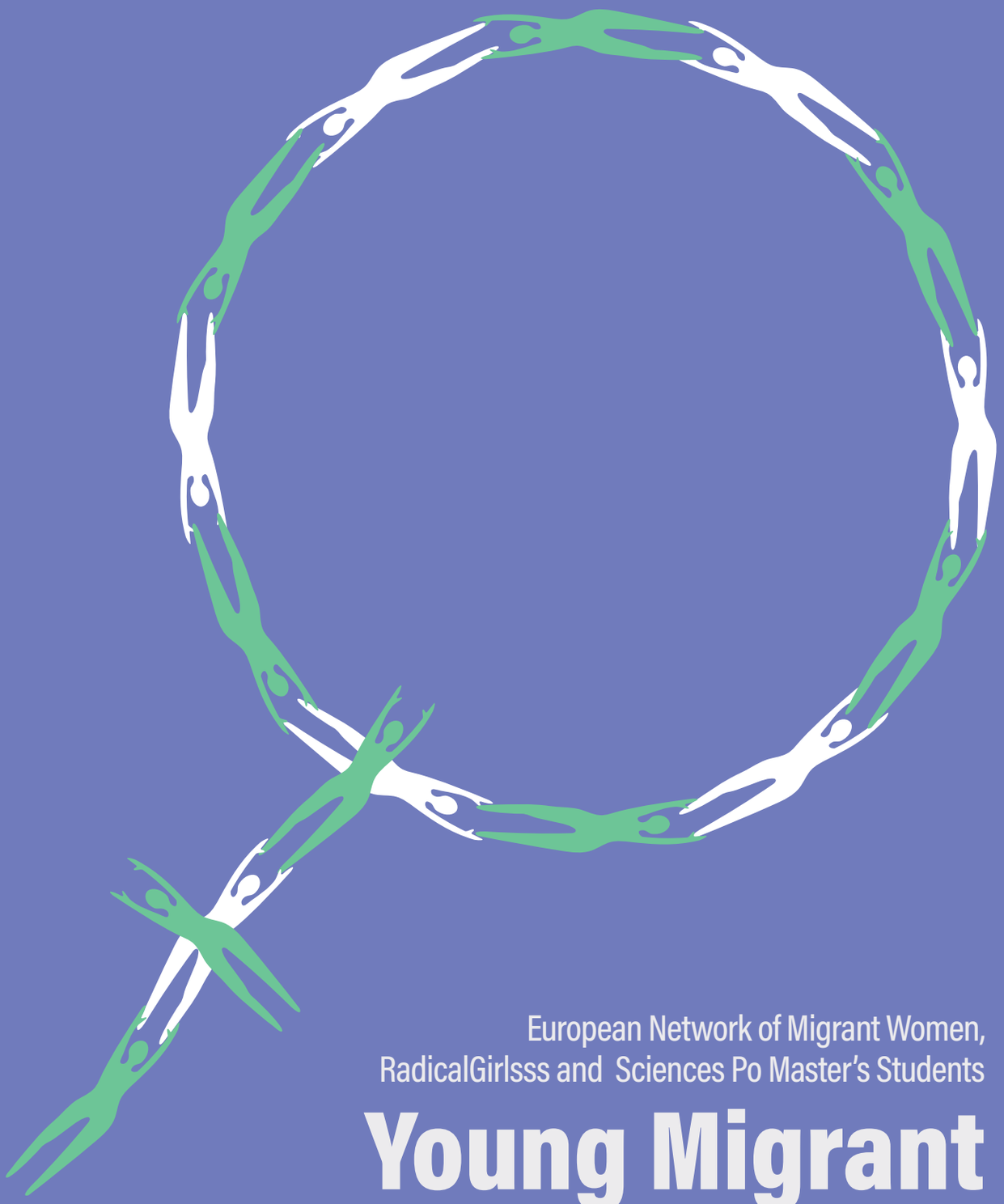

European Network of Migrant Women,
RadicalGirlsss and Sciences Po Master's Students

Young Migrant Women's Political Participation

2021

RADICAL Girlsss
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF MIGRANT WOMEN
SciencesPo PROGRAMME DE RECHERCHE ET D'ENSEIGNEMENT DES SAVOIRS SUR LE GENRE
unitar United Nations Institute for Training and Research
WOMEN FORWARD INTERNATIONAL

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This report was written by Gabrielle Majko and Carolina Medina.

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I. European Network of Migrant Women - **RGsss Foreword**

The COVID-19 global crisis endangered the lives of many migrants and refugees, with a particularly harmful impact on women and girls. In the longer term, the economic and social consequences of this crisis will imperil migrant and refugee women and girls' access to rights, dignity, integration and social cohesion if we do not take serious actions.

Could this global crisis provide an opportunity for addressing systemic flaws and barriers and creating a more equal society? The answer to this question lies in part in the participation of migrant and refugee women in regional and international decision-making processes.

Until today, migrant and refugee women have been distanced from international frameworks and processes such as the CEDAW convention, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). Their low participation is determined by many factors, from legal and financial barriers to the lack of awareness about the existing mechanisms. As a result, their interests are often poorly or not at all represented at the international level.

For young migrant women this gap becomes even bigger as they face specific challenges and many of them grew up without knowledge about the women's rights frameworks that feminist advocates created in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. It is crucial to bridge this representation gap before we lose the values, principles and legal obligations entrenched in these documents.

Migrant women are here and they have things to say. However, the failure to include their voices to the political agenda in a meaningful way leads to the overlooking of the subjects that concern them the most. This is why they need to be able to become active political citizens, take part in and really influence international decision-making processes. Without such participation, especially from the grassroots level, political processes risk to be more and more detached from the reality of women's lives. Furthermore, through their experiences of intersecting discriminations, migrant and refugee women could bring to the table a cross-cutting and holistic view of systemic change that is much needed.

So, what factors hinder migrant and refugee women's participation in international decision-making processes? What changes are required to address the causes of their disconnection from international decision-making bodies' activities and to foster their participation? How do migrant women themselves view such gap?

To answer these questions, the **European Network of Migrant Women** and its young women's group **Radical Girlsss** designed a feminist participatory action project research with **Sciences Po** research program on gender **(PRESAGE)**. This project, funded by **Women Forward International**, aimed to identify, define, and analyse the major barriers and gaps impeding migrant and refugee women's participation in European decision-making processes, with a specific focus on young women (16 to 25 years old), and come up with recommendations and a methodology on how to bridge them.

To do so, we brought together academic research and grassroot action in order to build bridges, get a comprehensive view of the subject and therefore truly assess how to have a positive impact on young migrant women capacity and agency to engage in political participation. We organised a series of workshops with young migrant women with the objectives of them gaining in self-esteem, increasing their ability to express themselves and being more equipped and informed. Most of the participants from these workshops are now actively involved within the European Network of Migrant Women and Radical Girlsss.

This report aims at enabling us to disseminate this approach and reproduce our method across Europe.

II. Framing migrant and refugee young women's participation in decision-making processes: a **cross-cutting issue**

A. Introduction

At the center of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) is the equal rights of women and men in all spheres, notably in political and public life. Yet, women and particularly young migrant and refugee women continue to face exclusion in formal and informal political participative spaces at all European levels. Young migrant women's political participation is an essential prerequisite for gender equality and genuine democracy. Their systematic exclusion is sorely felt. Amidst steadily rising xenophobia and nativism, States have a decisive role in setting the tone of who is and is not welcome to participate in the public forum. It is only through the promotion of the rights enumerated within CEDAW as well as the meaningful inclusion of young migrant and refugee women at all levels of policy-making that States will uphold the global core values of justice, fairness, representation, and human rights.

Who is a migrant woman?

Although the terms refugee, a person seeking asylum, or migrant tend to be employed interchangeably by most relevant stakeholders, these concepts designate different statuses within migratory populations. According to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, a refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their country of origin for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social group and is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country. A person seeking asylum is a third-country national who has made an application for protection under the above-mentioned Convention in respect of which a final decision has not yet been taken. Per the European Institute for Gender Equality, migrants are third-nationals who have moved or are endeavoring to move from a country - often but not necessarily the country of their nationality - to another one where their presence may or may not be regular. Beyond legal statuses, these policy framework-oriented terms become labels to define others, in that they permeate discourse on all levels and serve to inform social relations, often based on dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. It is worth noting that othering processes are often motivated by contrived and discriminatory purposes, denoting power structures that impact the lives of people who migrate (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988), a topic we will address later in our analysis.

Empirical evidence has shown that the application of these static concepts to distinguish groups of migrants fails to capture the historical, social, political, economic, and cultural contexts that drive migration as well as the multiplicity of identities, experiences, and patterns embraced and embodied by immigrants (Turton, 2003; Scalettaris, 2007; Vigil & Abidi, 2018). Considering the complex nature of migration, we will therefore refer to women seeking asylum, refugee women, and immigrant women as "migrant women." Despite all possible divergences within the range of circumstances and experiences relevant to women on the move, the latter find significant similarities in their paths which we will delve into in more detail below. We will also make use of this umbrella term as a reminder that rights are inherent to all, regardless of age, nationality, ethnic origin, color, language, or legal status.

Why a report on the political participation of migrant women in Europe?

Within the past decade, Europe has seen an increase in the arrival or attempted arrival of people at its shores after having undertaken perilous journeys and crossing artificial borders in search of safety. According to the UNHCR close to 5.2 million migrants and refugees reached European borders by the end of 2016. In 2019, more than 27,000 people arrived by sea in Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Spain and 40% of those maritime arrivals were women and children. Since the beginning of the 2015 "migrant crisis", there has been an increasing number of women and children among those who flee their home countries by force, or due to environmental, economic, or security crises. Consequently, in 2019 the percentage of women among all international migrants was 51.4% in Europe.

While the journeys towards Europe involve challenges for all who undertake them, women and girls face dangers and obstacles that are particular to their

situation. As Marchand argues: "It goes without saying that the migration-violence nexus is gendered. Men and women are affected in different ways and the violence to which they are exposed" (Marchand, 2008). Regrettably, their hardships do not halt once they have reached European territories. Upon arrival, migrant women often have to cope with a continuum of hostile environments, which is why the Council of Europe included the protection of migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women and girls as a strategic objective to promote gender equality and the fulfillment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms on the continent. Through this report, we will underline what those hardships are, and the ways in which they interlock to hinder migrant women's access to one of the core principles of human rights and a precondition for effective democratic citizenship for all people: political participation.

In general, there is a tendency to assume that political participation is restricted to the exercise of conventional electoral rights. However, the right of meaningfully participating in decision-making processes involves much more than simply voting or standing for election. It derives from the freedom to speak out, share valuable experiences, and build support networks; the opportunity for all members of the community to take part in formal and non-formal participatory mechanisms (Bekaj & Antara, 2018), raise awareness and influence political decisions; and the ability to access information, build capacity and develop leadership skills in pursuit of particular priorities and outcomes (UN, 2018). The political participation of young migrant and refugee women plays out within the different spheres of society, namely the household or private space, the community or camp, referred to as the local space, and the national and international levels. These spaces are dynamic and may overlap with one another (Anderson, 2019), providing different entries into political arenas. For instance, a local decision-making infrastructure can impact a young migrant woman's private life and her status within the host country; similarly, decision-making capacity in the household can set precedent for young women's ability to join local, national, and global political processes, and decision-making circles.

Several international and regional normative and legal frameworks (CEDAW, 1981; Beijing Platform for Action, 1995; Council of the European Union, 2004; Council of Europe, 2011) emphasize the responsibility of States to ensure migrant women's equal participation in political and public life. Emphasis is placed on political participation because it performs a leverage function for fulfilling their equal enjoyment, exercise, and knowledge of human rights. In the same way, it shall be considered a gateway to promote more equitable decision-making processes, create governance that is materially responsive to the goals of gender equality, and provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society overall.

When identifying the obstacles to young migrant women's political participation, we detect broader debates within the literature. For one, some academics, politics, and media have argued that political participation connects to socio-economic integration. This argument points to irregularities or

discriminations in migrant women's health, their family status, their country or culture of origin, their religion, or their legal rights as being obstacles for their political participation. The most prevalent analyses are driven by four principal frames. The first principal analysis is defined by migrant women's precarious situation. The second analysis emphasizes individuals' and institutions' inertia. The third untangles the cultural underpinnings of discrimination. The fourth contrasts with the preceding analyses to underline migrant women's capacity and agency.

Vulnerable to risk

Many scholars, non-governmental and civil society organizations raise the issue of young migrant women's exposure to physical violence, rape, prostitution, trafficking, forced marriage - a large system of gender-based abuse. The physical and mental effects of violence against women have a lasting impact on their ability to integrate in receiving societies, mainly because trauma or exploitation entails silencing and absence, which, in turn, can undermine their political voice. The "focus on healthcare access [...] [is] inextricably linked to the empowerment and emancipation of undocumented migrants" (Geddie et al., 2006), which explains why NGO reports and documents most usually deal with the topic of health. Some of them even point to a direct link between health and political participation: "the approach of using critical literacy [about health] as a route to realizing the democratic rights of citizenship" (Vissandjée et al., 2017).

Victims of sending States and male peers

The marginalization of migrant women originates from a multitude of pressures, not excluding the community surrounding them upon arrival in the receiving State. Some scholars and policymakers point to the difficult reconciliation of dissimilar cultures (Isolated in the suburbs) (Bucci, 2012; Baillot et al., 2012; Boira et al. 2018). In these, migrant men - and more generally the community around them - play an important role in migrant women's continued marginalization at the household level which is often exacerbated by the absence of adequate policy responses from receiving States' policy-making. The idea that migrant men can contribute to the marginalization of migrant women through putting extra pressure on them to find a balance between the culture of the receiving state and the one of their close community is a common analytical frame employed in the media (Campana, 2018). Typically, these writings identify migrant women's lack of protection through a historical lens: pointing to the exclusion of women's migrations throughout the 20th century.

The contemporary policy focuses on this group's vulnerability may carry essentialization and stigmatization leading to the framing of young migrant women as being deprived of agency and denying recognition of their autonomy. For instance, many scholars condemn the unequal implementation of family reunion policies or asylum-seeking procedures while underlining the State's failure to cater to the needs of migrant women. Many of these documents are NGO-funded reports or academic legal articles that study the "extent to which national policies consider women's needs in the application" (Emmenegger & Stigwall, 2019). There are different trends which all attempt to explain and curb migrant women's lack of political participation, it is important to note that these are not necessarily all part of the same school of thought but converse with each other as they base their reflection on gender-based discriminations.

Securitization discourse and its postcolonial roots

The majority of recent academic articles have a more critical appraisal of the aforementioned tormentor-victim dynamic. They try to gain hindsight by analyzing how discrimination against migrant women comes to be. Many of the "securitization" (Bigo, 1998) scholars identify the tension between two aspects of European States' policies: "interpret[ing] their obligations under the Geneva Convention [...], and to augment the rejection of asylum seekers as part of an ever more 'securitized' immigration policy" (Freedman, 2008; Gerard & Pickering, 2014). They understand this discriminatory securitization as being built by discourse which serves policymaking and vice versa. Othering discourse serves European and national-level policies to build identity which strengthens national and regional feeling of belonging all mobilized in opposition to the existence of "a fifth column" (Afshar, 2008; Kapur, 2010), an intruder within the society. This discourse exists through the media (Rasinger 2010), politics (Roggeband & Verloo, 2007; Thorleifsson, 2017) and religion (Steiner, 2015; Karyotis & Patrikios, 2010). Postcolonial studies influence the securitization arguments in how they present European policies as being embedded in longstanding discourse on gender and race which contributes to an othering dynamic - "a modern-day form of Orientalism" (Afshar, 2008; Degani & Ghanem, 2019). The dynamics at play result in migrant women's exclusion.

Migrant women's economic, cultural and social agency: migration as opportunity

A small number of documents contrast with all preceding perspectives by pinpointing migrant women's agency. Some focus on the changes brought about by migrations for women's political participation: changing family dynamics and

entering the labor market (Chuang & Le Bail 2020, Erel 2011), gaining economic influence, being at the forefront of unions, etc. (Stock, 2012) tries to transcend usual gender-based stereotypes as a reason for migration. The scholar comes to a conclusion that favors the way in which "women deliberately [...] enhance their opportunities for mobility". Some of the advantages of this point of view are that it provides a less siloed understanding of migrations and practical examples of participation (Caretta & Riaño, 2016). Nathalie Mondain even emphasizes the importance of "the contribution of contacts between migrants and non-migrants to social and cultural change of sending societies" [translation our own] (Mondain et al., 2012). However, these optimistic analyses might erase women's difficulty to make their voices heard as well as the hardships that feed into it.

Ultimately, it is clear that the scope of analysis in the literature is extremely wide: ranging from obstacles that threaten women's safety and lives to their agency within the labor market. These nuanced analyses bring attention to different facets of the continuum of violence that migrant women face. The real difference lies in whether or not the authors choose to grasp the roots of this overarching violence and whether or not their goal is to equip women with tools to overcome these very obstacles. However, we have identified various gaps to remedy. Firstly, the sources do not comment on the issue in a comprehensive way, each one is limited to their funder's scope of action or to one very specific aspect of the question. Secondly, class analyses seem to be left out of the literature on the subject, though the majority of texts underline the importance of an intersectional outlook. Thirdly, though most texts are very expansive on the mediatic, historical, legal, and political foundations of gender in migrations and especially on the situation of young migrant women, they very rarely employ analysis from an individualized perspective of a young migrant woman. This report seeks to demonstrate how the above analyses interact with one another and interlock to create the unique set of obstacles faced by young migrant women in accessing their political participative spaces.

Our objective

The centering of comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategies is critical in ensuring the political participation of migrant and refugee women and girls. It is essential in guaranteeing the full enjoyment of their human rights and achieving gender equality as much as it is necessary to create democracies that are representative and materially responsive. By doing so, we will first identify the factors that hinder migrant and refugee women's participation in international decision-making processes. We will then come up with recommendations inspired in practices which have shown to be meaningful and promising in enhancing young migrant women's political participation and dismantling the aforementioned barriers.

B. Methodology

This report was led by four female graduate students, under the direction of a coordination team composed of members from the European Network of Migrant Women and the Sciences Po Gender Studies Programme, PRESAGE, in partnership with Women Forward International. For this study we brought together academic research and grassroot field action in order to build bridges, get a comprehensive view of the subject and therefore truly assess how to have a positive impact on young migrant women capacity and agency to engage in political participation. The data was gathered using a combination of qualitative research methods.

Interviews

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders between November 2020 and January 2021 to enlarge their understanding of the subject and have first-hand valuable information from migrant women, women's rights advocates, activists, researchers, writers, non-governmental and nonprofit organizations (NGOs and NPOs, respectively), civil society organizations (CSOs), service providers, and other bodies specialized in migrant women's access to rights.

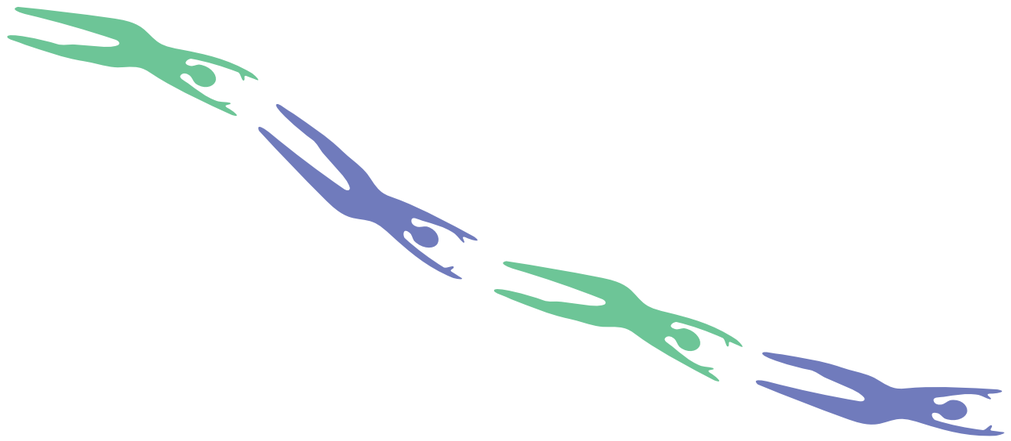
As part of the methodology design, the researchers and the coordination team designed a common ethics-, respect- and communication-based questionnaire that served as a guideline to conduct the interviews and collect relevant data. During the interview, the researchers informed the interviewees how and why the information was being collected, stored and used, and included a verbal protocol for consent. Likewise, all citations used in this report were sent to and approved by their authors. The researchers held a total of seventeen semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and four online semi-structured interviews with migrant women.

Online Participatory Workshop

The online capacity-building workshop was organized and conducted with Radical Girlsss, the youth movement of the European Network of Migrant Women. It was framed around the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and welcomed eighteen young migrant and refugee women settled throughout Europe already engaged in some form of feminist activism or advocacy. In order to put theory into practice, the researchers sent a survey to the participants prior to the online workshop in order to gather their thematic and technical interests. This was done with the intention of guiding the design of the workshop's capacity-building activities. The online workshop consisted of two parts, one hour allocated for self-introductions and a lecture on CEDAW and two hours for breakout sessions to deepen engagement with CEDAW. Based on the participants' survey responses, we designed three breakout sessions to develop skills in Online Campaigning, Public Speaking, and Arts and Activism to deepen engagement with Article 5 of CEDAW on gender roles and stereotyping. Most of the participants from these workshops are now actively involved within the European Network of Migrant Women and Radical Girlsss.

Limitations

The researchers were obliged to streamline the scope to account for the limitations of mobility and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In that sense, the shift of the fieldwork to the virtual environment generates involuntary selection biases, hence why the migrant women who participated in the report do not reflect the full diversity of migrant women in Europe. Additionally, the call for participants we issued attracted women with a certain access to information, means, language, as well as an interest in politics. Therefore, we cannot guarantee that the voices of the most exposed and unprotected migrant women were consulted for this report. In addition to the above, this study is based on qualitative research and original data, it is therefore important to note that the generalizability of our findings is somewhat limited.



III. Understanding the **continuum of violence** and its impacts on young migrant women's political participation

A. Psychosocial, cultural and political dynamics

Stereotyping and external perceptions

The overarching notion to be retained from this first section is that stereotypes associated with young migrant women are rooted in **deep systems and permeate many levels of society.** Thereby, they constitute one of the root obstacles to political participation, which requires sensitization, discussion and confronting diversity. Discrimination gravitates around sex, race, and class, but as will be discussed, the experiences of migration organize dynamics between the three lenses in specific ways.

Firstly, the basis for stereotyping most commonly referred to were **gender-based stereotypes.** In this sense, our interviewees underlined the variety of injunctions women have to comply with, whether based on sexuality, social roles, or economic dues:

"All of the stereotypes which women generally suffer from" (Miguel-Sierra)

"That there are jobs for women and jobs for men - all of these terribly partitioned opportunities." (Lévy)

"[It can be] considered that there are three roles women are systematically ascribed to: the virgin, the mother and the whore." (Ahrabare)

In addition, interviewees have pointed to the particularity of young migrant women's experience when it comes to gender-based stereotypes. What they call into question is the clash that may exist between gender-based injunctions from the receiving community and women's community or family. These can be contradictory but are equally limiting, in that they might confront each other in content but nonetheless pressure women into specific tropes and roles: be it motherhood, sexuality, femininity, domestic chores, etc. Nevertheless, interviewees have emphasized that these discrepancies have the power to instigate critical thinking and introspection, which are at the source of political thinking and constitute the first step to political participation. All of these stereotypes materialize in tangible obstacles to participation. Indeed, many of these roles constrain women's time, their access to tools, and extra-domestic life.

Secondly, as previously hypothesized, the majority of the interviewees emphasize that **race** is a basis for stereotyping. However, one of the most interesting parts of their argument was that racist stereotypes do not stop at the othering process, but further break down into subcategories:

"Arab women: submission; Asian women: gentleness; Black women: bwwestiality; Latino women: sensuality." (Ahrabare)

These stereotypes might vary from country to country but are especially relevant for migrant women because it informs their migration experience and their capacity to be supported and to be visible - on a local level, in NGOs, in media-according to whether a specific community's plight instigates pity from the general public or not.

Lastly, one of the gaps we originally identified has been largely filled by the interviewees' responses: the question of social **class**. Stereotypes of class drive young migrant women away from political processes, as they are seen as the poor of the poor. Interviewees reported discourse that's often heard:

"They're stealing our jobs; they're stealing our government allowance" (Viel)
"They're poor people who know nothing." (Raad)
"When you're poor you are not educated." (Dutrey)

These phrases show the extent of marginalization, but by being critical of these ready-made sentences, interviewees also shed light on an important subject matter: young migrant women have a potential way beyond the stereotypes that are ascribed to them, by the variety of their cultural and social backgrounds.

> ***"A young Comorian woman came to see me,*** *and she had very little State allowance because she had not been here for long. She tells me : 'The very little amount that I had, the State has taken it away!' I sent her to see the social worker and she came back and told me: 'The social worker does not believe me, she said I don't even qualify for State allowance.' Anyway, everything got figured out, but the Comorian woman came back to see me and said: 'She didn't believe me because my skin is black.'" This was huge. But I corrected her: 'She did not believe you because you are poor. She believes that when you are poor, you are stupid and uneducated.'"* (Odile Dutrey)

Psychosocial impact of cycles of violence

Consistent evidence shows that particular circumstances pertaining to or exacerbated by immigration, influence women's mental health (Delara, 2016). Their experience in the transit and destination countries can also make past forms of psychological distress worse (Lethi et al. 2016). In its 2019 Report on 'Migrants and their vulnerabilities', IOM stressed that "the issue of gender is relevant to vulnerability, with women experiencing higher rates of modern slavery in domestic work, the sex industry and forced marriage, while men are more likely to be exploited in state sponsored forced labour and forced labour in the construction and manufacturing sectors". The report also highlighted that underage migrants as well as undocumented migrants are even more at risk that the others.

Young migrant women "are the ones experiencing the bulk of violence, it pierces through and occurs in their bodies." (Dutrey)
And spend years being heavily "exposed to all kinds of violence." (Noreen)

Post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, social anxiety, dissociative reactions, and dangerous coping strategies appear as some of the most recurrent psychological effects, together with psycho-somatic consequences (Freudenberg et al., 2019; Melchior; Lévy; Ka-Sy). This causes young women to lack eagerness to participate in public life, not reinforcing or developing their skills and talents.

Nadia Sebtaoui argues that non-welcoming policies and lack of responsibility of all the EU States generate psychological distress on migrant women:

"The fact of being rejected from all countries, of being pursued by the police, of being treated badly... To be put in detention centers, in prisons, even just temporarily, to be questioned in their history continuously, to have to lie about their identity..."

In addition to that, young women rarely find cells integrated into the resettlement system that provide them with specialized services that know how to deal with their particular cases and respond to their needs. In fact, despite

the relevant stakeholders' efforts, gender-sensitive health services remain scarce and hostile for survivors of violence suffering from physical and mental distress. These broad vacuums marginalize and disempower young migrant women systematically, which impede them from regaining self-confidence, publicly expressing their needs and concerns, and engaging in highly-exposed leadership structures.

These gaps have however been partially addressed by grassroots associations such as Melissa Network:

"[Migrant women] were able to share and at the same time learn from other women and realize that they had common problems and that by sharing with each other they could help heal the pain and trauma they had experienced." (Carlos-Valencia)

In the case of Azmari, La Voix des Femmes, Melissa Network and GAMS, the founders of the associations made sure to establish a safe non-mixed space.

Survivors of "violence prefer not being in a place of exchange or even a place of training with other men." (Viel)
"Part of helping them is telling them, "okay, let's start small, we have small groups where you can just sit together and talk together and just highlight what you want." (El-Khoury)

> ***Sexual and sex-based Violence:*** *Young migrant women are often survivors of figurative and tacit expressions of violence that occur in one or more of the phases of their migratory experience, including sexual and gender-based violence (GBV). In turn, GBV manifests in different forms and according to feminist literature can be divided into five different categories: sexual violence (sexual harassment, rape, sexual exploitation, prostitution), physical violence (physical assault), harmful traditional practices (female genital mutilation, forced marriage, ostracism), socioeconomic abuse, and emotional and physical violence (abuse, humiliation, confinement). These sometimes repeated and multiple abuses escalating overtime are sources of long-lasting traumatic experiences that have a profound impact on women and lead them to build coping mechanisms in order to preserve their survival (Freudenberg et al., 2019).*

Undercutting representation in the public sphere and self-perception

Self-perception is a theme that was recurrent in the majority of the interviews. Interviewees underlined the fact that **young migrant women particularly struggle with a distorted view of their capacities and place in society**, which, according to them, notably materializes because of stereotyping (see III.A.1.) and traumatizing experiences (see III.A.2.). Firstly, many interviewees emphasized some defined similarities between migrant men and migrant women's plights: in the struggle for migration, both go through a certain **erasure of their individuality**. This is due to the essentialization of migration, be it by the receiving State or by the family or community: perceiving migration as having one ultimate goal, financial gain for example, or as being a linear endeavor, an achievement in itself. Nadia Sebtaoui particularly emphasized migrants' erasure of self resulting from this:

"in quasi all [communities] there is a type of debt to their family. They do not choose the migratory journey. This weight, this familial responsibility, this shame of failure."

As well as did Natasha Noreen:
"hearing the word migrant has importance because as migrants you don't have such involvement in political life. So, you don't see it as something belonging to you."

However, as will be underlined in the following sections, this sense of community and social appartenance can have a positive impact on young migrant women's political participation and the formalization of atmospheres where they understand each other better.

Secondly, some of the interviewees have highlighted the particularity of **young migrant women's experience as women**. The aforementioned view of migrant women as especially submissive - even more than women who are not migrants - reflects their incapacity to claim their rights and to be represented in the realm of political participation. This phenomenon has been evoked by an important share of the interviewees:

"The problem is the question of legitimacy. We struggle to give them adequate space because they tend to refuse it." (Ramajo)

The question of **representation** is especially valuable: the interviewees have underlined the over-representation of young migrant women in associations that provide aid, and their under-representation in decision-making instances - compared to migrant men.

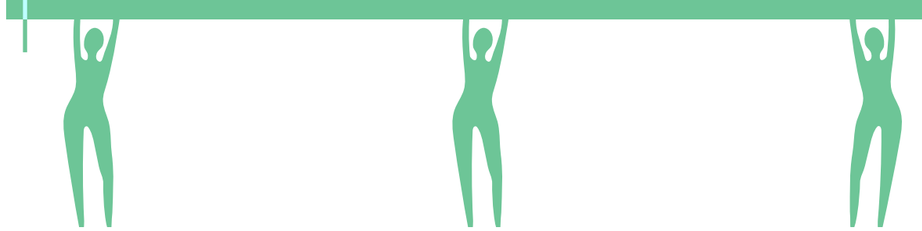
"I asked [other people] if there were people that they knew who could join the collective, and they systematically named men." (Bilong)

This lack of political representativity and "role models" with similar life experiences in places of power contributes to young women's voices being silenced and their experiences not being addressed. Lack of leadership opportunities is also worsened by the "tokenistic" inclusion of migrant women in decision-making processes:

"They are received, they are known, but they are not heard." (Miguel-Sierra)

In other words, young migrant women's difficulty to overcome certain obstacles set by dominant societies and close communities lies partly in the fact that these barriers are internalized. It is interesting to point out the links that have been made between migrant women and men in this capacity. Interviewees have thereby emphasized the importance -in some specific instances- of **dialogue and cooperation**, especially between migrant men and migrant women, as well as adopting a comprehensive approach grounded in the long term.

"I think when you first come, we as women are very sensible to what other people think of us. *And this is something that they conditioned us to when we were very, very young. I think boys and men are less likely to be. They have the confidence of saying: 'Okay, I made a mistake.' Whereas women, we're very like: 'Oh, what did he think of me?' So, when you know that you don't look like a woman, like your hair is not how it looks on TV. And your accent is a bit frowned upon. I think I saw a study somewhere that when people talk with an accent, people already think they are less smart than they are. I speak two languages, for example. But as good as we are, we actually know what people think. So, it makes us go to less places where we have to speak like in public."* *(El-Khoury)*



B. Intersection of gender-, origin- and status-based violence

Structural and systemic factors hindering young migrant's agency and independence

Migration could be beneficial to migrant women escaping violence and persecution and heading to Europe in search of better life opportunities. It could give them a higher degree of economic and personal independence, as well as safer spaces in which they can fully develop their aspirations and paths. In the same manner, women could be seen as valuable agents that contribute to improving human development outcomes in the countries of origin, transit, and destination. However, the positive results of migration are not merely incidental nor extraneous: they are highly conditioned by migratory, asylum, and integration policies, practices, and discretionary interpretations in every particular State. In that sense, we note that, overall[1], ineffective, male-centered, and feeble EU policies themselves have produced, or at least intensified, many of the vulnerabilities of the people seeking to reach European countries to claim international protection (Freedman, 2019). According to the European Institute on Gender Equality (EIGE), the main gender inequality issues relating to migration status in the EU are labor market participation, deskilling and the informal economy, family reunification, international protection and gender-based violence.

"Migrant women are out there, they are alive." (Dutrey)
"They have things to say." (Miguel-Sierra)

Yet, the very conception of mainstream institutions, programs, and policies renders their contributions invisible (Noreen) and makes it challenging to navigate social systems, government bureaucracy, and new languages. In fact, socialization processes and male-dominated decision-making permeate all the spheres of our society and translate into structural barriers that impede their meaningful participation in public life due to unequal access to and control over power, resources, and institutions. Migrant women are categorized as vulnerable a priori, without considering the systemic and contextual causes of this vulnerability. Additionally, it is significant that some actors prefer to use the term "at risk" rather than "vulnerable" for this exact reason. Consequently, they are confined in power structures and political dynamics biased against them or completely removed from their reality and circumstances.

"The voices from the bottom should rise much higher. But it is clear that for the moment, with the current agenda and the blockages at the European Union level, they do not want to hear anything." (Miguel-Sierra)

[1] European countries vary considerably in the sex-sensitivity of their asylum policies, procedures and practices.

According to the interviewees' diagnosis, the lack of timely, accessible and approachable information about the services to which migrant women are entitled plays an important role in establishing neglectful dynamics that depower them (Ahrabare). Women have pointed out that institutions themselves - all over Europe - are lacking in proper organization in that they have long and intricate procedures and add on to an already complicated situation. Representatives of gender-mixed NGOs also reported that it is more difficult to reach out to young migrant women when recruiting participants.

"They are the most overlooked subjects of any debate, they are not covered by the media, we don't let them speak, they are excluded from the reception system" (Ramajo) and are seldom included in any consultation process.

Despite the increasing attention and resources the international community has allocated to the fulfillment of this right, current policy focus on this group's vulnerability carries harmful essentialization and stigmatization leading to the framing of young migrant women as vulnerable victims in the public discourse (Freedman, 2019). It is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it fails to contextualize how securitized immigration regimes contribute to young migrant women's precarity (Gerard & Pickering, 2014; Peroni & Timmer, 2013). Second, it reinforces the barriers for young migrant women to participate in collective action and political activism by denying recognition of their autonomy and agency. The absence of young migrant women's voices gives rise to an incomplete deliberation of their needs and consideration of their capacities in regional decision-making processes. And, apart from the fact that "the normative framework that enables or inhibits such participation, is largely left to the individual discretion of host or origin countries" (Bekaj & Antara, 2018), evidence and the lack of it shows us that young migrant woman are precluded from public and political affairs.

Lack of independent migratory status: *In some European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom), migratory status and family reunification policies have been framed in a fashion that affects migrant women disproportionately. The way these provisions are designed creates structural dependencies that undermine women's autonomy and agency by, for example, forcing them to have a migratory status dependent on that of their husbands. This derivative status puts migrant women experiencing domestic violence in*

a precarious situation and may be inclined to endure abuse longer since they are threatened with the possibility of having their permit revoked and be left without means of support. "The question of political participation cannot be understood without taking into account the legal status of people because if you don't have a status, if you don't have papers, participation gets complicated" (Schmoll). It is worth recalling that in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation 35 (para. 29) urges States to reform any policy that "prevent or deter women from reporting gender-based violence", including "restrictive immigration laws".

Institutional violence and constraints

International, State-run and local institutions are especially relevant to be put under the microscope here because despite the fact that they are the primary targets of legal provisions meant to protect and promote the social and political participation of migrant women, they are also **perpetrators** of an array of violent acts and discourses that result in young migrant women's exclusion. Most of these grievances are related to the policy implementation by individuals who work for government institutions and humanitarian organizations, and their detachment from young migrant women's lives, a mutually reinforcing dynamic. For example, many of the interviewees spontaneously mentioned institutions for questions relating to deeply ingrained **stereotypes**, and pointing to their **systematic** nature. This approach to action framing disregards and downgrades the experience of women on the move, putting them in situations of revictimization, precariousness, and uncertainty (Freedman, 2019), especially when they go through credibility assessments and their status is determined.

On the front of individual interactions, it has been mentioned in previous sections that laws are not always respected by individuals who run these institutions (see Box 1). It is a shared remark that there is an overall lack of training to deal with young migrant women: their isolation or their cultural uprootedness, for example. It was also argued that **language** especially is a vector for young migrant women's difficulty to turn to institutions to get some help, to access welfare services, and more importantly for our report, to foster social interactions and to participate in political life.

"There is legislation. The rights are clear, normally. But there are people who read and interpret these laws. That is why it is important to be armed, to know these rights: for when you face this type of administration, which interprets poorly -voluntarily or involuntarily. Let us keep in mind that there is legislation but that there also are migration policies. So, those who interpret the laws say to people's faces: 'No Ma'am, you do not have the right.'" (Raad)

"The fear of social services exists as well. I've heard from people who sleep on the street: "I'm not going to tell anyone about it, otherwise I'll have my child taken away from me". And it is true. I've heard from my social worker colleagues: "If they sleep outside, I can't let that happen to a child. I am going to place them into foster care." And that goes through the judge, and there are very few spots for children. And this leads us towards a whole other subject matter." (Dutrey)

When it comes to how institutions function, interviewees have also highlighted the discrepancies that might exist between countries of origin and receiving countries' institutional culture and functioning.

However, interviewees underlined that what is lacking in State-led institutions is usually filled in by other entities, or by the close community surrounding young migrant women, who rely on these close individuals to provide them with information and guidance, which can create dependency and additional situations of violence (Ramajo, Carlos-Valencia, Sebtaoui, Miguel-Sierra, Neira, Dutrey).

Additionally, others have highlighted that interactions between members of the same migrant communities have allowed for other than traditional political participation to emerge. Collectives and associations that exist on this local level allow for the balance between a top-down and a bottom-up approach, for which many of the interviewees have advocated for. On the one hand, the participatory methodologies developed and applied by associations not only include women in learning and decision-making processes but can also be used as vehicles to incorporate their needs and concerns through horizontal and strategic support. In some cases - notably the Melissa Network, GAMS, and La Voix des Femmes - migrant women organizing amongst themselves have been successful at achieving this balance and, in the end, be seen and efficient on State, European and International levels. On the other hand, different modes of political participation such as protests, meetings, visits to European institutions, and conversations with representatives of institutions of power, have also been identified and judged as beneficial. However, it must be noted that these entities are also limited in means and by their level of action, and thereby surely cannot be substitutes for more centralized and all-encompassing State or regional policies.

"If migrant women become more involved in politics, things will surely change." (Ka-sy)

"[They] could bring a cross-cutting and holistic view of systemic change that is desirable." (Ahrabare)

We identified the incapacity for institutions on all levels to interact in a sensitive way with critical aspects of the migratory experience, which are of importance for young migrant women's participation in social and political spaces. Notwithstanding, we also noted the capacity of migrant women to bypass these institutional barriers and to showcase their interest and relevance in public spaces, seeking alternatives for participation, at other levels and of different types.

> ***"When there is a migrant woman in front of officials,*** *it is really easy for them to say: 'No, you have no right,' and it is very demotivating, and it is an obstacle. Every single time we have impediments to the person getting their documents, to being registered, to sign up, and after getting their permit to be able to register for training. Basically, to access certain rights that should be fundamental rights: access to health, to government help. It is a daily struggle. Every time we need to start over: send, call people, explain things to them, and tell them: 'No, that's what the law says,' that we know the provisions, that we know the rights. It is a fight, and it's a shame because it's a waste of our time and energy, which we could be using to fulfill other fights."* *(Noura Raad)*

Insufficient resources of subsistence and livelihood opportunities

When fleeing from life-threatening situations, migrant women are often forced to leave their original lands, livelihoods assets, and income-generation opportunities, provoking a significant erosion of their relative autonomy and heightening the burdens of survival. Interviewees reported that finding and affording suitable accommodation is a major constraint migrant women and their dependents confront daily both in urban, rural and camp settings through Europe:

"Without housing, we won't have access to anything." (Sebtaoui)

"When there is no possibility of having access to a residence, to have a place where one can settle down, look for a job... It seems complicated to talk about political participation." (Schmoll)

"Someone who is hungry, who is looking for a place to stay at night, will not get politically involved in the hosting country or in the associative milieu." (Ahrabare)

The lack of safeguard measures featuring inclusive schemes for receiving or generating adequate incomes brings about multiple forms of violence and discrimination against migrant women and puts them in situations that prevent them from raising their voices and retrieving their agency.

Migrant women can be swindled by opportunist "individuals that lend you money, but you have to pay back with so much interest." (Carlos-Valencia)

In this context of mistreatment and precariousness, the informal labor market, characterized by hazardous and coercive working conditions, appears as the only pathway to reach financial resources. Invisibility, blackmailing, absence of contracts, systematic disrespect for labor rights, obligation to work overtime, and insufficient wages were the most recurrent concerns among our interviewees regarding informal labor. Another topic discussed was the fact that migrant women devote excessive amounts of time and energy to fulfilling immediate basic needs and ensuring decent living conditions for themselves and their dependents. The latter diminishes time and energy that could be channeled towards activities that enable them to exert decision-making in their households and take up leadership

positions at any level (Miguel-Sierra, Schmoll and El-Khoury).

Given the pressing matters that need to be addressed immediately, political participation is often seen as the last stage of any resettlement process. We raised questions regarding plan and support timing and asked whether it is possible to reconcile these two ideas. There was a consensus regarding the fulfillment of migrant women's essential care as a pillar condition for safeguarding their lives and the importance of incorporating a holistic approach that encompasses human rights-based actions.

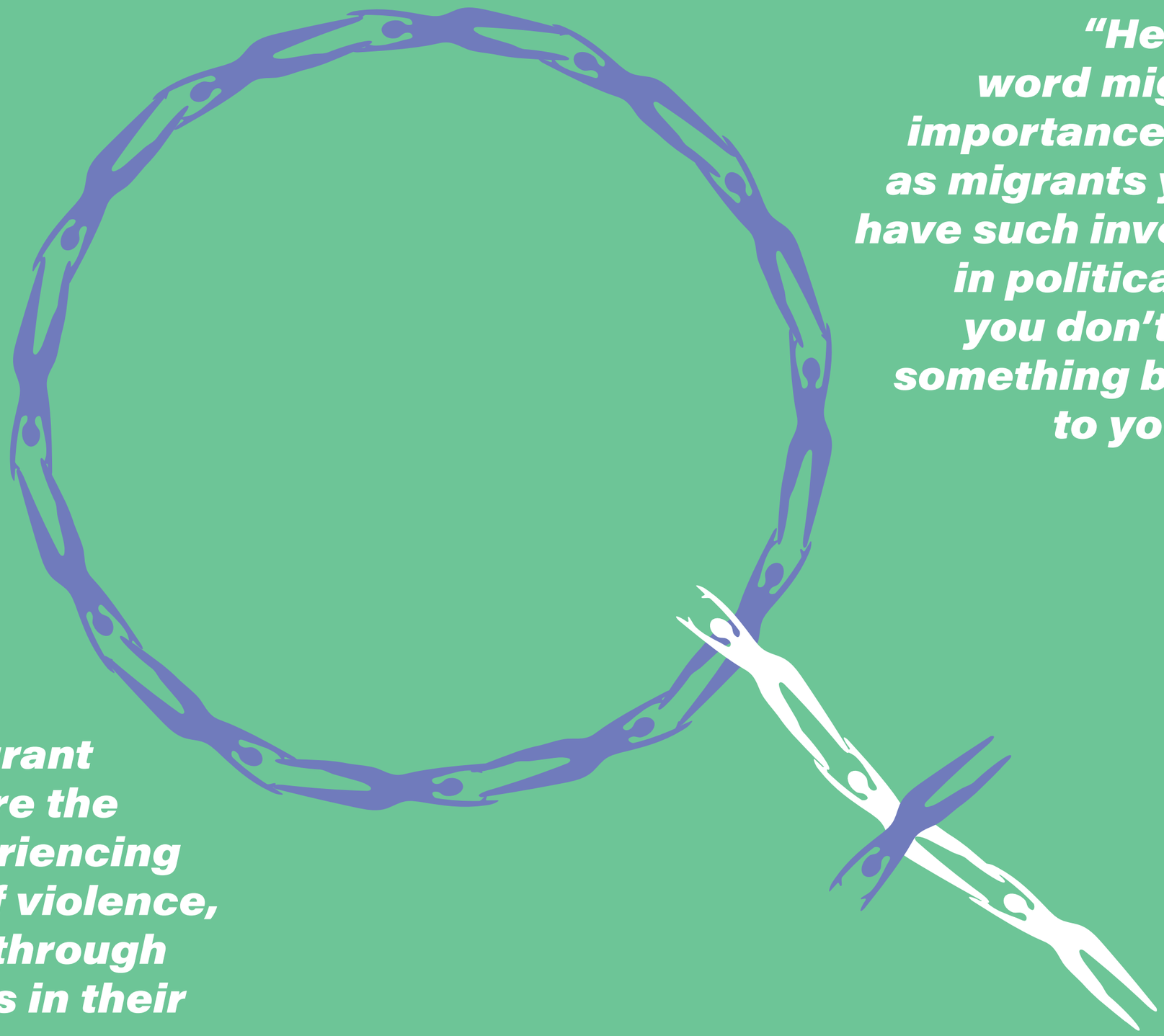
"Participating in meetings, exchanging with others, realizing that we are not alone and empowering oneself also gives courage for one's personal life, one finds stability through participation." (Bilong)

Moreover, "ensuring that (young migrant women) have access to political participation will also ensure that there is more representation of their rights, and that, as a result, there are specific measures that are taken to ensure that they meet their needs. It's a virtuous circle." Ahrabare.

"There can be no political participation without rights." (Schmoll)

Overall, political participation is seen as an instrument for the restitution of rights and liberties. In parallel, the impossibility of obtaining essential survival needs to lead a dignified life is considered to be a fundamental barrier to migrant women in both claiming their political rights and engaging in decision-making processes at any level. The impossibility of dissociating these elements, considering that they are anchored in an integrated human rights system, leads us to recognize their strong interlinkages and potential for mutually reinforcing each other.

> ***Under-qualification and unemployment in Europe:***
> *Access to formal employment and safe income-generation activities is one of the most critical hardships hampering migrant women's active decision-making power. According to studies carried out in recent years, they constitute the largest overqualified and under-employed group in Europe, partly due to difficulties in recognizing foreign qualifications, but also due to triple-sided stereotypes and household work which remains largely performed by women. "What is delusional is that a surgeon can only be an aide-nurse because we have jobs closed to foreigners and we do not recognize diplomas from foreign countries. We need to fight against demotion. The vocational guidance proposed by employment facilities is quite dramatic." (Bilong)*



"Hearing the word migrant has importance because as migrants you don't have such involvement in political life. So, you don't see it as something belonging to you." ***(Noreen)***

Young migrant women "are the ones experiencing the bulk of violence, it pierces through and occurs in their bodies." ***(Dutrey)***

IV. Recommendations

The following recommendations are embedded in a holistic approach whereby Human Rights are upheld, especially in the framework of CEDAW. This report has outlined how essential housing, language, access to labor, health care, knowledge, and protection against all forms of gender-based violence are to young migrant women's political participation. It also showed how gender, class, and race prejudices and inequalities are entrenched and reproduced within social norms and institutions of power and inherently hinder participation in decision-making processes. Therefore, all European States should strive for a situation where young migrant women are free of these obstacles. The following recommendations pertain to how EU institutions, governments, NGOs, or grassroots organizations can overcome these obstacles by focusing on young migrant women's active involvement in political life.

1. National and International levels of Governance

- Commit and evolve to supporting young migrant women;

- **Ratify, implement and comply** with obligations enumerated in CEDAW as well as its additional protocols, committee reports, general recommendations;

- **Support, finance and harmonize** Europe-wide data collection efforts on migration trends disaggregated by gender, age, ethnicity, and legal status accompanied by proper control mechanisms to prevent discriminative misuse of dataset and develop well-informed policies and programming;

- Implement more regular **training** on the legal provisions and methods of action for civil servants who interact directly with migrant women.

- Understand the obstacles hindering young migrant women's meaningful political participation and act upon them;

- **Sensibilize** the public on the obstacles young migrant women face through public education, community outreach against xenophobia, racism and harmful stereotypes and campaigns to raise social value and positive contributions of "care professions";

- **Compile toolkits and platforms translated in every relevant language** informing the rights and entitlements enumerated in conventions and treaties to support migrant women's autonomy and agency and ensure they have access to accurate and relevant information;

- **Establish** quotas and other temporary affirmative actions for young migrant women, notably in forums, consultative bodies, expert councils, and focus discussion groups, in particular when devising migration, asylum, and integration policies that affect their lives. These policies are already taking effect in some European countries, such as Finland, Germany, Italy and Denmark, and,to a lesser extent, France. However, there is no one-size-fits-all way of implementing quota systems, which is why these policies have to be well-informed and adapted to fit each particular context;

- **Create** favorable and enabling frameworks for young migrant women to participate in activities related to political life, offering, for instance, childcare facilities for mothers, non mixed safe spaces and financial support to attend meetings;

- Build partnerships and collaborate with humanitarian and private sector to integrate migrant women's voices at all levels and ensure autonomy;

- **Conduct** collective assessments with grassroots associations since they have a contextual understanding of migrant women's realities and often act as first responders to **generate** more robust dialogues and a shared understanding of the actions required to uphold migrant women's political rights;
- **Develop** a common system to recognize migrant women's qualifications, skills and diplomas by adopting a gender-sensitive employment policy and support frameworks;
- **Grant** work permits and **lift** structural barriers such as restricted freedom of movement, dependent status and provision preventing legal employment to the active participation of migrant women in the active labour market to ensure their self-resilience;
- **Expand** opportunities for migrant women through gender-responsive livelihood strategies that develop their potential and build on their skills and aspirations;

- Introduce a gender-based perspective into procedures to ensure realization and exercise of social, economic and political rights;

- **Implement** legal accompaniment and language translators for women seeking asylum or residency codified in a policy that centers dignified, humanistic, and civil reception, in strict respect for human rights and consideration of the gender-sensitive needs of migrant women (ie. psychological support; information on rights; interview accompaniment (no children, no family member), provide access to (emergency) health care and gynecologic follow-up right upon arrival, provide female interviewers for migrant women, etc.);
- **Rework and streamline** the different levels of decision-making to grant legal status, **shorten** the timescale and **deliver** durable autonomous documentation to women, including those arriving in Europe through family reunification requests;
- **Engage** directly with migrant women and provide mechanisms to participate in formal and visible spaces of power, regardless of their legal status, such as complaint, feedback, review, and response mechanisms, and expand political and electoral rights, like in Germany where one can be part of a political party but not run for office or Ireland, where one can run for office and vote in local elections.

2. Private NGOs and associations

- Integrate migrant women in the planning, design and decision-making within the associative body and service delivery activities;

- **Plan** activities centered around participatory cooperation, **promote** active learning, and **include** young migrant women, including former participants in:
  - Volunteer work
  - Creation, coordination, and animation of activities
  - Decision-making instances, boards of directors, general assemblies, and management boards
- **Coordinate** with the local **government** and the **private** sector to ensure sustainability and reach of activities;

- Bring support to integration processes in order to achieve migrant women's participation in political life;

- **Propose** capacity-building **training programmes** targeting young migrant women to help them develop the skills needed to participate effectively in leadership positions such as public speaking, teamwork, network building, knowledge of technicalities, and online campaigning. It is also important to **build** on self-confidence and self-perception;
- **Discuss and raise awareness** about the legal frameworks that protect migrant women, so these frameworks become tools they can use and leverage to assert their rights;
- **Foster accessible guidance on legal and bureaucratic procedures** considering young migrant women's contexts and prior knowledge;

- Actively reach out to groups of young migrant women that are less visible;

- **Conduct** internal evaluations to **identify** who is involved in the organization, those who are not, and the reasons that prevent this participation;
- **Adopt** a "leave no one behind" outreach approach to get to a broader audience and address the imbalances in voice influence and compensate for legacies of discrimination by turning directly to isolated and marginalized migrant women in receiving facilities, urban settings, and camps;
- **Coordinate** with civil society and grassroot organizations that operate in the same locality to collaboratively plan projects and make sure all participants, including undocumented migrant women, have access to the same rights and treatment.

3. Civil society organizations and grassroots associations

- Establish a strong and participatory organizational structure;

- **Promote and leverage** peer to peer support by providing safe spaces that allow migrant women to realize their full potential, build social cohesion, and broaden their social and support networks;

- **Make room** for participants or new-comers to **take part** in creating, running, planning activities and to participate in internal decision-making processes and instances, such as executive boards, advisory and assessment committees, in order to increase representation, leadership, and ownership;

- Foster a more interconnected local community of CSOs, associations, host communities and beneficiaries;

- **Strengthen** association to association bonds across services and **complement** necessary assistance;

- **Commit** to a more equitable sharing of responsibilities through coordination systems, cross-cutting forums, and the planning and implementation joint programmes;

- **Establish** favorable spaces for the dissemination and exchange of fruitful and applicable knowledge and methodologies. The above could be achieved through, for instance, social media releases, collaborative newsletters, and regular meetings between the organizations' representatives.

Recommendations specific to COVID-19
social media as the new gathering place

*- **Include** migrant women in the design and implementation of COVID-19 programmes, national health systems, policies, and planning;*

*- **Consult** with beneficiaries to assess the specific needs that pertain to the sanitary situation and include them in deciding on new means of action*

*- **Call** on migrant women that take action on a smaller scale (NGOs, grassroots organizations, etc.) to take part in citizen-led public debates (ex: Grand Débat National started in 2019 in France)*

*- **Take advantage of** the opportunity to reach young migrant women outside of your pre-COVID operating vicinity to build pan-European networks;*

*- **Using online platforms:***

*- **Use** platforms that can be joined with no Internet connection, including offline features, cloud-based technologies and apps;*

*- **Adapt** activities, forums, political actions to a shorter format and remote operations services;*

*- **Train** individuals - facilitators and beneficiaries alike - to make better use of digital tools;*

*- **Consider** limitations of privacy and space when planning online sessions.*

Contact List of Interviewees

This contact list includes the name, affiliation, and position of the experts who participated in the report through semi-structured interviews conducted by members of the research team. Throughout the report, we use quotations uttered by these women to illustrate and delve deeper into the barriers and opportunities for political participation for young migrant women in Europe. Accordingly, their last names appear in parentheses next to the input or a statement provided by them.

Interviewees	Affiliation / Position
Alyssa Ahrabare	Project officer, European Network of Migrant Women; Co-coordinator, Radical Girlsss; Spokeswoman, Osez le féminisme; Legal Expert; Consultant on women's human rights
Sophie Bilong	Research Consultant, Observatoire de l'immigration et de l'asile, Centre Migrations et Citoyennetés, Institut français des relations internationales
Odile Dutrey	Writer of the book Vivantes, des femmes migrantes racontent; Marriage and Family counselor, Family Planning and Education Center in France
Fabienne el-Khoury	PhD Public Health; Researcher in social epidemiology; Spokeswoman, Osez Le Féminisme
Racky Ka-Sy	Consultant, Trainer, Social psychologist
Daniela Levy	Consultant, Gender Equity Trainer

Interviewees	Affiliation / Position
Maria Melchior	Research Director, Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale (INSERM); Head of the Health Department, Institut Convergence Migration (ICM)
Caroline Neira	Psychosocial Support and Coordinator of Activities, GAMS
Natasha Noreen	Member, Radical Girlsss; Social activist
Noura Raad	PhD Law; Elève avocate; Co-President, European Network of Migrant Women
Hélène Ramajo	Director and Co-founder, Causons
Camila Ríos Armas	Director and Founder, UniR Universités & Réfugié.e.s
Camille Schmoll	Researcher on migration dynamics in the Euro-Mediterranean area, Co-director of the Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales (REMI)
Nadia Sebtaoui	Project coordinator - Unaccompanied minors, Médecins Sans Frontières
Maria Miguel-Sierra	Director, La Voix des Femmes
Deborah Carlos-Valencia	Co-founder, Melissa Network
Hélène Viel	Educator-in-training, judicial youth protection

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