

GIRLS ACTION PLAN

**GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PRIORITIES FOR
THE EU'S GENDER ACTION PLAN III**

AUGUST 2020



Plan International EU Office

Galerie Ravenstein 27/4
1000 Brussels
Belgium
T: +32 (0)2 2 504 60 50

CONTRIBUTORS

Head of Office: Serap Altinisik

Authors: Alice Rostant, Policy and Advocacy Assistant and Salomé Guibreteau, Policy and Advocacy Officer

Design and final editing: Ischi Graus, Communications and Campaigns Coordinator

All photos © Plan International

We would like to thank all young respondents to the survey who invested their time, shared their experiences and ideas to contribute to girls' lives and advance gender equality. We also thank Plan International offices in Ghana, Ethiopia and India and all GAA and Plan International Netherlands staff involved, as well as the EU office team.

Plan International is an international development and humanitarian NGO. The EU Office strives to advance children's rights and gender equality for girls in the EU's external action. Find [here our earlier GAP position paper](#) (April 2020), written with inputs from 11 national offices and in collaboration with Equal Measures 2030.

INTRODUCTION

The European Union's Gender Action Plan II is coming to an end in 2020. As an organisation working with and for children and youth with a focus on girls, Plan International believes that it is essential to consider age and not only gender in the next Gender Action Plan (GAP III). Girls, in all their diversity, have specific needs that are distinct from those of adult women, and their priorities should be heard and integrated in the GAP III, as "nothing should be decided for girls without girls!" (young woman consulted, India). In order to identify their needs and expectations, we conducted a consultation with girls and young women in three countries.

This brief presents the results and lays out girls and young women's priorities on several themes for the next GAP III.

The themes were chosen based on the European Commission's targeted consultation with civil society on the GAP III conducted in April 2020, namely digitalisation, voice and participation, social and economic rights, sexual and gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights, peace and security, and climate. On each topic, we asked respondents about their experience in the matter, the challenges they face, the solutions they would see fit, and their priorities.

“ I believe the European Union and its Gender Action Plan is very useful for my community which will make many voices heard. ”
YOUNG WOMAN, INDIA

Through the consultation, the young people were introduced to the European Union and the Gender Action Plan, and the role of the EU in their lives. Several respondents to the survey expressed their enthusiasm at being consulted and having their voices heard. They also mentioned that they believe the GAP III can make a difference for gender equality and girls' lives in their countries.

“ Collecting the voice and opinion of girls and women in influencing the government is the best strategy for the EU. ”
YOUNG WOMAN, INDIA

Respondents think that the EU can achieve change thanks to its values including gender equality (85% of respondents), as well as through its support for and consultations with activists and CSOs (65%), and through dialogue with partner governments (46%).

METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

The consultation is the result of a collaboration between the Plan International EU Office, Plan International Ghana, Ethiopia and India offices as well as the [Girls Advocacy Alliance](#) (GAA). The GAA is an initiative of Plan International Netherlands, Terre des Hommes Netherlands and Defence for Children - ECPAT Netherlands, in cooperation with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It engages with young advocates from 14 to 24 years old in all their diversity, in 10 countries, with a focus on gender-based violence and economic empowerment.

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the original plan to conduct face-to-face workshops with young people that would allow both to build their knowledge about the EU and the GAP II and to identify their priorities. Hence, an online consultation using a youth-friendly survey was organised. The top three priorities per theme were identified through multiple-choice questions while the rest of the data was pulled together from trends in open-ended questions. This brief presents the results of this consultation process. It will be shared with the GAA youth for them to use it for their own advocacy at country level.

WHO ARE THE YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTED?

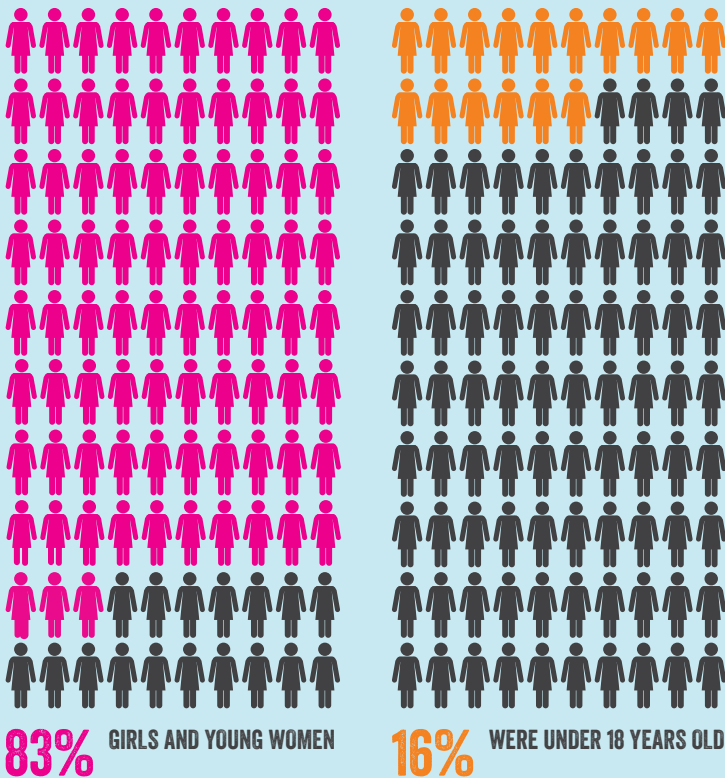
From the three participating countries, a total of 128 young people took the survey. We aimed to ensure inclusivity by reaching a wide group of diverse youth in all three countries, and in particular to have a rural / urban balance among the participants. For these purposes and taking into consideration digital and language barriers, data packages and devices were provided to the respondents with the support of the GAA staff from Plan International country offices. Given the current political context in Ethiopia and the internet shutdowns, fewer Ethiopian youth were able to answer the survey in comparison to the other two countries.

In addition, 2 young people with disabilities took part in the survey and are calling for greater consideration of girls and young women with disabilities in the EU priorities on gender equality.

17% of the respondents identified as male and they responded to the survey as advocates for girls' rights and gender equality. Therefore, the results are presented in this brief as "girls and young women's priorities for gender equality".

ABOUT THE YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTED

128 GIRLS AND BOYS



GIRLS AND BOYS COMING FROM RURAL AREAS MADE UP 1/3 OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE CONSULTED



OF THE GIRLS AND BOYS CONSULTED 29% DID NOT HAVE ACCESS TO INTERNET



9% OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE IS FROM ETHIOPIA

37% OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE IS FROM INDIA

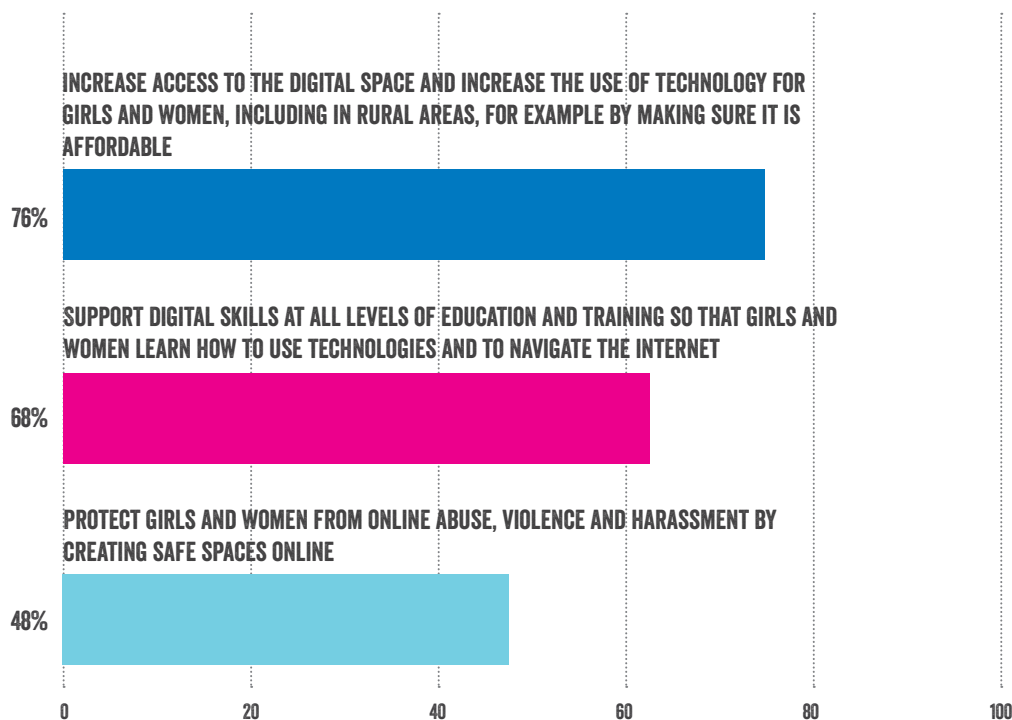
54% OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE IS FROM GHANA

GIRLS AND DIGITAL

One out of four (25%) respondents indicated that the internet plays an important role in girls and young women’s lives, in particular to access information, to communicate, and for educational purposes. Participants in all three countries raised access to internet and to technology (mobile phones, laptops) as an issue. In fact, 37 respondents to the survey did not have access to internet, or not stable access, and 21 of them live in rural areas. In Ghana in particular, 23% of respondents mentioned that affordability of devices and of data is a barrier. In India, girls’ safety online is an important issue that 29% of respondents chose to highlight. These answers are reflected in the choice of priorities.

“ Due to high cost of data, sometimes I am not able to complete my online courses. Data should be less expensive for us to be able to purchase. ”
 YOUNG WOMAN, GHANA

TOP 3 PRIORITIES



Looking at country-specific results, for Ghana and Ethiopia the multiple-choice option to “promote women’s employment in the technology sector by ensuring they have access to equal education and training, and by addressing discriminations based on gender stereotypes” was in the top three priorities, instead of safe spaces online.

“ I [hear] in some of places especially in rural areas that girls should not use internet and they have to do domestic work. ”
 YOUNG WOMAN, INDIA

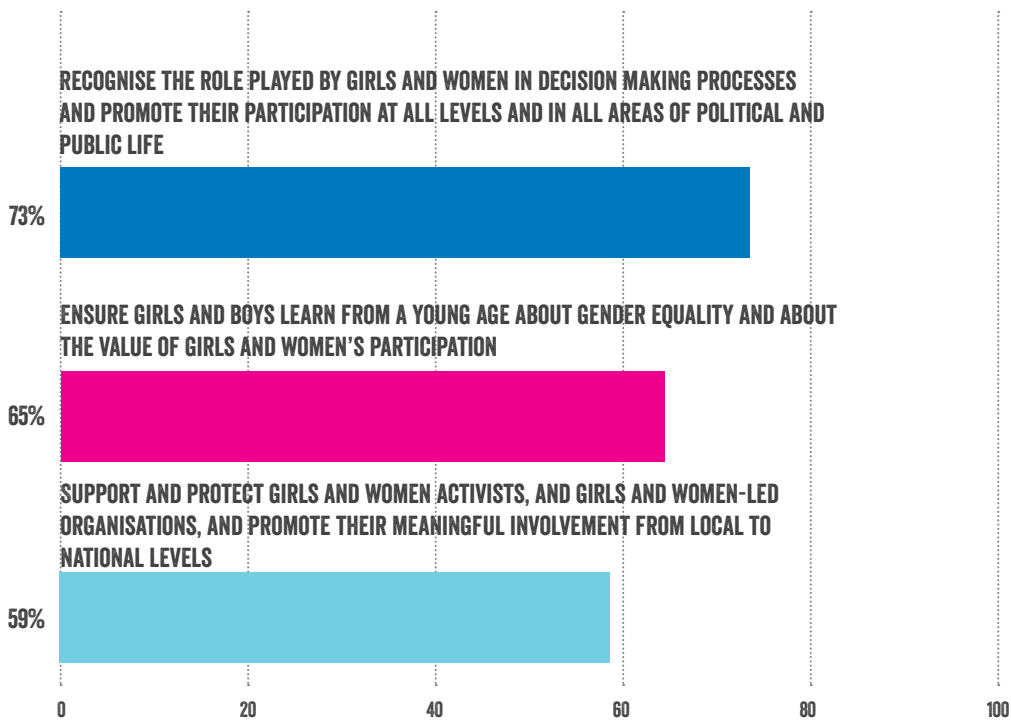
FOR MORE ON GIRLS AND THE DIGITAL SPACE, SEE ALSO
BEIJING+ 25 GIRLS' PLATFORM FOR ACTION REPORT
 BY PLAN INTERNATIONAL.

GIRLS' VOICE AND PARTICIPATION

75% of respondents recognise that girls' participation is a challenge, and many of them told us about instances where they felt their voices were not heard, either at home, at school, or in the community. In particular, youth across all three countries (15%) face community and family pressure when choosing a school subject, a career or when to marry. The feeling of not being heard is particularly felt among the youth in Ghana where 32% wish to open up space for girls and young women in decision-making, including in the household.

The respondents also pointed out other barriers to their participation such as backlash, a lack of confidence among girls and young women, as well as the overall impact of gender norms which restrict opportunities for girls and young women and the space that they hold in local decision-making.

TOP 3 PRIORITIES



I think only girls know what they want for themselves...They have to get the chance to ask and express what is good for them and what is not. If we want a positive change from our community or country then we have to give a chance for the young women who can lead a group of girls for improvement of our country.



YOUNG WOMAN, INDIA

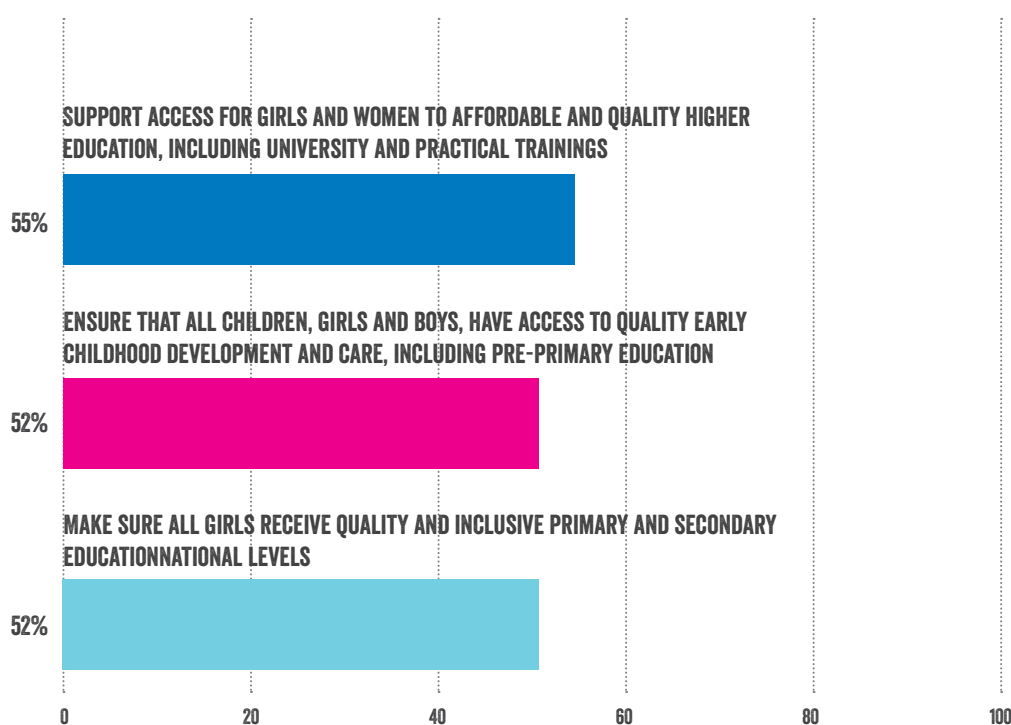
GIRLS AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS

COVID-19, LIVELIHOODS AND THE ECONOMY

27% of respondents to our question on the impact of COVID indicated that their livelihood had been affected, either due to loss of income or loss of employment. They call on the EU to support young women-led businesses, young women entrepreneurs and start-ups, and access to employment.

“Many young women like me have halted their economic activities due to the pandemic [...] I believe European [Union] could help by providing relief packages for female owned economic venture.” Young woman, Ghana

TOP 3 PRIORITIES



COVID-19 AND EDUCATION

31% of respondents to our question on the impact of COVID indicated that their education has been affected, due to school closures, delays in exams and graduation, or difficulties in accessing education online. They call on the EU to take action in the sector of education to ensure all girls can go back to school. In addition, respondents suggested that the EU should be involved in awareness raising around COVID-19.

“Covid-19 outbreak has shown impact on my studies. People like me has [been] facing problem to accessing online classes. In rural areas there is no proper internet connection. Making internet [accessible] can help me and my community”. Young woman, India

In Ghana and India, the biggest barrier to education is financial (20%). For example, girls and young women cannot afford school material such as textbooks, and tuition fees without scholarships. The second biggest barrier for 1 out of 6 respondents is the lack of support from their family to pursue their studies or a specific field of study. Girls and young women indicated that they were not always able to choose.

“ When I got admitted in the senior high school, I chose to [pursue] general science as a course but everyone was like science is not for girls, science is very difficult and so therefore I was asked to change my course to home economics and I refused. [...] what boys can do, girls can do it even better. **”**

YOUNG WOMAN, GHANA

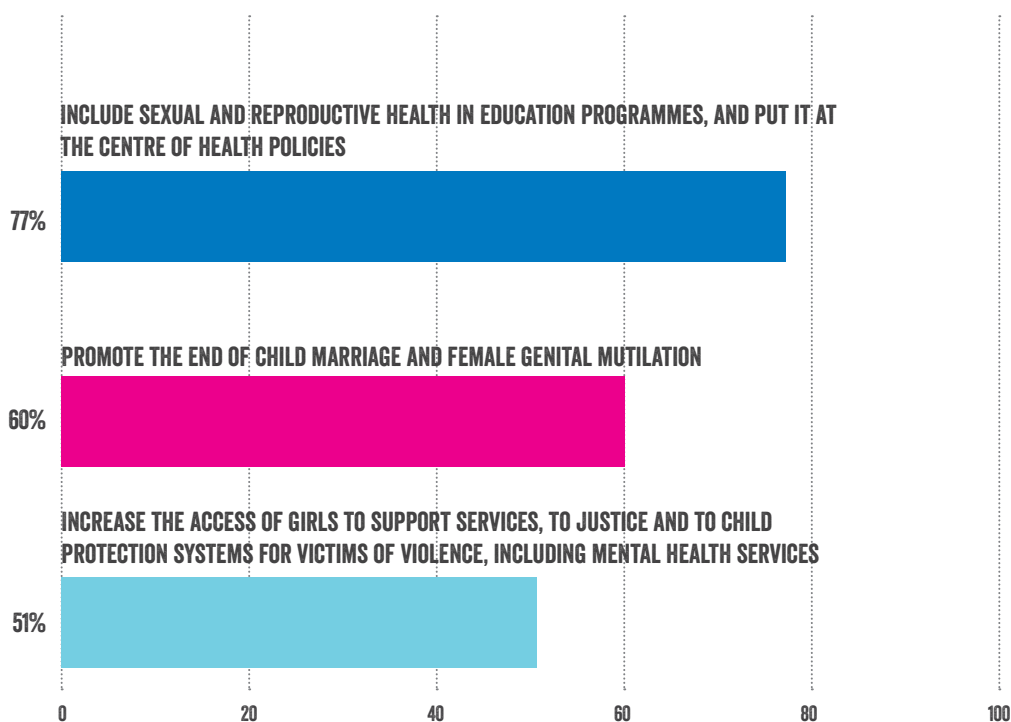
GIRLS' SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

For safeguarding reasons¹ we did not ask the respondents to elaborate on their experience of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the survey. However, they were given space to highlight some key issues and their priorities on the topic. Some respondents made comments about harassment being a problem for girls and young women, and some highlighted the importance of involving boys and men in discussions.

“ In my community child marriage and female genital mutilation are the major violence that [makes] girls and young women drop out from schools.. ”

YOUNG MAN, ETHIOPIA

TOP 3 PRIORITIES



“ Increase access for girls and women of all ages to quality and affordable sexual and reproductive health-care services. This is important because it prevents girls from using reproductive health drugs and services without the advice of professionals. ”

YOUNG WOMAN, GHANA

FOR MORE ON GIRLS AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, SEE ALSO

BEIJING+ 25 GIRLS' PLATFORM FOR ACTION REPORT

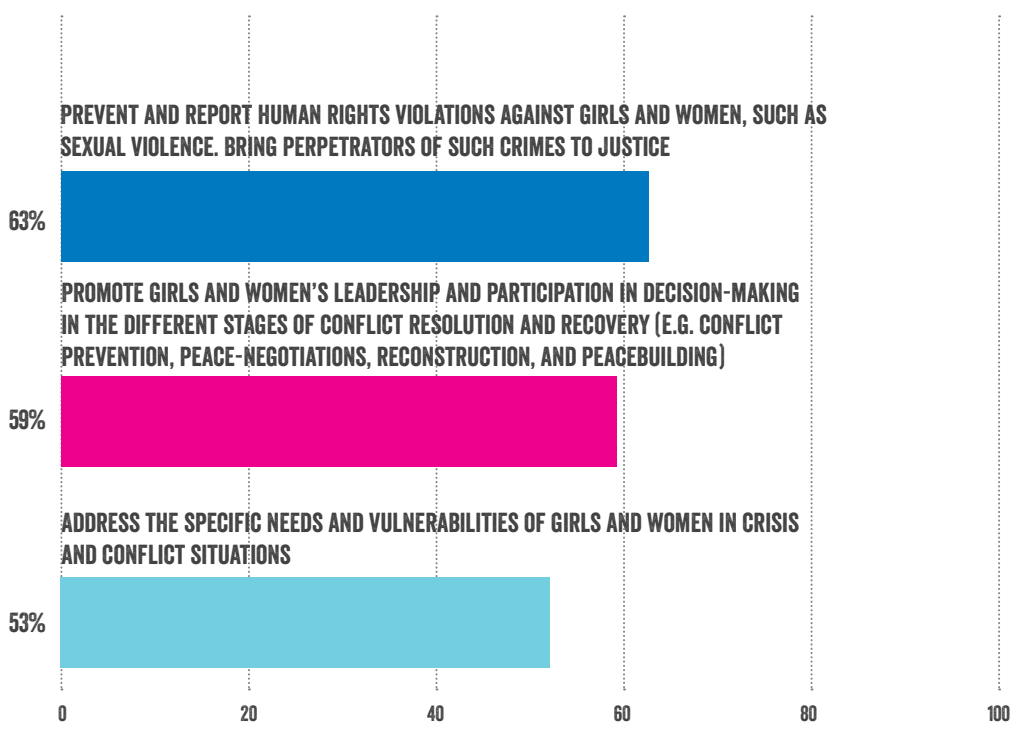
BY PLAN INTERNATIONAL.

¹ As per Plan International global policies on safeguarding children and young people, consultation initiatives should always prevent re-traumatisation or traumatising of young individuals from recounting painful or traumatic experiences

GIRLS IN CRISIS

It should be noted that a large majority of the respondents do/did not live through a crisis or conflict. However, a few of the respondents in Ghana mentioned that they experienced community conflicts such as tribal disputes. In addition, a few identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a crisis, and another few referred to their experience of natural disasters. Some of the respondents in Ghana and India mentioned the issue of sexual and gender based-violence in times of conflict and peacekeeping, as well as the necessity to educate girls and women on conflict and recovery processes.

TOP 3 PRIORITIES

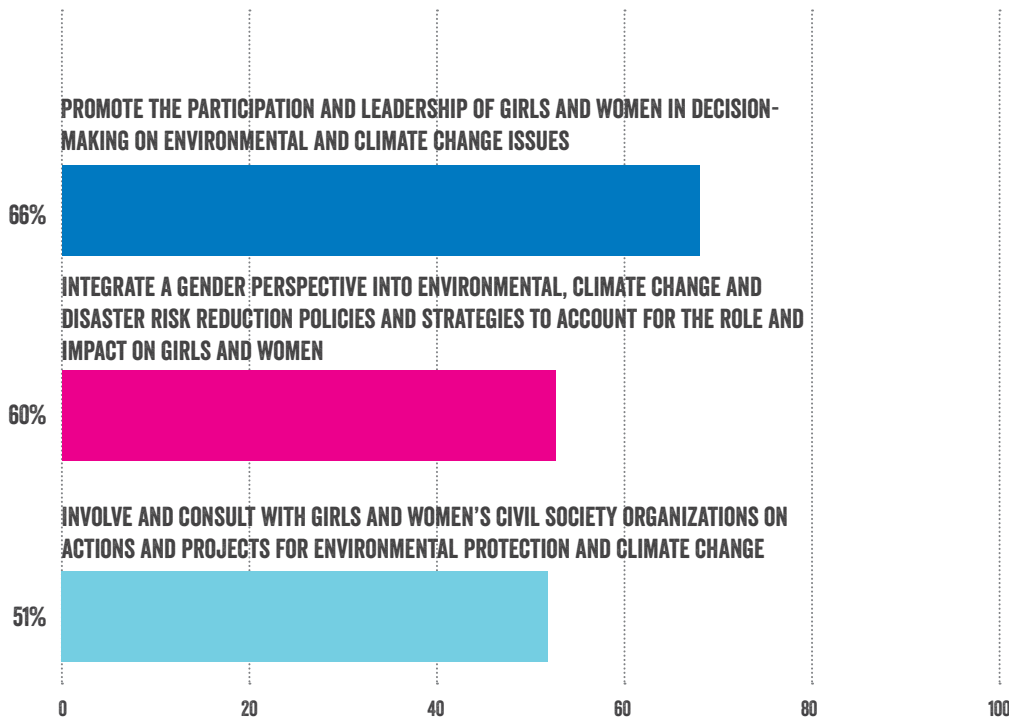


“ Women and girls need to be educated on conflict resolution, conflict management and peace building so that when there is violence in the community they would be able to protect themselves. ”
YOUNG WOMAN, GHANA

GIRLS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

89% of respondents believe that caring for the environment is important and 31% of them either take part in climate activism or wish to be involved. In fact, their biggest priority for EU action concerning this topic is to promote the participation and leadership of girls and women in decision-making on environmental and climate change issues. 19% of respondents expressed that environment protection is a collective responsibility, with some of them already taking action and engaging in awareness raising in their communities. The main sectors for action mentioned by the respondents are: reducing pollution, fighting deforestation, and developing green skills such as organic farming.

TOP 3 PRIORITIES



“ Yes, I want to take serious action regarding global warming, environment issues. The European Union needs to teach skills of plantation and greenery, pollution control aspects to the volunteers and girls. ”

YOUNG MAN, INDIA

CONTACT

Alice Rostant

Policy and advocacy assistant
Plan International EU Office
alice.rostant@plan-international.org

Salomé Guibreteau

Policy and advocacy officer
Plan International EU Office
salome.guibreteau@plan-international.org