pre-test survey of high school students.
2. Pre-test survey of young women.
3. Post-test survey of high school students.
4. Post-test survey of young women.

Four questionnaires were created based on the literature review, focusing mainly on the major obstacles that prevent young women from playing more active roles in politics and public life. Several questions were also dedicated to measuring existing gender stereotypes related to politics. Many of these stereotypes were measured indirectly through differences in answers between men and women. The questionnaire also included questions regarding political and civic participation, political activity, and political efficacy. Besides repeated questions from pre-test surveys, post-test surveys also included questions on the respondents' satisfaction with the EWA activities.

Both pre-test surveys were administered via the 1KA online application between March 1st and March 31st, 2023. All young women participating in the project ($n = 72$) were invited to participate in the survey, and all completed it. However, due to a high dropout in this target group, the post-test was completed by only 20 young women. On the other hand, 328 high school students completed the pre-test survey, and some students joined EWA activities in later stages, therefore making the post-test sample even larger ($n = 358$). Additional information about the samples and analytical procedures is provided in the results section of this chapter. Post-test surveys were conducted in June 2024 after all interventive activities with participants were conducted.

Focus Groups

Complementary to the survey project testing, focus groups with representatives of young women and high school students were also included. This method enabled a deep insight into the perceptions and opinions of participants. It facilitated the development and fine-tuning of activities, particularly the development of the women empowerment training program, workshops for high-school students, and an online toolkit.

During the pre-test phase, three focus groups were conducted with 30 young women and 4 with 37 high-school students. Each focus group was facilitated by one trained moderator (who moderated the discussion) and at least one assistant (who took notes and oversaw the recording process). Audio recordings were transcribed, and the transcriptions were coded and categorised according to the project proposal and EWA guidelines for the focus groups.

Results

Within this section, we present the results from pre- and post-test surveys within two subsamples: high school students (Study 1) and young women with political potential (Study 2). To provide a deeper insight into the developed interventions, we also include some results from the focus groups conducted in the context of the pre-test.

Results from Focus Groups

The results of the focus groups can be categorised into four topics:

1. Regarding the 'Evaluation of the situation on the political and civic participation of women in Slovenia,' results show predominant perceptions that there are no significant problems with women's political participation at the local level. However, problems arise at the national level, where, for example, gender quotas fail to function effectively. In addition, gender stereotypes are perceived as particularly strong and persistent in the sphere of politics.

2. Regarding the 'Main obstacles in the area of female political and civic participation,' traditional roles and persisting stereotypes appear as dominant obstacles. Societal pressures, particularly through media and social media, are also perceived as strong and crucial barriers.

3. Regarding the 'Self-evaluation of one's abilities and skills in this area,' personal traits, lack of motivation (e.g. lack of willpower),

and capacity (e.g. skills) appear as dominant factors hindering women's participation.

4. Regarding the 'Perceptions and suggestions on how EWA project could contribute to relevant issues of female participation,' participants expressed a desire for the provision of relevant knowledge (e.g. political information workshops), mentoring and networking opportunities (e.g. job shadowing) and various forms of capacity building (e.g. public speaking workshop).

These findings, along with other results from a pre-test, were used in the development of interventive activities and approaches to their execution.

Study 1: High School Students

The analysis of results for high school students was based on the comparison of relatively large pre-test ($n = 328$) and post-test ($n = 358$) samples. Since not all respondents who filled out the post-test questionnaire also completed the pre-test, the analysis follows the logic of a separate sample design. As Table 6.1 shows, the two samples were very similar in terms of socio-demographic structure, which makes the comparisons of the observed variables relatively valid.

This study's main statistical analytical tool was an independent samples t-test, which also included comparative analyses of means and standard deviations. T-tests were used to establish the statistical significance of differences in the pre-test and post-test groups' sample means. Additionally, analysis of 95% confidence intervals for mean values, crosstabulations, and frequency tables were used to analyse and present the results. All observed variables utilised 1 to 5 pro-trait scales, where a value of 1 indicated the lowest possible presence of a measured concept and a value of 5 indicated the highest.

Most of the relevant results can be discerned from Table 6.2, though some of them are further elaborated in subsequent analyses. Table 6.2 presents mean values with standard deviations for all 33 variables measuring different aspects of political interest, engagement, and attitudes. We also added information about the statistical significance of the difference in pre-test and post-test sample means. This information is crucial as it indicates whether there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test groups, infering that this difference might at least partially be due to the exposure to applied in-

TABLE 6.1   Basic Demographic Characteristics of the Sample of High School Students

Category	Item	Pre-test		Post-test	
		n	%	*n*	%
Gender	Female	236	72.0	252	70.4
	Male	81	24.7	91	25.4
	Other	11	3.4	15	4.2
Mother's educational level	Primary school	39	12.5	42	12.5
	Vocational or technical secondary school	21	6.8	32	9.6
	Secondary school	58	18.6	71	21.2
	Higher vocational college	3	1.0	2	0.6
	University-level education: bachelor degree	99	31.8	103	30.7
	Higher than bachelor degree (MA degree, spec.)	50	16.1	53	15.8
	Master in Science	21	6.8	18	5.4
	Doctorate of Science	20	6.4	14	4.2
Type of work settlement	Rural	133	40.7	148	41.9
	More rural than urban	33	10.1	40	11.3
	In between	48	14.7	41	11.6
	More urban than rural	45	13.8	42	11.9
	Urban	68	20.8	82	23.2

terventions. The first important finding from Table 6.2 is that, in most cases, mean values did not change statistically significantly. Out of 33 applied measures, only 10 showed significant changes. The second finding, which is rather surprising, is that in most of these 10 cases, the change was not in the desired direction.

For example, our results show that the respondents within the post-test sample, compared to those from the pre-test sample, were less interested in social, cultural, and environmental issues, as well as issues of equal opportunities for women and men. Furthermore, the post-test group reported significantly lower levels of political engagement in terms of attending future elections, sharing socially relevant messages via social networks, or visiting websites or social media profiles of political parties or movements. Some of the gender stereotypes were also significantly more present in the post-test group. This includes increased agreement with the statement that men are generally better suited to be political leaders than women and that a woman appears less feminine if she loudly defends her views.

TABLE 6.2   Means and SDS for All Included Variables Relating to Political
Participation and Attitudes, High School Students

Question	Test	n	$\bar{x}$	SD
To what extent are you personally interested in politics?	(a)	318	2.87	1.19
	(b)	348	2.83	1.14
Approximately how much time per week on average do you spend monitoring politics or current events?	(a)	316	2.54	1.50
	(b)	349	2.35	1.55
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Economy.	(a)	309	2.66	1.12
	(b)	345	2.66	1.14
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Corruption.	(a)	304	2.78	1.26
	(b)	338	2.67	1.26
To what extent do you follow the following topics: International politics.	(a)	308	2.87	1.29
	(b)	347	2.74	1.19
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Culture.**	(a)	312	3.08	1.21
	(b)	347	2.83	1.12
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Social issues and policies.*	(a)	309	3.09	1.17
	(b)	345	2.90	1.12
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Environmental issues.**	(a)	310	3.22	1.26
	(b)	346	3.01	1.24
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Issues of equal opportunities for women and men.**	(a)	311	3.52	1.32
	(b)	346	3.18	1.23
Signed the petition ('live' or 'online').	(a)	306	3.46	1.10
	(b)	330	3.46	1.07
He was present at demonstrations and protests.	(a)	304	2.56	1.15
	(b)	335	2.39	1.09

Continued on the next page

While the described changes were statistically significant, it should be stressed that they were still relatively small. For example, agreement with the statement that a woman appears less feminine if she loudly defends her views increased from 7 per cent in the pre-test to 12 per cent in the post-test group.

The above-mentioned statement is particularly interesting because the difference between the pre-test and the post-test group occurred only among girls (see Figure 6.1 on p. 147).

This might suggest that encountering many examples of women in politics through EWA activities led some girls to conclude that this type of engagement does not align with their ideas about femininity. This no-

TABLE 6.2   *Continued from the previous page*

Question	Test	n	$\bar{x}$	SD
Contacted politicians.	(a)	306	2.04	1.01
	(b)	341	1.92	0.95
Boycotted the purchase of certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons.	(a)	285	2.47	1.08
	(b)	319	2.39	1.09
Sent or shared a message via social networks that related to a current social problem.**	(a)	303	2.87	1.22
	(b)	335	2.53	1.18
Visited the website or social media profile of a political party or movement.**	(a)	307	3.19	1.24
	(b)	330	2.91	1.23
Participated in volunteer activities.	(a)	306	3.25	1.21
	(b)	332	3.17	1.14
Participated in the activities of non-governmental organizations (youth, student, artistic, sports …).	(a)	303	3.36	1.23
	(b)	335	3.30	1.14
If there were parliamentary elections next year and you would have the right to vote, would you participate?**	(a)	311	4.12	1.15
	(b)	366	3.84	1.11
To what extent do you think the political system in Slovenia allows people like you to influence politics?**	(a)	289	2.70	0.89
	(b)	326	3.11	0.94
How would you rate your general knowledge of politics and political events?	(a)	295	2.45	0.91
	(b)	305	2.35	0.89
And how capable do you feel or able to participate in politics?	(a)	289	2.42	1.06
	(b)	299	2.30	1.07
How likely do you think it is that you would run for some political office in the future?	(a)	296	1.9	0.89
	(b)	299	1.85	0.93

tion is further supported by the finding that the difference between the pre-test and post-test groups regarding the belief that men are generally better suited for politics than women occurred only among girls.

It should be noted that, on average, girls are substantially less likely than boys to accept either of the two statements measuring gender stereotypes in politics. This relationship has not changed. However, it is interesting to see that interventions aimed at breaking gender stereotypes might even have the opposite effect.

The third and crucial finding is much more positive in terms of the effectiveness of the observed interventions. Namely, our results show that the high school students in the post-test group were much more

TABLE 6.2   *Continued from the previous page*

Question	Test	n	$\bar{x}$	SD
Obstacles to participation in politics: I am not confident enough.	(a)	290	2.59	1.29
	(b)	287	2.70	1.32
Obstacles to participating in politics: I don't want to be so exposed to the public.	(a)	289	3.14	1.35
	(b)	286	3.28	1.32
Obstacles to participation in politics: I have insufficient knowledge about politics.	(a)	289	3.44	1.25
	(b)	292	3.48	1.30
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because it would be difficult to reconcile political and family life.	(a)	279	2.68	1.19
	(b)	284	2.74	1.21
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because you are immediately labeled as a dirty politician or dirty politician.	(a)	271	2.98	1.36
	(b)	282	2.91	1.34
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because I am not interested in politics.	(a)	287	3.31	1.45
	(b)	281	3.40	1.42
Politics is a dirty business that an honest person prefers to avoid.	(a)	288	2.88	1.12
	(b)	285	2.95	1.17
In general, men are better suited to be political leaders than women.**	(a)	289	1.80	1.28
	(b)	284	2.12	1.25
If there were more women in politics, things would be better.	(a)	271	3.13	1.24
	(b)	281	3.09	1.16
Children are likely to suffer if the mother is employed and still in political office.	(a)	286	2.34	1.24
	(b)	279	2.49	1.23
A woman appears less feminine if she loudly defends her views.**	(a)	283	1.55	1.08
	(b)	287	2.01	1.21

NOTES   Row headings are as follows: (a) pre-test, (b) post-test. $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$.

likely to believe that the political system in Slovenia allows people like them to influence politics. This is obviously a very central attitude of political efficacy, which is one of the crucial factors of wider political engagement. Importantly, the difference between the pre-test and the post-test group was, in this case, quite substantial. For example, the share of those who think that the political system in Slovenia allows people like them to influence politics to a large or very large extent was only 15 per cent in the pre-test group. This increased to as much as 35 per cent in the post-test group (see Figure 6.3).

Furthermore, as Figure 6.4 clearly shows, this increase was particularly strong among girls. Specifically, the mean value increased by 0.49
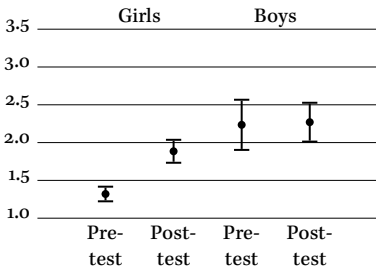
FIGURE 6.1   Agreement with the Statement That a Woman Appears Less Feminine if She Loudly Defends Her Views
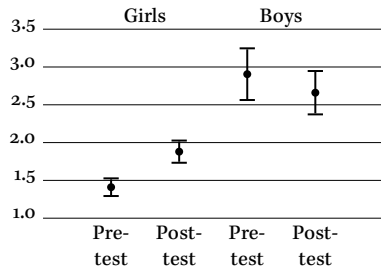

FIGURE 6.2   Agreement with the Statement That Men Are Generally Better Suited for Politics Than Women
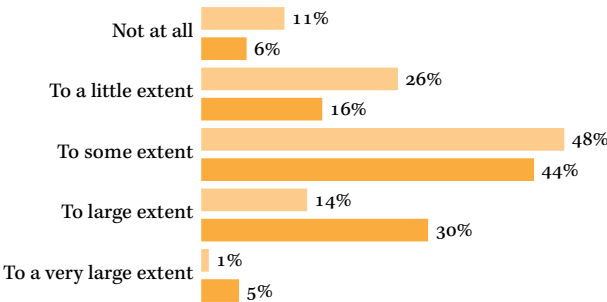

FIGURE 6.3   Political Efficacy among High School Students: Comparing the Pre-Test and the Post-Test Sample (light – pre-test, dark – post-test)
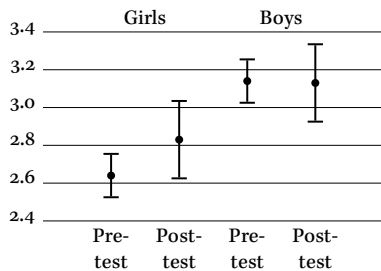
FIGURE 6.4

Gender Differences in Political Efficacy among High School Students: A Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Samples

points (from $M_{pre-test}$ = 2.64 to $M_{post-test}$ = 3.13) among girls, compared to an increase of only 0.31 points (from $M_{pre-test}$ = 2.82 to $M_{post-test}$ = 3.13) among boys. This is a very encouraging result from the women's political empowerment perspective.
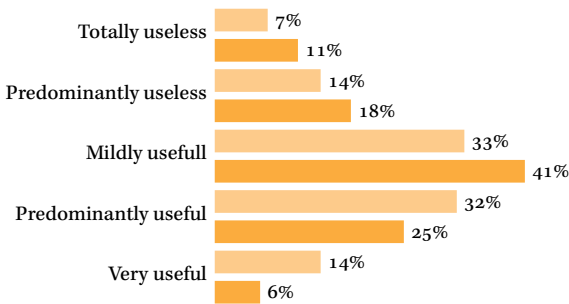
FIGURE 6.5   Gender Differences in Perceived Usefulness of the EWA Activities, only
              Post-Test Sample (light – woman, dark – man)

Another encouraging finding is that the respondents in the post-test group found the EWA activities predominantly applicable on average ($M_{post-test}$ = 3.19, SD = 1.11). Furthermore, as evident from Figure 6.5, satisfaction was much higher among girls than boys. As much as 46 percent of girls found the EWA activities predominantly or very useful, compared to only 31 percent of boys.

To conclude, many of the findings presented might raise doubts about the effectiveness of the EWA activities. Most of the statistically significant results indicate lower political engagement and an increased presence of gender stereotypes in politics.

However, there are also some optimistic results. Most importantly, EWA activities were generally well received by the participants, particularly girls, with almost 80% finding the activities at least mildly useful. This is crucial since girls were the main target group of the intervention.

Additionally, the significant increase in the perception that the political system allows people like them to influence politics is a positive outcome that highlights the potential of EWA activities to foster political efficacy and engagement. This may be a crucial indicator for long-term political engagement. If young girls and boys believe that people like them can effect change, they will likely engage politically later in life.

Study 2: Young Women

The analysis of results for young women with political potential compared a relatively large pre-test sample (n = 72) with a smaller post-test sample (n = 20), focusing on those who participated in at least one EWA

TABLE 6.3   Basic Demographic Characteristics of the Sample of Young Women

Category	Item	Pre-test		Post-test	
		n	%	*n*	%
Educational level	Primary school	1	1.4	0	0.0
	Secondary school	19	26.4	1	5.0
	University-level education: Bachelor degree	34	47.2	8	50.0
	Higher than bachelor degree (MA degree, spec.)	14	19.4	8	40.0
	Master in Science	4	5.6	1	5.0
Type of work settlement	Rural	20	27.8	4	20.0
	More rural than urban	14	19.4	5	25.0
	In between	7	9.7	2	10.0
	More urban than rural	5	6.9	2	10.0
	Urban	26	36.1	7	35.0

activity. There was a significant dropout rate among women who initially signed up and completed the pre-test. Additionally, some women joined later and only completed the post-test, necessitating a separate sample design for the analysis.

Table 6.3 compares the socio-demographic structures of both samples, showing a high level of similarity in settlement type. The gender distribution remained consistent, with each sample including one respondent who identified as 'other' while all other respondents were women. However, there was a significant difference in age structure: the average age was 28.18 years in the pre-test group and 37.65 years in the post-test group.

This age difference is also reflected in educational levels. The post-test group had a significantly higher proportion of women with tertiary education compared to the pre-test group. Only 5% of the post-test group had less than tertiary education, compared to 28% in the pre-test group. This discrepancy may help explain the high dropout rate, suggesting that EWA activities might be too demanding or less interesting for participants with lower educational levels.

As with the high school students, the primary statistical analysis tool used was the independent samples t-test, which included comparative analyses of means and standard deviations. T-tests were employed to determine the statistical significance of differences in sample means between the pre-test and post-test groups. Additionally, analyses of 95% confidence intervals for mean values, crosstabulations, and frequency

TABLE 6.4   Means and SDS for All Included Variables Relating to Political
Participation and Attitudes, Young Women

Question	Test	n	$\bar{x}$	SD
To what extent are you personally interested in politics?**	(a)	71	3.79	0.827
	(b)	19	2.95	1.177
Approximately how much time per week on average do you spend monitoring politics or current events?	(a)	70	4.11	1.814
	(b)	19	3.74	2.207
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Economy.	(a)	69	3.61	1.074
	(b)	19	3.26	1.046
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Corruption.*	(a)	69	3.55	1.132
	(b)	19	2.84	1.068
To what extent do you follow the following topics: International politics.*	(a)	70	3.84	1.030
	(b)	19	3.16	1.167
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Culture.	(a)	70	3.73	1.006
	(b)	19	3.32	1.157
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Social issues and policies.*	(a)	70	4.24	0.731
	(b)	19	3.74	0.933
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Environmental issues.	(a)	67	4.04	0.928
	(b)	19	3.79	0.976
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Issues of equal opportunities for women and men.*	(a)	68	4.37	0.809
	(b)	19	3.58	1.170
Signed the petition ('live' or 'online').	(a)	70	4.40	0.891
	(b)	19	3.95	1.268
He was present at demonstrations and protests.	(a)	69	3.13	1.097
	(b)	19	2.68	1.108

Continued on the next page

tables were used to analyse and present the results. All observed variables utilised 1 to 5 pro-trait scales, where a value of 1 indicated the lowest possible presence of a measured concept and a value of 5 indicated the highest.

Most of the relevant results can be discerned from Table 6.4, though some are further elaborated in subsequent analyses. Table 6.4 presents mean values with standard deviations for all 33 variables measuring different aspects of political interest, engagement, and attitudes. Additionally, we included information about the statistical significance of the differences in pre-test and post-test sample means. This information is crucial as it indicates whether there is a statistically significant

TABLE 6.4   *Continued from the previous page*

Question	Test	n	$\bar{x}$	SD
Contacted politicians.**	(a)	69	3.04	1.322
	(b)	19	2.11	0.737
Boycotted the purchase of certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons.	(a)	70	3.54	1.304
	(b)	19	3.32	1.108
Sent or shared a message via social networks that related to a current social problem.**	(a)	68	4.21	1.045
	(b)	19	3.32	1.108
Visited the website or social media profile of a political party or movement.**	(a)	69	4.3	0.928
	(b)	19	3.00	1.202
Participated in volunteer activities.	(a)	69	4.06	1.083
	(b)	19	3.68	0.885
Participated in the activities of non-governmental organizations (youth, student, artistic, sports …).	(a)	69	4.17	1.057
	(b)	19	3.68	1.157
If there were parliamentary elections next year, would you participate in these elections?**	(a)	69	4.90	0.389
	(b)	19	4.05	1.177
To what extent do you think the political system in Slovenia allows people like you to influence politics?	(a)	70	2.97	0.868
	(b)	18	2.72	1.018
How would you rate your general knowledge of politics and political events?	(a)	71	2.86	0.867
	(b)	17	2.94	0.899
And how capable do you feel or able to participate in politics?	(a)	68	2.81	0.981
	(b)	18	2.67	1.085
How likely do you think it is that you would run for some political office in the future?*	(a)	67	2.76	1.169
	(b)	17	2.12	0.928

difference between the pre-test and post-test groups, suggesting that the difference might be at least partially due to the interventions.

The first important finding from Table 6.4 is that, in most cases, the mean values did not change significantly. Out of the 33 measures applied, only 12 showed significant changes. The second and central finding is that, in all 12 cases, the change was not in the desired direction.

Specifically, women from the post-test sample were less interested in politics as compared to the ones from the pre-test sample ($M_{pre-test}$ = 3.79; $M_{post-test}$ = 2.95). They were also significantly less interested in topics like corruption, international politics, and social policies, as well as in issues of equal opportunities. Furthermore, the post-test group re-

TABLE 6.4   *Continued from the previous page*

Question	Test	n	$\bar{x}$	SD
Obstacles to participation in politics: I am not confident enough.	(a)	69	2.74	1.390
	(b)	17	2.94	1.391
Obstacles to participating in politics: I don't want to be so exposed to the public.	(a)	70	3.39	1.219
	(b)	18	3.72	1.227
Obstacles to participation in politics: I have insufficient knowledge about politics.	(a)	70	3.40	1.184
	(b)	17	3.53	1.328
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because it would be difficult to reconcile political and family life.	(a)	69	2.83	1.236
	(b)	17	3.41	1.278
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because you are immediately labelled as a dirty politician or dirty politician.	(a)	69	3.13	1.316
	(b)	17	3.47	1.068
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because I am not interested in politics. **	(a)	68	2.13	1.268
	(b)	17	3.12	1.616
Politics is a dirty business that an honest person prefers to avoid. **	(a)	68	2.69	1.069
	(b)	17	3.59	0.939
In general, men are better suited to be political leaders than women.**	(a)	69	1.38	0.750
	(b)	17	1.94	1.298
If there were more women in politics, things would be better.	(a)	66	3.50	0.932
	(b)	17	3.65	0.996
Children are likely to suffer if the mother is employed and holds a political function. **	(a)	68	2.07	1.124
	(b)	17	2.94	1.088
A woman appears less feminine if she loudly defends her views.	(a)	70	1.33	0.793
	(b)	17	1.47	1.007

NOTES   Row headings are as follows: (a) pre-test, (b) post-test. $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$.

ported significantly lower preparedness to contact politicians, as well as lower levels of sharing messages related to any social problem via social networks or visiting websites of political parties. Perhaps most surprisingly, the willingness to attend elections also dropped substantially ($M_{pre-test} = 4.90$; $M_{post-test} = 4.05$).

Furthermore, the estimated likelihood of running for political office has declined significantly. This is related to the fact that the perceived obstacle of not being interested in politics increased substantially ($M_{pre-test} = 2.13$; $M_{post-test} = 3.12$).

The decrease in interest in politics is probably related to the increased negative views of politics. For example, the post-test group ex-
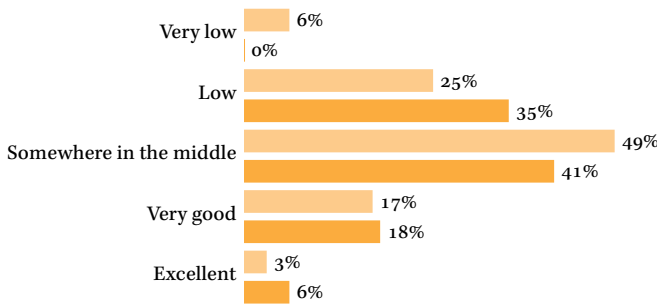
FIGURE 6.6   Self-Assessed Political Knowledge, Pre-Test and Post-Test Sample
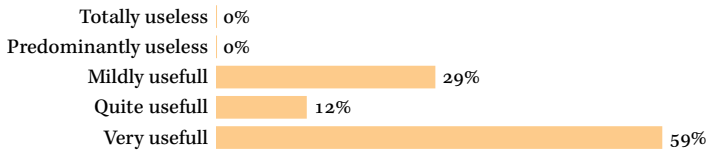(light – pre-test, dark – post-test)

FIGURE 6.7   Perceived Usefulness of the EWA Activities, Only Post-Test Sample

pressed significantly higher agreement with the statement that politics is a dirty business ($M_{pre-test}$ = 2.69; $M_{post-test}$ = 3.59). Additionally, some of the gender stereotypes were significantly more present in the post-test group. This includes increased agreement with the statements that men are generally better suited to be political leaders than women and that children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed and holds a political function. There were some instances of seemingly positive effects from the EWA activities. Although the mean differences were not statistically significant, more detailed analyses suggest that these effects are at least potentially relevant and interesting.

According to the results in Figure 6.6, the share of women rating their political knowledge as very good or excellent increased from 20% to 24%. Additionally, while 6% of women in the pre-test group assessed their political knowledge as very low, there were no such cases in the post-test group.

The third and very important finding is more positive regarding the effectiveness of the interventions. Our results show that respondents in the post-test group generally found the EWA activities very useful ($M_{post-test}$ = 4.29, SD = 0.92).

As evident from Figure 6.7, none of the respondents considered the

interventions to be predominantly or totally useless. Conversely, nearly 60% of respondents rated the EWA activities as very useful.

In conclusion, we must acknowledge that the intervention results did not meet expectations. Most indicators of political interest and engagement showed no significant change after the interventions, and those that did change significantly did so negatively. Women in the post-test group reported lower levels of political interest and engagement and, in some cases, even higher levels of gender stereotypes related to politics.

These findings can be partially attributed to sociodemographic differences between the two samples. The fact that the post-test sample consisted of older and more educated women likely influenced the results. However, additional analyses limited to women aged 25 or older and those with tertiary education did not yield significantly different outcomes.

It is important to note that all participants in the post-test group evaluated the EWA activities positively, with the majority opting for the highest possible grade. This indicates that the quality of activities was more than acceptable and is not the reason for the undesired differences between the pre-test and post-test groups.

We believe the real reason is that political engagement and interest are influenced by a complex set of determinants, which cannot be easily altered by a few workshops or similar activities. Achieving higher gender equality in politics may be better accomplished through other policy measures discussed in the introduction of this chapter.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the EWA project's interventions aimed at promoting political engagement among young women and addressing gender stereotypes in Slovenia. The study uses a combination of educational programs, workshops, and online tools to evaluate these interventions' efficacy through a pre-test-post-test design involving 340 high school students and 21 young women.

Key findings regarding the impact of the interventive activities on the population of high-school students could be summarised in the following points:

  1. Most of the statistically significant results indicate lower political

engagement and an increased presence of gender stereotypes in politics.

2. EWA interventive activities were generally well received, particularly among participating girls, which were the main target group of the intervention.

3. The political efficacy of both girls and boys has increased significantly, which is one of the crucial indicators for long-term political engagement.

With regards to the populations of participating young women, key findings of a current study could be summarized as follows:

1. Somewhat surprisingly, most indicators of political interest and engagement show no significant change or even a negative change after the interventions, which could be at least partially attributed to sociodemographic differences between the two samples.

2. All participants in the post-test group evaluated the EWA activities positively, with the majority opting for the highest possible grade, indicating that the quality of activities was extremely acceptable.

3. There is a notable increase in the share of women rating their political knowledge as very good or excellent.

4. There is a notable predominance of positive perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the interventions, with respondents in the post-test group generally perceiving the EWA activities as very useful.

While our findings largely correspond with positive reports from other initiatives and programs (Fawcett, 2019; CLGF, 2021), these findings must be put into a broader perspective. Firstly, the alignment of positive results reported by the Fawcet Society and CLGF with the results of our study can undoubtedly be attributed to the effectiveness of (1) specific content (e.g. gender mainstreaming) and (2) specific interventive approaches (e.g. mentoring) indicating the strong demand for these interventions. Secondly, our results showing no or even a negative impact should also be considered, partly with regard to the design of the EWA project and partly with regard to the nature of the problem of political and civic engagement among women. Unlike other projects and initiatives, EWA is the only project based on a quasi-experimental,

enabling the detection of both negative and positive impacts of interventive activities. Therefore, it is most likely that this approach enabled us to detect these results, while elsewhere, these findings remained undetected due to different methodology. Lastly, results showing no or even a negative impact could be attributed to the nature of the issue, namely young women's political and civic engagement. There is a general consensus that interventions in this sphere persist as notoriously difficult, and our results show that some elements of the intervention produce positive results while others fail. This indicates that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. We believe the actual reason lies in the fact that political engagement and interest are shaped by a complex array of factors that cannot be easily modified by a few workshops or similar initiatives. Thus, achieving greater gender equality in politics may be more effectively attained through complex policy measures targeting the macro-societal level while offering micro-level interventions to willing individuals.

To sum up, findings from the current study suggest several important conclusions:

1. The interventions, such as educational programs and workshops, significantly enhance young women's self-assessment of their political skills and motivations for civic participation. The provision of targeted knowledge and tools is crucial in fostering these positive changes.
2. Workshops designed for students help sensitise the participants towards gender stereotypes in politics.
3. Mentorship and networking present a crucial approach. Opportunities to pair aspiring women politicians with experienced mentors are instrumental in building confidence and providing practical insights into political careers.

Despite the overall success, the study also comes with several limitations. Firstly, the study's approach has a methodological limitation, particularly regarding the alignment of the samples throughout the project phases. Ensuring that the entire sample of participants from the pre-test took part in both interventions and post-test was a challenge. Improvement in this area would provide better results and insight into mechanisms for improvement. Secondly, there is a limitation regarding the sample size and composition. Modifying the sample by,

for example, including representatives from other populations and diversifying it by including specific sub-samples would enable better fine-tuning of the approach and provide deeper insight into the potential of the interventive activities. Thirdly, there is a limitation of the interventive approach, which included numerous activities targeting several aspects of political and civic participation. Future improvements should avoid the 'omnibus' approach and instead include a selection of methods and approaches, recognising that interventive activities have their limitations and that political and civic participation is influenced by a complex system of factors.

The EWA project's targeted interventions demonstrate significant potential in the political empowerment of young women and the reduction of gender stereotypes among high school students. By addressing both skill development and societal attitudes, the project sets a precedent for future initiatives aiming to achieve gender equality in political participation. Continued efforts, improved mentorship, inclusive educational programs, and sustained online support are essential for building on this foundation and creating a more equitable political landscape.

References

Antić Gaber, M. (2002). Women in Politics in Slovenia's New Democracy: Why so few? In N. Toš & V. Miheljak (Eds.), *Slovenia between continuity and change, 1990-1997: Analyses, documents and data* (pp. 88-102). Edition Sigma.

Antić Gaber, M. (2019). Slovenia: From socialist legacies to legislative gender quotas. In S. Franceschet, M. L. Krook & N. Tan (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of women's political rights* (pp. 699–711). Palgrave.

Antić Gaber, M., & Kovačič, M. (2014). Gender equality in politics: The case of Slovenia. *Journal of Comparative Politics, 7*(2), 45–60.

Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF). (2021). *A review of mentoring programmes for women's political advancement and leadership.* https://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Publications/reports/Mentoring_for_women.pdf

European Institute for Gender Equality. (2022). *Slovenia.* https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/slovenia

European Institute for Gender Equality. (N.d.). *Gender equality in academia and research – GEAR tool: Slovenia.* https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/legislative-policy-backgrounds/slovenia?language_content_entity=en

European Women's Lobby. (2017, 25 October). *Council of German women.* https://www.womenlobby.org/Council-of-German-Women

Fawcett. (2019, 17 December). *Fawcett launches 'Equal Power,' a coalition to transform women's representation.* https://www.fawcettsociety.org .uk/news/fawcett-leads-ground-breaking-campaign-to-transform -womens-representation

Krašovec, A., & Johannsen, L. (2016). Gender quotas in Slovenia: Imple-mentation and effects. *Politics & Gender, 12*(3), 456–482.

Lukšič, I. (2010). *Gender equality in Slovenia: Achievements and chal-lenges.* Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Oppor-tunities.

Ramet, S. P. (1999). *Gender politics in the Western Balkans: Women and so-ciety in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav successor states.* Penn State Uni-versity Press.

Rener, T. (1985). Yugoslav women in politics: Selected issues. *Interna-tional Political Science Review, 6*(3), 347–354.

Republic of Slovenia. (2023). *Guidelines for the mainstreaming of gender equality in development cooperation and humanitarian aid of the Re-public of Slovenia.* https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MZEZ /Dokumenti/stiki-z-javnostmi/Guidelines-for-the-Mainstreaming -of-Gender-Equality-in-Developmen-Cooperation-and -Humanitarian-Aid-of-the-Republic-of-Slovenia.pdf

Republic of Slovenia. (2024, 8 March). *Minister Fajon: Women's participa-tion in decision-making is essential for peace.* https://www.gov.si/en /news/2024-03-08-minister-fajon-womens-participation-in -decision-making-is-essential-for-peace/

United Nations. (2023, 17 February). *Experts of the Committee on the Elim-ination of Discrimination against Women commend Slovenia on wom-en's political and economic participation, ask about Roma women and the representation of girls in science subjects.* https://www.ohchr.org /en/news/2023/02/experts-committee-elimination-discrimination -against-women-commend-slovenia-womens