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Deliverable D7.3 – Findings document on gender in the area of children and climate change

Reflections on the gender distribution of project participants

The Hot & Happening project offers all genders equal participation in the project activities. Some partners work with school classes, which usually have a mixed group of boys and girls, others work with children that voluntarily signed up for the program. The locations, schools, or centers where we work with children are chosen based on children belonging to certain marginalized groups. For example, in the Netherlands, vocational school pupils were included, Sweden focused on schools characterized by social-economic barriers, Lithuania and Romania focused on children at risk of poverty, early school leaving or violence, while Albania's ETMI included Roma populations. There was no other pre-selection made incl. based on gender by partners to decide whether a child can participate. There is only an age limit of 11-18 years old which relates mainly to the suitability of the methodology. Also, for decision makers, we have not selected participants based on gender.

As shown by the data, the **child participants are quite equally distributed between girls and boys**. For girls and boys, this varies per work package between 47% and 53% (non-binary children represent 0% - 0,5%). However, for one activity - namely the national H&H event - the ratio is different with 70% being girls. This larger difference is observed especially in Albania, Romania, and the Netherlands. In Albania, this is explained by the reason that girls showed more interest, and engagement in extracurricular activities compared to boys. In the Netherlands, this can be explained by a mix of reasons being voluntarily signing up, and nominations by the teacher. In Romania it was explained by the mix of the above two reasons. All in all, the balanced contribution and shared responsibilities between girls and boys demonstrated an equitable approach within the project groups. Both girls and boys shared the same responsibilities and workload, ensuring an equitable distribution of tasks and participation. This balance is crucial for achieving a collaborative environment where all children, regardless of gender, can contribute equally and feel valued.

When focusing on **decision makers**, there is a much more skewed picture overall and per activity. Almost **2/3 of the 176 participants** of the training on child participation **were women** against 1/3 being men. This ratio is similar for other activities where decision makers as well as community members were involved including teachers and youth (18+), whereby women represented 60-76% of the participants. Generally, an interest-based, voluntarily joining of adults was prevalent in the project. The gender distribution of decision makers in our project shows a different picture than those of the latest findings of the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS, 2025¹). This report

¹ Margaras, V. (2025, March). *Women in local and regional government: Trends, challenges and best practices* (EPRS Briefing No. PE 769.526). European Parliamentary Research Service.



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found that only 34,5% were women in the EU in local and regional governments, while the topic of youth shows one of the highest female proportions of all portfolios (40%). It is interesting that our findings from all countries show a much higher proportion of female decision makers; around 75% across all WPs. Even when we investigate decision making power (low, mid and high), women hold similarly high proportions in all groups amongst our project participants. Based on our findings, it seems that more female decision makers compared to their male counterparts are working on the theme child participation and climate or show interest in it. Furthermore, as partners from Sweden pointed out, social sustainability is also a more popular profession among women. Partners from Lithuania reasoned that while elected decision makers are overwhelmingly male in Lithuania, and the country is no exception to the problem of gender inequalities observed EU-wide, women are often overrepresented in (lower-paying) public administrations that execute decisions, societally perceived as less prestigious. This is even more true of the teaching profession (target of WP4 and of many of the activities with children), which is almost entirely female-dominated, and of the NGO sector, which chronically struggles to attract men. The gender differences observed in men and women's engagement in the project, therefore, does not necessarily reflect a gendered gap in attitudes towards climate change – although these, in light with international studies², are highly likely to be present. Selection bias due to structural issues is a more likely explanation. Additional research outside of the project is needed.

Reflections on results by gender

When looking at the results of the project for participants, we see very little and few gender differences. In general, the average pre scores for girls were 3.43 and 3.49 for boys. The post-scores were 3.73 for girls (+0.3) and 3.68 (+0.2) for boys. Concerning the pre-scores or baseline for children (self-assessment via questionnaire), there was only a small difference when looking at overall scores of one of the topics. For knowing the workings of local government and the EU, girls scored 0.2 scores higher (4%) on average. This difference changed to boys scoring 0.1 higher in post-scores (boys reported a greater increase in their local government and EU related knowledge). On climate-related questions such as having knowledge on the topic climate, there was no difference observed neither in the pre-, nor in the post-scores.

² [1] See e.g. Ballew, M., Marlon, J., Leiserowitz, A., & Maibach, E. (2018). Gender Differences in Public Understanding of Climate Change. Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/gender-differences-in-public-understanding-of-climate-change/>; Sunn Bush, S. & Clayton, A. (2023). "Facing Change: Gender and Climate Change Attitudes Worldwide." *American Political Science Review*, 117(2), 591-608. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000752>; Remsö, A., Bäck, H., Renström, E. A. (2024) "Gender differences in climate change denial in Sweden: the role of threatened masculinity". *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15(2024). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1450230>



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When it comes to decision makers, the picture is similar. The pre-scores were 3.49 for women and 3.41 for men, whereas the post-scores were 4.25 for women (+0.76) and 4.19 for men (+0.78). The only observable difference that we can conclude is that participating in the project halved the gender differences reported by adults (pre-scores showed an average of 0.2 difference between men and women, with some higher outlier values, while post-scores showed an average of 0.1 difference without any outliers).

We have also organized many mixed focus group discussions about results mid-way of the project in all countries. The results do not show differences between boys and girls, or men and women in the decision maker FGDs. One activity focused on evaluating criteria of child participation, with inclusiveness being one of them. Children were specifically asked to score the criteria, meaning everyone can participate in the project and its activities. This was agreed upon by the children from all countries; they reported that they experienced the project as welcoming to all. They also indicated they felt safe and respected.

General reflections on gender

Overall scores and gender averages hide specifics per partner or country, and per theme. The project data shows differences per country, and per location within countries. For example, in the Netherlands girls almost caught up with boys regarding skills. Moreover, overall gender analysis can hide differences between locations (rural/urban), educational level, or other characteristics. Intersectionality is a very important factor, being more important than gender alone based on the project data. As an example, during the mid-term learning session we discussed the differences in children's confidence-related barriers to meaningful participation, which was found to be more prevalent in the rural areas of Romania, while the opposite was true for Sweden. Even within a country, two groups or children from different locations could show differences in attitudes and related needs that local facilitators were tailoring the program to. Target age also did not yield significant differences in our observations. While Lithuania focused on the youngest children among participating countries, (starting at the age of 11), the similarities with other countries were greater than the differences: children equally wanted to be heard in issues that affect them and similarly expected adults to listen to them and implement their ideas. We have concluded that in order to better understand child participation in climate, a group's specific local and socio-economic contexts taken together is more important than general differences in gender, age, or type of location. We recommend adopting individual- and group-centered approaches that recognize children not as a monolithic group, but as individuals embedded in specific communities and relationships. Supporting local youth voices (by local actors) and tailoring initiatives to their unique contexts will ensure that climate action is more inclusive, effective, meaningful and



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sustainable. The Speaking Minds methodology is a program that addresses these needs: connecting local children with local decision-makers, facilitated by local actors based on their local knowledge, involving wider local communities (teachers, community members) to ensure wider local engagement.

Looking at the effects of climate change, there is few data or literature on how these affect boys and girls living in Europe differently compared to, for example, Africa or Asia. This also holds true for the effects of climate policies.

As an example, the Speaking Minds methodology has been implemented in the Netherlands for 8 years now, focusing on different topics among climate. When looking at the total pre- and post- results from the past 4 years among children, similarly to the current project results, no significant differences can be observed among genders. However, cumulated data shows significant differences when comparing levels of education. The more vocational the educational level, the lower the children score on all items of the questionnaire utilized in the Hot and Happening project as well. Given that the Hot and Happening project focused on marginalized groups in all participating countries – partially informed by these previous findings -, educational level and associated socio-economic contextual comparisons could not be made.

There were some country specific differences noted by children, but these were not supported by all countries. For example, in the Netherlands, the effects of climate change on boys and girls are seen as similar. The relationship between gender and climate is not a topic of discussion including media or political debates. In the Netherlands, the focus is therefore on inclusivity as a more comprehensive concept than gender alone by ensuring those children who are least represented are heard. In Sweden, participating children and other participants found that girls tend to adopt a broader perspective, often considering national and international consequences of climate change. Boys are generally more inclined to focus on the personal and local implications of climate change, emphasizing how it affects themselves and their communities. In Lithuania, children noted that girls might be more willing than boys to recycle, with one child marking that age would be a more important characteristic than gender to investigate, because they experience that students are more interested in the topic than teachers. In general, the project findings suggest that that the gendered differences on knowledge of and willingness to act against climate change, widely studied globally³, are acquired later in age, probably as a result of socialization

³ [1] See e.g. Ballew, M., Marlon, J., Leiserowitz, A., & Maibach, E. (2018). Gender Differences in Public Understanding of Climate Change. Yale Program on Climate Change Communication. <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/publications/gender-differences-in-public-understanding-of-climate-change/>; Sunn Bush, S. & Clayton, A. (2023). "Facing Change: Gender and Climate Change Attitudes Worldwide." *American Political Science Review*, 117(2), 591-608. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000752>; Remsö, A., Bäck, H., Renström, E. A. (2024) "Gender



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processes incurring among older age groups than those targeted in the project who were under 18. The lack of gendered differences in this area among children makes them uniquely well-suited to take action as a united force against this issue.

To ensure all children can participate in activities related to climate no matter their gender, background or other intersectionality dimensions, we have the following observations and **recommendations**. These can vary per specific target group:

- Projects focusing on child participation and climate should be tailored to the local, group and individual characteristics and needs of children that go beyond general differences like that of gender or specific age groups.
- Use a mixture of program elements, such as sharing ideas with each other, talking to each other, working in groups on various climate themes to ensure everyone can give their opinion and meaningfully participate.
- Connecting children with local decision makers for sustainable change. Local policy makers - especially those working on youth topics - should initiate themselves to visit schools to make the municipality more accessible for children.
- Ensure the municipality is making participation an important topic. Take the ideas of children seriously, be honest, listen well, use the language of children, give feedback, and take action. Because not everyone is trained on creating safe spaces for children (as seen by the pre-scores of decision makers), the process can be enhanced with adopting a structured way like this project with a trained facilitator.
- Gender balance of adults working on child participation and youth inclusion in climate. Actively showcase male role models and success stories within the field. Representation plays a powerful role in shaping aspirations—children often look up to role models who share their gender identity, which influences their perception of what is possible and appropriate for them. By increasing visibility of men thriving in this profession, we can help broaden young boys' and men's sense of belonging and potential within the sector and in general their attitudes towards climate. Use communication channels preferred by children.. Social media is used by all children, no matter their gender or background. For ex. a municipality can post a message on Instagram to which children can react.
- Ensure that initiatives to tackle climate change involve children at as early an age as possible. This ensures that children are engaged in actions against climate change before gendered differences produced by socialization emerge and is likely to reduce the risk of these differences developing with age.



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Conclusions

In the participating countries children do not feel that there are gender differences in the effects of climate on children. When invited to become active in climate related topics, both boys and girls participate actively in discussions. The questionnaire results show very similar results between boys and girls in their understanding of climate, their rights, skills and their knowledge on workings of national governments and the EU. While decision makers were overwhelmingly women, significant differences versus men in their self-reported knowledge and attitudes were not observed. Our project highlights that the sole focus on gender as a single determinant to predict results can't explain the intersectionality dimensions that are affecting children's participation and the associated barriers. Our data shows differences between and within countries, cities and schools, but not within gender. We recommend the lens of intersectionality, focus on socio-economic status, and associated access to education and participation when addressing specific children's needs in child participation. Our project found that **regardless of gender, girls and boys and adult women and men all appreciate and see the value of cooperation with each other in addressing climate related issues.** Not only with the aim for the children to feel included and empowered, but also for the benefit of the wider community and for the climate issue at hand.