

SOTWG 2023

Netherlands Fact Sheet

This Netherlands country report presents key country-specific findings from the Plan International activist survey for the State of the World's Girls (SOTWG) Report 2023 and the peer-to-peer qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. For the global analysis and details on the methodology please refer to the technical report. If you have any questions about this fact sheet please email isobel.fergus@plan-international.org, aisling.corr@plan-international.org, or martha.guevara@plan-international.org.

Contents

How to read and use the factsheet information	2
Overview of respondents	3
Issues campaigned on	5
Sources of knowledge on issues	7
Perception on how governments act on issues	7
Type and level of activism	8
Perceptions of impact of their activism	9
Most impactful activities	9
Positive Effects because of participation	10
Funding to support their activism	11
Barriers to their activism.....	11
Civic Space	14
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)	15
Future in Activism.....	15
Recommendations	15
Calls to Action	16

How to read and use the factsheet information

Structure and content

This factsheet pulls out key information and includes findings for key sections of the State of the World's Girls 2023 global technical report.

Understanding limitations and how to interpret the data

It is important to note that limitations apply both to the data analysis within the global report and the conclusions that can be drawn from that, as well as individual country level data analysis. Below, the most important notes to be considered are summarised.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In relation to the questions asked to girls and young women on the SDGs. The following information was shared with them before proceeding to the questions on the SDGs:

The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. The 17 Goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, as part of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the Goals. They propose 17 goals for sustainable development, such as action on climate change and eradicating hunger. These goals have been formulated by a collaborative approach between different groups, such as UN member state governments, NGOs, grassroots consultations, and young people. The goals are universal in their nature, meaning every UN member state has committed to achieving these goals. One of the goals specifically also targets gender equality

Potential Biases from Peer-to-Peer Methodology

Limitation 1: Our co-researchers were drawn from the community being studied; it means they had access to other activists who may have been unwilling to engage with professional researchers. Our co-researchers were able to use their existing networks and relationships of trust to approach other female activists to take part in the research and bring with them the advantage of their own lived experiences. In addition, participants may respond more honestly and openly to a co-researcher they know, has personal experience of the issue being discussed and can speak more informally. However, it is possible that bias may have also been introduced both from the co-researchers' interviewing activists from their own networks and contacts and also through their own familiarity with the topic.

Limitation 2: Co-researchers were recruited from different Plan International Offices' networks and partners so there was bias of being interested in the issue and topics central to the work of Plan International.

Limitation 3: Most of the co-researchers and corresponding interviewees needed online access or access to a telephone to do the interview. Some countries did conduct their interviews face to face but it means the majority of girls and young women needed to have sufficient access to devices that have internet or a phone connection.⁷⁵ This means that girls and women who do not have sustainable access to the internet or phone connections, often the girls who are the most vulnerable, were not able to share their experiences in some of the countries.

Lack of generalisability of the survey

Limitation 1: On average, the survey was filled in by 32 young women and activists per country, however it is likely that these identify with Plan International's values and interests. Therefore, their responses cannot be said to represent the views of activists per country or even globally.

Overview of respondents

Survey

In the Netherlands, 59 girls and young women activists participated in the survey. The language of the survey was English.

To be eligible to take part in the survey, young women either had to self-identify as activists, influencers or campaigners or needed to have taken part in any of the following activities:

All participants interviewed and in the focus group discussions chose their own pseudonyms, which are used in all of the SOTWG reports. Throughout this factsheet, girls and young women’s pseudonyms are used in the text alongside their age at the time of interview or focus group,

Table 1: What activities girls and young women activists take part in

What activities girl and young women activists take part in	%
Raised funds for a group or organisation to support campaigning activities	34%
Spoke out or engaged in advocacy or campaigns (online or in person)	71%
Spoke to media as part of a campaign	12%
Joined a group to prompt social or systemic change (online or in person)	49%
Engaged my networks for an activist, advocacy or campaign group (online or in person, in a voluntary capacity)	44%
Engaged in individual protest, such as boycotting brands	61%
Utilised my skills or talents (e.g., writing, organising, creative or artistic) for advocacy, influencing or campaigning	44%
Lobbied people with decision making power (in a personal or voluntary capacity)	12%
Took part in demonstrations, protests, marches or other similar activities	61%
Took part in strikes, walk-outs or similar activities in a work context	14%
Organised or helped organise a group or movement (online or in person)	24%
Created or organised a petition (online or in person)	8%
None	0%
Prefer not to say	0%

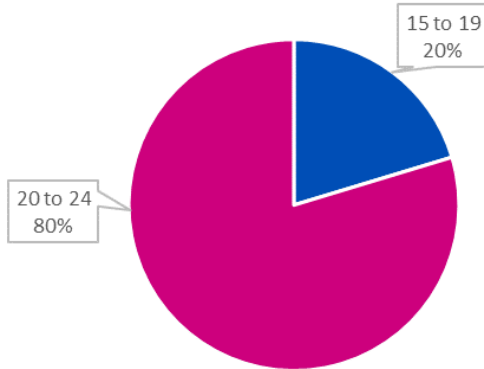
Based on a total 59 responses

47 per cent of those surveyed self-identified with the terms of activist, influencer or campaigner, and 17 per cent would not self-identify as such. That not all young women and girls identify with the term activist, and this finding was consistent also in the qualitative work.

Age: The surveyed girls and young women were between 15 and 24 years old. Most participants reported (80%) were aged 20-24. See figure 1a.

Figure 1: Age distribution of the sample

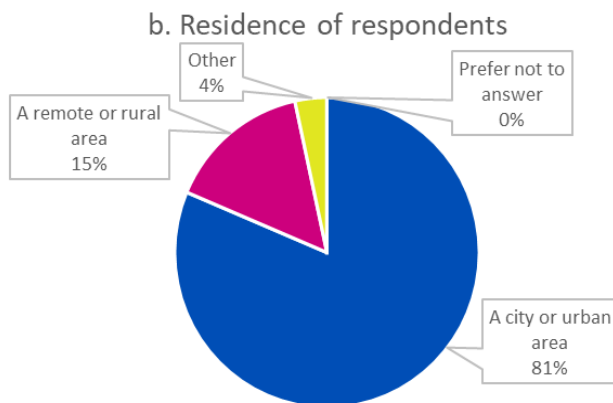
a. Age breakdown of respondents



Based on a total of 59 responses

Location: The surveyed girls and young women activists were mostly from an urban area (81%), the remaining respondents reported being from rural areas (15%) or other areas (4%). See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Residence distribution of the sample



Based on a total of 59 responses

Intersectional characteristics:

- 49% identify as LGBTIQ+
- 8% identify as belonging to a racial or ethnic minority;
- 5% identify as belonging to a religious minority;
- 19% identify as having a disability;
- 2% identify as a displaced person or refugee;
- 78% had completed or were in higher education, such as university or college

Qualitative Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Our co-researchers were all aged between 15-24 years and identified as activists or were involved in campaigning or activism. Co-researchers were trained on qualitative interviews and ethics as they conducted all the interviews with their peers who also identified as activists or campaigners or were involved in related activities. The interviews were semi-structured allowing space for the girls to include their own prompts or follow up questions. The interviews varied in time but usually lasted about 30 minutes to two hours long and were conducted via Microsoft Teams, Zoom, WhatsApp and face-to-face in a relevant Plan office, depending on what was most convenient for the interviewer and interviewee.

Table 2: Name of co-researcher, pseudonym and age..

Co-researcher	Pseudonym of Participant	Age
Lotte Peters	Giulia	23
	Sofie	22
	Beau	23
Jetske Beke	Anna	23
	Isa	22
	Lillith	17

Two of the girls and young women activists from Netherlands (used pseudonyms and age provided below) attended a global activist focus group discussion with girls and young women from Philippines, Vietnam, Nepal, Malawi and Australia.

- Floortje¹
- Els (24)

Issues campaigned on

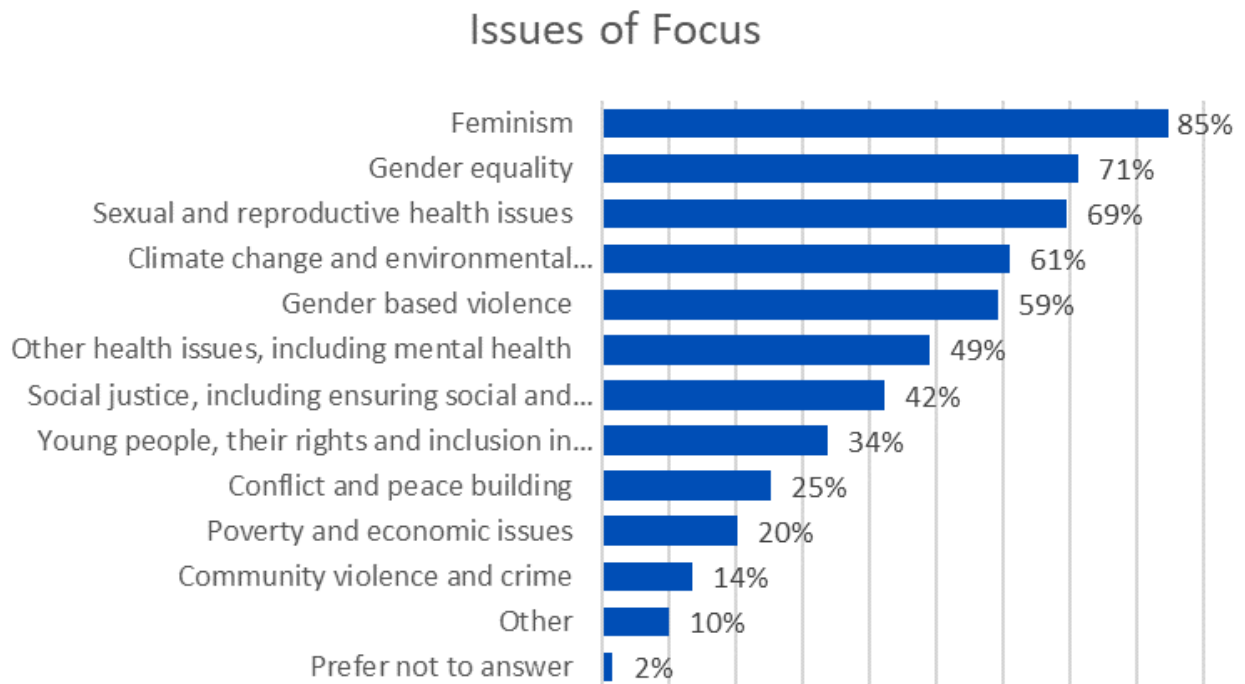
Survey

Survey respondents were asked to identify the issues that their activism and campaigning was focused on.² The top issues for the girls and young women amongst girls and young women globally were feminism (85%); gender equality (71%) and young people, health and reproductive health issues (69%). The issues which received least votes amongst girls in the Netherlands were other issues (10%); community violence and crime (14%) and poverty and economic issues (20%). See Figure 3.

¹Exact age unknown but was between 15 and 24 years.

² The answer options were based on a mapping of the issues in previous State of the World Girls surveys that girls and young women had chosen as being most important to them.

Figure 3: Issues of focus



Based on total 59 responses

Qualitative Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The girls and young women from the interviews and focus group discussions were particularly focused on climate action. Isa (22) shared that climate change and sustainability issues had consumed her thinking over the past years and she had switched to vegetarianism years ago for environmental reasons. Beau (23) expressed that climate change is an urgent problem of our time and that she is very worried and often feels powerless:

“Climate change is a pretty high priority, just because it’s a world problem that there is quite a time pressure on it. Yes, and I also think small personally, but for me that too. Feels most urgent for myself. I’m very worried about that and it’s very bad. It can make you feel very powerless.”

Giulia (23) is a member of Extinction Rebellion and largely focused on climate change nationally often calling out Dutch organisations and companies as well as the government. She mentioned Greta Thunberg as being a particular inspiration for her.

“Then you also got all these strikes in schools. And yes, back then Greta Thunberg was really quite competent. For the first time, features in the news with those school strikes for the climate and I found that very inspiring then. That I really thought oh, this is really bold that we just don’t have the right to vote yet. But we can really do something or at least I can do something.”

Sofie (22) had started working for an organisation directly related to her campaign interest and this allowed her to organise webinars and publish papers on climate change.

Many of the girls and young women had more than one area of focus, with some mentioning gender equality as another area of interest. For example, Lillith (17) confirmed she was most active in climate activism but also had an interest in gender equality, combating homophobia and the Black Lives Matter movement. Sofie (22) also shared she was interested in anti-racism within the climate justice

movement. Giulia (23) also remarked her focus was climate action, but she participated in women marches. Sofie and Beau also has an interest in trans rights:

“With women's rights, I think there is a huge amount of hate on trans women at the moment. There was a demonstration just last Saturday against a read-aloud afternoon by drag queens in Rotterdam, and there was fortunately also a very big counter protest where there were about ten more people than to the extreme right-wing protest against it. But things like that do matter to me. I'm thinking about it.” Beau, 23

Anna (23) conveyed that while she was particularly committed to climate change, she also looked into national issues such as student debt and the housing crisis and had joined a compensation protest on student debts previously.

Sources of knowledge on issues

The girls and young women had different sources they went to, to learn more about their issues of activism. Many of the girls and women paid attention to media. Giulia (23) studies journalism, so remarked that she always follows the news. Sofie (22) and Beau (23) also mentioned learning from news articles. Lillith (17) mentioned being politically interested and often learnt from what politicians were doing and saying. Many of the activists used social media to keep up to date in their area of activism. Giulia and Sofie used social media to follow news channels. Beau mentioned using Instagram stories to learn more about sustainability and the comedian and influencer Arjen Lubach had inspired her to turn vegetarian. However, many of the activists were acutely aware of the downfalls of social media and mentioned the issue of misinformation and disinformation. Sofie mentioned while she learnt from social media, she made sure to check their sources. Giulia used factchecking methods to check news articles. While Beau also reviews the sources of content and generally doesn't take information at face value. Anna (23) noticed that some news outlets report differently. For example, climate protesters were often depicted as violent and obstructing police but when farmers protest, they say it went by quietly. She mentioned trying to combat disinformation by reporting that there was no violence at the climate protest she was participating in.

Some of the other activists got their learnings from more formal spaces, such as university or workshops run by organisations and from books. Anna (23) learnt a lot from her studies in forest and wildlife management and she had previously studied ecology. Sofie (22) also learnt from her studies but underscored that there was not enough focus on climate justice through formal studies. Beau (23) learnt from books on history and gender equality, Sofie also mentioned using books to enhance her learnings. Sofie mentioned attending a workshop series run by indigenous organisations on how colonialism still permeates current economic systems.

The activists also learnt from each other. Anna (23) mentioned learning from others within the climate movement, Giulia (23) also mentioned learning from fellow activists through sharing information on Telegram which she remarked was as great way to learn from other activists but also a way of highlighting underexposed subjects and information. Sofie (22) learned through national collaboration circles and also from friends who work on climate activism or anti-racist movements.

Perception on how governments act on issues

Beau (23) shared she was disappointed with government action on climate change and wanted the government to tax companies on CO2 emissions:

“And the longer we do nothing, the bigger the measures we have to take to still manage to some extent.”

Sofie (22) felt that the government puts business and trade interests before climate change issues:

“I must say. The Dutch government has done all the things to comply with certain climate agreements. Then I must also say that we fail to comply with many of the agreements. They are [the Dutch government] are really very low down in Europe, of

the countries that really do something against climate change. Yes, Germany is really many times better. So is France.”

We are doing very little with it. Just like with meeting still nowhere near nitrogen limits. Europe has already taken us to task twice, but we're just not really going to do anything about it. No, exactly... But you also see it happening in the Netherlands that it is the poorer people who are hit hardest by temperature changes, by the fact that it is becoming more difficult to supply fuels.” Sofie, 22

Type and level of activism

Many of the girls and young women from the Netherlands cohort saw themselves as working as part of a collective, in particular as part of the climate movement. Lillith (17) mentioned beginning more on an individual basis but as she started engaging more with friends on the topics she was active on, she became part of a collective.

Most of the activists from the Netherlands had participated in direct action and civil disobedience such as marches, blockades and sit-ins. Another type of activity mentioned was awareness raising. Sofie (22) mentioned organising webinars and publishing papers. While Anna (23) tried to raise awareness and change practices in relation the effects of agriculture on nature and the climate:

“I would like to be able to provide information about that or do research into it in such a way that the parties, or at least, for example, the farmers and the conservationists, come together more. And not that it's now yes, it's now incredibly polarized. I would like to reduce that very quickly.”

Sofie and Giulia (23) also mentioned using creative methods such as photography and song writing.

“Yes, you can be an activist in many ways. I think I do quite a few... I don't do fundraising yet. I'm not that into lobbying either, even though I do know that it's important that there are other organisations and people who are a bit more comfortable with that” Sofie, 22

Due to the preference of working in a collective, most of the girls preferred a mix of practicing face to face and online methods. Giulia (23) shared that it depended on the purpose whether she would use online or face to face methods but generally she would do direct actions such as blockades and sit-ins because they get more media attention. However, she acknowledged to get people to go to one place you do need social media but persuading people to the cause is better done in-person. Anna (23) also participated in direct action but mentioned online modes were useful at protests for checking what was going on in different places. Beau (23) shared that conversations were better face to face but recruiting people to the movement is better done online. While Lillith (17) shared that she was not a big fan of conducting her activism in online spaces because doing it in-person gives you a sense of community and allows her to meet new committed people. Although she acknowledged that online methods do have their uses for example, reaching a large amount of people in a quick manner:

“It really gives me hope to see how many people are committed to that. And yes, you can really get to know people from there... But I think ultimately the real power lies mainly in offline because there you are really together and there you feel the passion.”

Around half of the girls and young women who participated in the interviews mentioned focused their activism at the national level. Beau (23) mentioned that the level she focused on depends on the aim but generally she focused on national campaigns, targeting fossil fuel industries. In relation to the housing crises, she targeted the Dutch government. Sofie (22) also discussed protests aimed at influencing private industries and companies. Giulia (23) focused her activism across different regions of the Netherlands such as the Randstad, Utrecht and Amsterdam, she mentioned focusing less at local community levels because she felt that the Netherlands had less of community feelings and dynamics than other countries. Giulia mainly focused on the Dutch government but also focused on national and international companies. For instance, nationally, she advocated for a Dutch supermarket to draw up a

climate plan with their suppliers. While internationally, she focused her activism at oil companies, trying to thwart oil projects in Brazil, Argentina and Australia.

“Focused on the international community, but it is all on local governments, even though they are often in other places in the world. The climate problem is just not going to be solved at the international level. They’ve been trying to do that for a long time, but there’s just not enough power for that. And I think in the last couple of years we are now really starting to that doesn’t really have that much effect and so you really have to go on local grassroots bottom-up approaches.” Giulia, 23

Perceptions of impact of their activism

Most impactful activities

Young women and girl activists were asked to choose the three most impactful activities they had taken part in. The most frequently chosen options were speaking out or engaging in advocacy and campaigns (44 per cent), *Taking part in demonstrations, protests, marches or other similar activities* (41 per cent), raising funds for supporting campaigns (34 per cent), and utilising talents for the purpose of a campaign (27 per cent).

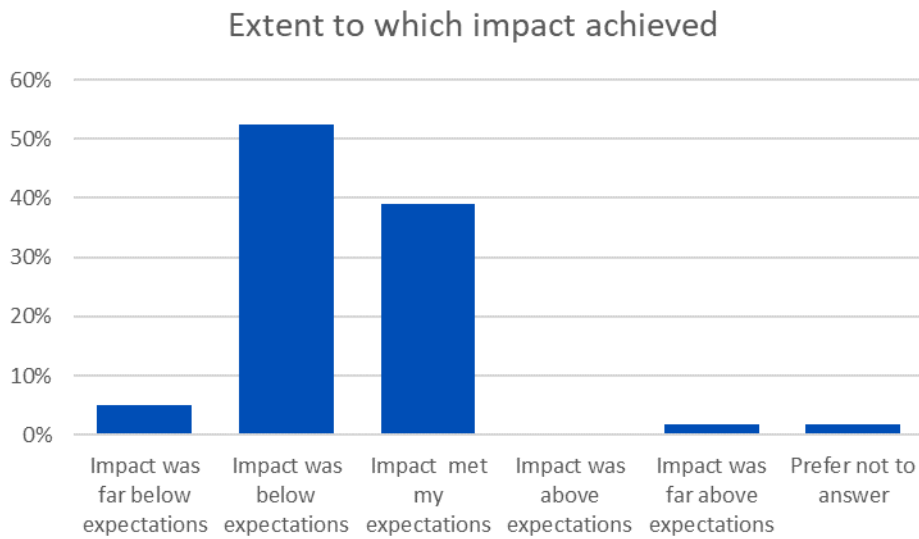
Table 3: Activities perceived as most impactful

Most impactful activities	%
Spoke out or engaged in advocacy or campaigns (online or in person)	44%
Took part in demonstrations, protests, marches or other similar activities	41%
Utilised my skills or talents (e.g., writing, organising, creative or artistic) for advocacy, influencing or campaigning	27%
Joined a group to prompt social or systemic change (online or in person)	25%
Spoke to media as part of a campaign	22%
Engaged my networks for an activist, advocacy, or campaign group (online or in person, in a voluntary capacity)	15%
Engaged in individual protest, such as boycotting brands	15%
Lobbied people with decision making power (in a personal or voluntary capacity)	17%
Organised or helped organise a group or movement (online or in person)	17%
Raised funds for a group or organisation to support campaigning activities	12%
Took part in strikes, walk-outs, or similar activities in a work context	10%
Created or organised a petition (online or in person)	7%
None	3%
Prefer not to say	3%

Based on total 59 responses

58 per cent of those surveyed said that the impact achieved by their campaigns, activism or influencing did not meet their expectations. 39 per cent felt the impact just met expectations. (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Extent to which impact achieved



Based on total 59 responses

Positive Effects because of participation

58 per cent of young women and girl activists said they developed their confidence as a result of their activism, and around 50 per cent said they developed or learned new skills or built up their social or professional network. 85 per cent said they felt pride or satisfaction as a result of their activism.

Table 5: Positive effects as result of activism

Positive Effects because	%
Felt pride and satisfaction for contributing to change	85%
Developed my confidence	58%
Developed or learned new skills	46%
Built up my social or professional network	44%
Experienced admiration from my community	29%
Other positive effects	19%
None of the above	8%
Prefer not to answer	2%

Based on total 59 responses

Qualitative Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The girls and young women had mixed feelings to whether their activism was making an impact. Lillith (17) lamented that relatively little has happened. Beau (23) felt she built awareness of the issues and had managed to make an impact in some areas but not as many as she would have liked to. Anna (23) felt it difficult to say whether was having impact, as climate action can be quite polarising but people in general do understand why you are doing it. Sofie (22) mentioned a particular airport protest had an impact and discussed some of the outcomes from it:

“We occupied [name of airport] in November, the private jet part of [name of airport] and then it was announced last week that the airport is now going to ban private a chat, that they are never allowed to fly again and that they are going to rearrange on

small, short flights that are in regular traffic and so on. So, it does have an impact. Had it really not done it on its own. I don't believe that at all."

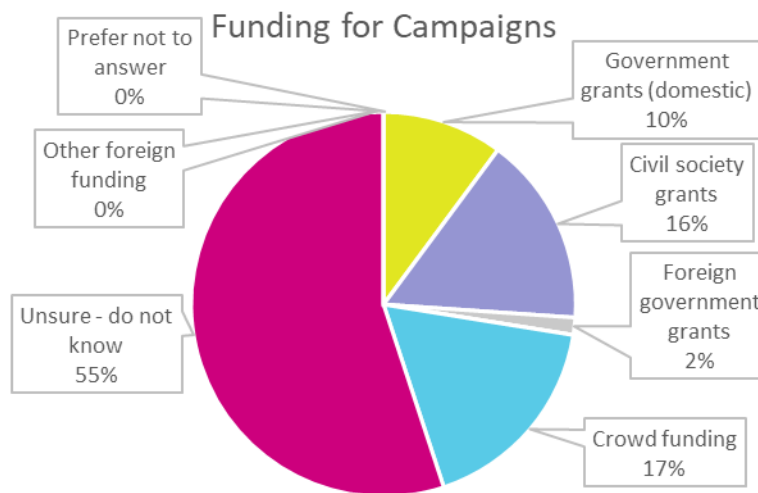
During the focus group discussion, Floortje was pleased that she was inspiring others:

"I think the most significant moment for me was to see the people I was advocating for rise up and start practicing how to advocate for themselves as well."

Funding to support their activism

When asked about how activists funded their campaigns, most respondents (55%) were unsure about who had funded their campaigns or actions. 17 per cent of respondents reported being supported through crowd funding.

Figure 5: Funding for their campaigns

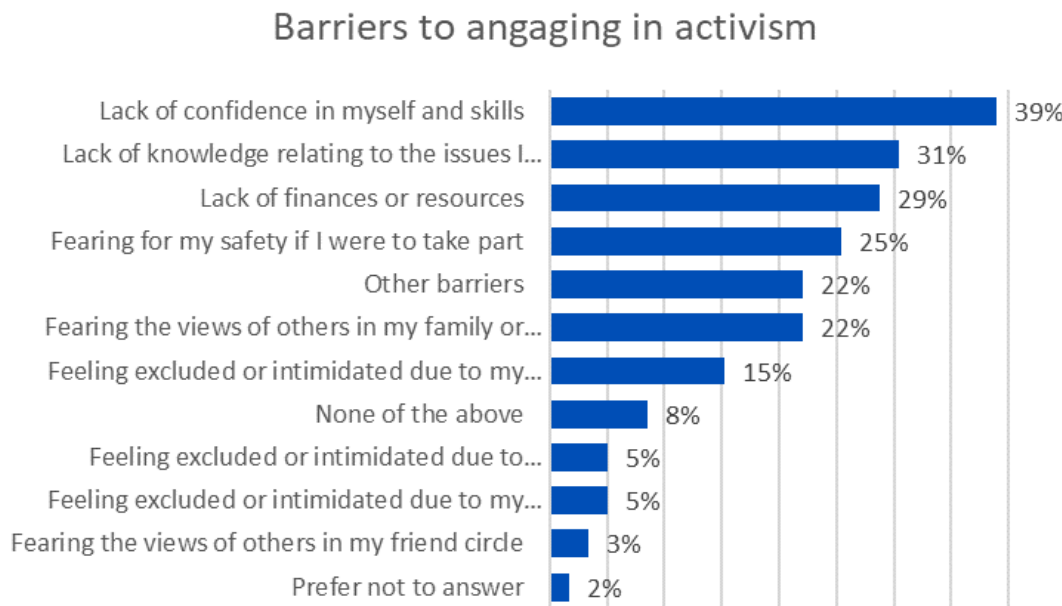


Barriers to their activism

Survey

When asked to select the top three of a list of barriers which prevented them from engaging in activism, influencing, and campaigning, the most frequently identified barriers were lack of confidence in themselves and skills (39 per cent), lack of knowledge on the issues they wanted to campaign on (31 per cent), and a lack of finances or resources (29 per cent).

Figure 6: Barriers to engaging in activism.



Based on 59 responses

As regards negative experiences encountered during their activism, 42 per cent said they felt not listened to by adults. Around 20 per cent said they felt unwell or anxious and only included in discussions by adults due to age and gender. Only 3 per cent said they faced negative experiences that made them stop engaging in activism altogether.

Table 6: Negative experiences as a result of participation in activism, campaigning or influencing:

Negative Experiences as a result of participation	Percentage
I felt not listened to by adults	42%
None of the above	34%
I felt emotionally or psychologically unwell or anxious	20%
I felt adults only included me due to my age and gender, but did not fully take on board my views	19%
I feared for my safety	12%
I felt intimidated or bullied by others	7%
Other negative experiences	7%
I faced financial difficulties	3%
I faced negative experiences which made me stop engaging in activism, campaigning or influencing	3%
Prefer not to answer	2%

Based on 59 responses

Qualitative Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Girls and young women in the interviews and focus groups discussed issues around safety as a concern due to their activism. The activists shared experiences of feeling unsafe while taking part in direct action often at the hands of the police. Giulia (23) described chaos at a blockade and getting hit by an officer:

“Mainly because of police, because that was during a blockade...and that was just horrendous chaos. And then I just got hit pretty hard by an officer and then suddenly I thought wow.”

Anna (23) remembered being faced with water cannon by military police and decided to get out of the situation. However, a male friend at the protest had bruises as police held him in a hold too long. Anna has an anxiety disorder and she shared that heavily armed police make her anxious, so she also has to be careful not to over push her limits. Anna had also heard stories of police coming to your door of those organising protests which had made her fearful. Sofie (22) remarked that at protests men are normally tackled harder than women but when women diverge from expectations of being kind and cooperative it changes:

“Maybe also because he is a policeman. They tend to be more careful with women. Because I'm quite sweet often right? I have also seen female friends of mine who are a bit more resistant and then it is quickly seen as oh, you are such a nasty hippie woman and then suddenly you are no longer a woman.”

Anna (23) remarked that heavy policing takes its toll especially because the right to peaceful assembly is only partially allowed in the Netherlands:

“It just takes a lot of capacity mentally because you have a lot of protests of course. And yes, it is not entirely legal. Yes, according to European legislation, but not according to Dutch legislation. Uhm, so that's something you can see the impact of...Mentally to deal with aggressive police as well.”

She further remarked that she felt certain place in the Netherlands were safer to protest than others:

“I would rather do a protest in Amsterdam than The Hague or Rotterdam...There they are much friendlier, because they just know there that you don't do violence. They just know that they have to drag you away. You're not going to further impede them in that sense as it were. Unless there's a reason for that. If you turn on a water cannon, yes, then everybody will stay even longer.”

Beau (23) said her family are supportive of her activism, but they do worry about the dangers:

“With my father I often don't tell him beforehand, because oh. He worries a lot. Sometimes for no reason, but he's also values activists and people who fight for something. And he's quite left-wing himself, so he really likes what I'm doing. But when I tell him I'm going to be in a situation where I might be in a bit of danger, he doesn't like that very much. But I can't be activist without pushing against the border a little bit. Because that's how it works. There is a chance that I would be arrested. Maybe. So that's why I just often tell people afterwards that it's all good.”

The girls and young women interviewed felt that safety challenges were worse if you were a person of colour. Lillith (17) shared that climate movements were very white. Spaces that might feel safe for her when talking to her non-white friends felt unsafe for herself. She also felt that police at protests target people of colour more.

“The climate movement is incredibly white...it just stands out, but if you then always only see a certain kind of people... of course you have to deal with police and so sometimes police violence...you still unfortunately see that sometimes non-white people experience more police violence.”

Sofie (22) also remarked about seeing acts of racism at protests and remembers police targeting a woman and saying anti-Semitic remarks. Sofie also felt Dutch police treated foreign nationals and refugees worse especially if they didn't speak Dutch:

“You can also see that they [the police] are becoming more and more repressive and, above all, they just find it very irritating that we are allowed to campaign.... I did suffer

from how they acted towards me, but what I found much more difficult actually and also much traumatising was to see how the police act towards other people and then for especially people of colour or people who are disabled or where marginalised groups. Those are often treated much worse, and I know that... I am really not saying that every individual working in the police is a racist, but the institution is incredibly racist and full of white men”.

Girls and women interviewed were asked directly if the barriers mentioned were more or less difficult because of their gender or age. Beau (23) felt that men are taken more seriously, and people were more likely to question claims by girls and women:

“I also think that there is a reaction to strong women and that people can be intimidated by women in particular. That’s precisely why there might be a bit of a backlash. Like leave that because their own masculinity might be undermined in that.”

Lillith (17) also felt that age played a role in not being taken seriously, as people see young people’s activism as just teenagers rebelling. Anna (23) also remarked that older generations can be against their disruptive action. Lillith also said older people do more of the talking in the climate movement.

Sofie mentioned gender stereotypes as a challenge, sharing that men are often seen as voice of reason and women as emotional:

“When women say the same thing as a man, yes with the same emotion, it is seen as hysterical and boosting. Whereas with men, it is seen as convincing”.

Civic Space

Two of the girl and young women commented on the shrinking civic space making activism difficult. Beau (23) mentioned backsliding in progress around gender equality and women’s abortion rights. She shared that the Netherlands is seen as a tolerant society for example being one of the first to legalise gay marriage, but she was beginning to see slippages to certain rights especially around trans rights and also found that ruling on Roe vs Wade in the United States had increased anti-abortion discussions in the Netherlands. Sofie (22) also discussed a swing to the right in society. She felt that Dutch police were not as repressive as other contexts but also felt that this was changing:

“Look, we all have protest rights in the Netherlands and that’s very nice, because you see it really can be very different in other countries. And our police are not as repressive as some other police units can be. In France, sometimes it can really be like almost a militia like how they deal with the activists. It’s really not like that here. However, you can also see that they are becoming more repressive here, above all, they just find it very irritating that we are allowed to campaign.”

Sofie (22) also discussed that there were lots of regulations like fines and prison sentences in the Netherlands making it difficult to protest:

“We do have quite a lot of rights, but they are also not always respected. Because according to the European Court of Human Rights, for example, a highway occupation is simply part of the protest right that we should guarantee within Europe. But the Netherlands then says this is illegal, while European legislation should actually always take precedence over Dutch legislation.... And so recently a lot of my friends were also arrested preventively while they hadn’t done anything yet and then under the guise of clearing up, while that is actually a very vague legal term.”

“It’s quite intense and it has a big impact on you. On your later life choices. But there are a lot of things that come from you having a criminal record, which makes it quite difficult to do some of them well. I know I can probably never be a lawyer again, because I’ve already been arrested for the climate activist action. I haven’t really done anything. I didn’t break anything, that kind of thing.... but then you can’t work in the legal and judicial system anymore.”

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

All the girls and young women from the Netherlands in the interviews and focus groups had heard of the SDGs. The activists had learned about them through a mix of online sources and their education. Giulia (23) learned about them on NGO websites and through chairing her Student Union Sustainability Committee, where she had learnt about them while organising a sustainability week aimed at students. Anna (23) had learnt about the SDGs at university through her biology degree. While Lillith (17) had learnt about them at school and online where she had come across articles that mention relevant goals to climate change.

Some of the girls and women were critical of the SDGs. Lillith felt that while the goals were good, it was unrealistic to achieve them by 2030. She commented that the problems that they aim to address are complex and need systematic change. Sofie (22) shared within climate justice movements there is criticism of development in general. She thought that since the SDGs are created by the UN there is too much of a Western focus or gaze within the SDGs discourse and felt that gender equality organisations refer to goals more in their work compared to climate organisations.

When asked if their other activists used the SDGs goals in their work. Anna (23) confirmed that they do not influence how she campaigns:

“No, really not at all. I think they are good causes in themselves. But in the area of climate change, for example, less so, because I don't think they do too much... We don't really use them within XR [Extinction Rebellion].”

Lillith (17) and Sofie (22) had never used them for their activism or seen other activists use them. Giulia (23) also confirmed this, apart from one activist she knew who used them for a campaign a long time ago.

Future in Activism

When girls and young women activists were asked about their future in activism, the majority of the wanted to continue being activists or at least work in a field that was connected to their values. Lillith (17, Netherlands) was taking a gap year to become a full-time activist in the climate movement but also wanted to work with an intersectional perspective with other feminist and anti-racist movements. Anna (23) wanted to continue studying alongside her activism. Giulia (23) liked the media aspect to her activism and therefore saw herself working most likely as a journalist or maybe in communications for an NGO. Sofie (22) said she was opposed to the idea that as you get older you compromise your values and hoped to continue to stand true to her beliefs:

“I hope in future activism is not necessary, but I know that won't be the case. I hope to become an artist sometimes and that maybe it's more important for a while to make money and you might have to sacrifice some of your morals from time to time, I guess. But I just hope that that doesn't necessarily have to happen... Because in the end, I think it's more important to stand behind the person that I am rather than living in a super big villa and having three cars.”

Recommendations

It is critical that power holders in all decision-making spaces support girls' and young women's collective action and recognise their value and role as civil society actors. There are five keyways to achieve this.

1. Increase the amount of flexible and diverse funding to grassroots girl and youth-led groups and networks.
2. Strengthen adolescent girls and young women's participation in civic and political life: this entails ceding power to grassroots girl and youth-led groups, and providing access to decision-makers through open, safe civic space.

3. Address barriers to girls' and young women's activism and the mounting backlash against those who are politically active at family, national and international levels: particularly against the backdrop of strong anti-rights movements and increased gender discrimination.
4. Support girls' and young women's education at all levels, including the necessary soft skills development to build self-confidence, improve communication competences and bolster leadership potential.
5. Increase political will, investments in and commitment to gender equality among Member States as a cross-cutting priority for the 2030 Agenda at the SDG summit and for the remainder of the SDGs.

Calls to Action³

1. **Provide financial resources and non-financial support**

- **Government donors, philanthropists, funding bodies and civil society organisations must:**
 - **Increase** the provision of flexible and responsive funding to girl- and youth-led groups, organisations, and networks to support their work. This involves incorporating seed and other types of flexible funding and including small grants and long-term financing, which is responsive to their priorities and the contexts they operate in.
 - **Provide** non-financial support in line with girls' needs.
 - **Re-assess** risk appetites to shift more power to and trust in young people. Including by removing any bureaucratic barriers that prevent girl activists and young women-led groups from accessing funding and other non-financial support.
 - **Provide** financial resources through more inclusive and participatory grant-making processes co-designed with girls.
 - **Provide** fair and adequate compensation. Organisations working with girls and young people need to pay for their time and expertise.

2. **Strengthen the meaningful engagement of girls and young women in all areas of public life, facilitating access to decision-makers.**

- **Governments should:**
 - **Remove** any institutional barriers that constrain girl-led groups and youth groups' freedom of association and assembly, access to information, the right to privacy and to be heard.
 - **Ensure** that national laws and policies make it possible for girls and young women to choose to organise within movements or associations and legally register or not, without repercussion for their activities or their funding options.
 - **Provide**, along with local authorities, the necessary spaces and resources to enable girl and youth led groups to engage in public dialogue and decision-making as respected members of civil society.
 - **Adopt**, budget for, implement and monitor national legislation and policies to ensure that girls and young women activists in all their diversity, are able to actively contribute to public life.
- **Governments, local government and national ministries must:**
 - **Increase**, strengthen and adequately resource existing structures that enable girls and young people's participation within formal governance mechanisms such as national youth councils, and child and youth parliaments.
- **United Nations, governments and the international community must:**

³ Please note, this is a summarised version of the calls to action for full list detail see SOTWG 2023 report: Turning the Word Around: Girl and Young Women Activists leading the fight for equality - Technical Report. Available at: <https://plan-international.org/publications/turning-world-around>

- **Fulfil** their commitment to girls and young women's meaningful participation in the shaping, implementation and monitoring of global development agendas and frameworks.
- 3. Address barriers to girls' and young women's activism and the mounting backlash against those who are politically active.**
- **Governments should:**
 - **Ensure that** girls and young women activists can speak out without fear of threats, harassment or violence, both online and in public spaces through social norms change campaigns, enforced laws and policies, and strengthened reporting mechanisms.
 - **Government policy makers and social media companies must:**
 - **Take responsibility** for creating an open, accessible and safe online civic space for girl and young women activists, providing meaningful connectivity and secure access to the internet.
 - **National, regional and international human rights bodies and governments should:**
 - **Take measures** to monitor the specific situation for girl and young women human rights defenders and take appropriate action to protect and empower them.
 - **Governments, donors, NGOs and gender justice movements must:**
 - **Resource and support** the wellbeing and safety of girl-led groups who are advocating at the frontlines. Girls need space to process and support their psychosocial health when dealing with the systemic violence and discrimination against them.
 - **International organisations, including UN bodies, partnerships and INGOs should:**
 - **Invest** in and support long term programmes, including mentoring, that provide early opportunities and sustained support for girls and young women who choose to speak out and advocate in their communities.
- 4. Support girls' and young women's education at all levels**
- **Education Ministries should:**
 - **Ensure** the provision of inclusive, quality gender transformative education which includes a focus on human rights and civic education. Equipping all children and youth, particularly girls and young women, with the necessary skills, knowledge, critical consciousness and experience to feel confident to engage in civic and political life as activists, advocates and informed citizens.
 - **School stakeholders (teachers, councils, and parents) must:**
 - **Provide** students, especially girls, with opportunities to develop the soft skills integral to influencing, including leadership skills-development, public speaking, and access to decision-making processes within school governance structures, such as school councils and elections.
 - **INGOs and civil society must:**
 - **Recognise** the value of girl and youth activists to effect change. Support the development of critical influencing skills: building effective advocacy, being able to lobby power holders, navigating different policy spaces and influencing processes. Focus should be on soft skills development, including leadership and public speaking.
- 5. Member States must increase their political will, investments in and commitment to gender equality as a cross-cutting priority for the 2030 Agenda at the SDG summit and for the reminder of the SDGs.**

- **National Governments must:**
 - **Support** gender equality and girls' rights within the SDG framework. We call on Member States to make firm statements of intent at the summit and affirm strong global and national commitments to investing in gender equality and interventions for adolescent girls across all SDGs.
 - **Invest** in gender and age disaggregated data that properly tracks progress on the SDGs.
 - **Provide** appropriate training in the processes of data monitoring and utilise tools like Citizen Scorecards with girls, youth groups and communities so governments can be held to account.
- **International policymakers and national governments must:**
 - **Promote and encourage** ownership of the SDG Agenda at grassroots level, providing accessible and practical information about the SDGs. They should also design SDG interventions, in direct partnership with girls to maximise their impact and relevance of the SDGs to local activists and their communities.
 - **Commit** to systematic and ongoing engagement with adolescent girls and young women activists. Regular consultation and dialogue on the issues that affect their lives will ensure that young activists can help to drive change and deliver the SDG promise of a better world that is fit to address today's challenges.
- **Governments and civil society should:**
 - Encourage girls and young people to participate in the formal accountability mechanisms of the SDG framework such as the Voluntary National Reviews. Where girls are excluded from these spaces, they should be supported to engage in shadow and alternate reporting where progress from their perspectives can be captured.