**Questionnaire on girls’ and young women’s activism**

**Feedback of the Government of Malta**

1. **Nature, modalities and trends of girls’ and young women’s activism**
2. **What is the normative framework related to participation of girls and young women in civic space and their activism?**

The normative framework for girls and young women’s activism and participating in civic space reflects Malta’s obligations to guarantee the enjoyment of human rights principles such as freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association, laid down in Maltese law and international treaties which Malta is a party to, such as the European Convention on Human Rights. The Consitution of Malta (Article 14, 45, and 46) ensures that women’s rights and equal participation are recognised in the same way as men. The participation of women and girls in civic space is also governed by the National Youth Policy and the Voluntary Organisations’ Act.

1. **What are the main features of girls’ and young women’s activism participation in political and public life in your national context? Please describe, in particular, in terms of:**
   1. **Specific issues (thematic areas) on which girls and young women are mostly engaged**

Girls and young women’s activism often begins with student activism and their involvement in student organisations within post-secondary and tertiary education institutions that have close ties to the two main political parties in Malta. Many continue to engage in the national political arena after their studies, while others either join non-governmental organisations or the media.

The thematic areas on which girls and young women in Malta are mostly engaged are the environment, reproductive rights, intercultural inclusion and anti-racism, gender equality, domestic violence, good governance, LGBTIQ equality, the legalisation of cannabis, sport, and other general political issues of the day.

* 1. **Political actors and authorities they mostly engage with**

They mostly engage with political parties, MEPs, Government & Opposition, NGOs, the media, and local authorities (depending on the subject matter).

* 1. **Levels of engagement (grassroots, local, national, international)**

Mostly at the local and national level.

* 1. **Main spaces for engagement (e.g. schools, community, media, online platforms, etc.)**

The main platforms for engagement include social media, traditional media houses and online news portals, political party media, online television appearances, speeches at rallies, university debates and election campaigns, and other community-based events. Community and school engagement, including education projects, also provide space for girls and young women to meet and organise. For instance, the Girl Guides have focused on the issue of domestic violence over the past few years implementing a number of educational projects among their members and in schools.

The spaces for engagement generally depend on the organisation they are involved in and the issue being addressed. Organisations such as Moviment Graffitti engage in physical protests mainly around environmental issues; those working on women’s reproductive rights use awareness raising through digital media but also provide support services; organisations such as the Girl Guides provide educational workshops; student organisations focus on peer events. Those engaged in youth mock parliaments, meanwhile, are generally interested in the political sphere.

* 1. **Cross-movements cooperation and solidarity**

1. **What are the forms and modalities for girls’ and young women’s activism participation in your national context? Please provide information about any structures in place (formal and informal) and how they operate?**

Girls’ and young women’s activism participation is carried out both through organised structures as well as more ad-hoc or spontaenous forms. The organised structures in place include student organisations, youth organisations, youth wings of the major political parties, Youth Policy Groups, the National Youth Council, National Youth Parliament, thematic NGOs, and the media. More ad-hoc modalities include spontaneous appearances at protests and rallies, personal accounts on social media, and interviews with online news portals and newspapers.

1. **What are the main trends and drivers influencing their activism participation in your country or region?**

The opportunity for activism in the digital space is undoubtedly driving more participation of girls and young women, as they take advantage of having their own platform to share their views and engage with both like-minded individuals and others who disagree. Political parties are also providing positive space for girls and women to lead policy debates and influence the outcomes that materialise from those discussions. Educational attainment may also be playing a role, with women registering 60.5% of all University Graduates in Malta in 2020.

1. **What are the positive and inspirational examples of girls’ activism in terms of:**
   1. **Social mobilisation and change**

* Women’s Rights Foundation: advocacy for licensing, importation and distribution of emergency contraception
* Malta Girl Guides: [‘Stop the Violence’ Project](https://maltagirlguides.com/stop-the-violence/)
* Moviment Graffitti: Environmental advocacy.
  1. **Influencing policies and legislation**
* Sarah Ezabe: Advocacy in favour of intercultural inclusion and engagement with national authorities in the design of Malta’s first Anti-Racism Strategy
* Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement: LGBTIQ Equality Advocacy & Service Provision
  1. **Personal development and empowerment (of girls and young women)**
* Malta Girl Guides Association: one of the most active Voluntary Organisations in Malta, serving to empower girls and that includes among its youth leaders a number of young women.
* National Youth Agency
* Youth Hubs
* Youth.Inc Programme
* Rainbow Support Service
* Youth Catholic Action

1. **Enabling factors and good practices**
2. **What solidarity and support frameworks are available in your national context to enhance girls’ and young women’s activism? Please provide concrete examples on any positive role of:**
   1. **Legal/policy and institutional frameworks**

The Voluntary Organisations Act regulates the operation of NGO’s, while the National Youth Policy sets out priorities for the Youth Sector. The National Youth Agency assists in the capacity building of youth organisations as well as providing youth services.

* 1. **Social, cultural, and religious institutions**

Many youth organisations have a religious ethos or are based in parishes. The church structure that supports religious organisations is the Diocesan Youth Commission. There are also drama groups, band clubs and sports teams that girls and young women are involved in. The National Youth Agency also runs several empowerment initiatives aimed at building the capacity of young artists to engage in activism such as Artivisti and IdeAzzjonisti (<https://youth.gov.mt/>)

* 1. **Technological infrastructures/means**

The National Youth Agency has several support services aimed at youth organisations, including small funding schemes that support empowerment initiatives and the procurement of resources. Other schemes are available to voluntary organisations to assist in the implementation of projects. Public Private Partnerships are available to those NGO’s providing social services.

* 1. **Other frameworks**

1. **What are the ways the State promotes and supports girls’ participation/activism? Please provide concrete examples and good practices with respect to measures taken by the State, in particular:**
   1. **To address discriminatory social norms, gender stereotyping, and stigma against girls’ public participation and activist roles**

The Human Rights Directorate within Malta’s Ministry for Equality, Research & Innovation carries out regular awareness-raising campaigns aimed at combatting social norms and gender stereotyping.

* 1. **to ensure gender and age-responsive protection from attacks against girl activists**

The Maltese Government set up the Victim Support Agency (VSA) with the aim of supporting and empowering victims of hate crime and hate speech motivated by prejudice based on a person’s gender, gender identity, race, colour, religion or belief, sexual orientation, language, national or ethnic origin, citizenship or political belief or any other opinion. The VSA also works towards the development of positive attitudes and a more inclusive society, diminishing hate and promoting equal opportunities among all members of society.

* 1. **to assess and support girls’ evolving capacity to fully and freely participate in all spheres of public decision-making**

In 2021 the Maltese Parliament approved a Constitutional amendment to introduce temporary positive measures necessary and reasonable in a democratic society to ensure de facto equality between men and women in politics (through a mechanism to ensure that at least 40% of MPs are women, to be applied for the first time at the next General Election), and also an amendment of the General Elections Act to increase the number of electoral commissioners and ensure equal representation between sexes.

1. **What are the particular issues and platforms, if any, in which the State encourages girls and young women’s engagement? How is the diversity of girls’ activism and inclusion in all human rights activism initiatives ensured (e.g. gender equality, disability, environment, LGBTI issues, etc.)? Please share positive practices.**

The State does not hinder any engagement from girls & young women but goes on to endorse and support various initiatives such as for example, the emergency contraception legislation.

The National Youth Agency runs a number of initiatives aimed at empowering young people. A full list of these can be found here: <https://youth.gov.mt/> In general, the National Youth Agency looks at having equal gender representation in its initiatives.

1. **How do other stakeholders promote girls’ and young women’s engagement and activism in your national context? Please describe which stakeholders are active in this area and what role they play.**

There are many non-governmental organisations aimed at promoting girls’ and young women’s engagement and activism which play an important role in applying the adequate pressure in their respective areas. Moreover, there are no restrictions on freedom of expression in Malta.

The National Youth Agency engages with youth organisations and young people to promote youth leadership such as through the Model European Parliament and the Schools Civic Education Programme.

1. **Challenges and structural barriers**
2. **What kind of gender and age specific barriers are affecting girls’ and young women’s participation/activism in your national context? Please indicate concrete examples of direct and indirect as well as formal and informal factors posing threats and risks for girls and young women engaging in the public space (examples of these can include stereotyping based on gender and age, restrictions on freedom of expression, speech, assembly, liberty, etc.).**

In Malta there are no restrictions on freedom of expression depending on gender and age. While women have tended to be under-represented in the political sphere, temporary measures to address this will come into effect with the next General Election as explained earlier. Women tend to be over-represented in the social field and care sector. They also still carry a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities within the home. This can limit their engagement in activism and the political sphere.

1. **Are there any specific laws, policies, and practices that place obstacles to girls’ and young women’s participation, activism, or collective action? If yes please specify.**

None.

1. **What are the threats girl and young women activists in your country or region experience in relation to their work as activists? In particular, in terms of:** 
   1. **Being prosecuted and punished for their activism**

None

* 1. **Facing intimidations, harassments, and attacks (direct or indirect, online or offline, sexual or physical)**

/

* 1. **Lacking access to justice and reparation for violations of their rights**

None

1. **What are the particular concerns that may arise with respect to girls’ and young women’s access to technology and other infrastructures? How does the digital divide impact girls’ activism?**

More than half of the female population in Malta have basic digital skills. Moreover, quite a substantial amount of lobbying by activists is done on online platforms and thus, hindrance in this area is quite minimal.

1. **What are the challenges in your national context, in the recognition and protection of girls as human rights defenders? What negative trends undermine their evolving capacities and interests at the family, community, and State levels?**

Offensive and degrading comments on social media often leads to dehumanisation of activists. These personal attacks divert attention away from the recogition of these girl activists as human rights defenders and the need to engage in an informed, civilised debate on pressing issues of concern.

1. **Emerging issues**
2. **What are the impacts of digital advancements and major shifts in digital activism on girls’ and young women’s engagement/participation?**

Digital advancements have helped girls and young women activists reach a wider audience both locally and abroad. The digital space has also provided a platform on which these activists can reach younger audiences which tend to engage more online. Moreover, digital activism led to a new dimension of projects which could be organised online.

1. **What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls’ and young women’s activism/participation?**

The COVID-19 pandemic mostly impacted events which had to be shifted online due to government restrictions, and financial independence due to a reduction in donations given to NGOs during the pandemic.

1. **Recommendations/ the way forward**
2. **What concrete measures should States adopt and implement to ensure girls’ and young women’s meaningful participation, activism, and collective action at all levels?**

* Protection of freedom of speech
* Access to justice
* Financial assistance
* Equal access to digital technology

1. **What concrete measures should States adopt to address systemic gender-based/age-based discrimination and challenges affecting girls’ and young women’s engagement in the political and public life?**

States should ensure constant dialogue with young girls and women activists to assure that any obstacles they may face in making their voice heard is tackled effectively. States should also provide the space for civil society, the media, and other social partners to take a leading role in providing public platforms for girls and young women to participate in the national debate.

\*\*\*