

## Chapter Ten

# Recommendations for Stakeholders Promoting Women's Political and Civic Participation and Gender Equality

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The EWA project-Empowering Women in Active Society-aims to address persistent gender inequalities and promote women's political and civic activation. The project adopts a holistic approach, targeting young people, especially high school students and women aspiring to political careers, and includes comprehensive educational initiatives and collaborative efforts with various stakeholders. Key findings reveal low political interest among young people, influenced by gender stereotypes, insufficient political knowledge, and fear of public exposure. The project developed interventions in the form of educational manuals, workshops, and online tools to promote gender equality and women's political participation. The project's recommendations presented in this chapter emphasise the integration of gender equality into educational curricula, gender mainstreaming training for public administration, partnerships between NGOs and government, targeted youth engagement programs, gender-focused policies within political parties, positive media representation of women in politics, and supportive legislation by government and policymakers. These recommendations aim to create an inclusive social and political environment where women are empowered to participate fully in democratic and decision-making processes.

*Keywords:* gender equality, political participation, active citizenship, recommendations, youth engagement

### Introduction

The EWA project-Empowering Women in Active Society-was established to address persistent gender inequalities and promote a bal-

anced representation of women and men in politics. Historically, women have been marginalised in social, political, and economic spheres. In Slovenia and globally, men have traditionally had more significant opportunities to participate in public and political life, while women were often confined to private roles. Despite notable progress in recent decades, considerable disparities remain, necessitating targeted interventions to foster gender equality (e.g. Antić Gaber, 2019; Jalušič & Antić Gaber, 2020; Luthar & Trdina, 2015; Mesec, 2020; Popič & Gorjanc, 2018; Ule, 2009, 2010, 2013). As mentioned in previous chapters of the current book, one of the persisting issues regarding women's political and civic participation in Slovenia remains the underrepresentation of women in political positions (e.g. see chapter titled 'Navigating the Path to Gender Equality: A Global Perspective on Women's Rights and the Slovenian Women's Movements'). Despite improvements seen after the 2022 elections, when the first women filled the position of the president of the country, and several other leading political positions were accommodated by female politicians, the issue remains. Although numerous notable scholars are focusing on this topic (e.g. Antić Gaber, 2019; Antić Gaber & Kovačič, 2014; Oblak Črnič & Švab, 2020; Švab 2003) and despite the apparent abundance of knowledge regarding these issues, holistic and successful interventions are scarce.

Within the context of Slovenia, the EWA project stands out in three main areas, namely (1) it adopts a holistic approach to the issues of women's political and civic participation, (2) it focuses on planned interventions, and (3) it provides a methodological approach for testing the project results. Other chapters of this publication provided an in-depth description of these elements.

However, the current chapter is dedicated to the recommendations developed within the EWA project. The main purpose of this section is to provide a general overview of these recommendations, along with their basis in gathered results and possibilities for application in the field.

### **Background to the Recommendations**

The project's main target groups were young people, especially high school students and women aspiring to build a political career or be actively involved in society. These groups were also part of our sample in surveys and focus groups conducted during the project. The adopted tools provided valuable insights into young people's and women's inter-

est in politics, their active involvement, and the importance of gender equality among young people. Another target group were employees in public administration who received guidelines for incorporating the gender aspect into their work and policy formulation. Additionally, we created the EWA manual for secondary school teachers with classroom instructions and a manual for young women navigating their way into politics.

The survey results among high school students showed that only 34.3% of young people were interested or very interested in politics. It is concerning that 25.6% of all respondents do not devote time to educating themselves about current political topics. Participants in the survey also had to assess their general knowledge of politics and current events, with almost half rating it as reasonably good, followed by those who think they have poor knowledge. The respondents were most interested in gender equality, environmental challenges, and issues related to corruption and the economy. Analyses show that in the future, among the various methods of political participation, participants are most likely to resort to signing petitions, participating in elections, and joining non-governmental and voluntary organisations. However, they are less likely to establish contact with politicians or run for political office. Most respondents consider it unlikely (44.6%) or completely impossible (36.1%) that they will run for political office in their lifetime.

We also investigated the reasons why young people, especially women, do not decide to participate in politics actively. From the gathered results, we concluded that the main reasons are insufficient knowledge about politics, lack of interest in politics, fear of public exposure and the derogatory designation of a politician, worries about combining political and family life, and lack of self-confidence. These results were especially valuable for the preparation of project interventive activities and were also considered during the testing phase of the project. The testing results are outlined in the chapter 'The Impact of Targeted Interventions on Political Empowerment and Gender Stereotypes Among Young Women and High School Students in Slovenia.' The authors conclude that project activities generally had a positive impact on the participants, allowing important insights to be drawn from these results. These insights can be used as recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

Gender stereotypes remain one of the key obstacles in achieving desired equality between women and men and stem from established so-

cial norms. They are perceived from childhood in our family environment, workplaces, media, culture, education, among peers, and in the broader society. Stereotypes have a vast influence on our self-image, well-being, and the way we communicate with other people. They also strongly influence whether individuals participate in educational programs, are active at work, or engage more broadly in socio-political activities. Teachers and parents are key players in raising adolescents' awareness of gender stereotypes, traditional roles, and gender equality. In doing so, teachers and parents must be aware of their conscious and unconscious prejudices, which they can pass on to students or children. It is important to introduce these contents into the school environment, familiarise students with historical and contemporary examples of inequality, and teach them to recognise and address gender stereotypes and prejudices in society. With this in mind, a manual on teaching active citizenship was created for teachers. This manual emphasises gender equality and women's participation in politics, introduces key concepts, and includes three learning modules for teaching. These modules focus on gender stereotypes and gender equality, active citizenship, and women's political participation. Among the important features of the manual are the emphasis on creating a safe and inclusive environment and a clear and coherent framework to understand gender equality. In addition, activities aim to foster critical thinking and active participation. The manual is freely available on the official project's website, [ewa.si](http://ewa.si), together with accompanying interactive learning tools (e.g., quizzes, memory cards, timelines, online workshops, games etc.).

Considering that women are still underrepresented in politics, it is important to understand their limited influence and the challenges they face in formulating policies that affect their lives. Increasing women's political participation is vital to achieving gender equality and improving democratic processes. Lasting change can be achieved through a comprehensive approach that includes education, awareness raising, collaboration with non-governmental organisations, and monitoring progress. To improve women's political participation, it is necessary to educate and raise awareness about gender equality and the importance of active citizenship. Misconceptions about women's involvement in politics often result from gender stereotypes and social prejudices. Generally, stereotypes portray women as sensitive, emotional, and weak, and these traits are usually not associated with political leadership. On the other hand, political leadership is associated

with typically masculine characteristics such as toughness, aggressiveness, or self-confidence. These misconceptions are harmful as they can limit women's participation in politics, make it more difficult for women candidates to be elected, and contribute to gender inequality in politics. To promote gender equality in the political space, we aimed to debunk these misconceptions and encourage greater involvement of women at all levels of politics.

We provided women and girls with various educational opportunities that included content on political processes, gender stereotypes, campaign management strategies, public speaking, media, and networking. In addition, we offered mentoring and networking opportunities with experienced women politicians. This initiative was supported by the notion that decision-makers and experienced politicians who have succeeded in breaking through the glass ceiling must be aware of their role in actively encouraging young women to participate in politics.

As part of the project, we held 30-hour workshops for women and girls who wanted to be actively engaged in the political arena. These workshops tackled topics related to the importance and role of women in politics (with an emphasis on ecofeminism), democratic processes in Slovenia, effective communication (public speaking, social media campaigns, etc.), work-life balance, business etiquette, and similar issues. Moreover, participants had the opportunity to discuss challenges and achievements with prominent women politicians. During the course of the project, the handbook *Pot v politiko* (Path to Politics) was developed (Ljudska univerza Celje, 2024). The handbook is intended primarily for women interested in politics, wanting to upgrade their political knowledge, and looking to better understand political activity. It is designed to explain why the representation of women in politics is crucial and to present the benefits of participating in the political arena. The manual is freely available on the project's website, ewa.si.

It is also essential to strengthen the knowledge of state administration employees who are responsible for effectively including gender aspects in policy making and work. Gender mainstreaming means that gender equality is fundamental in all social, political, and economic factors. In practice, this means that if specific policies and measures are gender-neutral, the results of these policies and measures will have different effects on women and men because they do not consider the particular situations of both sexes from the start. As part of the project,

we prepared guidelines for integrating gender aspects at work and creating policies for employees in the state administration. In addition, we designed an online training course on gender mainstreaming in policymaking for state administration. This course was developed in cooperation with the Administration Academy, an internal organisation unit within the Ministry of Public Administration, and it provides a combination of theory and practice. An additional feature of the course is the final assessment of knowledge, upon which participants receive a completed training certificate. Lastly, we also developed a seminar on gender mainstreaming for the coordinators for equal opportunities and employees of the ministries. The seminar consisted of a workshop on gender mainstreaming in policymaking and a lecture by a renowned Slovenian professor and Nobel prize honouree, Dr Lučka Kajfež Bogataj, who discussed environmental and climate change through a gender lens. With these activities, we aimed to equip state administration officials with knowledge and practical approaches on how to implement gender mainstreaming in policymaking.

The aforementioned guidelines are freely available on the [ewa.si](http://ewa.si) website. They comprise three chapters, combining theoretical knowledge with real-life examples and activities. The first chapter covers basic terminology, explaining the differences between equality, equity, and equal opportunities. The second chapter addresses the differences between sex and gender, as well as gender roles, stereotypes, and discrimination. The final chapter is devoted to gender mainstreaming in policymaking, discussing why it is important, how to successfully implement it, and how to reorganise the work process to include it.

### **Recommendations for Relevant Stakeholders**

Based on our results and in addition to specific recommendations and suggestions within other chapters of this publication, a general set of recommendations for stakeholders to promote gender equality and women's political participation could be offered:

### ***Recommendations for the Educational Context***

Educational institutions should provide a stronger integration of gender equality into curricula. There is a persistent need to develop and implement comprehensive educational programs that address gender stereotypes, gender equality, and political participation. Within this context, interactive online tools and technologies like games and work-

shops could be used since these are familiar to students. At the same time, a set of appropriate and specialised training for teachers should be provided.

This training should provide teachers with knowledge and skills to:

1. recognise and challenge gender stereotypes, and
2. promote an inclusive environment (e.g. as demonstrated in the EWA manual, which offers modules on gender equality, active citizenship, and women's political participation).

This training should be offered in the form of continuous professional development opportunities for teachers, including workshops, seminars, and online courses focused on gender equality and inclusive teaching practices. Establishing peer learning networks where teachers can share experiences, strategies, and resources for promoting gender equality in the classroom would also be beneficial. Moreover, school-wide campaigns and events should be organised to highlight the importance of gender equality and the role of women in politics. This could be done, for example, through thematic weeks dedicated to gender equality. Such events could include debates, exhibitions, and role-playing exercises. Following suggestions gathered within our project, student-led initiatives present great potential within this sphere. Initiatives such as gender equality clubs, where students can plan events, conduct awareness campaigns, and collaborate with local NGOs, would greatly support young women's political and civic activities.

### *Recommendations for the Public Administration*

Within this context, several important areas and numerous possibilities for improving women's political and civic participation arise. The first to mention is gender mainstreaming training. Training sessions for public administration employees should be conducted, with a particular focus on integrating gender perspectives in policymaking. Digital technologies, such as online courses, should be developed in cooperation with relevant partners (e.g. the Administration Academy) to maximise reach and impact. Teaching modules should be customisable to adapt to different departments and levels of government, ensuring relevance and effectiveness. Also, a train-the-trainer approach should be adopted to build internal capacity and ensure the sustainability of gen-

der mainstreaming efforts within public administration. This approach will enable trained individuals to disseminate knowledge and practices within their organisations, creating a multiplier effect and embedding gender mainstreaming into the institutional culture.

Policy guidelines on gender inclusion should be developed with a particular focus on integrating gender issues aspects into everyday work and policy development. Examples of such guidelines are available on the EWA project website and cover terminology, gender roles, and practical steps for gender mainstreaming. These guidelines should be part of comprehensive policy frameworks that provide detailed guidance on incorporating gender perspectives into all policy development, implementation, and evaluation stages. To bolster these frameworks, a repository of best practices and case studies showcasing successful gender mainstreaming initiatives from other countries and sectors should be formed.

Lastly, a system of monitoring and evaluation should be implemented. Such mechanisms ensure continuous improvement and accountability and are key elements of inclusive and democratic societies. Particular focus should be on:

1. regular gender audits, assessing the impact of policies and programs on gender equality and identifying areas for improvement, and
2. performance indicators, following gender equality and integrating results into the overall performance management system of public administration.

### ***Recommendation for Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)***

Within this context, specific partnerships and collaborations should be developed and implemented. Particular focus should be on fostering partnerships between NGOs and government agencies to jointly develop and implement projects that promote gender equality and women's political participation. A multi-stakeholder partnership involving NGOs, government agencies, the private sector, and academia should be developed to leverage resources and expertise for gender equality initiatives. This partnership could be supported by a joint funding basis, securing financial support for large-scale gender equality projects and ensuring sustainability. In addition, mentorship programs should be developed to connect aspiring women politicians with experienced



leaders. These programs should provide support to help build confidence and offer practical guidance on navigating political careers. Structured mentorship programs should have clear objectives, timelines, and evaluation criteria to ensure effectiveness. Since EWA results also show the particular strength of peer mentoring, these mentorships should capitalise on peer mentorship among women at different stages of their political careers, ensuring continuous support and knowledge-sharing.

Strong support for advocacy and awareness should be provided. These campaigns should highlight the importance of women's political representation and challenge existing stereotypes and prejudices, which are cornerstones of an inclusive and democratic society. Grassroots campaigns are particularly important since they engage communities at the local level, raise awareness about gender equality, and mobilise support. In addition, policy advocacy should strive to influence legislation and policies that promote gender equality and women's political participation.

### *Recommendations for Youth Engagement*

Within this context, targeted programs and projects for young women should consist of the following:

1. education programs targeting political education for young women, covering topics such as public speaking, campaign management, leadership skills, and work-life balance, and
2. youth leadership initiatives, encouraging young women to take active roles in student councils, debate clubs, and community organisations.

The design of these programs should strive to enhance women's political knowledge and skills (e.g. workshops covering topics such as public speaking, campaign management, and work-life balance, as demonstrated in the EWA project). Another approach in this area could be to develop internship and fellowship opportunities in political offices, NGOs, and public administration to provide hands-on experience and mentorship. Additionally, political interest among youth should be encouraged and supported:

1. interactive educational tools could be used to make learning about politics engaging and relevant for young people and

2. extracurricular activities, such as debate teams, youth councils, and model government programs that provide hands-on experience in political participation and leadership.

Surveys and focus groups could be conducted to understand the barriers young people face regarding political participation. The results can be used to develop strategies to increase their interest and political involvement. Strategies could include interactive educational tools and engaging extracurricular activities. These strategies should be incorporated into broader support structures within schools and/or communities, with the main aim of encouraging young women to participate in politics. This can include the establishment of clubs, debate teams, and youth councils. A partnership network among youth councils could act as a basis since these councils serve as advisory bodies to local governments, giving young people a voice in decision-making processes.

### *Recommendations for Political Parties*

Within this context, particular emphasis should be devoted to gender issues. Stakeholders should ensure that candidate lists for elections are aligned with gender quotas. This involves not just meeting the minimum requirements but actively promoting the inclusion of women in winnable positions on these lists. It is essential to move beyond tokenism and ensure that women have real opportunities to be elected and make meaningful contributions.

1. implementation of transparent selection processes for candidates, prioritising gender balance and ensuring women's representation in winnable positions should be ensured, and
2. support networks within political parties for women candidates, including mentorship, training, and peer support groups should be developed.

At the same time, an internal system for training and development should be established. Political parties should provide internal training sessions to educate members on gender equality and to develop women's candidates' skills and confidence. Emphasis should be on developing a supportive environment, addressing issues such as work-life balance, mentoring for women in politics, women's civic participation, etc. Here, particular attention should be on:

1. organising capacity-building workshops for women members to enhance their political skills, such as campaigning, public speaking, and policy analysis, and
2. developing leadership programs that promote inclusive leadership styles and address the unique challenges faced by women in politics.

### *Recommendations for Media*

Within the media context, particular emphasis should be placed on promoting a positive representation of women in politics by highlighting their contributions and achievements. This includes addressing gender bias and encouraging balanced and fair coverage of female politicians. This should be a part of broader public awareness campaigns, where media platforms could raise public awareness about the importance of gender equality and the benefits of women's political participation. Two possible venues are:

1. media training programs, offering training programs for journalists and editors on gender-sensitive reporting and the importance of balanced representation, and
2. highlighting role models, regularly featuring profiles and stories of successful women in politics and other fields to provide positive role models.

Media also presents an important potential for public awareness campaigns. Collaborative campaigns with NGOs and government agencies on public awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of gender equality and women's political participation are crucial. Media could present an important platform for collaboration between these subjects, apart from offering unique assets for a functioning democracy and the dissemination of gender-related topics. Media also presents an important context for particularly important technologies for youth. Here, social media platforms could be utilised to engage with the public, share success stories, and promote gender equality initiatives.

### *Recommendations for Government and Policymakers*

The main focus should be on legislation and policy. Legislation supporting gender equality in all spheres, particularly focusing on polit-

ical participation, should be enforced. Particular attention should be on the following:

1. enactment and enforcement of comprehensive gender equality laws that cover political, economic, and social spheres, and
2. policy incentives for organisations that promote gender equality, such as tax benefits, grants, and awards.

At the same time, funding and resources for programs and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and supporting women in politics should be allocated at local, regional, and national levels. Also, national campaigns should be launched to educate the public about gender equality and to encourage women's participation in political processes. Two potential options here are:

1. launching public education programs to increase awareness about gender equality and the benefits of women's political participation and
2. conducting community outreach programs to engage citizens at the grassroots level, encouraging and supporting their involvement in promoting gender equality.

A strong monitoring system should be developed to follow the progress toward gender equality. Currently, Slovenia has numerous active programs and initiatives focusing on gender inclusivity and equality. Therefore, this system should be comprehensive and stationed at the level of governmental organisation. The system of monitoring should:

1. include monitoring of all national gender equality strategies with clear goals, timelines, and accountability mechanisms and
2. include regular reporting mechanisms, tracking progress on gender equality initiatives and publishing findings to ensure transparency and accountability.

By adopting these recommendations, stakeholders can foster a more equitable society where women have equal opportunities to engage in political life and influence decision-making processes. This involves creating an environment where women are empowered to participate fully in political activities, from running for office to being involved

in policy implementation and governance. Combined efforts of stakeholders are essential for dismantling barriers, challenging stereotypes, and building a more inclusive and democratic political environment.

## Conclusion

Gender equality remains a critical issue in Slovenia, reflecting broader global challenges. Despite significant progress in recent years, some disparities persist. These include unequal pay, the feminisation of certain professions, and the underrepresentation of women in politics. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive and sustained efforts across various sectors of society. The EWA project has demonstrated the importance of a holistic approach to promoting gender equality and women's political participation. Through targeted interventions, educational initiatives, and the involvement of diverse stakeholders, the project has made significant strides in raising awareness and empowering women.

The recommendations outlined in this chapter provide a possible roadmap for continued progress. Educational institutions, public administration, NGOs, youth, political parties, media, and government must collaborate to effectively implement these strategies. By integrating gender equality into curricula, promoting positive media representation, enacting supportive legislation, and providing mentorship and training, these stakeholders can create an environment where women are fully equipped and encouraged to participate in political life. Ultimately, achieving gender equality requires a collective effort. By addressing gender stereotypes, providing comprehensive education, and fostering an inclusive political culture, we can ensure that women have equal opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes and leadership roles. The work of the EWA project and similar initiatives highlights the potential for transformative change and the crucial steps needed to build a more equitable society for future generations.

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