PHOENIX

Youth Work for Gender Awareness in the Euro-Mediterranean Context

SYNTHETIC DIAGNOSTIC REPORT

PHOENIX

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

PROJECT SUMMARY

PHOENIX is a KA2 - Capacity building in the field of youth, implemented with the support of Erasmus+ program.

The project **aims** to enhance gender equity and young women empowerment by providing youth workers, peer educators, local organizations and international NGOs, in EU and Mediterranean countries, with new tools and methods, training modules and pedagogical approaches to raise youth awareness on gender-sensitive issues, both within the local communities and at international level.

Therefore, the project answers to the specific objective of the call: anti-discrimination and gender equality.

The work plan is designed to reach logically and efficiently the project objectives and to deliver the expected outcomes and results. The work plan includes the following working packages:

- WP 1: project management and coordination
- WP 2: research – needs assessment
- WP 3: mobility preparation and implementation
- WP 4: organization of workshops
- WP 5: communication and dissemination.

The consortium members are LUNARIA – Italy, JORDAN YOUTH INNOVATION FORUM – Jordan, AGDZ VOLUNTEERS WITHOUT BORDERS – Morocco and OTRA ESCUELA – Spain.

BACKGROUND

Lunaria launched in 2012 a **long-term strategy** aimed to promote gender equality through youth work, within a European and worldwide perspective.

The actors, target groups and beneficiaries of the process were and are young people, youth-social workers, local organizations and NGOs.

This work has brought the organization to explore different sensitive issues within the big umbrella of "gender", as for example gender-based stereotypes, gender role models, gender-based discrimination, hate speech toward individuals and LGBTIQ+ communities, gender-based violence and women empowerment.

Within this strategy, we have already implemented different projects in cooperation with European organizations (as youth exchanges and training courses within the KA1 of Erasmus+ program) and partner countries organizations (as capacity building in the field of youth within the KA2 of Erasmus+ program).

More specifically about the previous KA2s, below are some references of the projects already implemented:

- **2014-2015 JAMBO Young Women Empowerment to Improve Quality of Youth Work and Volunteering in EU and Partner Countries**: aimed to empower youth and social workers from eastern Africa and Europe, by providing them with new tools to favour women participation in short term local and international voluntary service projects.
- **2015-2016 PANDORA'S BOX Young Women, Community Development through EU and LA Cooperation**: aimed to follow up the work already started with Jambo, further developing, in European and Latin American countries, the action and the methodologies already applied in the field of gender equality.
- **2017–2018 STAGED! Struggling Against Gender-based Discrimination through Youth Work in EU and Asia**: aimed to follow up the work started in Jambo and Pandora and aimed to enhance gender equity and young women empowerment in European and South-eastern Asian countries, by developing new tools and methods to favour young women participation and empowerment.
- **2018 – 2020 GAGA Global Action for Gender Awareness:** aimed to enhance gender equity and young women empowerment by providing youth workers, peer educators, local organizations and international NGOs, in European and Partner countries, with new methods, training schemes and pedagogical approaches to raise awareness on gender-sensitive issues.

OBJECTIVES

The project aims to enhance gender equity and young women empowerment by providing youth workers, peer educators, local organizations and international NGOs, in EU and Mediterranean countries, with new tools and methods, training modules and pedagogical approaches to raise youth awareness on gender-sensitive issues, both within the local communities and at international level.

More specifically, the project aims to promote non-formal learning activities, to support the development of youth work in third countries, to foster the testing and launching of schemes and programmes of non-formal learning mobility in the Euro-Mediterranean context.

In order to meet the above mentioned goal, the project foresees to implement the following specific objectives:

- **SO1:** to raise awareness on gender-sensitive topics and on the importance of sharing equal rights and opportunities, for every human being, in European and Mediterranean countries.
- **SO2**: to exchange good practices in the field of gender equity and women empowerment, among civil society organizations.
- **SO3:** to develop youth work methods and tools for the socio-professional development of youth workers and facilitators, in order to further develop their skills and competences for the promotion of gender equity.
- **SO4**: to develop, test and launch a pedagogical approach, training schemes and non-formal learning mobility experiences in order to boost the participating organizations' expertise within the gender framework.
- **SO5:** to enhance the active involvement of young people with fewer opportunities and groups at risk of exclusion, with a specific attention to young women, fostering their active participation in society.

WORK PLAN

The work plan is designed to reach logically and efficiently the project objectives and to deliver the expected outcomes and results.

WP 1: PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION: aims to guarantee the correct development and implementation of the activities as well as the economic efficiency of their planning and management. It includes two partner meetings: Kick off meeting and Evaluation meeting in person and various other online partner meetings.

WP 2: RESEARCH – NEEDS ASSESSMENT: aims to provide a detailed diagnostic of the situation in the participant countries, for what concerns the challenges faced and the needs of youth workers and organizations in terms of methods, tools and pedagogical approaches to raise gender awareness among young people. It includes two phases: the "Youth worker and organization meetings" to hand out the questionnaires to local organizations and youth workers and the "Study phase: diagnostic re-elaboration", where the data and information gathered are going to be elaborated.

WP 3: MOBILITY PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION: aims to share the gender perspective and the existing non-formal education tools used in the different countries, setting the ground for a common understanding; to build the standardized questionnaire to detect the youth workers and associations needs in the local backgrounds; to design a first draft of the pedagogical approach for activities to raise youth awareness on gender-sensitive topics; to create, develop and test a set of new tools and workshops for the upcoming activities; to finalize the design of the synthetic pedagogical approach to be applied in projects and activities aimed to enhance gender equity; to run the final assessment of the tools and workshops tested in the previous steps, finalizing the methodological curricula on gender.
It includes three main activities: the ITC 1: Working methods and diagnostic, the ITC 2: Pedagogical package for youth work, the ITC 3: Evaluation and methods assessment.

WP 4: ORGANIZATION OF WORKSHOPS: aims to raise awareness among local youth workers, peer educators and young people on gender-sensitive topics (overall objective); to train local youth workers and peer educators with tools and methods on gender sensitive topics, to afterwards facilitate workshops targeted to young people (Local trainings); to test and assess the tools and methods created during the second training, contemporarily raising awareness among young people on gender-sensitive topics and therefore creating new opportunities for gender equity (Local workshops).
It includes two main activities: the Local trainings targeted to youth workers and educators and the Local workshops targeted to young people.

WP 5: COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION: aims to ensure ongoing visibility at different levels of project concept, objectives, activities and results; to involve local, regional associations and youth groups in local project activities; to promote and disseminate the shared pedagogical approach for gender equity in the participating countries; to disseminate the methodological curricula on gender to further enhance grassroot and international actions; to create new synergies and cooperation with local organization and communities to implement activities, initiatives and projects to raise gender awareness.
It includes two main activities: the Standard dissemination plan for 21 months and the Follow up, additional measures for dissemination for the remaining 3 months.

CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

The project foresees a combination of **international activities** (3 training courses) to develop non-formal learning methods, new forms of practical training schemes and tools for the socio-professional development of youth workers and trainers and **capacity building activities**. These consist in meetings with youth workers and organizations for the needs assessment and in the implementation of local trainings (targeted to youth workers and educators) and workshops (targeted to young people). The capacity building activities are conceived to strengthen the impact of the raising awareness action on gender at local and regional level.

The diagnostic is meant to gather a consistent number of stakeholders to detect the needs of youth workers and organizations in terms of methods, tools and pedagogical approaches for raising youth awareness on gender-sensitive issues.

Therefore, the pedagogical approach and the workshops to be designed afterwards, are aimed to answer the identified needs.

Moreover, the local activities aim to contribute to the raise awareness among local youth workers, peer educators and young people on gender-sensitive topics, to train local educators with tools and methods for gender sensitization, enabling them to afterwards facilitate workshops targeted to young people, to test and assess the tools and methods created during the second training for a final upgrade.

PROJECT STRUCTURE

KICK OFF MEETING - ITALY: FEBRUARY 2024

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING COURSE 1 -
ITALY: MAY 2024

RESEARCH – NEEDS ASSESSMENT - ALL: JULY 2024 - OCTOBER 2024

Diagnostic: youth workers and organizations meetings - all: July 2024 - August 2024
Study Phase: diagnostic re-elaboration - all: September 2024 - October 2024

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING COURSE 2 -
MOROCCO: NOVEMBER 2024

ORGANIZATION OF WORKSHOPS - ALL: JANUARY 2025 - AUGUST 2025

Local trainings - all: February 2025 - March 2025
Local raising awareness workshops - all: June 3025 - July 2025

INTERNATIONAL TRAINING COURSE 3 -
SPAIN: SEPTEMBER 2025

COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION - ALL: JANUARY 2024 -
DECEMBER 2025

Follow up and dissemination: November 2025 - December 2025

EVALUATION MEETING - JORDAN: DECEMBER 2025

TARGET GROUPS

The project foresees the knowledge development of young people and young women coming from backgrounds with fewer opportunities, who have not finalized the study cycle or have abandoned school at an early age. It will be achieved boosting their participation in local and international activities where they will learn youth work techniques and increase their understanding and/or articulation of gender issues.

The combination of these approaches is conceived to strengthen their skills and competences both from a methodological point of view (also in perspective of the labour market) and from the thematic point of view (becoming more sensitized on the subject and therefore action-makers within their local communities).

NEEDS ANALYSIS

In the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development Goals, the UN sets a great emphasis on the need to empower women and girls for democratic societies, governance, and inclusive sustainable development. However, despite significant progresses in the last decade, gender inequality is still a reality and women, and minority groups face a combination of multiple discrimination, in Europe and worldwide. The Human Rights Watch, World Report 2017 shows how girls and women are still facing restrictive social norms, constitute the majority of the world's poorest and are the group at higher risk of HIV/AIDS and STDs. Role models, stereotypes and prejudices rooted in the cultural behaves and norms lead to early pregnancy, early marriage, machismo, domestic, psychological, sexual and gender-based violence, often most of the cases going un-reported. A consistent number of women is still not financially independent, have scarce access to remunerated labour market and are paid less than men, remaining in a subordinated role in the family and community. Women are under-represented in governments and decision-making bodies even when specific quota are set. Intersectionality is quite wide-spread and in some countries the LGBTIQ+ community faces restrictive laws and persecution.

The widespread pandemic in 2020 consistently contributed to strengthening the gap and the discriminative events, within families, communities and working places.

The above mentioned KA2 project "GAGA Global Action for Gender Awareness" implemented between 2018 and 2020, included a research report, based on the outcomes of the questionnaires collected in all the participating countries for the diagnostic run in 2019. Questionnaires were gathered in Europe, East Africa, Latin America and South-eastern Asia. Thanks to this action it was possible to run the first youth work needs assessment, for what concerns methods and tools promote gender equality, in the different geographical areas. The research report is the result of the analysis of the 738 valid questionnaires delivered in 10 countries (in four continents). These data show that the topics on which the most information is needed are LQBTQIA+ issues and Gender Role Models. Regarding the accessibility to information on gender issues, the 68% of respondents stated it is not too difficult to find general information in their environment, but there is still a big lack of information on the subject in their own native language and of tools to tackle the subject with young people. Among the main challenges faced: gender-based stereotypes, leading to discrimination and violence in some cases, gender pay gap and inequalities inside the labour market for men and women, discrimination towards minorities and hate speech.

All these elements show the urgency to further invest in women empowerment and gender equity, identifying and redressing power imbalances and enhancing their autonomy to better manage their own lives. Moreover, there is the need for more updated information after Covid-19, able to measure the real impact of pandemic on the life of the most vulnerabilised groups. Thus, it's important to get an updated picture of the needs, in terms of youth work techniques and approaches, to tackle the gender' subjects, raising awareness and action among young people and local communities.

CONSORTIUM

LUNARIA - Italy
https://www.lunaria.org/

JORDAN YOUTH INNOVATION FORUM
https://jyif.org/

AGDZ VOLUNTEERS ORGANIZATION
https://agdzvolunteers.com/

OTRA ESCUELA
https://madrid.otraescuela.org/

CHAPTER II – SYNTHETIC COUNTRY REPORTS

ABOUT

The project forecasts the implementation of two specific deliverables at the end of the Work Package 2, Research – Needs Assessment, led by the partner association Otra Escuela: the "D2.1 Synthetic Country Reports" and the "D2.2 Synthetic Diagnostic Reports".

The reports are the result of the desk (D2.1 Synthetic Country Reports) and of the field (D2.2 Synthetic Diagnostic Reports) research implemented during the diagnostic phase, with the support of researchers and youth workers from Italy, Jordan, Morocco and Spain. The information were then processed, fine-tuned and standardized, leading to the current document.

The D2.2 Synthetic Diagnostic Reports is a quantitative and qualitative synthetic report in English showing the needs, in terms of youth work methods and tools to promote gender equality in the participating countries.
The information contained in this report, come from the re-elaboration of the data and information extracted from the questionnaire for the diagnostic targeted to youth workers and educators and from the questionnaire for the diagnostic targeted to young people.

TOOLS AND TIMELINE

The current reports were created thanks to the activities implemented in the previous months within the project PHOENIX.

STANDARDIZED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE DIAGNOSTIC: aimed to detect the youth workers and associations needs in the participating realities. During the international training course held in Italy in May 2024, the consortium chose to create two questionnaires, one targeted to youth workers and one to young people. This, with the purpose to gather different perspectives towards gender-sensitive issues and to combine the youth and educators' experiences for a more structured, solid, and effective diagnostic.

RESEARCH – NEEDS ASSESSMENT: the questionnaires were used during the WP2: Research – Needs Assessment, taking place between July and October 2024. During July and August 2024, the questionnaires were handed out in presence and online by the training' participants who were trained for an efficient management of the diagnostic tools, using non-formal education and participative methods.

DESK RESEARCH REPORT: between July and August 2024, the researchers of the consortium worked on the desk research, gathering relevant information to better contextualize the countries' situation and the gender framework in some specific areas: laws and institutions, education, civil society, religion, and local area background. The reports were then collected and analysed by the researchers' team. These synthetic reports are not conceived to offer an omni-comprehensive picture of the countries' situation, but to share some interesting and useful insights to better contextualize the situation and the outcomes of the diagnostic reports.

DIAGNOSTIC RE-ELABORATION: in September and October 2024, it followed the diagnostic re-elaboration, where the data and information gathered have been processed and elaborated, becoming part of the current deliverables, showing the situation and needs, in terms of policies, approaches, methods and tools to promote gender equality. The two deliverables are very important project milestones because they were afterwards used during the "International Training Course 2: Pedagogical package for youth work" (November 2024 in Morocco). Here, they were used as the starting point to design the first draft of the pedagogical approach for activities to raise youth awareness on gender-sensitive topics and to create, develop and test a set of new tools and workshops for the upcoming activities, the local trainings and workshop part of the WP4: Organization of Workshops (to be held between January and August 2025). In this perspective, the new workshops and the synthetic pedagogical approach designed, were specifically created to address the identified needs highlighted during the research and, for this reason, they are integral part of the bottom-up approach proposed all along the project and tailor made on the local backgrounds' needs.

TARGET GROUP

The deliverables are conceived for a variety of different stakeholders and target groups.

Youth and social workers, peer educators, facilitators and, in general, people involved in the educational activities targeted at young people are the main beneficiaries.

At large, also, their organisations, youth centres, other new associations and NGOs interested in further developing the gender raising awareness action among young people.

CHAPTER III – NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The present analysis is part of the WP2: Research – Needs Assessment and aims to provide a detailed diagnostic of the situation in the participant countries (Italy, Jordan, Morocco and Spain) regarding the challenges faced by the youth workers and the organisations as well as their needs in terms of methods, tools and pedagogical approaches.

The research design was twofold: on the one hand, it aimed to identify the abovementioned elements by delivering questionnaires to youth workers, and on the other hand, it aimed to enhance the results by checking the opinion of young people, who were the target group of the youth workers.

Therefore, the survey covered the perspectives of **224 youth workers** and **341 youngsters** (as distributed below), making it relevant to the project's objectives.

Number of respondents

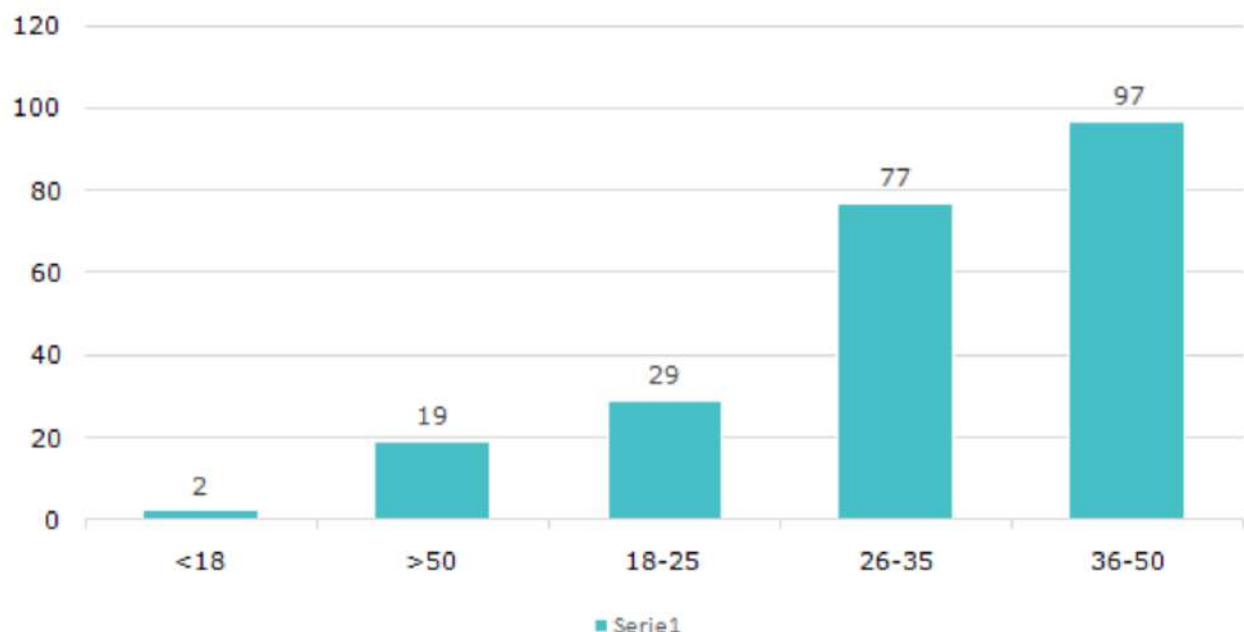| COUNTRY	NO. OF YOUTH WORKERS	NO. OF YOUNG PEOPLE
Italy	45	66
Jordan	51	55
Morocco	67	158
Spain	61	62
Total	**224**	**341**

Given that the research mainly focused on youth workers, the analysis will first focus on them, providing a comprehensive interpretation, followed by several comparisons with the answers received from the young people.

YOUTH WORKERS' PERPECTIVE ON GENDER ISSUES AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

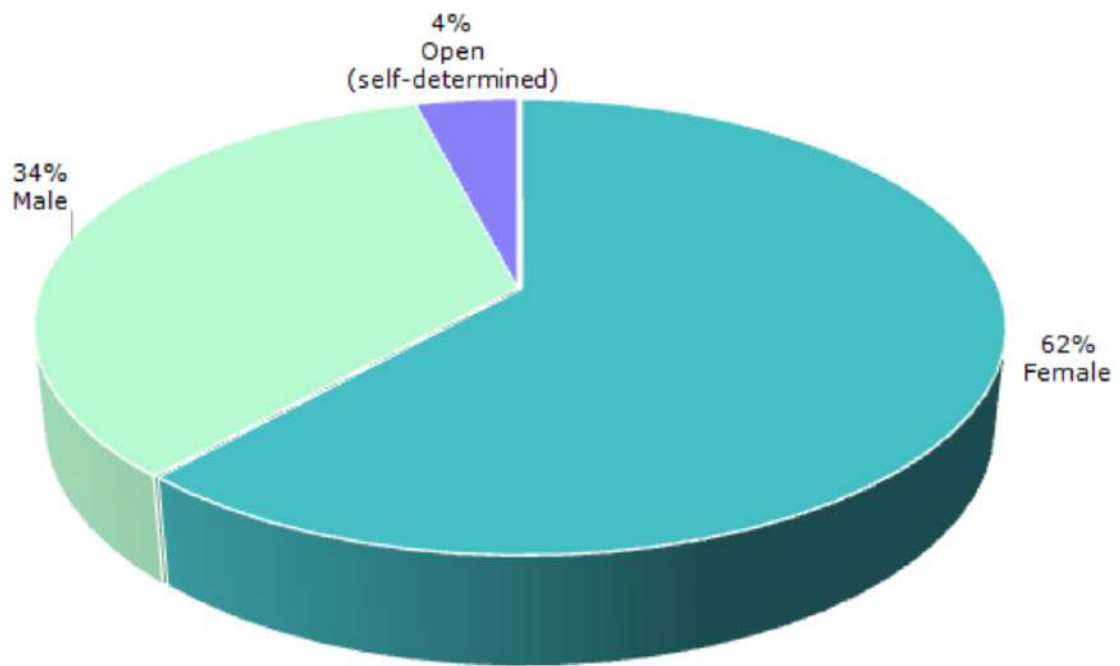## The youth workers' respondent profile – a brief analysis

The study included 224 respondents from four countries, as presented above: 45 from Italy, 51 from Jordan, 67 from Morocco, and 61 from Spain. The survey sample is well-distributed across these countries, which may suggest a diverse representation of youth workers' perspectives and experiences across different cultural and socio-political contexts. The balance in respondent numbers also allows for meaningful cross-national comparisons.

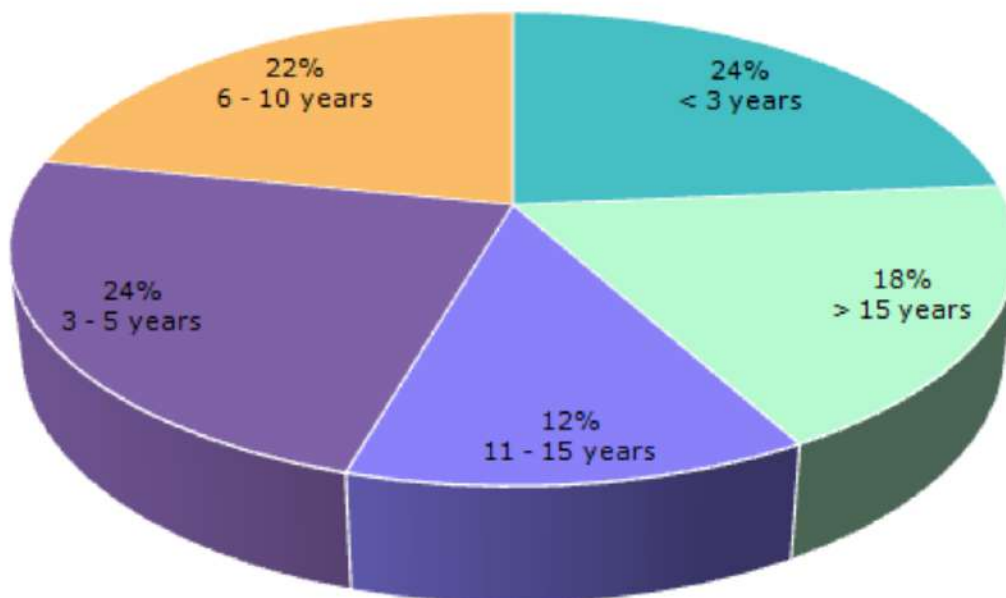### Age of respondents (total) - absolute numbers

In terms of age, the chart suggests that middle-aged adults (26-50 years) represent the majority of respondents, with much lower participation from both younger (<18) and older (>50) age groups. This distribution reflects the nature of the survey's subject, targeting interests, responsibilities, or needs that are most pertinent to people between 26 and 50.

Gender of respondents

4%
Open
(self-determined)

34%
Male

62%
Female

Years of experience in the youth field

22%
6 - 10 years

24%
< 3 years

18%
> 15 years

24%
3 - 5 years

12%
11 - 15 years
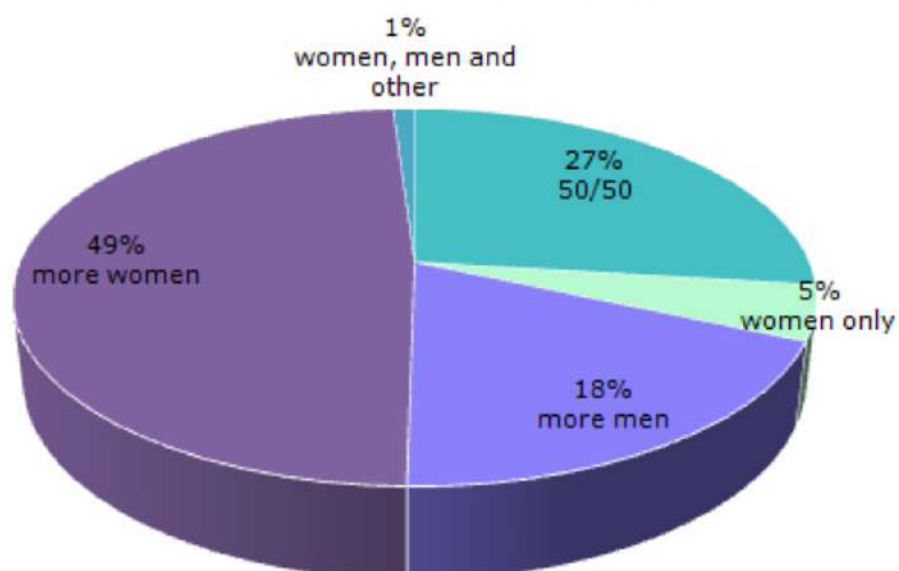
The gender and experience of the youth workers involved in the study highlight its representativity, given the fact that they cover all significant segments. Therefore, we can analyse the various perspectives and provide an insightful needs analysis for Phoenix project.

Gender of their target group

Most of the youth workers have women as beneficiaries, but 18% of respondents work with men or with diverse groups (1%). This proves the potential of the project outputs to be used in various contexts, hence its wide dissemination.

Youth workers' challenges in their daily work

Severity of issues youth workers are facing (mean)

Issue	Mean
No citizenship status	2
Lack of appreciation for their job	3,1
Lack of capacity of writing proposals	3
Lack of knowledge	2,7
Lack of resources	3,35
Lack of participants	2,2
Lack of funding	3,5

The mean value (average) of their rating related to several relevant aspects was calculated to briefly identify youth workers' daily work issues.

As noted above, the biggest struggle is the **lack of funding**, which scored 3,5 out of 5, making it the most significant obstacle in all the contexts analysed.
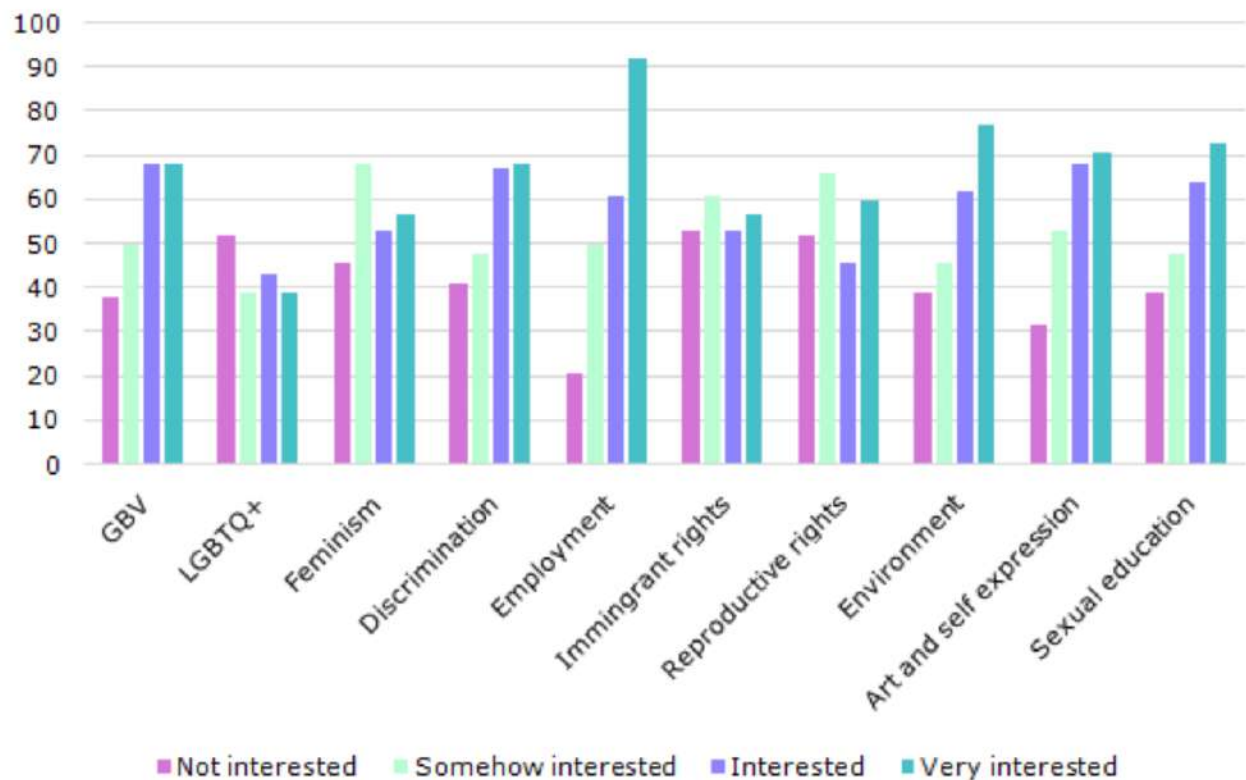
Obviously, this goes hand in hand with the **lack of resources** that comes second and the lack of capacity for writing grant proposals.

For sure, human resources, financial resources or time can all affect youth work's quality and efficiency.

Moreover, the **lack of appreciation** for the job as a youth worker leads to frustration and a lower impact on society.

The study also highlighted the **lack of knowledge** that we aim to address with the new tools and the pedagogical approach to be designed.

Degree of interest of young people various topics

Legend: Not interested | Somehow interested | Interested | Very interested

Several things stood out when it comes to the **topics of interest** for the young people our respondents work with. According to the results above, we can distinguish the high-interest topics in the youth workers' perception: employment, environment and sexual education.
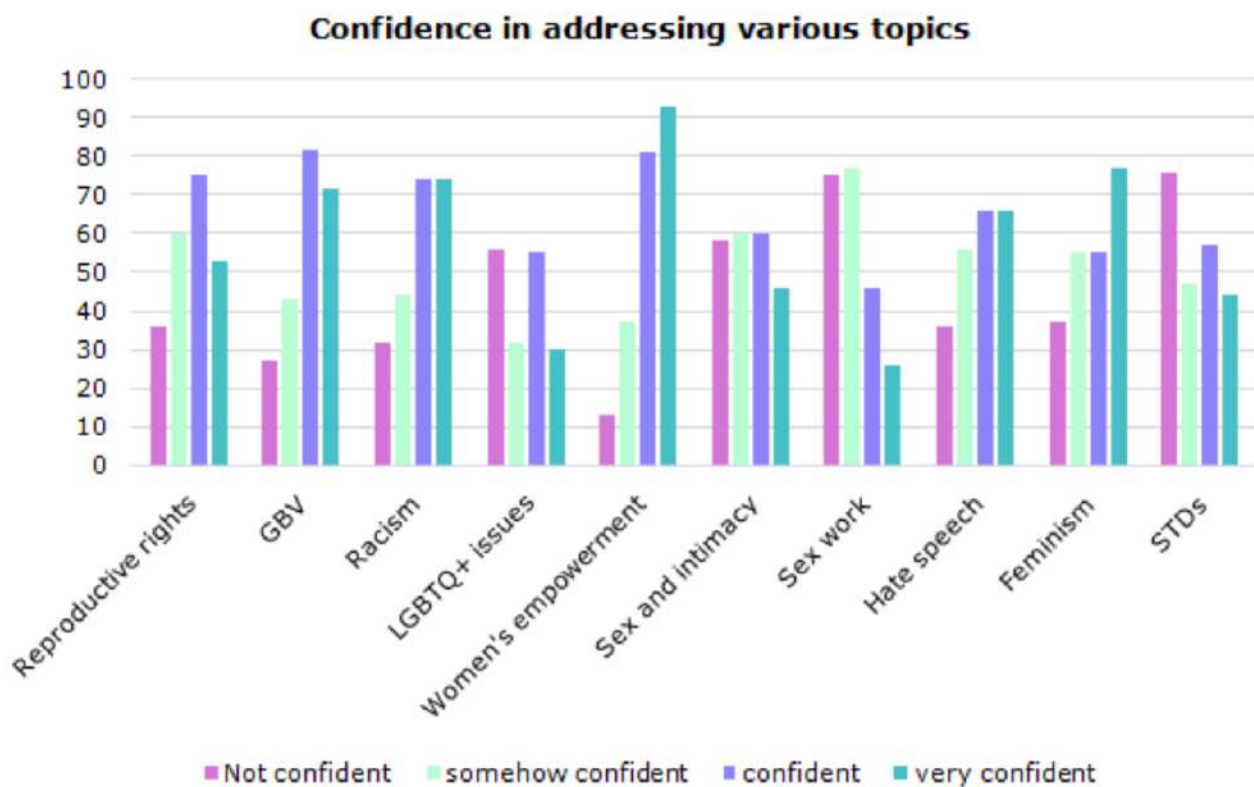
- **Employment:** has the highest "Very interested" responses, making it the most popular among young people. This strong interest likely reflects a high demand for job-related skills and opportunities, showing employment as a top priority.
- **Environment:** another topic with significant "Very interested" responses, indicating widespread concern about environmental issues among young people. This aligns with global trends of youth activism in climate change and environmental sustainability.
- **Sexual Education:** there is considerable interest in sexual education, with high counts in both the "Interested" and "Very interested" categories. This reflects the importance placed on awareness and education regarding sexuality, relationships, and health.

The topics of moderate interest were gender-based violence and discrimination, feminism and reproductive rights, and art and self-expression. Critical social issues resonate across different contexts, and young people appear invested in addressing these areas.

Feminism may have different levels of appeal depending on cultural or personal perspectives, but it remains a relevant area of interest.

While not as strongly emphasised as topics like employment or GBV, there is still considerable interest in creative expression, indicating a need for platforms and opportunities that foster creativity and identity exploration.

The youth workers identified LGBTIQ+ issues and immigrant rights as lower-interest topics for their target groups. This reflects cultural variations in acceptance and engagement (in the case of LGBTIQ+ issues) and the fact that immigrant rights are more relevant to specific subgroups or locations. However, tailoring programs to the specific needs and comfort levels of each region might improve engagement with these topics.

Confidence in addressing various topics

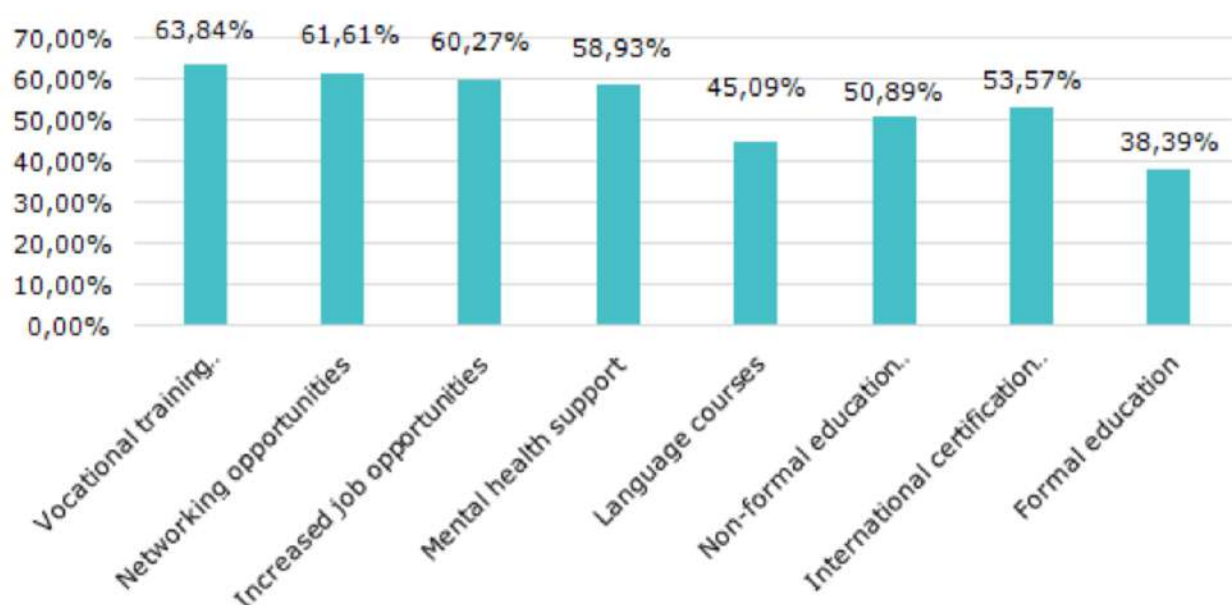Legend: Not confident | somehow confident | confident | very confident

This is also highlighted by the level of confidence in addressing the topics. By briefly analysing the chart above, we can see a high variation in the answers.

Youth workers feel most confident discussing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Racism, with a majority expressing confidence or high confidence, likely reflecting the emphasis on these issues in training and public discourse.

Topics like Reproductive Rights, Women's Empowerment, Hate Speech, and Feminism see moderate confidence, with most youth workers feeling somewhat or fully confident but with fewer feeling very confident. These areas are generally approachable, though some workers still feel hesitation.

LGBTIQ+ Issues, Sex and Intimacy, and Sex Work are areas where youth workers often feel less confident. There's a significant proportion of "not confident" responses, suggesting these topics may be more challenging due to social sensitivities, lack of training, or personal discomfort.

Youth workers' needs for career development

When asked about the need for career development, the youth workers showed a significant interest in vocational **training programmes** and **networking opportunities**. This suggests a high demand for practical skills that can be directly applied to career roles, on the one hand and the fact that they value professional connections to advance their careers, possibly for support, mentorship, or collaboration, on the other hand.

The need for **job opportunities** was very close to these choices, reflecting the insufficient employment options in the field.

Mental health support came right after, pointing to a recognition of the challenges faced in youth work and a need for resources to maintain well-being.

More than half of the respondents opted for **international certification of youth work** and **non-formal education programmes**, due to a diverse or multicultural work environment where alternative education methods could be advantageous. The international certification could consequently improve job mobility or professional standing internationally, as well as the **language courses**.

Only 90 respondents out of 224 find formal education necessary, making it the lowest priority among listed needs, possibly because youth work may emphasise practical experience and skills over a traditional degree.

A brief overview on the challenges youth workers are facing in addressing gender issues with young people

Looking at the qualitative data provided by the study, youth workers face many challenges in addressing gender issues with young people. These challenges are deeply influenced by cultural norms, generational views, and socio-political influences.

The cultural and societal norms were the most frequently invoked reasons. Many young people grow up in environments with entrenched gender roles and patriarchal values, which create resistance to discussing gender equity. According to the respondents, a patriarchal society leads some youth to view women's empowerment efforts as threatening. Similarly, addressing these topics can provoke conflict due to cultural and religious sensitivities. The fear of losing tradition, the local customs, the religious norms were quite often mentioned as challenges in addressing the topic. Moreover, the role of the family is crucial in this respect and the lack of role models was mentioned for several times.

Linked to this are the **gender stereotypes and misinformation**. Persistent stereotypes, such as the idea that women are unsuited for leadership, contribute to resistance among young people. These biases are particularly strong in regions where traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained in the family and societal structures.

Polarisation and radicalisation are also significant challenges. Youth workers report an environment where opinions on gender are highly polarised. For example, in Spain, there is an ideological split between feminist and denialist perspectives, making integrative discussions difficult.

Hate speech and reactionary ideologies further complicate efforts to promote balanced views on gender issues.
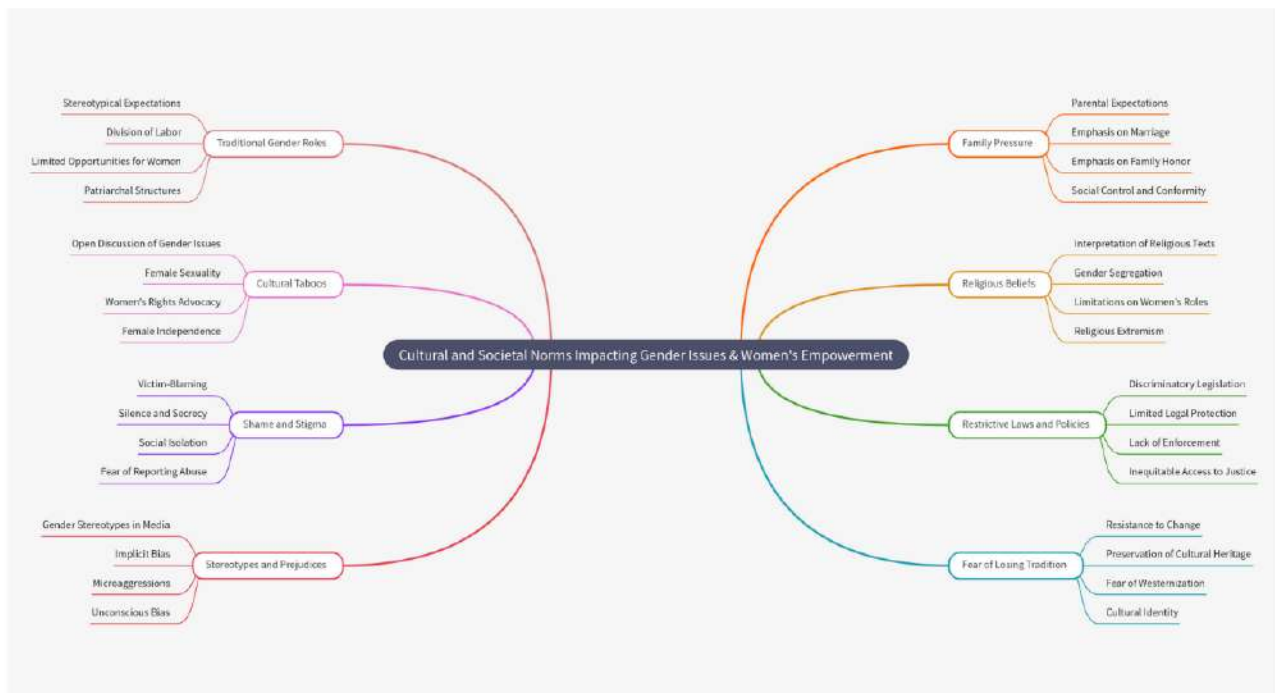
Peer pressure and social influence were also mentioned for several times and it is widely accepted that young people may hesitate in expressing their views due to fear of judgement and peer rejection. This is compounded by the influence of social media, which often spreads gendered misinformation or reinforces negative stereotypes, making open dialogues challenging.

Lack of knowledge and awareness are also significant factors that prevent addressing the project's topic. Limited access to information on gender issues and a lack of educational resources lead to confusion and misinformation. This educational gap is evident across regions, with youth sometimes having only social media as their primary information source, which can perpetuate biases and misunderstandings. The lack of intersectional approaches, lack of formal trainings and a lack of representation were also highlighted by the respondents.

This is also linked with a **resistance to change and denialism**: there is a notable resistance to discussing gender issues among youth who feel that gender equality has already been achieved or view such discussions as redundant. In parts of Europe, for example, neo-fascist ideologies fuel denialist attitudes, dismissing gender-based inequality and reinforcing stereotypes. In other realities, gender issues are perceived as taboo, therefore, the subject is off the table by default.

The **lack of support** for the youth workers is also a significant challenge. As seen above, they often lack adequate resources or institutional support, especially in regions where government or family attitudes towards gender topics are conservative. This lack of support limits opportunities for safe, consistent, and well-informed discussions with young people, which leads us to another major challenge: **safety concerns and the need for safe spaces**. Engaging youth in sensitive discussions on gender requires safe spaces, which are often unavailable. This is critical in regions where the topic is stigmatised or where youth face social retaliation for expressing gender-related views.

An in-depth analysis of the challenges faced by youth workers

The cultural and social norms – causes and reflections on youth work

An in-depth analysis of cultural and social norms was needed to better understand the causes of these challenges and facilitate the identification of suitable issues to address in the training course and toolkit to be designed. As a youth worker, understanding these aspects is essential for effectively supporting young people, particularly when helping them navigate social expectations, gender roles, and issues around empowerment.

As highlighted in the mind map above, there are plenty of roots of the cultural and social norms impacting the way in which youngsters perceive gender. By addressing them, youth workers could make a real difference towards a more balanced approach.

When it comes to **traditional gender roles**, youth workers frequently come across young people who are dealing with the pressure to fit into established gender norms based on **stereotypical expectations**. In this respect, they can provide alternative narratives and encourage young people to explore identities that might not conform to these norms by having a thorough awareness of these forces. However, this issue is directly linked to the **division of labour and patriarchal structures.** Youth workers who are aware of how gender roles affect family duties and job choices can help young men and women adopt more egalitarian perspectives, encouraging equality and shared responsibility.

Cultural taboos are frequently delicate topics to address, especially in heterogeneous groups. Therefore, it is essential to examine their causes in detail. Of course, the leading cause is the need for **open discussion on gender issues**, which emphasises the utility of projects like Phoenix.

There is a cultural reluctance to address issues like domestic violence, harassment, and abuse. The lack of open conversation perpetuates a cycle of silence, leaving many victims isolated and unsupported. Cultural stigmas discourage women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community from **seeking help**, fearing judgment or social repercussions. This can lead to untreated trauma and prevent them from accessing resources for recovery.

The **lack of open dialogue with families** was very often mentioned in the answers of both youth workers and young people. This highlights, on one hand, the essential role of families in society and, on the other hand, the urgent need to involve them in the entire process. The lack of dialogue can prevent young women or members of the LGBTIQ+ community from understanding their rights or feeling comfortable addressing gender-based discrimination.

Limited public awareness campaigns and the **fear of social reprisal for speaking out** also have a significant impact on limiting progress toward breaking taboos around gender-based violence, minorities and women's rights.

Female sexuality and the broad gender spectrum are also relevant when speaking about taboos. The **restrictive norms around dating and relationships** usually lead to unrealistic expectations, and they can limit the freedom to make decisions about their own lives. Societies with **strict norms around premarital sex** may stigmatise women who don't conform, leading to social exclusion or harsh consequences, especially in cases of pregnancy.

Sexual harassment and assault as taboo topics can lead to victim-blaming and discourage the oppressed from seeking justice. However, one of the main causes of these issues is the **lack of comprehensive sex education**. Whether it is inexistent, insufficient or biased, it restricts young people's knowledge of their bodies and health, leading to risky behaviours and difficulties in handling sexual or reproductive health concerns.

Women's rights advocacy s another chapter directly linked to cultural taboos. Women's rights activism can often be viewed as a challenge to existing cultural norms, resulting in societal resistance.

Resistance to change is sometimes the trigger for opposing gender equality/equity initiatives, especially if such changes are perceived as conflicting with tradition.
The **lack of support for feminist movements** and the **discrediting of women's rights activists** can also significantly impact gaining a more inclusive, equitable society.

Female independence is a cultural taboo in certain societies and has severe consequences for achieving gender equity. **Financial dependence on men, limited educational opportunities**, and **employment restrictions** constrain women to conform to traditional roles. In many cultures, women are **socially expected to prioritise family**. Hence, they need to prioritise family responsibilities over personal goals, which can prevent them from pursuing higher education or professional opportunities. This also happens in social enclaves, such as the situation described by one of the youth workers from Italy:
"We recently had an incident where girls were not allowed to choose how to spend their free day and were not allowed to express themselves freely. This was shocking."

Shame and stigma, family pressure and religious beliefs

Going back to the cultural and societal norms impacting gender issues and women's empowerment, it is essential to highlight the role of **shame and stigma** in preventing a more inclusive and equitable society. **Victim blaming** is a frequent phenomenon towards people who face gender-based violence, deterring them from seeking help and leading to **fear of reporting abuse. Silence and secrecy** enforced by the societal pressure around gender issues also perpetuate discrimination: the ones who challenge norms risk becoming **socially isolated**.

Obviously, the **family** plays an essential role. It is the primary socialisation agent for the early learning of gender roles and for reinforcing norms. The family is also crucial in influencing beliefs and attitudes through their transmission related to cultural and societal values on gender. Moreover, they are the ones who determine access to education and, very often, career choices. Therefore, they can be a source of support or restriction. As custodians of tradition, families sometimes perpetuate cultural practices that may uphold or challenge gender inequality. Fear of dishonour was mentioned quite often in the answers of the Moroccan and Jordanian youth workers regarding the challenges of addressing gender issues with the youngsters and was placed under the "sensitive topics" label:
"One of the challenges is addressing sensitive topics like honour, which can deeply influence young people's perspectives on gender issues and women's empowerment, often making open dialogue difficult."

Nonetheless, the role of the families is also of providing emotional and psychological support, which can be essential for individuals navigating gender-related challenges, such as discrimination or identity struggles.

The **religious beliefs** go hand in hand with family pressure regarding gender issues. Gender roles are sometimes justified using religious teachings, which can be selectively interpreted to limit women's rights and discredit LGBTIQ+ members. Religion contributes to the integration in the community. Therefore, non-conforming with its rules leads to being ostracised and banished, affecting the entire well-being and image of the individual and the entire family. Many of the comments given by the Moroccan respondents addressed religion as an important factor in addressing gender issues:
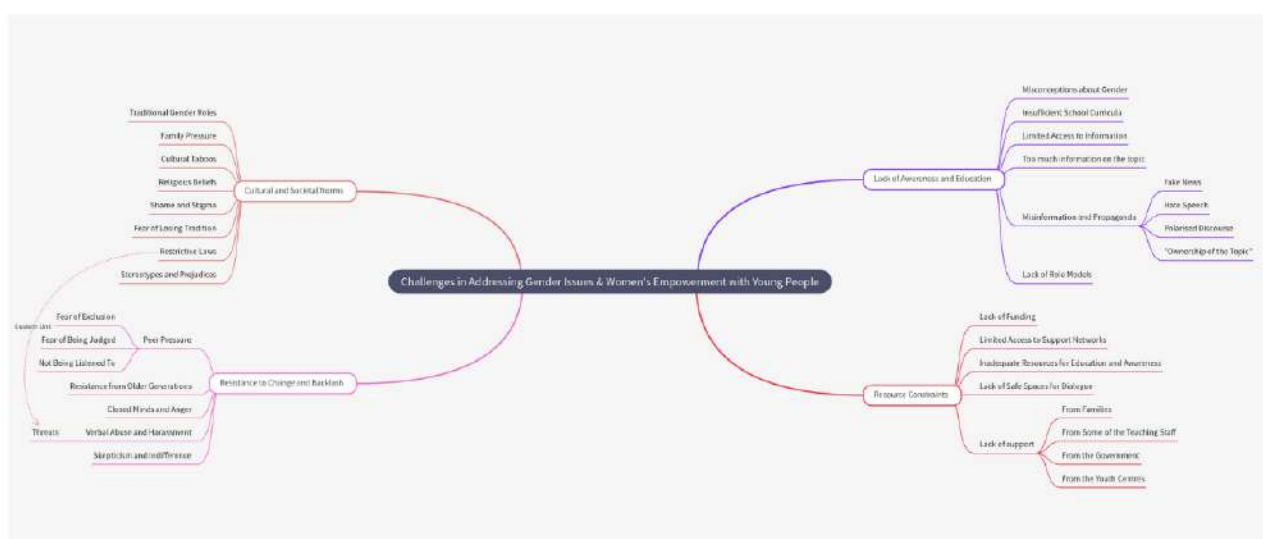*"This topic [gender issues and women's empowerment] is against religion and aims at sedition."*
"This topic [gender issues and women's empowerment] is against religion and far from the Moroccan society."

Restrictive laws and policies have a dramatic impact on gaining gender equity. **Discriminatory legislation** leads to structural discrimination, explicitly or implicitly discriminating against women and LGBTIQ+ members. For example, article 489 of the Penal Code of Morocco criminalises "lewd or unnatural acts with an individual of the same sex". Hence, same-sex sexual activity is illegal in Morocco and can be punished with three years imprisonment and a fine of 1.200 Dirhams. This obviously shuts the door for any conversation about this topic, justifying the reluctance we also identified in our respondents' answers. However, not officially criminalising homosexuality does not necessarily mean that gender equity is easy to gain. For instance, in Jordan, as of 2013, the newly revised Penal Code makes honour killings, as a legal justification for murder, illegal. But for society, honour is still a fundamental issue and this has, as mentioned above, a detrimental effect on addressing the gender topic with youngsters. Moreover, they feel threatened and they fear losing their integrity if they openly discuss about it:
"Challenges in addressing gender issues with young people include cultural resistance, limited resources, and safety concerns."

The fear of losing tradition, stereotypes and prejudices

All of the above factors are directly linked with the **resistance to change** and the **fear of westernisation**. Efforts toward gender equity may be seen as importing "foreign" values, which could be interpreted as a threat to preserving cultural identity and community integrity.

Stereotypes and prejudices were amongst the most invoked reasons for which youngsters have challenges in speaking about gender and women's empowerment. Whether they are being reinforced by media, by families or by society in general, deconstructing stereotypes is a must for a more equitable living in a globalised world. As a youth worker from Jordan stated:
"Addressing gender issues and women's empowerment with young people often involves overcoming deeply ingrained cultural stereotypes and misinformation."

Going back to analysing the root causes, **resistance to change and backlash** are also caused by **peer pressure**. Whether it is related to the fear of being judged, the fear of exclusion or simply not being listened to, youngsters are being influenced by their friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. One of the respondents phrased it very well:
"A significant challenge is tackling the impact of peer pressure, which can hinder young people's willingness to discuss and embrace gender issues and women's empowerment due to fear of judgment or exclusion."

As mentioned before, **resistance** is another important factor, whether it comes directly from youngsters or from older generations. They may react with scepticism, anger, or verbal abuse, making it harder for others to engage in progressive conversations. Unfortunately, resistance affects moral and the effectiveness of intervention. In this respect, creating intergenerational dialogue becomes essential but highly challenging.

Resistance is also connected to the other root cause, **lack of awareness and education**, which is the main area of intervention for the Phoenix project. In most realities, there are **insufficient school curricula**, therefore, gender topics are inadequately covered in schools.

This contributes to the distribution of **misconceptions about gender**, leading to confusion and stereotypes.

"The biggest difficulty when addressing these issues with a young target group is the confusion that sometimes arises over the binary question. The argument usually goes between the biological, the 'natural' and the cultural. So even when you try to talk about women and women's empowerment, what happens is that it all shifts to 'biological woman' and 'biological man', not moving away from binarism and not trying to open up reflection to the possibility that that binary idea of gender is constructed by society itself and can therefore change." (YW, Spain)

However, it seems that sometimes youngsters from Spain deal with the opposite situation when the topic is too present in the public discourse, failing to catch their attention. Moreover, "assigning the gender issue" to NGOs only somehow isolates the topic instead of giving it a sense of ownership for everyone:
"Part of the young population has adopted many hate speeches and is negatively reactive. Another part is saturated with theoretical information on the matter, and is tired of working on these topics. Furthermore, in public secondary schools, sometimes it is not valued that these topics are worked on in the subjects. Still, there is a tendency to trust external organisations and encourage teachers to only dedicate themselves to working on their own subject."

Another threat is linked to the fake feeling of having the problems solved. In this respect, a youth worker from Italy mentions:
[A challenge is] "The belief that everything has already been done and that gender equality has already been reached in society."

Misinformation and propaganda were also frequently mentioned during our research, highlighting the crucial role of the media in constructing and deconstructing myths, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviours. Fake news, hate speech, and polarised discourse complicate efforts to present factual, unbiased information. Many testimonials focused on these aspects:
[One of the challenges is] "consumption of content on networks with contradictory messages where they talk about empowerment but show a woman subjected to patriarchy both in audiovisual content and in marketing, etc. Identification of the young group with this content." (YW, Spain)
"Often, the only context in which young people have heard about the topic is in social media. The topic is not discussed at school, in the family, in informal relationships, so organisations have the task of playing an informative and educational role, and often this is tiring." (YW, Italy)
[One of the challenges is] "polarisation of discourse, which prevents the integration of different positions, dialogue." (YW, Spain)

"There is a multitude of preconceived ideas and prejudices that are difficult to verbalise out loud, but that exist and are greatly reinforced by the bombardment of sexist videos and images of sexual violence and extreme violence that they receive through the networks."

The **lack of role models** is also very relevant to our project. Visible leaders championing gender equality leave young people without inspiration or guidance. As mentioned by a youth worker from Jordan:
"A major challenge is addressing the lack of representation and role models, which can make it difficult for young people to see the relevance of gender issues and women's empowerment in their own lives."

Therefore, due to the fact that misinformation hampers efforts to build trust and credibility, youth workers must invest additional time and effort in awareness campaigns, creating educational resources, and debunking myths.

Resource constraints were also mentioned quite often, especially those related to **funding**. Other constraints included **limited access to support networks** and **inadequate resources for education and awareness**. Although the project cannot tackle the lack of funding, it can definitely strengthen the bonds between the partners addressing the gender issue and designing and developing efficient tools for gender education and awareness.

The **lack of safe spaces for dialogue** is a crucial issue, since in many realities youngsters cannot openly discuss and question concepts they have been taken/given for granted. One of the Spanish youth workers mentioned:
"Since our organisation does not deal directly with gender issues and women empowerment, one of the issues would be to create a sharing space that can allow the free expression of thoughts and opinions on this issue, also directly linking it to the main issues we deal with, such as migration, labour and active citizenship."

Moreover, given the current legislation, the Moroccan youth workers highlighted the need of protection for the people who would like to tackle the topic:
"The topic must be opened in a safe environment, and the participants must be protected."
[These are] "topics that need a safe environment for dialogue to avoid any conflict".
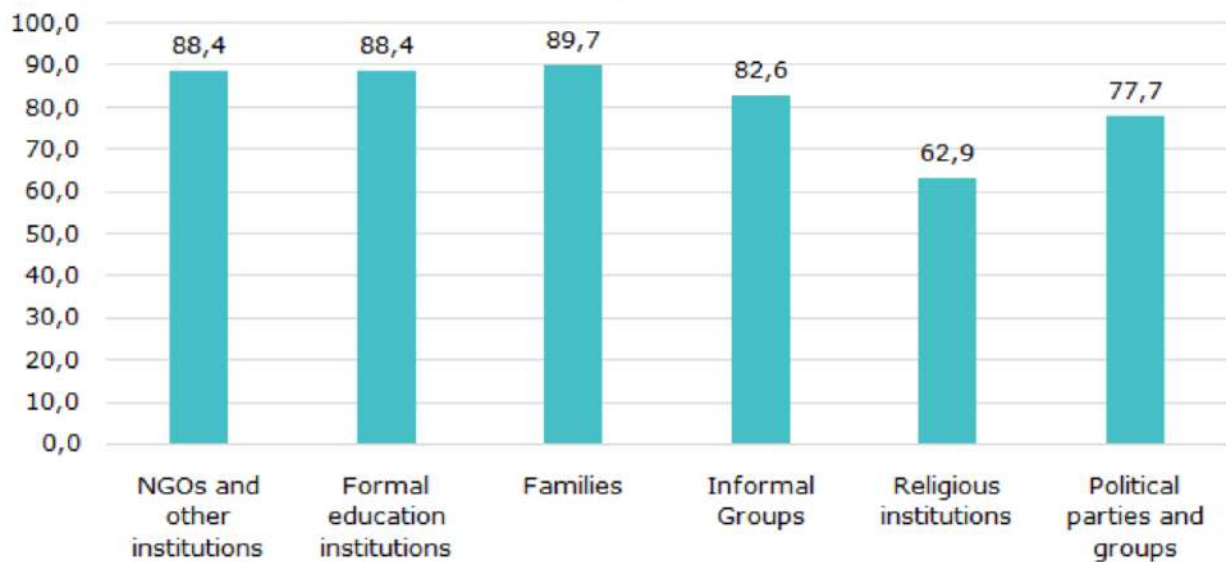*"Urgent topics only need a safe environment for dialogue and expression."*

Youth workers often **lack the institutional and community support** needed to address gender issues. Sometimes, the support depends on politics:
"[There is] continuous questioning due to lack of training and lack of support and resources depending on the party that governs the Administration for which you work."
(YW from Spain)
The affirmation above is also justified by the credit youth workers give to various stakeholders in addressing the gender issue.
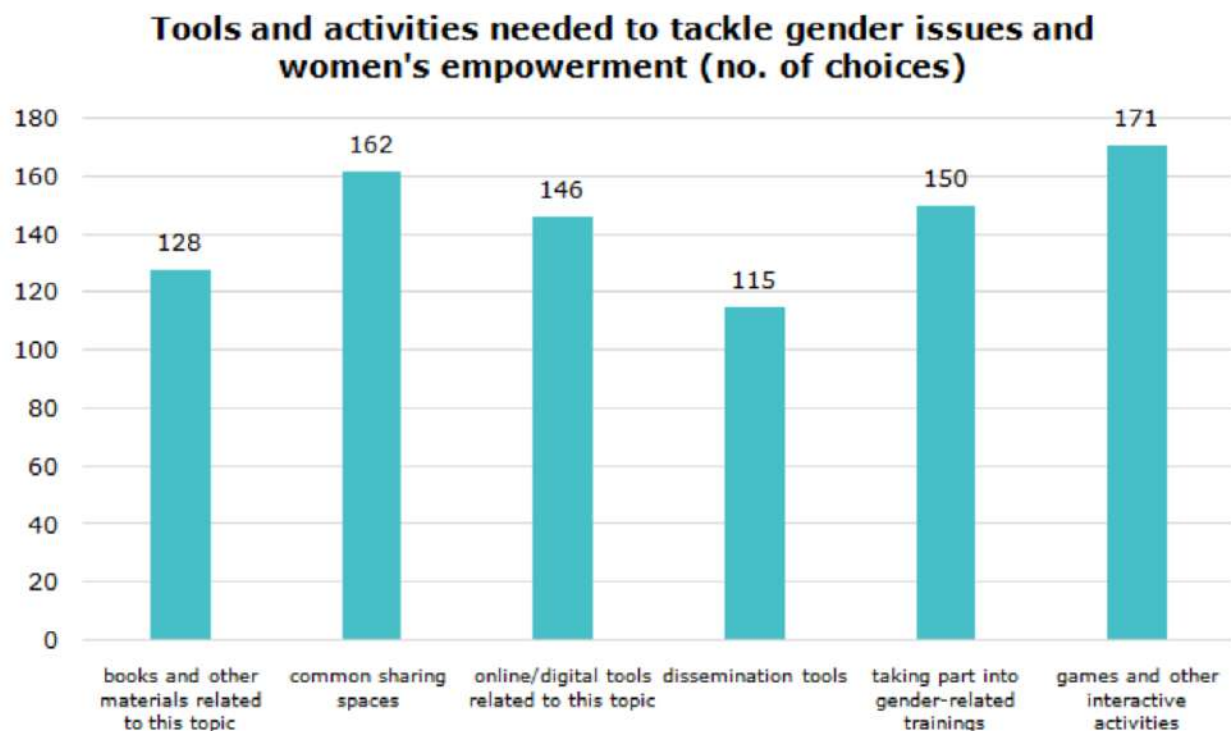
Important stakeholders in addressing gender issues and women's empowerment

Important and very important stakeholders in addressing gender issues and women's empowerment in youth workers' opinion (%)

Stakeholder	Percentage
NGOs and other institutions	88,4
Formal education institutions	88,4
Families	89,7
Informal Groups	82,6
Religious institutions	62,9
Political parties and groups	77,7

As seen in the charts above, 88,7% of the respondents considered families to be important and very important in dealing with gender issues, closely followed by formal education institutions and NGOs. Religious institutions are considered important and very important for 62,9% of the participants in the survey, with a higher percent from Morocco (76,1%) and Jordan (70,6%), highlighting the essential role they play in the society.

Tools and activities needed to tackle gender issues and women's empowerment

Tools and activities needed to tackle gender issues and women's empowerment (no. of choices)
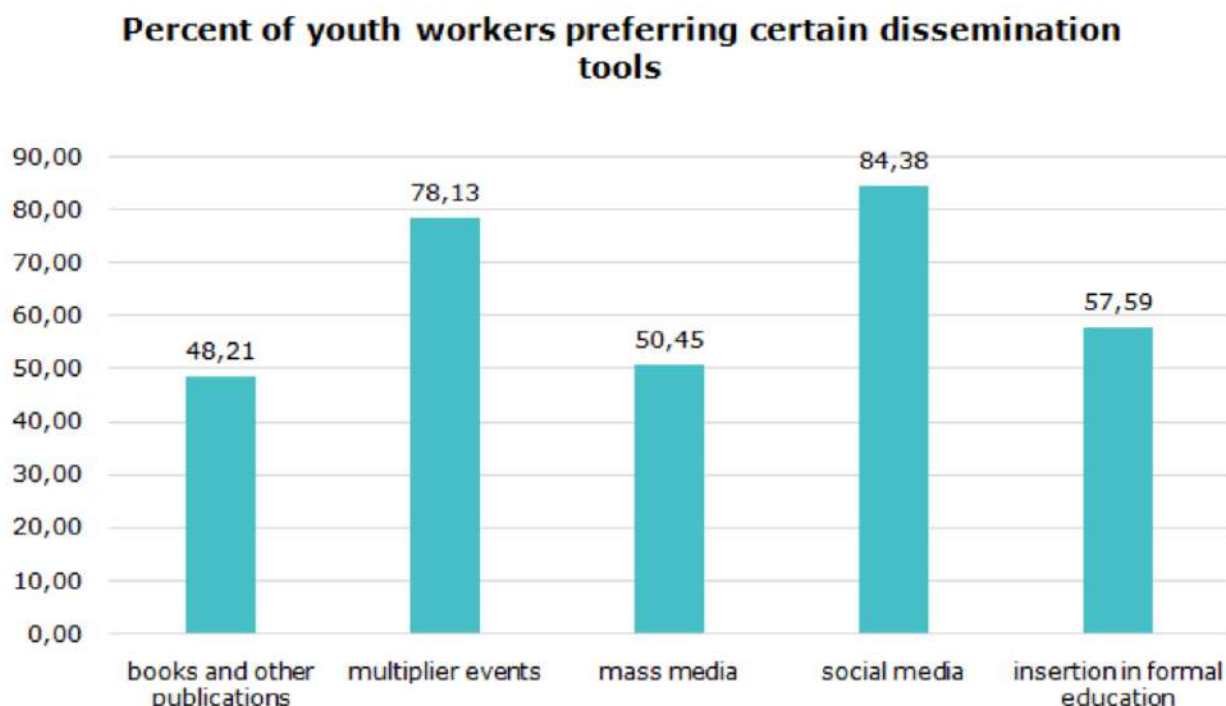

When it comes to tools needed to address gender issues and women's empowerment, youth workers mainly opted for games and other interactive activities (76,34%), underlying the need for new tools in the field of non-formal education and proving once again the relevance of Phoenix project.

The common global spaces to share best practices and successful experiences chosen by 72,32% of the youth workers show the urgent need for networking, solidarity and collaboration while having a sense of belonging to a bigger entity sharing the same goals. The fact that Phoenix is a KA2 – Capacity building in the field of youth – responds to this particular need, aiming to enhance gender equity and young women's empowerment in EU and Mediterranean countries.

Taking part in gender-related training courses (66,96%) and having access to more online/digital tools related to the topic (65,18%) show the need to gain more information in an interactive way, with books falling in the last place, being chosen by 57,14% of the respondents.

A little over half of the respondents mentioned the need for dissemination tools. Taking a closer look at their preferences, it is clear that social media wins in terms of efficiency, with 84,38% of them making this a priority. Social media is followed by multiplier events (festivals, conferences, seminars, cultural events, meetings etc.), showing once more the need for networking and face-to-face interaction for a greater impact.

Percent of youth workers preferring certain dissemination tools

Percent of youth workers preferring certain dissemination tools

Another relevant aspect is related to the insertion of the project results in formal education, making it easier to reach the target group through a more "official" channel that is less contested by families and peers due to its authority.

Traditional media, books, and other publications are no longer efficient for youngsters, who are more inclined to spend time online or participate in must-see events.

In conclusion, from the youth workers' perspective, addressing gender issues requires tackling deeply ingrained cultural norms, overcoming resistance, and addressing resource gaps. To be effective, youth workers need the training to navigate sensitive topics, community engagement strategies to bridge the generational divide, institutional support, funding for programs and tools to counter misinformation and inclusive spaces for dialogue.

These challenges underscore the need for holistic and sustained efforts to address gender issues and empower young people, making the Phoenix project extremely relevant to this matter.
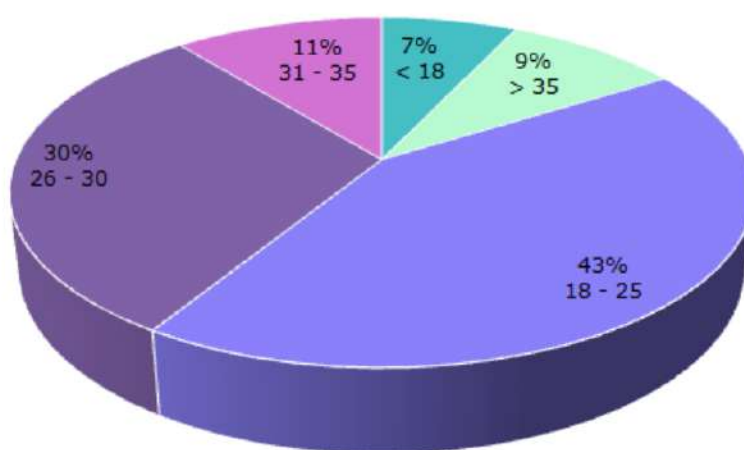
YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERPECTIVE ON GENDER ISSUES AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

As mentioned in the beginning, the present analysis also includes the opinions of young people on gender issues and women's empowerment because they are the target group of youth workers and educators. This is an efficient way to double-check the relevance of the results and the future tools to be created.

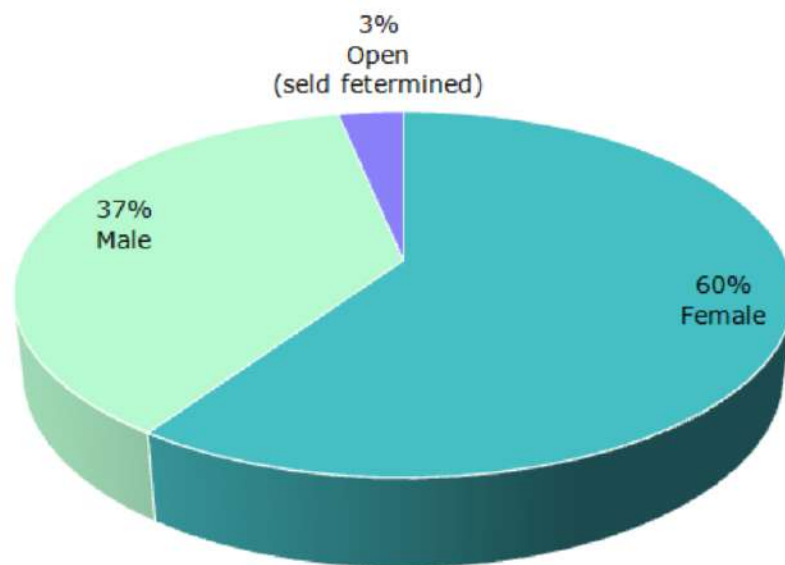## The youngsters' respondent profile – a brief analysis

Five hundred forty-one respondents filled out the questionnaire, which was divided by country as follows: 66 individuals from Italy, 55 individuals from Jordan, 158 individuals from Morocco, accounting for the majority segment of the chart, 62 individuals from Spain. Cross tabs will address the imbalance in the number so that the results can be extended to all the project partners.

Age of respondents

Regarding their age, the largest group of respondents (43%) fall under the 18-25 years old category. This is typical as this age group is often the most active in gender discussions, advocacy, and participation in youth-focused programs. The second-largest group, 26-30 years old, represents the young adults who usually show interest in the main subjects that affect them. The other categories, 31-35 years old (11%), over 35 years old (9%) represent the categories that make the transition to adulthood, while the under aged (7%) are less present in the study.
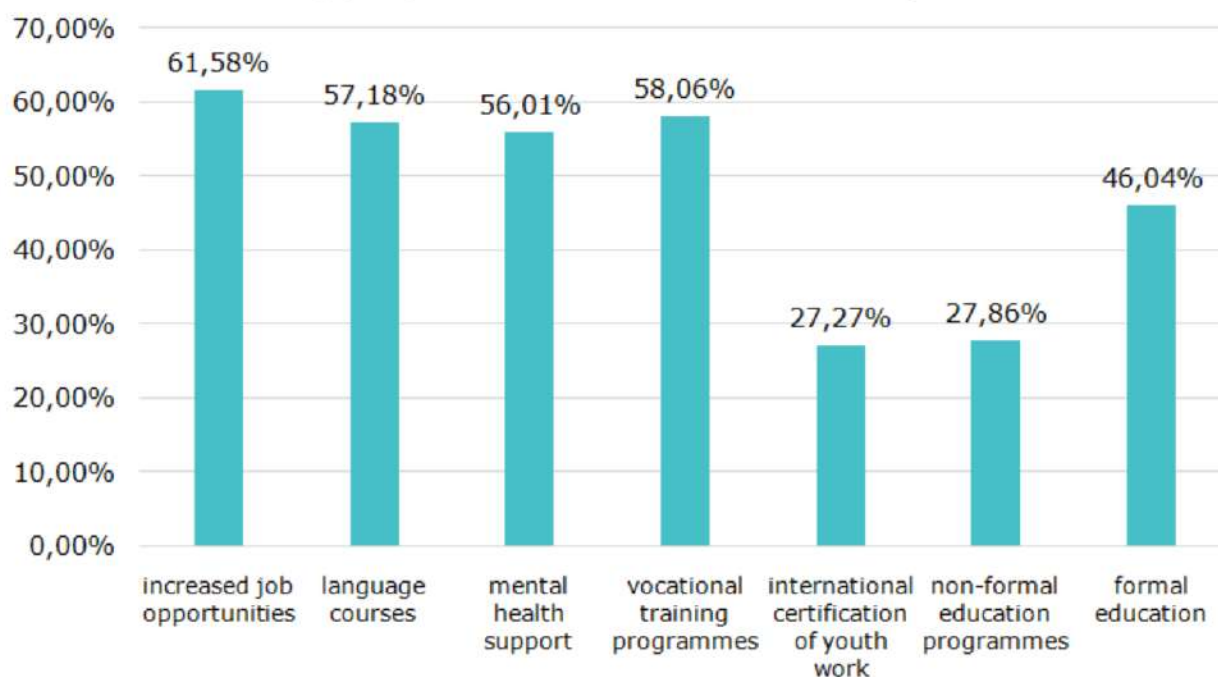
Gender of respondents

3%
Open
(seld feiermined)

37%
Male

60%
Female

Gender-wise, 60% of the respondents are female, 37% of them are male, and 3% are non-conforming. This distribution ensures representativity for Phoenix project since it focuses on the 18-30 years group, the main target group of youth workers.

Young people and their needs for career development

Young people's needs for career development

Asked about their needs for career development, young people seem to favour opportunities directly tied to employability, including job openings, vocational skills, and certifications.

In this respect, 61,58% of the respondents chose the need for increased job opportunities, indicating that young people prioritise access to jobs as the key to career growth. Almost all societies struggle with high rates of young people's unemployment rate. Therefore, this answer underlines the need for a better insertion of youngsters into the labour market.

Consequently, practical skills through vocational training are highly valued (58.06%), highlighting a preference for work-ready capabilities over theoretical knowledge.

However, the high demand for language skills (57,18%) suggests that young people view language proficiency as critical, perhaps for accessing international markets or improving communication in diverse workplaces.

Over 56% of the respondents opted for mental health support, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of mental health in maintaining productivity and career longevity in a society prone to burnout.
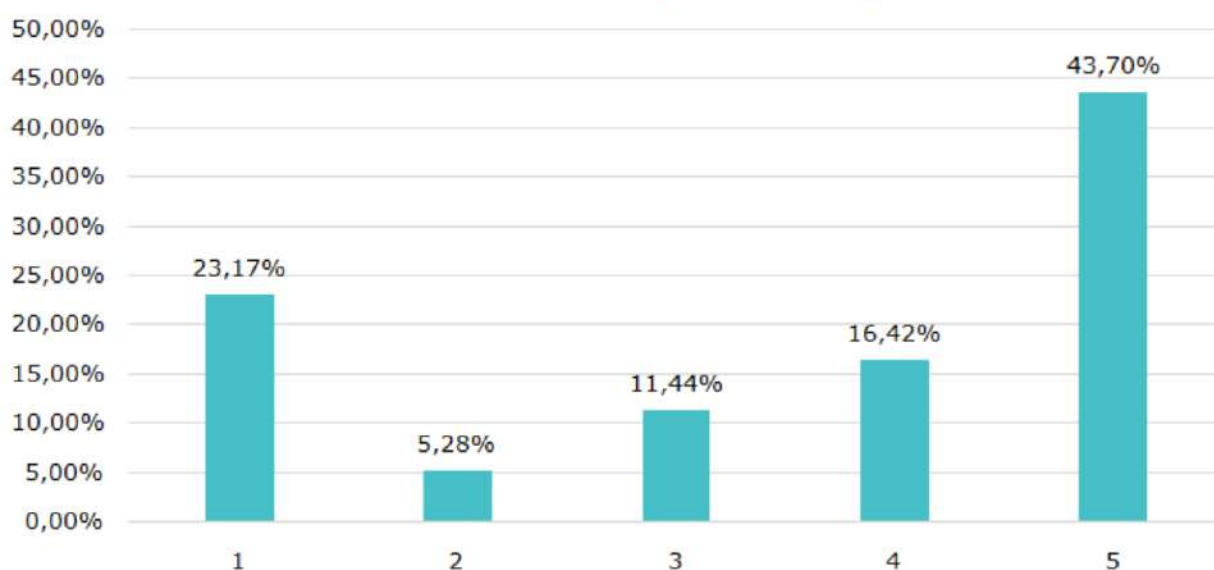
Formal education was still amongst the choice of 46,04% of youngsters, showing its importance for recognition in the job market but marking a shift towards more hands-on learning.
Non-formal education programmes were less favoured than the other options, perhaps because they were perceived as less "official", with a lower benefit for their careers or relevance. This highlights a severe need for better communication from the NGOs regarding the benefits of such programmes in order to enhance the credibility and impact of non-formal education.

Young people's interest in gender issues and women's empowerment

Asked to mark their interest on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 means not interested at all and 5 means highly interested) regarding the topic of the project, the youngsters provided very diverse answers, which initially took us by surprise.

Young people's interest in the general topic (gender and women's empowerment)

Although more than 60% of the respondents were interested and very interested in the topic, a significant number of youngsters (79 persons) showed no interest at all. Taking a closer look at the results and going deeper into the analysis, we identified the fact that most of the respondents who showed no interest came from Morocco (76), which makes total sense given the political climate and the attitude of the society related to this topic. Having more respondents from Morocco than from the other partners also contributed to the imbalance of answers, therefore we decided to analyse further results having the country of origin as one of the criteria.

Young people's interest in the project's topic (individual choices)

COUNTRY	1	2	3	4	5
Italy	1	1	3	22	38
Jordan	1	6	9	9	30
Morocco	76	7	18	19	37
Spain	1	4	8	5	43

Consequently, if we extract the youngsters who chose 4 and 5 (interested and very interested), the situation looks like described in the table below, making the topic relevant for 3 of the 4 partners.

Interested and very interested youngsters in the projects' topic (percent)

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	PERCENT
Italy	92,3%
Jordan	70,9%
Morocco	35,7%
Spain	78,7%

In order to analyse the familiarity of several subtopics for the young people, they were asked to rate how confident they feel if/when speaking about them. In the table below, we chose to present the percentage of respondents who proved to be confident or very confident in addressing the issues.

Confident and very confident young people in addressing gender-related topics

SUBTOPIC	Italy	Jordan	Morocco	Spain
GBV and prevention	90,80%	54,50%	31,80%	85,20%
LGBTQI+ issues	72,30%	N/A	13,40%	80,30%
Feminism	83,10%	47,30%	18,50%	77,00%
Immigrant rights	81,50%	58,20%	34,40%	83,60%
Reproductive rights	83,10%	47,30%	25,50%	80,30%
Environmental issues	89,20%	50,90%	43,90%	78,70%
Art and self expression	70,80%	58,20%	40,10%	75,40%
Sexual education (intimacy, affection, etc.)	83,10%	49,10%	36,30%	83,60%
Stereotypes and prejudices	86,20%	56,40%	28,70%	93,40%
Employment/self employment	70,80%	61,80%	44,60%	73,80%
Hate speech (online/offline)	56,90%	N/A	37,60%	60,70%

As shown above, across most topics, young people in Italy and Spain report higher levels of confidence compared to Jordan and Morocco. Spain demonstrates particularly high confidence on topics like stereotypes and prejudices (93.4%) and immigrant rights (83.6%). This is also justified by the profile of the partner organisation, Otra Escuela, which works on mediation, social and community communication with a significant focus on migrant rights.

Italy shows a similar trend, with high confidence in discussing GBV and prevention (90.8%), feminism (83.1%), and reproductive rights (83.1%).

Moroccan youth consistently report the lowest confidence across almost all topics, LGBTIQ+ issues scored only 13.4%, feminism at 18,5% and reproductive rights at 25,5%. Exceptions include employment/self-employment (44.6%) and environmental issues (43.9%), which are still relatively low compared to other countries. Young people in Jordan show moderate confidence, with employment/self-employment (61.8%) and stereotypes and prejudices (56.4%) among the highest-scoring topics. However, confidence significantly drops on issues like feminism (47.3%) and reproductive rights (47.3%).

Making a brief topic-specific analysis, it is evident that gender-based violence (GBV) and prevention were subject to a more active dialogue in Italy (90.8%) and Spain (85.2%), while Jordan (54.5%) and Morocco (31.8%) trail behind. This indicates potential cultural or systemic barriers to openly discussing GBV.

Confidence varies significantly when it comes to LGBTIQ+ issues, with Spain (80.3%) and Italy (72.3%) showing strong confidence, likely due to progressive societal attitudes and Morocco (13.4%) and Jordan (N/A) reflecting socio cultural and legal restrictions on LGBTIQ+ discourse.

A similar situation is also present when discussing feminism, with Spain and Italy scoring over 75%, proving the prominence of feminist movements in these countries, and Jordan (47.3%) and Morocco (18.5%) suggesting that feminism might face resistance due to cultural norms.

Reproductive rights and sexual education generate confidence in 83,10% of youngsters from Italy, 80,3% from Spain, 47,30% of youngsters from Jordan and 25,50% from Morocco, reflecting possible cultural sensitivities around discussing intimate topics.

Environmental issues, employment, and self-employment received the highest average scores among the four countries, indicating a universal concern about economic opportunities and the need for environmental protection and care.
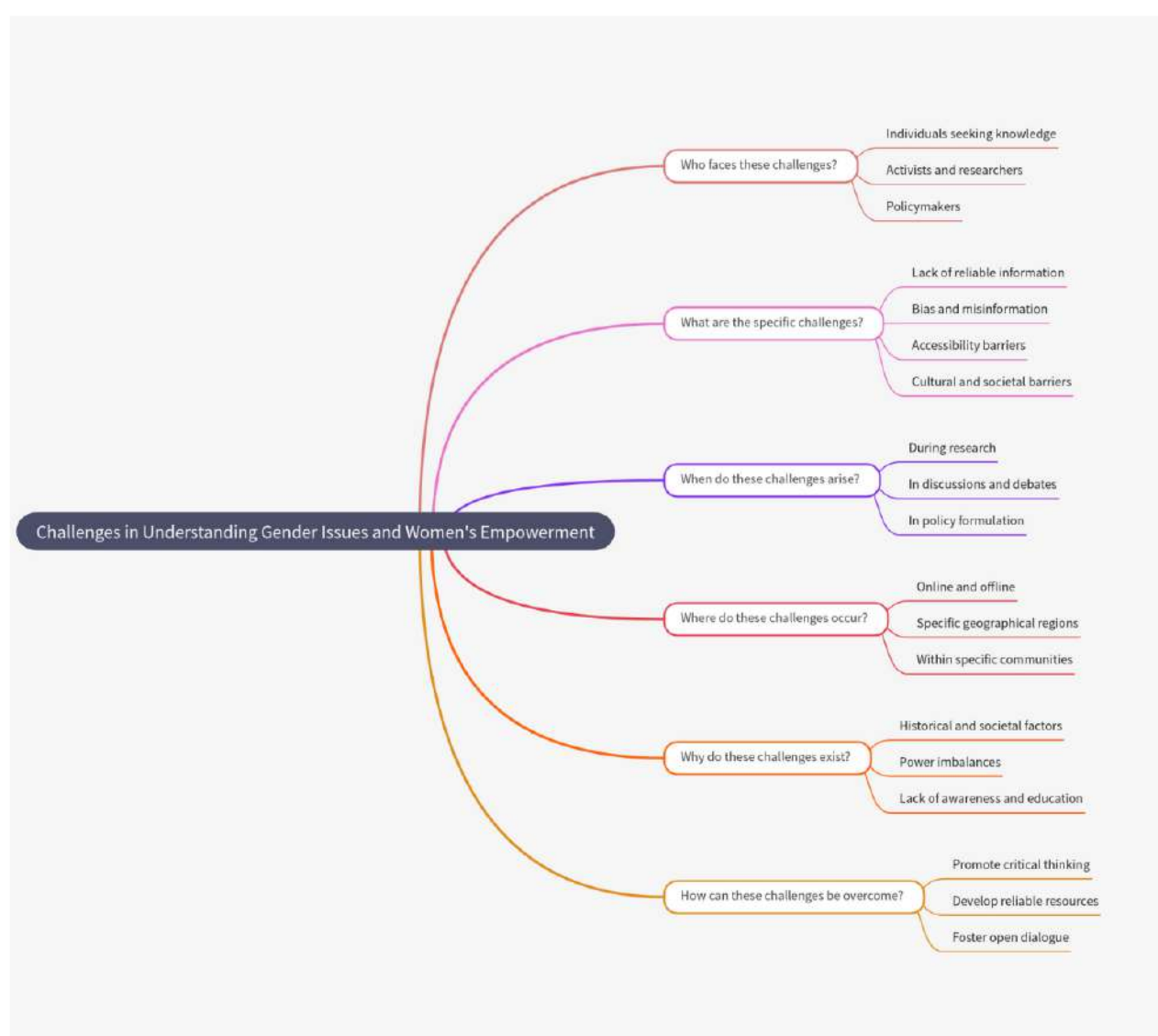
An interesting result refers to stereotypes and prejudices. While 93.4% of youngsters from Spain feel confident in addressing them, just 28.7% from Morocco do, indicating a need for broader awareness initiatives.

Hate speech (online and offline) scored less among all countries surveyed, showing that even in progressive contexts, hate speech is a difficult topic to address.

Challenges young people face while trying to understand gender issues and women's empowerment

Corroborating the results with the confidence youth workers have in addressing related topics, we can conclude that there is a good knowledge of their target groups. However, there is a clear need for improving knowledge and tools related to sensitive issues on both sides while using an intercultural pedagogical approach.

In order to be able to design it better, we aimed to identify the challenges young people face while trying to understand gender issues and women's empowerment. The results are synthesised in the mind map below and they coincide significantly with the ones the youth workers face.

This time, the challenges were clustered around four different pillars: information access and quality, social and cultural barriers, personal limitations, and lack of support.

The first pillar, **information access and quality**, was constantly mentioned during the research. Both youth workers and young people have difficulty in finding unbiased and comprehensive sources. Paradoxically, there is an overabundance of information online, but it mainly leads to confusion and misinformation. Moreover, there is a lack of localised or contextual data specific to certain regions or demographics.

The two quotes below underline these issues:

"One of the key challenges I face in learning more about gender issues and women's empowerment is the availability of accurate and unbiased information. Often, resources are either limited or filtered through cultural and societal biases, making it difficult to find comprehensive and objective data."

"While information is available, it is not always easy to find trustworthy sources, especially those that provide in-depth analysis or perspectives from diverse regions and cultures. This makes it difficult to gain a well-rounded understanding of the complexities surrounding these topics."
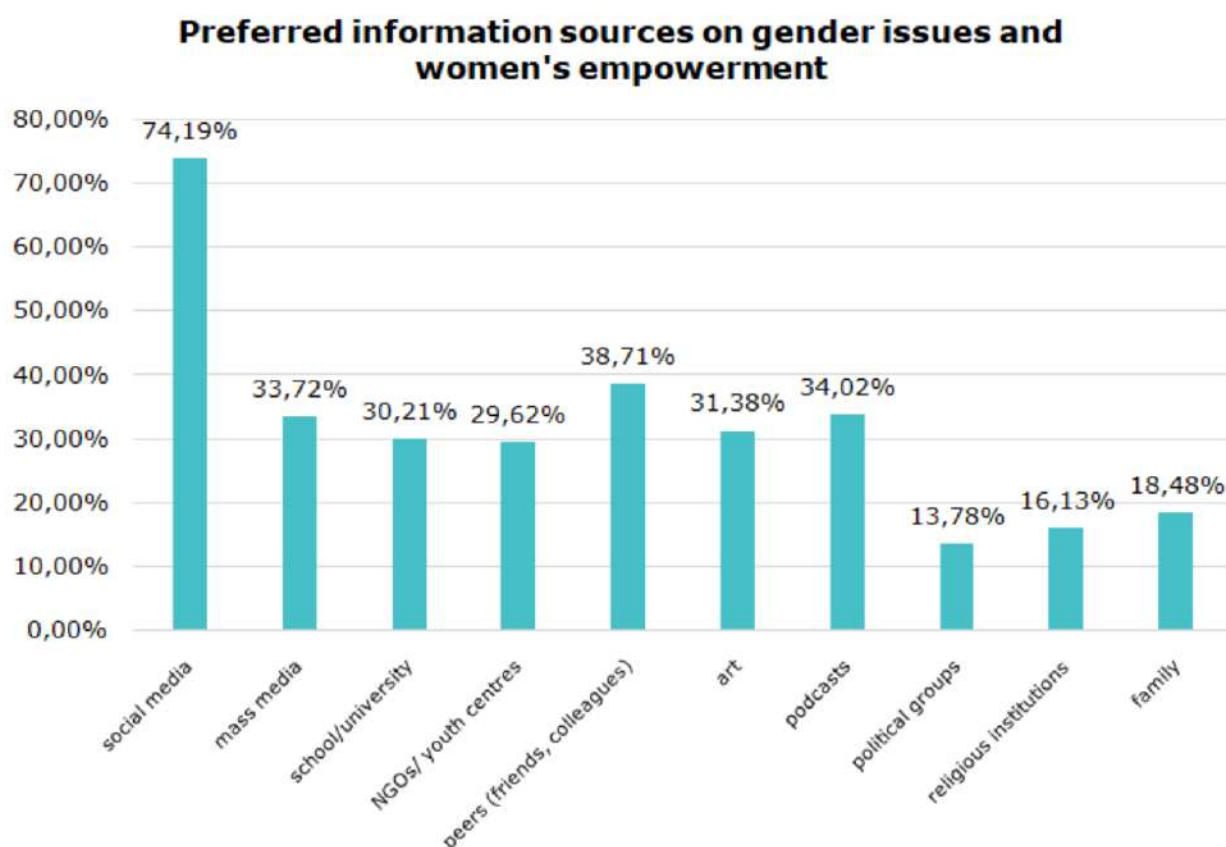
The complexity of gender concepts can prevent many youth workers from addressing the topic with their target groups. The terminology and the evolving understanding of gender can be highly intimidating to educators who are expected to know all about it and confusing for young people. Gender is increasingly viewed as a spectrum rather than a binary concept. This can be confusing for young individuals, particularly those just starting to explore their identities. The traditional dichotomy of male and female is frequently firmly embedded, and discussing gender fluidity, non-binary identities, and transgender concerns necessitates clarity, patience, and suitable terminology. Moreover, there are many terms and concepts related to gender (e.g., cisgender, genderqueer, genderfluid, pronouns) that young people may not fully grasp or may find overwhelming:

"Every time I go to a conference on feminism I get bombarded with a lot of names and concepts that I don't know. Even if I am looking them up, sometimes I don't find results or I don't really find what they were talking about. So yes, I find it hard to start from scratch to understand the feminist movement. Therefore, I find that I cannot fully know what concerns gender discrimination (I will always miss something, even if I may have it under my nose) and women's empowerment (of which we hear little about anyway)." (Young woman, Italy)

The **social and cultural barriers** highlight societal stereotypes, patriarchal systems, and a lack of open discussion spaces. Most of the subtopics have been already analysed because they were also identified as challenges for the youth workers. However, it is essential to underline the specific barriers that are: the religious and political obstacles, generational gaps in understanding gender topics and issues like misogyny, queer phobia and cultural resistance to change. Especially the Moroccan respondents mentioned the fact that by only discussing these topics you will get stigmatised by society.

Another element worth mentioning is **echo chambers**, which occur when individuals are exposed only to views and perspectives that align with their pre-existing beliefs. These echo chambers limit critical thinking and openness to diverse viewpoints. Echo chambers can be particularly prevalent among young people engaging with gender issues due to their reliance on social media, peer groups, and algorithm-driven platforms. This aspect is also underlined by the youngsters' sources of information of choice.

Preferred information sources on gender issues and women's empowerment

Preferred information sources on gender issues and women's empowerment

The data reveals that social media is the dominant source of information on gender issues and women's empowerment, with 74,19% of respondents favouring it. Its accessibility and widespread reach make it the primary platform for young people to engage with gender-related content. However, this reliance also makes it susceptible to echo chambers and misinformation, which can limit critical thinking. Similarly, informal conversations with peers (38,71%) play a significant role in shaping opinions, highlighting the importance of interpersonal dialogue. Yet, peer-based discussions can perpetuate biases if not grounded in reliable information.

Traditional and educational sources like schools/universities (30.21%), mass media (33,72%), and NGOs/youth centres (29,62%) are moderately utilised. Schools and universities provide structured knowledge, while NGOs and youth centres are recognised for their expertise and activism. Despite their potential for delivering accurate and in-depth content, these sources are often overshadowed by the immediacy and convenience of digital platforms. Additionally, creative mediums like art (31,38%) and newer platforms such as podcasts (34,02%) are emerging as engaging alternatives for storytelling and awareness, offering opportunities for growth in their influence.

On the other hand, more traditional or conservative sources, such as religious institutions (16,13%) and family (18,48%), are the least preferred, reflecting a disconnect between these institutions and the current discourse on gender.

Their lower relevance may stem from perceptions of outdated or restrictive views on gender issues. The overall trends suggest that while social media and peers dominate, there is significant potential to strengthen underutilised resources, particularly NGOs, art, and podcasts, to provide a more balanced and inclusive understanding of gender issues.

Going back to the challenges, **personal limitations** refer to personal bias, lack of life experience, and fear of discovering personal relevance to gender issues. However, it implies economic and time limitations, further preventing deeper engagement with the topic:

"My challenges in learning about gender and empowerment are mainly the lack of support networks in this new culture and prejudices, both here and in my community of origin complicate everything. Economic and job instability is another factor that limits my time and access to educational and activism spaces. Discrimination due to my administrative status makes everything more difficult, so finding and participating in safe and empowering spaces is difficult for me."
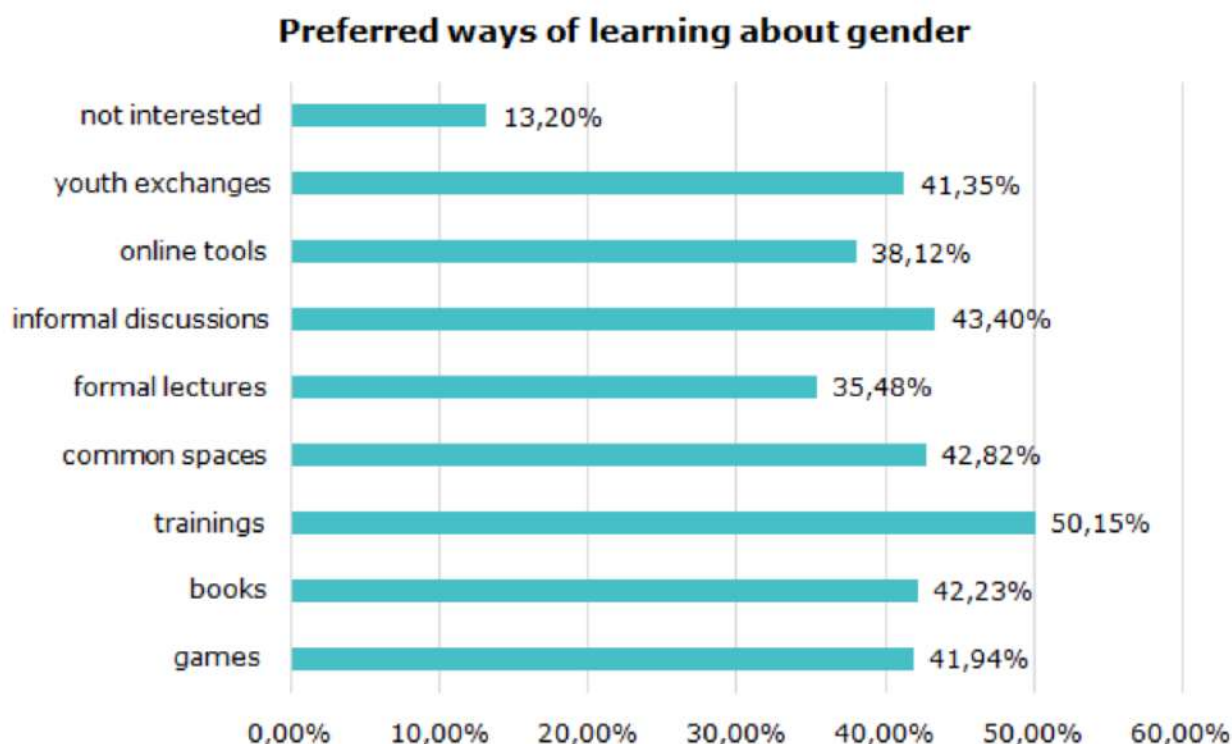
It is impossible to treat these pillars separately since all of the challenges are intertwined. **Lack of support** refers to the difficulty of finding safe spaces for discussions, the lack of communication with experts or informed individuals, and the general social disinterest in addressing this issue. The quote from a young Moroccan best shows the link between religion, society, the **need for safe space**, and the personal threat felt when tackling gender:

"To address such topics and discuss them in a conservative area like Morocco is somehow sensitive and in most cases considered as a taboo due to our collective point of view about gender roles distribution and religious instructions. In my case, as a rural woman, I find it very difficult to open a mundane discussion about feminism or gender-biased topics because if I do so, I will be regarded as a rebellious woman who revolts against the common rules and is even hated by most of them. This made me become very selective with the type of people I open a discussion with on such topics."

The complexity of the challenges can also be seen in the mind map at page 39, which answers the main research questions we have encountered along the way.

Fostering open dialogue, promoting critical thinking and developing reliable resources are crucial for a better understanding of the gender issue and for a more equitable society. In this respect, youth workers need to find the most suitable way of delivering information and awareness.

Preferred ways of learning about gender

Preferred ways of learning about gender

Category	Percentage
not interested	13,20%
youth exchanges	41,35%
online tools	38,12%
informal discussions	43,40%
formal lectures	35,48%
common spaces	42,82%
trainings	50,15%
books	42,23%
games	41,94%

(Horizontal axis: 0,00% 10,00% 20,00% 30,00% 40,00% 50,00% 60,00%)

According to the chart above, **trainings** emerge as the most popular choice, with 50.15% of respondents favouring this method. This preference highlights young people's interest in engaging, interactive, and structured formats where they can actively participate, share experiences, and gain practical knowledge. Such workshops or seminars provide a focused approach to complex topics, making them particularly appealing.

Other popular methods include **informal discussions** (43.40%), **common spaces** (42.82%), **books** (42.23%), and **games** (41.94%). These results indicate that young people value flexible, interactive, and diverse learning environments. Informal discussions and common spaces suggest a preference for peer-to-peer learning and open dialogue, fostering deeper understanding in casual and inclusive settings. Books remain relevant, demonstrating an appetite for traditional, self-paced learning, while games' popularity emphasizes the effectiveness of gamification in making learning fun and engaging.

Interestingly, **online tools** (38.12%) and **formal lectures** (35.48%) are less favoured, with online tools showing moderate popularity despite the widespread use of technology by young people. This may indicate that while digital platforms are accessible, they may lack the interactivity or depth offered by other methods. Formal lectures, on the other hand, are less appealing, possibly due to their rigid and one-directional approach, which contrasts with the collaborative and experiential methods preferred by this audience.

Lastly, only 13.20% of respondents identified as "not interested," showing that the majority of young people are keen to learn about gender issues and women empowerment. This reflects a strong awareness and willingness among youth to engage with these topics. However, the findings underscore the importance of using varied and dynamic approaches, such as trainings, games, and discussions, to ensure maximum engagement and impact when addressing these critical issues with younger audiences.

CONCLUSION

The challenges surrounding gender issues and women empowerment are deeply woven into the experiences of young people, yet they also represent areas of tremendous potential for growth and change. For youth workers, these challenges are not merely obstacles - they are opportunities to inspire, educate, and empower a generation to redefine norms and create a more equitable society. The findings of this study underline the **critical role youth workers play** in shaping perspectives, fostering dialogue, and building skills that equip young people to tackle these issues with confidence and empathy.

One of the most striking aspects of working with young people is their openness to learning and their willingness to challenge the status quo. Yet, **addressing gender issues requires more than just awareness, it demands active engagement through inclusive, dynamic methods**. Youth workers must create environments where discussions about gender and empowerment are not only safe but also stimulating. This could mean using interactive tools like games or informal conversations that resonate deeply with young people, making abstract concepts relatable and personal. By using them, youth workers can help young people unlearn biases, explore the meaning of equity, and see themselves as part of the solution.

Equally important is **nurturing young people's capacity to lead change in their communities**. As they grapple with issues of gender inequality, many youth - especially women and girls - face structural barriers that can feel overwhelming. Here, the role of youth workers becomes pivotal in providing mentorship and advocacy, ensuring that young people, regardless of gender, feel seen, heard, and valued. By equipping them with knowledge, practical skills, and the confidence to take action, youth workers empower them not only to envision a better world but to actively contribute to its creation.

Perhaps the most transformative element of this journey is the opportunity to **challenge societal norms and re-imagine what gender equality looks like**. Youth workers stand at the crossroads of tradition and innovation, able to guide young people through complex cultural landscapes while fostering a new vision for empowerment. This involves tackling difficult questions about power, identity, and inclusion but also celebrating progress and resilience. It is about helping young people see that every conversation, every small action, contributes to a larger movement for change.

Phoenix project proves to be a great opportunity to address in an interactive and efficient way topics such as – gender in a multicultural context, gender stereotypes and prejudices, women's empowerment and leadership, tackling gender-based violence, LGBTIQ+ inclusion and rights, gender representation, healthy relationships and consent, legal rights and advocacy and many others.

By focusing on cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, the project can ensure its tools are relevant, effective, and impactful in diverse settings.

Lunaria is an "Association for Social Promotion", established in 1992, not-for-profit, non-religious, and autonomous from any political party affiliation.

It promotes peace, social and economic justice, equality and the guarantee of citizenship rights, democracy and participation, social inclusion and intercultural dialogue.

At the local, national and international level, Lunaria performs and stimulates social change, carrying out advocacy initiatives, political and cultural events, non-formal education and communication activities, and leading networking as well as information and raising awareness campaigns.

The core of Lunaria's work and commitment is made of international volunteering and mobility, youth programmes, migrations and the struggle against racism and inequalities, sustainable development, the analysis of economic, social, and public spending policies.

PHOENIX

Youth Work for Gender Awareness in the Euro-Mediterranean Context