#WeCo
LEAD

Young Women's Leadership for Collaborative Sustainable Communities

#WeCoLead

2021-1-SE02-KA220-YOU-000028775

International Report – PR1

May 2022

Project Partners

- SwIdeas
  (Sweden)

- Formation et Sensibilisation de Luxembourg (Luxembourg)

- SZUBJEKTÍV ÉRTÉKEK ALAPÍTVÁNY (Hungary)

- COMM'ON
  (Greece)

- CESIE
  (Italy)

Table of Content

The Internationa Project Team

(From Hungary, Luxembourg, Greece, Sweden, and Italy)

Introduction

Although all are impacted by the changes and uncertainties brought about in 2020, younger generations and vulnerable groups such as young women are likely to be greatly impacted. While environmental degradation threatens the future of youngsters, women often have low resilience power in face of crises, whether they are caused by disease, natural disaster, climate change, conflict, or even the generalized Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Now, with the consequences of Covid-19, women, young people, and other vulnerable groups face bigger threats. UN Women (2020) highlighted women make up for more than 70% of the global health workforce and are "more likely to be burdened with unpaid care and domestic work, and therefore have to drop out of the labour force". It also predicts that the pandemic will "widen the gender poverty gap – meaning, more women will be pushed into extreme poverty than men" (ibid). Additionally, the OECD has proven that gender equality is key to sustainable development, namely, it would favour the pursuit of objectives like poverty reduction, public health improvement and female and child mortality rate reduction. For this reason, supporting ways for female and youth empowerment, employability, and leadership, especially in environmental matters is key to building resilience for young women.

Considering this context, #WeCoLead project explores the power of social media as a means of promoting information and narratives that may uphold oppression, the experiences of young women, the role of non-formal and informal education, the potential of interactive methodologies, and the opportunities that transnational connections and leadership and capacity building can offer to overcome the threats previously outlined.

In particular, this report is a result of a research and activities implemented within social media which had the goals of:
- Initiating critical thinking in a collective manner
- Exploring the idea of the target group coming together to engage in critical analysis, lead reflection, and collectively speak for themselves, tapping on their sense of initiative.
- generate a critical reflection around mainstream unsustainable narratives to then assess how young women can take initiative to lead the changing of mindset in terms of gender equality and sustainability
- encourage young women to work collectively to record and edit reels videos reflecting the main discussed topics and their opinions, inviting their peers to engage in critical thinking
- explore young women's perceptions on how to overcome the obstacles that already existed and that are currently being laid out with the pandemic

Cross-National Overview - Summary

All partners conducted simplified research that contained online research, social media analysis and focus group discussions as well. A summary of the intersections of the results among the countries within the #WeCoLead consortium is provided below.

According to the findings of the partners, the pandemic had both negative and positive effects. Due to the significant increase in household waste, overconsumption, as well as the increase of single-use, disposable items and plastics (such as for tests, gloves, masks, etc.), environmental problems and pollution became more visible in the five partner countries. However, this increased awareness did not cause direct changes in all the countries. For instance, in Italy, participants claimed that a sustainable lifestyle is only reachable by the upper-middle-class people and that political regulations need to be put in place to address climate change. This highlights that in the country people are generally sceptical about the importance and impact of individual actions and responsibility. On the contrary, in Greece, Luxembourg and Hungary participants claimed that the pandemic helped change their habits and shopping ways to reduce their ecological footprint. In Sweden, they did not experience a significant change in awareness, but the country already presented a strong environmental awareness when compared to the other participating countries.

Regarding mental health, all the partner countries indicated a concerning decrease in perceptions of wellbeing. Each national research showed that anxiety, feeling of loneliness, and depression increased in connection to the quarantines, the home office, home studies, and the sudden lack of social interactions for approximately 1,5 years. Participating students and the teachers suffered the dire consequences from online studies, such as negative consequences for studies progression and interaction. Similarly, while some employed women appreciated the opportunity to stay at home to concentrate in other tasks such as cleaning the home with more sustainable products, engaging in physical exercise, etc., most of the results appoint to a connection between home office and a sense of anxiety and stress, as the division between work and time off were blurred.

An economic crisis was visible in the respondents' experiences in Hungary and Italy since several young women lost their jobs during the pandemic and were forced to use all their savings to maintain their living conditions. In Hungary, gender inequality in job seeking is a problematic systemic issue and for this reason, losing jobs put women into a highly vulnerable situation. On the other hand, in Sweden this issue was not importantly highlighted, which might be connected to the availability of support from the Swedish welfare system and the opportunities to work from home as well as to the fact that while schools remained open, people in the country still counted with a reasonable freedom to maintain their mobility.

Besides the negative effects which will be further highlighted throughout this document, some participants in all partner countries experienced positive feelings regarding their physical and mental health thanks to more free time and me-time, and more opportunities to focus on themselves at home in a safe environment.

In Greece and Sweden, domestic violence in families and abuse at workplaces turned out to be more known during the pandemic. The number of reported cases of abuse increased significantly and people joined different online movements to raise awareness about this issue. According to European studies (Wijk et al., 2021) and the experiences initiated within the #WeCoLead project, in the other partner countries

quarantine situations also increased domestic violence, although most cases have not been brought to light during the pandemic.

Spending more time at home increased the number of household chores and in some cases, women felt more responsibility for handling them. While some respondents and participants did not experience any changes, there was no significant difference in the findings between the partner countries, besides that in Sweden, women seemed to feel a higher level of gender equality in household chores than in the other countries.

In the next sections, each topic of the overall research implemented by each partner organisation will be detailed. The sections are divided as follows:
1) Methodology & Activities
2) Overview of the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Gender Inequality and Sustainability
3) The Effects of the Pandemic on Gender Inequalities, Employment and Health
4) The Effects of the Pandemic on Sustainability and Environmental Consciousness
5) Creation of the Reel Videos
6) Upcoming Challenges during the Implementation of the Activities
7) Expected Impact of our Activities & Conclusions

Methodology & Activities

In our ever-changing world, the media, and people themselves represent the main source of information and knowledge. Social media has gained a scope never seen before, becoming a means for people to interact, communicate, and fill their lives with activities such as TikTok challenges and watching/creating reels during quarantines and lockdowns.

Based on this, the main goal of the first project result of #WeCoLead is to bring our target group, young women together to engage in critical analysis, lead reflection, and collectively speak for themselves.

The project partners conducted 1) limited online research with questionnaires to identify issues young women face regarding gender roles, employment, physical and mental health, and sustainability. When the keywords were collected from the respondents, 2) a social media content analysis was done to select 2 trending social media posts in each country that represented burning issues. Based on this, 3) focus group discussions were conducted with 10 young women/representatives of supporting organizations in each country that created space to engage, to share personal experiences and harms, and to think about possible solutions. An online transnational roundtable was also organized to exchange experiences from different national contexts, discuss the local context, build connections between young women from different backgrounds, but who face similar difficulties, and look for similarities and differences between their experiences. Then, 4) with the participation of the involved young women, reel videos were created around the discussed topics/issues for a social media campaign to raise awareness to the actual problems regarding gender inequalities, health and environmental problems that were connected to the Covid-19 pandemic and that highlighted the young women's opinions, points of views, challenges, and perspectives.

Co-funded by the European Union
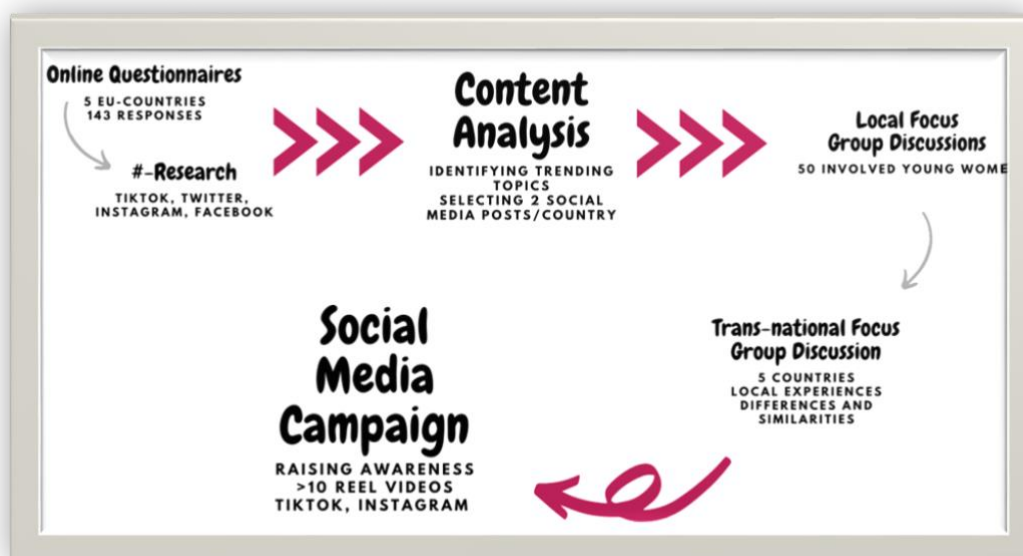
#WeCo LEAD

Online Questionnaires

The #WeCoLead partner organizations conducted online research by sending out questionnaires to young women living in Italy, Sweden, Greece, Hungary, and Luxembourg to understand the intersection of gender issues, health, climate change, and Covid-19 in the past year. Altogether, we collected responses and inputs from 143 young women throughout the 5 partner EU countries. In summary, we found that most respondents believe that the Covid-19 pandemic has had major negative consequences, especially in terms of mental health, social life, and job opportunities.

OVERVIEW ON SWEDEN

Our Swedish partners collected 28 answers from their questionnaire on Sustainability and COVID-19 measuring the impact of young women's health and social inequalities. The reported effects of *covid-19* were the following:

- Increased level of stress and anxiety - negative effect on **mental health**.
- Difficulty in adjusting to **online studying** - hard to concentrate and learn.
- Restricted **physical health** and lack of motivation to keep active.
- Lack of **social contacts** leading to isolation
- Increased **waste** of plastic items.

#WECOLEAD
FOCUS GROUPS COUNTRY OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW ON ITALY

90% of the Italian respondents who participated in our survey believe that the **Covid-19 pandemic** has had major negative consequences, especially in terms of *mental health, social life and job opportunities*.

However, we have to mention a effect as well: the level of **awareness** and consciousness of the respondents regarding **environmental problems** has increased: 82% found environmental sustainability 'very important', while this number was only 70% before the pandemic.

OVERVIEW ON HUNGARY

Our Hungarian partners collected 34 answers from their questionnaire on Sustainability and COVID-19 measuring the impact of young women's health and social inequalities.

- 76% of the responding young women claimed that their roles in the household chores changed because of COVID-19.
- 88% of this women detailed that the number of their tasks increased
- 97% of the respondents highlighted that COVID-19 has affected their mental health displeasingly.

OVERVIEW ON GREECE

Our Greek partners collected 31 answers from their questionnai Sustainability and COVID-19 measuring the impact of young wor health and social inequalities. The main findings were:

- young women in Greece were afftected in terms of **social life** **mental health** factors, although they did not consider that this h do with their gender.
- the environment was negatively impacted by the pand causing an **increase in household waste**.
- However, this seems to be compensated by the **decrease pollution** and reduced air travel.

OVERVIEW ON LUXEMBOURG

The young women respondents in Luxembourg had *mixed experiences* of the pandemic: some claimed that *online work* made life easier and more effective at home, while other said that this shift caused an *increase in household chores*.

For most young women respondents in Luxembourg, however, the *covid-19* pandemic had a *negative impact on their mental health*, causing an increase in stress, and depression feelings. On a positive note, most respondents claimed that they started to value *environmental sustainability* more!

- Research

To gather information on the current trending posts on social media, all the partner organizations conducted research on the social media platforms mentioned below. Each partner identified the main trending topics and key terms to be investigated in their national contexts that were most relevant for the target group and the project's topic. This identification was based on an analysis of trending hashtags as well as of content of relevant influencers in each national context. Based on this research, each partner selected 2-3 social media posts which, based on both their outreach and engagement, were considered to provide an insight into each country's local context regarding the Covid-19 pandemic's impact.

Researched social media platforms:

- TikTok
  Originally called Musical.ly, Tiktok is an app where users can share videos of themselves dancing or lip-syncing to songs or audio clips, post stories and events of their lives. It also hosts a variety of short-form user videos, from genres like pranks, stunts, tricks, jokes, dance, and entertainment with durations from 15 seconds to three minutes Unlike social media channels like Facebook or Instagram, TikTok has an unweighted algorithm that shares videos in chronological order based on when they were shared.

- Instagram
  Instagram is a photo and video sharing social network. The app allows users to upload media that can be edited with filters and organized by hashtags and geographical tagging. Posts can be shared publicly or with pre-approved followers. Users can browse other users' content by tags and locations and view trending content. Users can like photos and follow other users to add their content to a personal feed.

- Facebook
  Facebook is an online social networking service, which can be accessed from devices with Internet connectivity, such as personal computers, tablets and smartphones. After registering, users can create a profile revealing information about themselves. They can post text, photos and multimedia which are shared with any other users who have agreed to be their "friend" or, with different privacy settings, publicly. Users can also communicate directly with each other with Facebook Messenger, join common-interest groups, and receive notifications on the activities of their Facebook friends and pages they follow.

- Twitter
  Twitter is a place to go to find out what's happening in the world right now. Twitter can be used to receive news, follow high-profile celebrities, or stay in touch with old high school friends. Twitter began as an SMS-based platform, so the 140-character limit was initially simply a necessity -- mobile carriers imposed the limit, not Twitter. However, as Twitter grew to become a web platform, it kept the limit simply because it aligned with Twitter's brand.

Content Analysis

Based on the received data from the questionnaires and the social media research that was conducted in each participating country, we were able to identify the key terms and popular topics regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on gender equality, wellbeing, and the environment.

The identified keywords of the selected posts in each partner country were the following:

- **Sweden** – keywords related to gender inequalities and women empowerment
  #gömdakvinnor = "hidden women" and it is an expression for all, the thousands of women who are forced to live with a fake identity #nuräckerdet = 'now it is enough' #kvinnostrejk = "women on strike" #frånenkilletillenannan ='from a guy to another' #snubbarförsamtycke = 'men for consent' #stoppamachokulturen = 'stop the macho culture'

- **Hungary** – keywords related to body image, women empowerment and to negative psychological effects
  #covid19 #bodypositive #mentalhealth #braveness #nomakeup #workfromhome #womenempowerment #womenhelpwomen #isolation #depression #fear #uncertanity

- **Italy** – keywords related to immediate action to environmental protection and gender inequalities
  #emergenza = emergency # urgent # responsibility #hope #politicalinefficiency #fear

- **Luxembourg** – keywords related to fashion and personal responsibility
  #facemaskfashion #covid19luxembourg #stayhome #staysafe

- **Greece** – keywords related to the #metoo campaign and environmental protection
  #metoogr #Reduce #Reuse #Recycle #environment #zerowaste #climatecrisis #climateemergency #globalwarming #sustainability #circulareconomy #noplanetb #planetorplastic #unenvironment #wastemanagement #climatechange #oneplanet #plasticfreegreece #preciousplastic #recycle #banplasticbags #environment #Nature #Earth #SavethePlanet #ClimateAction

The collected posts can be observed below:
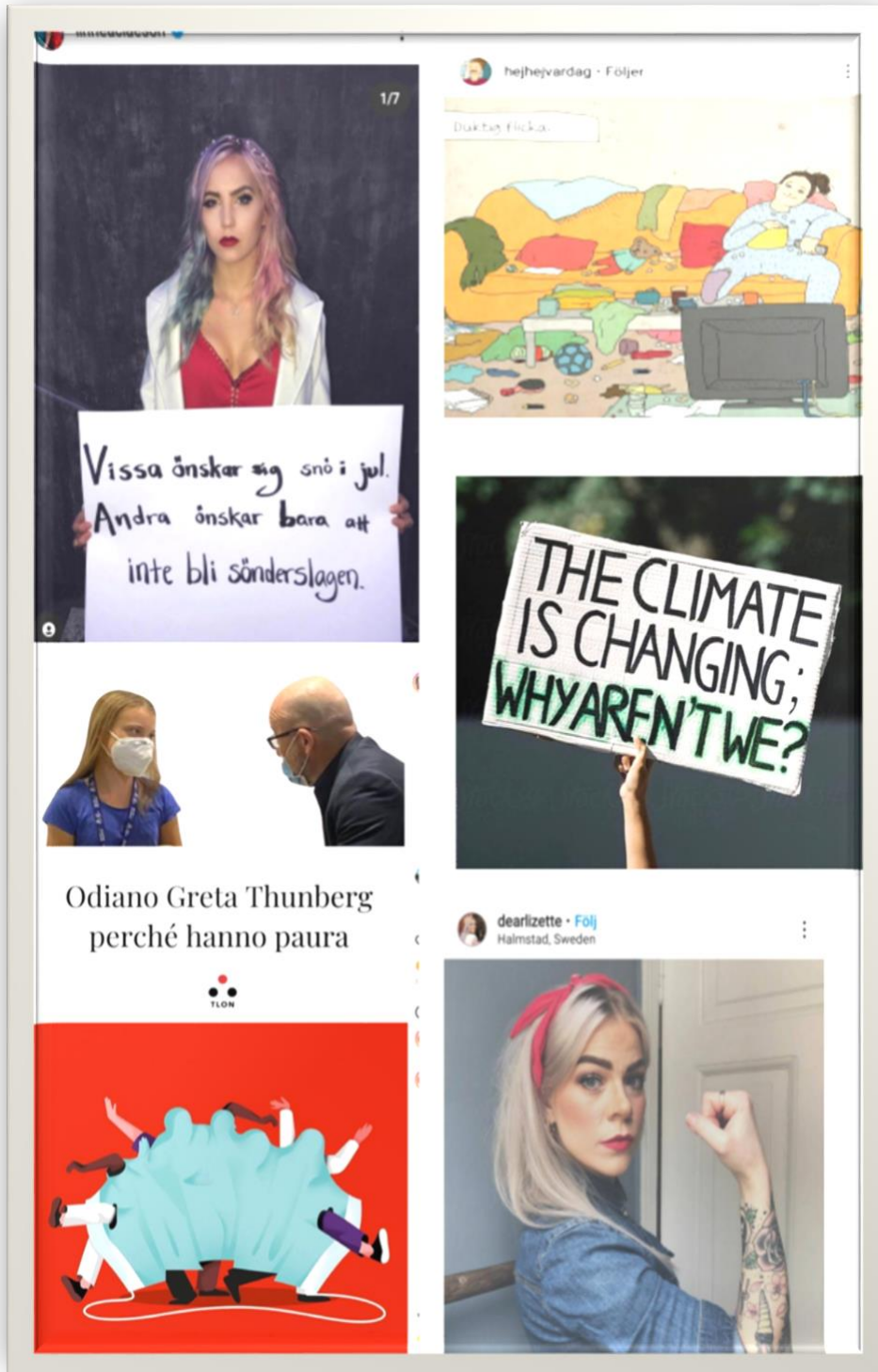
Focus Group Discussions

Each partner organization organized few occasions (of around 90-120 minutes each) for the organization of local focus group discussions. The goal of the occasions was to get insight into the experience and opinion of the 10 participating young women on Covid-19 pandemic's effect on wellbeing, gender roles, and climate change and sustainability.

A focus group discussion involves gathering people to discuss a specific topic of interest. It is a form of qualitative research during which questions are asked about the participants' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinion, or ideas. In focus group discussions, participants are free to talk with other group members; unlike other research methods, it encourages discussions with other participants. It generally involves a group who interviews a small group of people. It is led by a moderator in a loosely structured discussion of various topics of interest.

The participants of the focus groups were young women - who were involved in the stages of the project's first result so they could speak for themselves while exercising their critical thinking and their sense of initiative. Some of them were young women considered from "disadvantaged backgrounds", such as women facing economic obstacles, cultural differences, and from migrant backgrounds. The staff members of the partner organizations were also involved as moderators/facilitators of the discussions and the creation of the reel videos.

Most of the focus group discussions took place offline but, in some cases, only online sessions were possible to implement due to safety reasons regarding the Covid-19 pandemic as well as due to logistical reasons, such as when participants were in distant geographical locations.

Additionally, the Subjective Values Foundation (SVF) organized a transnational focus group discussion with the participation of at least 1 young woman from each partner countries to discuss local contexts, share experiences and find out the similarities and differences between the countries.

Through the first-hand contact, the target group was encouraged to critically reflect and share the main struggles they go through, both previously and currently, as well as their perceptions on how to overcome the obstacles that already existed and that are currently being laid out with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Participants of the partner countries

Sweden

In Sweden, a total of 11 young women were involved in the discussions. Their ages varied between the ages of 23 and 30. The focus groups were held on 4 different occasions, using an online format to accommodate the women's educational and working schedules. The young women who participated in the project in Sweden could be divided into 3 groups, according to their specific life situations at that moment:

1) a first group of the women were students at university, and they are still in the educational field, trying to figure out their next steps in life.
2) a second group includes the women who are working full-time and have fixed employment but are still at the beginning of their careers in a new country.
3) a third group comprises the women who are self-employed and working part-time in low-income jobs to support themselves in a new country and city. This group also had similar views to the women who are currently unemployed and actively seeking job opportunities.

The diversity of backgrounds and experiences of young women also led to a wide range of responses and sharing of experiences, with some common elements too.

Hungary

In Hungary, 13 young women participated in the focus groups, aged between 18 and 28 years old. The majority lived alone or with their partner, and none of them had children. Regarding their employment status, 3 of them were students, 2 unemployed (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) and the others were employed – most of whom were working from home. All the participants were born and raised in Hungary but some of them were part of minority groups. Due to the age difference between the participants, a diverse picture of the pandemic's effect on different life statuses was explored.

Italy

The Italian partner, CESIE worked with 8 young women between the ages of 25-30 who were mainly young Sicilian women coming from Palermo as well as from different small cities all around it. Despite living and working in Palermo, women's bond with their local and ancestral culture is still high and it has a significant impact on their own lives, including on their mindset. Unfortunately, migrant women refused to participate in the focus group and thus we failed to get them involved into project's activities. Apart from one student, all those who participated in the focus group were employed before, during and after the pandemic. Regarding their family background, the group was considerably homogeneous. None of the women who participated in the focus group has children and they all were in stable relationships. Despite this, they were deeply aware of the difficulties related to motherhood and the barriers faced by women before and/or during the Pandemic.

Greece

The number of the young women that participated in the local focus groups in Greece was 11 in total. They were aged between 18 and 30 years old and all of them were Greek: 3 from Crete, 5 from Athens, 1 from Ithaki, 1 from Anafi, and 1 from Agios Efstratios island. 3 of them were students, 3 employed, 3 freelancers, 1 unemployed, and 1 high school student. Regarding their family background, 5 of them were in relationships, 2 married with children, and 4 of them were single.

Luxembourg

In Luxembourg, 14 young women participated during the focus group discussions, who were aged between 18 and 30 years old. Four of them were locals, and 10 were refugees. 2 of them were students who had part-time jobs, 2 were employed adults, and 10 were unemployed women. 2 women were single, and 12 were married and had children.

Social Media Campaign

Using the words of the young women, "social media is very helpful, as it reaches people who are already aware and those who need to hear more about gender issues". Thus, besides carrying out a critical analysis of social media content, several local and one transnational focus group discussions, the partner organizations created reel videos with the contribution of 50 young women in total to be published on the social media accounts which were created specifically for the project (Instagram: weco.lead, TikTok: wecoleadproject).

In terms of the impact of the project, the reels created direct peer-to-peer connections and had an innovative outreach among the target group, encouraging broader critical thinking and sharing a sense of identification and belonging. The reels were also an opportunity for the young women to explore their creative and critical thinking skills through the process of conceptualizing, creating, recording, and editing their reels.

Our social media campaign contributed to raising awareness on gender and environmental issues, socioeconomic inequalities, and health topics. At the same time, the involved young women appreciated the opportunity to be heard and express their opinions as they indicated often feeling disadvantaged or discriminated against in their societies. The campaign gave space for young women to form a community and created a safe space to discuss these issues, support each other, look for support, and express themselves.

The reel videos are all uploaded onto our Instagram (@weco.lead) and TikTok channel (@wecoleadproject).

Overview of the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Gender Inequality and Sustainability

Sweden

SwIdeas received a total of 28 responses to the two versions of the questionnaire, one in English and one in Swedish. A summary of the situation in Sweden is the following: Most women are responsible for the household chores, although some of them are students and thereby live alone. Some women are married with children and live with their families. Although the sample does not represent the whole Swedish society, it has been observed that the Covid-19 pandemic has not had a major impact in regard to changes in their work at home (both with their family and in the house). This could be because of their high educational level and professional career: many of them had the privilege of working from home and could manage the overall situation without disruption in their paid and unpaid work. This could also be related to the fact that in Sweden, the restrictions were not very strict and allowed for more mobility than in other countries.

Since most of the young women who participated in the focus groups in Sweden have a migrant background, they emphasized their experience of double life in both Sweden and their countries of origin during the pandemic. In total, 11 young women between the ages of 23 and 30 participated in the local focus group discussions, which were held on 4 different occasions, using an online format to accommodate the women's educational and working schedules. The young women who participated in the project in Sweden can be divided into 3 groups, according to their specific life situation at that moment: 1) a first group of the women are students at university, and they are still in the educational field, trying to figure out their next steps in life. 2) a second group includes the women who are working full-time and have fixed employment but are still at the beginning of their career in a new country. 3) a third group comprises the women who are self-employed and working part-time in low-income jobs to support themselves in a new country and city. This group also had similar views to the women who are currently unemployed and actively seeking job opportunities. The diversity of backgrounds and experiences of young women also led to a wide range of responses and sharing of experiences, with some common elements too.

The main experiences of young women in Sweden can be summarized as follows:
- There was a consensus that Sweden, compared to other countries, was much less restrictive during the pandemic. This entailed that there were no major issues for moving around etc... however, the only downside was the lack of social interaction and platforms for socializing.
- Most of the women experienced loneliness, stress, anxiety, and isolation.
- One positive outcome noted by one participant was that some friendships became deeper, and women formed good connections and supported each other online during the pandemic in Sweden. This was noted particularly in contraposition to men (partners/husbands) who had difficulties in sharing their feelings with other men and friends.
- Some of the women were new to Sweden when the pandemic started in 2020 and were in the process of finding new friends and learning the Swedish

language: this negatively impacted their motivation to study and the whole learning process, due to the shift to online learning.
- Some women experienced a job crisis as well, which impacted their mental health particularly. Being new to Sweden, and not knowing the language and culture, they had to take on low-income jobs to support themselves. For young people in general, the labour market was blocked and there was no way of getting new contacts for future employment.

Hungary

34 respondents filled out the online survey in Hungary. Most of the participants felt strong negative effects of covid: some of them lost their jobs, some had physical problems due to the stress related to the Covid-19 pandemic, and several of them felt a decrease in social connections. However, some felt positive effects: they became more conscious about their health (for example they started to work out more often, they stopped impulse-shopping and bought only necessary food and products) and about the environment (e.g., using bikes instead of public transport to decrease air pollution).

The respondents experienced a significant increase of waste generation in their surroundings due to the extreme multiplication of food delivery and the use of many disposable masks and gloves. 100% of the respondents described the actual situation of climate change very negatively and supported acting right away to address this issue.

The majority of the Hungarian focus group participants experienced negative effects related to the Covid-19 pandemic: some of them faced difficulties in their studies with online methods, some lost their jobs or faced difficulties re-entering the labour market, they realized environmental problems, and they felt the negative outcomes of the pandemic on their mental and physical health.

Italy

In Italy, about 50% of the online research respondents are responsible for household chores but for most of them (62%) the pandemic has not caused an increase in the household load. Interestingly, on the mental and physical well-being front, 90% of respondents believe that the Covid-19 pandemic has had major negative consequences, especially in terms of mental health, social life, and job opportunities.

The young women who participated in the focus group emphasized how the lack of social interactions and confinement at home negatively affected their mental health and ability to search for a job and/or achieve educational goals. At the same time, there was a dilation of the workday and a significant increase in the workload to be daily carried out, reducing the time dedicated to leisure activities, hobbies, and personal issues.

Luxembourg

The participants of the survey were mainly composed by young women who have higher education and are employed or self-employed. 76.9 % of them live with two

and more adults in the household. 61.5 % have no children and 38.5 % have one or two kids. The results of the survey show that the participants had different experiences during the lockdown. Some of them find online work efficient, and most of them think that being at home with all the family members adds more duties to the regular housework and doesn't let them work effectively. Most of the participants expressed negative answers about the impact of the Covid-19 on mental health. Indeed, some shared having had depression, stress and less confidence.

Most of the women who participated in the focus group discussions experienced depression because of the lack of social life and many household duties. They lost their jobs because of economic issues or had difficulties combining paid jobs and household chores at home. Few of them gave positive feedback about the lockdown. Those women enjoyed spending much time at home and were quite satisfied with online work and classes.

Greece

COMM'ON received 31 answers to the online questionnaire. Most participants seem to have been negatively affected as far as their mental and physical health is concerned, due to the long quarantine period and that Covid-19 also affected their daily lives, their work at home, their relationship with others and their careers. More anxiety, insecurity, fear, and pessimism were the main experiences that the participants shared in the questionnaire. Less social interaction, more stress at work, delay/postponement/cancellation of plans and commitments. They became very sceptical about their social interactions and felt anger and a great violation of their personal freedom when they were forbidden to move and leave their houses during the quarantine which affected their psychology-. They also put off work and routine plans, as well as medical issues, ex. annual diagnostic exemptions and experienced a great lack of social life, as well as less travelling.

For most of the young women participating in the focus group, the most intense experience was job insecurity, anxiety, and alienation. Curfews and intrusive measures brought fear, while distance learning and work intensified insecurity and alienation. This sudden change in everyday life resulted in significant changes in their mood and mental health. On the other hand, for many, this great change brought peace of mind and more time for self-reflection and redefinition, as their priorities in life changed. Small everyday things such as cooking, walking, house parties, movies, friends and music are some of the things that have been unforgettable memories during the pandemic period for the participants.

The Effects of the Pandemic on Gender Inequalities, Employment and Health

Sweden

Most of the survey respondents did not claim many gender-related effects in the results of the survey. It appears that most of them were not fully aware of the relationship between gender-based oppression and the environment. Therefore, the only element that they forwarded as a gender-related issue was in relation to household chores, which did not change much compared to before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Those women who were working from home and married, living with family/children, claimed that the work was equally divided at home (only increasing slightly in some cases). No other gender-related issues were reported in the survey.

Most of the young women were either studying and working full-time or part-time in Sweden when the pandemic hit: in this sense, most of them have shifted their work from the University of the office to the home environment. This has had an impact mostly in negative terms (as described above and below) on social isolation and women's mental and physical health. However, none of the respondents has issues concerning employment during the period of the pandemic as they could support themselves financially, and the social welfare put in place by the Swedish system allowed them to continue their path, fortunately. However, this result is based on a small sample size (28 young women), who are mostly aged between 23 and 30, and well-integrated into the labour market and society in Sweden. Some of the women reported being self-employed or entrepreneurs as well, which may have had a different effect because of their employment status.

The effects of Covid-19 on young women in Sweden in terms of mental and physical health were very negative, as most of the young women who responded to the survey claimed the following issues: an increased level of stress and anxiety; negative effect on mental health including difficulties in adjusting to online studying, which made it harder to concentrate and learn. Some respondents also reported an increase in their sense of loneliness during the pandemic, including feelings of depression; restricted physical health and a lack of motivation to keep active. The sense of feeling overwhelmed in the face of many changes and restrictions at once also was something that came up in the survey results. Lack of social contact leading to social isolation also was pointed out as a negative effect of the pandemic.

According to the participants of the local focus group, the flexibility to multi-tasking at home was a positive effect for most women, although women craved social interaction and got easily exhausted from online meetings. So, the flexibility to work from home was deemed as positive but with some negative downside for gender roles as well:

- In some households, women did not experience a difference in terms of gender-related issues. Most migrant women also claimed that the gender roles were already strongly biased towards women, so the pandemic did not alter this already negative trend.
- One woman claimed that because of working from home, the unpaid household work for women became more visible. Everything needed to be done anyway, and the conversation began in a good way to shed more light on the inequality that gender roles bring.

- Women were still perceived as being the main caretakers of the family in Sweden, as well as in the women's home countries since they must work from home and still take care of the house and the family.
- One participant who lives with her partner experienced a shift in gender roles at home during the pandemic: the young women in the couple think about the household chores more, while the partners do not, and this makes it stressful for the women.
- Another topic of discussion was gender-based violence, which increased in Sweden during the pandemic and the gaps in social support became more visible. The situation was similar in the women's home countries.

Hungary

While some respondents of the online survey experienced a decrease in household chores because they could share the tasks with their husbands due to their home office possibilities, some had to work much more at home, spending more time cooking instead of eating at the workplace cafeteria or cleaning more often because of spending more time at home. It was indicated that the increase in chores harmed their paid work.

Some respondents lost their jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic and faced difficulties finding new ones during the pandemic. Some experienced a bigger workload at their workspaces because of the regular sick leaves and uncertainty in their teams which hurt their motivation and the increased level of stress had negative mental consequences. The respondents who have children claimed that they needed to work much more due to the home-schooling of their kids while handling their paid jobs and the households as well.

Some participants experienced some positive effects of Covid-19 on their mental health, such as gaining self-knowledge and having a bigger insight into their relationships, and they could work out more frequently at their homes. However, the big majority of the respondents reported strong negative effects. They had difficulties because of the lack of opportunities to meet their friends and family, lack of social events, and everyday small talk. They claimed to see the world more negatively and several of them experienced depressive thoughts and feelings due to loneliness and fear.

Regarding the focus group participants, some of them lost their jobs during the pandemic because the company could not maintain its functioning under the changed circumstances. The group discussed that this problem affects mostly women because they are more likely to work in the commercial sector for instance. This aspect was also highlighted by a national KSH research, which found that 68% of the shop and store workers are women and they were highly affected by the closure of these services.

In Hungary, women experienced considerable gender inequality regarding job seeking before the Covid-19 pandemic, and their situation got even harder finding new jobs. They were less likely to get hired to a new workplace because they are the ones who usually stay at home with kids in case of sicknesses or the closure of the schools.

The pandemic caused hard times for the focus group participants, who mentioned having experienced a lack of social contact and feeling of loneliness. They were constantly worried about the health of their loved ones and found it hard to handle the closure that emerged due to the requested isolation and curfews. The participants were also worried about their financial status because their jobs became unstable.

Italy

Forced and prolonged cohabitation (24 hours a day, 7 day a week) with incompatible people during the Covid-19 lockdown had a detrimental effect on women according to the online survey respondents. Partner intimate violence remains a serious and persistent concern.

For those who are students, the tool of distance learning over a long period seems to have negatively affected their performance, also resulting in delayed completion of studies. In addition, from the survey, it emerged that most of the respondents are unable to make plans for their future and feel anxious about their lives.

According to the survey, respondents are using their savings to survive the economic crisis generated by the pandemic. Some of them are even supporting their families, paying the bills, and covering family expenses, and thus are in desperate need of increasing their earnings.

Among the focus group participants, the most common feelings were related to physical and mental impatience: anxiety, stress, not taking care of body and diet, inability to stay out of the house for as long as they used to be, struggling not to feel "confused" in overcrowded spaces. In addition, many referred to significant changes in social and community life given the inability to stay in public spaces, especially indoors, and the confinement within the walls of their homes. Some of the focus group participants admitted having suffered panic attacks during the most acute phase of the pandemic. Paranoia related to possible contagion persists, limiting conviviality and participation in social events.

Most of the women interviewed by CESIE affirmed that the pandemic harmed the household economy, causing serious problems to all family members. In addition to the shortage of food, they had to rely on public subsidies and private aid, even for acquiring personal hygiene items. Moreover, pre-existing domestic violence has certainly escalated even if not fully reflected by the official data.

During the pandemic, the time dedicated to their regular job and their domestic tasks entered in conflict, preventing women from carrying out their paid work properly. Moreover, for those who are still students, young women's employment opportunities seem to have significantly decreased over time due to the current economic regression.

Luxembourg

Almost all the participants of the survey mentioned that although they are mostly responsible for the household duties, during the pandemic there was more work at home and with the kids because all the family members were at home.

The Covid-19 appeared not to have had considerable impact on the employability of the participants. The only issue was difficulty with combining work and family. Some of them find online work not as effective as offline. A few effects of the pandemics were positive for employability as it was a self-development and power recovery period.

The Covid-19 had a significant impact on the mental health of the target group. Most of them experienced anxiety and depression. Lack of social activities and lack of leisure in group settings has certainly affected their mental state. Some of them also mentioned that after having Covid-19, they have weaker bodies, weaker immune systems, and more stress to follow due to restriction changes.

As mentioned before, some of the focus group participants had to spend more time on work at home and with kids, which affected their paid work. However, most of them did not experience significant gender-related issues during the pandemic. Some of the participants mentioned that during the lockdown, in Luxembourg as in many countries, the cases of domestic violence increased.

Some of the participants also had financial difficulties due to the economic crisis. Some of them found work from home not as effective because they could not concentrate on work.

During the focus group discussions, some women identified themselves as introverts or extroverts. Introverts mentioned that they had not much stress during the lockdown, they enjoyed time at home and online work. Extroverts mentioned that it was hard not to have a social life, and isolation was a reason for the anxiety. They find working, and studying from home positive, but on the other hand, it is stressful not to have a social life at all.

Greece

Most participants questioned the relationship between the situation and their social gender. Although their experience was lived through their gender, almost all participants claimed that the issues that emerged were gender-free, meaning that they believe the issues affected men/women/others in the same way.

Covid-19 has significantly influenced social life and work, as there was more personal and work insecurity. Working longer hours, the lack of separation between home and work life, and the lack of clear boundaries on when one stops, and when one begins. Online work affected their psychological and daily balance as home transformed into a workplace rather than a safe/relaxing/private space away from work-related issues and routines.
Study conditions also changed as studying was no longer a face to face/laboratory process and participants lost a great part of interaction with other students and professors, which they believe was crucial for their studies.

Regarding physical health, there seems to be quite a lot of agreement that most postponed medical examinations, while others believe that the isolation certainly did not help their physical health, as there were variations in body weight and psychological changes since no one could live their lives the way they wanted to. Mentally, the majority were affected by the quarantines and lack of social life. Social

life was under pressure, and this played a vital role especially psychologically to most participants, as there was much more isolation and fear.

What emerged in the focus groups, is that most of the young women did not feel like they took on more responsibilities, because they were women. Household chores were in many cases done even before the pandemic mainly by the women, so for many, it did not change radically. Some girls returned to their family home during the quarantine and claimed that they took on more housework due to the change in the environment, to help their mothers. In some cases, there was an equal division and balance of household chores, they just took much more care of the home because they were spending a lot of their time.

For student participants, the Covid-19 period had a big impact on their studies, as the way of education changed and tele-education and distance learning entered their lives so that sometimes, because they live with other people at home, it was not easy for them to isolate themselves to attend their classes and they could not easily concentrate. For working women, the fact that telecommuting increased had some positive and negative effects. On the negative side, they often felt they did not have time to work and do everything they needed or wanted to do (e.g., clean or go for a walk), as their personal space was reduced, which made them less productive at work, as there was always something else coming up that they had to deal with at home.

On the positive side, there were several days when they were more focused at work because they were not in the same office with a lot of people, and for many, they started spending time doing things they enjoyed. Some also reported that they had more free time to themselves and were not as pressured, but sometimes they lacked creativity. For those who became unemployed, when they returned to work, reported that it was difficult to readjust to their working environment, as they did not have the same amount of time, as before, to do the things they wanted to do at home.

Stress, insecurity, and excessive anxiety are the main characteristics reported by all the focus group participants, while uncertainty, physical fatigue and many fluctuations in psychology complement the experiences of most young women.
In some cases, they were so negatively affected by the negative mental wellbeing, which made them fail their exams. For some, there was a strong feeling of loneliness, but this helped them to come closer to themselves and redefine their relationships with their fellow human beings.

On the positive side, for many, this period brought great relief, a lot of free time for new creations and freedom from the many obligations they had. They had a "break" in which they could spend time with themselves and their families, which resulted in personal development and strengthened their relationships.

The Effects of the Pandemic on Sustainability and Environmental Consciousness

Sweden

According to the respondents of the online survey, the effects of Covid-19 on sustainable development were quite negative in the eyes and perceptions of young women in Sweden. Some of the negative consequences of this were seen as excessive food consumption and household shopping, which consequently caused an increase in waste of plastic and other packaging materials. The excessive use of plastic in terms of face masks, gloves, etc... which have been used and not disposed of properly, was reported as being a very damaging negative trend for the environment. Young women in Sweden also worked from home mainly during the pandemic, seeing, therefore, an increase in household electricity use, which also has an impact on the environment. Other reported effects were the following: online shopping leading to more emissions; waste and overconsumption of goods; an apparent decrease in air pollution; good continued economic growth for big companies and failure of small ones; pollution of waste in the ocean. In terms of awareness about environmental problems and sustainability, the results of the survey did not show a significant shift in the perception of the relevance of this topic for young women, who were already aware of the importance of having sustainable habits and lifestyles in Sweden.

From a global perspective, the pandemic highlighted the intersection of climate change with gender, exposing the connection between how humans take care of ourselves and the creatures on the planet. From the research shared, the women who participated in the local focus group discussions were hopeful about the fact that there seemed to be a pollution reduction, although the issues of fast fashion and online shopping were a negative downside. Many women highlighted the fact that sustainability took a step back overall: many companies used the pandemic to sell, causing overconsumption. In Sweden, there were more alternatives of the same products and almost at the same price, making it accessible.

It was recognized that women tend to care more about sustainability: although the decision-makers are mostly men, the women that try to bring change are often inhibited. When reading or hearing about sustainability, most women think of environmental sustainability and how can we sustain the good things. However, sustainability was also perceived as something which provides a consistent amount of all aspects, such as sustainable mental health, social integration, health, etc. Therefore, it was perceived that sustainability embraces all aspects of life. Many young women shared their experiences of becoming more sustainable when moving to Sweden, and becoming more aware of it, implementing some small life changes. Social sustainability is seen as less of a topic when talking about sustainability. However, empowering marginal groups was also seen as relevant for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Hungary

The respondents experienced an increased amount of waste due to food deliveries, online orders, disposable masks, and the unnecessary, so-called 'panic-shopping' when people feared not being able to buy products when they need them. However, many people decided to use green methods of transport e.g., bikes which caused a decrease in air pollution from cars and public transport vehicles.

Some respondents tried to live more sustainably because they had more time to eat and clean in a more environmentally friendly way.

Some participants of the focus group discussed that the Covid-19 pandemic drew their attention to environmental problems, and it has become more important to them to protect the planet as best as possible. Some of them had more time to reduce their household waste and clean their clothes and homes with environmentally friendly products and it also became more important to them to use their bikes or rollers for moving around the city to avoid the crowd in the public transport vehicles.

Italy

In terms of sustainable development, 90% believe that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a large increase in the purchase of disposable items, an increase in the use of pollutants for sanitation and an increase in the use of online shopping sites with the resulting consequences. Awareness of the negative effects of the pandemic on the environment is confirmed by the fact that while environmental sustainability is now very important to 82% of respondents, it was very important to 70% before the pandemic, an increase of 12 percentage points.

Those who participated in the focus group agreed on the fact that the Covid-19 did not increase people's awareness of environmental issues and the urgent need for a more sustainable lifestyle. By contrast, it emerged that such a lifestyle and the ensuing guidelines or recommendations are often hard to put into practice and only those with good economic resources, living in fancy or central neighbourhoods, are fully encouraged, supported, and allowed to adopt sustainable practices, such as recycling, driving electric cars, reducing meat consumption etc.

Therefore, it is neither sufficient nor fair to rely just on the civic engagement, sensitivity. and individual choices of every single citizen to promote and foster sustainability at the local and national levels. Although the importance of the bottom-up approach remains uncontested, political decisions and regulations on this matter are highly required.

Luxembourg

Spending more time at home helped people to pay more attention to the environment and learn more about the flora and fauna around us. Fewer cars and plane trips also affected the environment in a positive way and people were aware of it because of the news.

According to the answers to the online survey, environmental issues were the good aspects of the Covid-19. It made people appreciate more what they have and think about the environmental issues. All of them reported that the awareness about environmental issues increased during the pandemic.

Greece

Participants of the online survey acclaimed that Covid-19 had both positive and negative consequences on global warming and environmental issues. There seems to be a consensus that a major problem being created is the increase in household waste, partly due to quarantine and to the fact that people used to stay more at

home and consume a lot. Environmental pollutants have been decreased a little, but litter and plastic from masks, antiseptics and covid tests have increased.

Finally, most participants claim that the pandemic made many people redefine their relationship with the environment, especially during the quarantine period and the reduction of mobility and travelling, which significantly reduced air pollution and helped the environment, even if for a short period.

According to the focus group members, Covid-19 has certainly raised awareness about environmental issues and sustainability. Through the discussions, it emerged that during the pandemic period there was less waste in the public space and more waste in the household space. There was strong overconsumption and waste of food and materials and a large increase in waste, plastics, and disposable products.

There was no provision for Covid-19 waste management such as masks/plastic tests etc., nor was there any policy provision to address many of the problems arising due to overconsumption and the amount of generated waste. People started using public transport less due to fear of contagion, but at the same time, there was more remote working which reduced commuting. Along with the curfew, there was less traffic on the roads, and less air pollutant emissions, so the air became cleaner for a while, which is also the same for the factories, as production decreased due to the lockdown.

Something worth noting is that nature calmed down for a while, while noise pollution was reduced, and birds could finally be heard in the city. It was emphasized that it is very important to see how we can do better management of our waste and to have more mobilization for actions to improve environmental problems.

Creation of the Reel Videos

With the contribution of participating young women, each partner organization created reel videos to be shared on social media platforms. The main themes that emerged during the focus group discussions in the partner countries were the following:

- Positive and Negative Effects of Covid-19
- Mental and Physical Health
  - The importance of mental calmness and balance in our daily lives
  - Discussing our problems, setting boundaries and setting our needs
  - The importance of being in contact and empowering each other
  - Sharing our thoughts and realizing that we all have common experiences
  - Not forgetting to enjoy the small joys of life
  - To realize the value of our existence in the world

- Human Relationships
  - Strengthening social relations/socialization of the individual after isolation
  - Respect and solidarity with fellow human beings – condemnation of violence
  - Need for optimism after two years of the pandemic
  - Socialization as a medicine for healing the 'wounds' of quarantine
  - Importance of having safety frames for people, against individuality

- Environment & Sustainability
  - One's relationship with nature and how far we have been/are distanced from it – Appreciation of nature
  - Ways/suggestions to improve environmental issues
  - The importance of anticipating the impact of such a major change (in everyday life) and for our waste management
  - The awareness of how far man has moved away from nature and destroyed it and the redefinition of the individual-nature relationship.
  - A reminder for the future of why it is so important to 'save what can be saved'

Upcoming Challenges during the Implementation of the Activities

Due to the pandemic and the sensitivity and (in some cases) unpopularity of the topic, the project partners faced some difficulties in the implementation of the #WeCoLead project.

Noteworthily, in Italy, CESIE chose to work with two different groups: young women and migrant young women from disadvantaged backgrounds. While the first group was keen and enthusiastic about the proposal to discuss gender-related issues and sustainable practices, the latter was unprepared and unwilling to address sensitive topics such as gender inequality and GBV. This is especially true when it comes to vulnerable migrants and potential victims of domestic and partner intimate violence. Thus, due to the specific level of vulnerability, they decided to address different topics in the two groups to avoid hurting personal feelings or causing "secondary victimisation" or traumas. It was also a challenge in some cases when the participating women did not agree to appear in the video with their pictures and voices for privacy reasons. The solution was found by the group with the help of the facilitator who recorded videos in which no participants were shown.

Some partner organizations faced some difficulties when organizing the meetings due to the Covid-19 regulations or illnesses that did not allow gatherings, or for the geographical distance between the participants. Bringing together a very diverse group of young women in the project activities as well as having different schedules and priorities was also a challenge to overcome. Some women were working full-time, and others were unemployed, while others lived in other cities. So, the dilemma faced by the Italian partner was concerning whether inclusion should be prioritized (meaning, all women would be included regardless of their location) or locality (involving more young women in the city of the organizations). In the end, inclusion was prioritized, so that women from all over the countries could join the focus groups and reels creation workshops online: this created a division since some of them could receive more support in person in terms of recording the videos, while others were at a distance and had limited means. However, efforts were made to accommodate all the young women's needs and lifestyles, as well as their working schedules.

Another challenge was the difficulty in reaching the right target group: indeed, several of the women who expressed interest in the project activities were over 30 years old, as they had more time and energy to participate in the project. In order to allow them to be included, they were given the possibility to participate in an informal manner, giving space to their thoughts and needs. Conversely, young women between 18 and 30 years old were more difficult to be reached and were busier, having therefore less time to engage in the project's activities.

Expected Impact of our Activities & Conclusion

Although most of the project partners shared similar realities through the pandemic, all partners agree that a feeling that people from different countries could seat down at the same "table" to discuss and share these shared experiences was lacking. For young women in particular, these opportunities for open conversation between peers can be extremely rare. Even though they can discuss between a group of friends, for example, coming together in an organized format with other women from different countries is hardly offered. As organizers, the partners witnessed the group coming together and sharing more openly from meeting to meeting, realizing their similarities, sharing difficult moments, and empathizing on facts and (un)shared thoughts.

Creating a series of reels was an opportunity for the participating young women to share findings with others, support them not to feel alone, help them "see" the little things that make a positive difference, and create an online space for thoughts and maybe more discussions on the topics.

In many European countries, social media is one of the most common ways of communication, especially among young people. Thus, with the knowledge gained during the project, the participating women started to pay attention to the structures and hidden messages of social media posts by analysing different techniques and manipulations from the case studies.

As previously mentioned, young women suffer from severe gender inequality in many European countries, and they usually do not have the possibility and platforms to express their experiences and thoughts. The great majority of the political actors are male; thus, women commonly lack the space to enforce changes.

Social media has proved to be a powerful vehicle for bringing women's rights issues to the attention of a wider public and encouraging stakeholders to step up commitments to gender equality. By studying various success stories, the participants were empowered to be one of the examples of female leaders and to make their voices be heard by using social media.

However, to positively affect collective sensibility and to trigger a significant change within our society, massive awareness campaigns need to be arranged and promoted. Additionally, massive online exposure to new concepts and ideas may help us in getting rid of patriarchal expressions and sexist language used and unfortunately adopted until the present day.

Next Steps

After the closure of our social media campaign, #WeCoLead project will take the following steps:

1) **#CoCreateTheToolkit:** creation of a toolkit to provide young women with information and theoretical and practical support for active citizenship.

This activity explores the role that informal and non-formal education can play to provide tools for young women to act as leaders and changing forces in their communities towards sustainability, equality, and inclusivity.

Thus, with the partnership, this workpackage will develop a toolkit in a digital format which will include modules that are considered key to female empowerment. The toolkit developed will be available online and include a storytelling method/approach, which is key to creating a sense of connection, to build familiarity and trust, and to make people more eager to engage and to listen, while also helping to develop critical thinking in an entertaining manner. The toolkit will include a step-by-step process with methodologies, theoretical modules for empowerment, and exercises. The target group will collectively participate on the selection of the actual topics included in the toolkit and on its co-creation. In this process, we will create a space for collective knowledge to emerge based on the sharing of the barriers young women face and of experiences that, through a process, led to a change in their lives. This way, knowledge will be translated into an easily and digitally accessible toolkit which will be a collective effort from young women to support and empower other young women who face the same difficulties.

2) **#SoThatMoreCanCome:** creation of a digital booklet for youth workers on the results of the project.

The third and last work package of the project will focus on valorizing and maximizing effect of the experiences and results of the project. Especially when working with young people and around topics of sustainability and gender equality, transmitting knowledge in a consistent and long-term manner is key to sustainably ensuring that the process of changing mindsets and encouraging critical thinking.

Along these lines, an e-booklet for youth workers will be created. This will be organized into
chapters and will highlight the main aspects which have been learned from the project and directly from the target group. The goal is to develop a material for youth workers to be capacitated to keep on transferring the knowledge and experiences initiated within the project to other young women. The e-booklet will also have a flexible approach, allowing the youth workers to select the content that is most suitable for the interests, issues, and goals when working with a group of young women.

Based on the project's experiences, the e-booklet will encourage critical thinking, promote active citizenship and civic participation specially in gender and environmentally related matters, and provide insights for the target group to address and try to overcome the struggles they are faced with. The e-booklet will also include a how-to for the toolkit developed on work package **#CoCreateTheToolkit** and how to use storytelling as an engaging learning method.

Although the final content of the e-booklet might change with the collective knowledge and experiences initiated during the project with the target group, an initial suggestion of topics to be included are for instance:

1) An introduction to storytelling as well as provision of external links/information to other online toolkits/sources for youth workers to be able to utilize and develop storytelling activities.
2) The top issues/problematic areas that need to be addressed in order to empower young women.
3) Critical Thinking: adopting critical lenses towards information to counter fake news/oppressive narratives.
4) Inspiring leadership, initiative, and civic engagement: young women as change-makers for more sustainable and inclusive communities.
5) Socio-economic empowerment and autonomy: towards secure employment for young women.
6) A guide to utilize the Toolkit from R2 (**#CoCreateTheToolkit)**
7) Address your own needs: how to select the right content from the Toolkit to address particular needs and goals

It is noteworthy that the e-booklet will contain methods that present important aspects and skills young women should have to become future sustainability and community leaders. It will seek to enable youth workers to be able to transfer knowledge on how to make their voices heard, take on initiatives and participate in civic life, and encourage critical thinking.

Thus, it will be resourceful to provide tools for the target group to share and overcome struggles as well as to fight for their aspirations and for a better, more sustainable future for their communities.

For more information, follow us on:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- TikTok]

References

Wijk, D.; Beltrán, L.; Nouri E.; Mason-Jones, A. (2021). *The impact of COVID-19 on intimate partner violence in Europe*. (download from: https://www.aspher.org/download/981/impact_of_covid-19_on_ipv_in_europe.pdf in June, 2022.)

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). (2020). *The World for Women and Girls. Annual Report 2019–2020.* (download from: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/UN-Women-annual-report-2019-2020-en.pdf in June, 2022)