

# VOICES FOR CHANGE

# YAS

YOUTH ACTIVIST SERIES



The charity for  
girls' equality

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Australian authors of this report acknowledge and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise sovereignty was never ceded and that this land always was and always will be First Nations land. We recognise their ongoing connection to land, waters and community, and we commit to ongoing learning, deep and active listening, and taking action in solidarity.

We recognise the ongoing fight for First Nations justice and the long and continuing history of discrimination and disenfranchisement of First Nations people in Australia. First Nations people have been fighting for the right to vote, Treaty and Truth-telling since invasion. First Nations people were not allowed to vote until 1962, and were not recognised as citizens until 1967. The fight for self-determination for First Nations people continues, with calls for Voice, Treaty and Truth, as expressed in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. At the time of this report, the Australian Government has committed to implementing the calls of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, starting with a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament. However, First Nations justice will only be achieved with both a Voice and Treaty. We stand in solidarity with First Nations people to address injustice, self-determination and First Nations leadership.

We also thank all Indigenous girls, young women and gender diverse people from around the world who have been at the forefront of movements for change and have participated in initiatives such as the **Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report**.

**Cover Image:** Vietnam's ethnic minority girls are empowered to lead Girls Get Equal campaign for gender equality



# Meet the team of young people leading this project

## Australia:

Bettina Z. (she/her)  
Christina C. (she/her)  
Dani V. (she/they)  
Emily B. (she/her)  
Grace F.(she/her)  
Gracie P. (she/her)  
Iremide A (she/her)  
Jan S. (they/he),  
Janice R. (she/her)  
Jemma R.(she/her)

## Indonesia:

Alya Z.S. (she/her)  
A. Mirah K. (she/her)  
Dhiya A.S.H. (she/her)  
Grestine (she/her)  
Khalishah L.N.R. (she/her)  
N. Asyifah (she/her)  
P. Naila (she/her)  
Sarah A.W. (she/her)  
Silvia (she/her)  
Wada G (she/her).

## Vietnam:

B.Y. Nhi (she/her)  
N. Bảo Ngọc (she/her)  
N. Hà My (she/her)  
N.N Thuần Anh (she/her)  
N. Thuận Nhơn (he/him)  
N.H. Yến Nhi (she/her)  
& Provincial Children Council from  
Quang Trí, Vietnam

## FOREWORD

Young people, in all their diversity, are the future leaders of our world with the potential to transform communities. Youth activism helps to position young people for leadership and allows different perspectives to be shared, which is beneficial for policy reform and structural change.

Based on our key findings in Australia, young people feel disempowered due to the lack of transparency and accountability within government, and the belief that young people's participation in activism will not create meaningful impact. Despite this, they are still passionate about working towards the common goal of diversity, inclusion and equality.

This project enabled us to make recommendations that will support young people to create a better future. It has been an incredible experience working with youth activists from Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam. I am privileged and honoured to have gained many insightful perspectives from like-minded people who are equally motivated in fighting for youth representation in politics.

*Jan (they/he), Australia*

Young people are the leading force in society. They are enthusiastic, resilient, and incredibly passionate about making positive impacts. Partaking in political and decision-making processes is a very meaningful way through which young people create change. Nevertheless, if they are not given opportunities, nothing will happen.

The report explores youth political participation and recommendations from young people for changes they want to see in Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam. In Vietnam, a limited number of young people are interested in and/or engage in politics. We hope to increase spaces for young people in all their diversity to ensure inclusive decision-making processes. In addition, capacity building of young people is

critical and should be strengthened to support their engagement in politics.

It is my pleasure to be part of the report, which brings me a better understanding of issues related to youth political engagement through working with youth activists in three countries. It is very inspiring to see how young people concentrate on addressing social problems. I look forward to young people having more opportunities to speak up and make critical decisions for themselves and society.

*Nhi (she/her), Vietnam*

Change is possible when young people and their meaningful participation are acknowledged. Young people, in all their diversity, are highly aware of the issues impacting themselves and their community. As future global leaders, they should be able to realise their right to political participation, as their participation can offer critical perspectives and an inclusive decision-making process. The unfortunate fact is that, based on our key findings in Indonesia, young people are becoming hesitant to participate, and signs of uneasiness are visible. Structural and cultural values limit young people in their participation. Even so, they are still hoping and striving to be part of change.

This research project shows that youth participation is empowering. I am honoured to be part of this project with inspiring and like-minded youth activists from Indonesia, Australia, and Vietnam. It has been a remarkable experience to gain insights from different countries and backgrounds, to build recommendations for issues that are important to all of us. I hope this project will drive us one step closer to ensuring that support and trust are given to young people's energy, creativity, and aspiration to be included in better changes for their present and future.

*Naila (she/her), Indonesia*



Youth Advisory Committee members meet for the first time in Vietnam

## INTRODUCTION

Young people, in all their diversity, are extraordinary leaders and change-makers. From gender equality to climate justice to the spectrum of issues in between, we see young women and gender diverse young people leading movements for change. Yet whilst they have both the ability and passion to create change, they often do not have equal opportunities, power or privilege to become leaders, or engage in political processes. Many girls, young women and gender diverse young people do not have the learning opportunities to understand the systems that underpin political processes, and more often than not, decision makers do not effectively or meaningfully engage with young people on the solutions they craft.

Every single day, young people are fighting for their right to be heard - and they're dissatisfied with decision makers not listening to them due to their age, gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexuality. At Plan International we believe that young people are best placed to create solutions to the problems that directly impact them, and this project allows us to explore young people's leadership and political participation, and propose solutions for a new way forward. For this project, young people from Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam came together to collectively inform what inclusive, and truly representative, civic spaces could look like.

This group of powerful young people collaboratively designed this project to uncover how young people currently engage in politics, and the changes they want to see so their voices are heard when it comes to decisions that directly affect their lives. Under the guidance of a youth centric model, participants designed the guiding project questions, conducted data collection through focus groups discussions with peers and qualitative surveys, and armed with this evidence, will campaign for change and accountability from decision-makers.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**1** Invest in, support and work with grassroots, youth-led networks

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**2** Formal models to support young people in their diversity to have a say

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**3** Education opportunities

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**4** More transparency and accountability

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**5** Increasing diversity of representation



# HOW DID WE GET HERE?

## I. Our prior research and advocacy



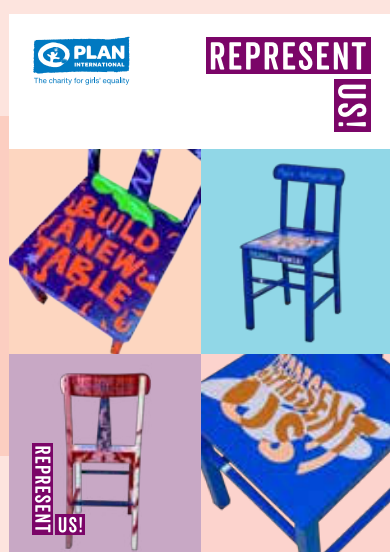
Swastika, 19, attends Girls Out Loud meeting in Sindhuli

### Girls Get Equal

Plan International's Girls Get Equal campaign has stood alongside girls, young women and gender diverse young people globally to call for an end to gender inequality. Girls and gender diverse young people everywhere are undervalued, undermined and underestimated. Plan International's Girls Get Equal is a global campaign demanding power, freedom and representation for girls and young women in all their diversity.

### Equal Power Now

Equal Power Now surveyed almost 29,000 girls and young women aged 15-24 from 29 countries, as well as in-depth interviews with 94 girls and young women across 18 countries. The report found that girls and young women feel consistently excluded from politics: only half (50%) believe that people in their community view it as acceptable for girls and young women to engage in political activities, with one in five (19%) having been personally discouraged from doing so. Despite this, they care significantly about democracy and continue to redefine what it means to be political, fighting for their right to participate in formal political processes whilst also leading grassroots movements and collective action.



### Represent Us

Led by our youth activists, the Represent Us campaign called on politicians in Australia to implement the recommendations of the Set the Standard Report, and introduce gender and diversity targets. In a survey of 1000 young women and gender diverse young people, the Represent Us report found that 90% of those surveyed felt it was easier for men to succeed in politics than women and 82% supported introducing diversity targets as an intervention to ensure the representation of women and people of different ethnicities<sup>i</sup>.

<sup>i</sup> Recognising that targets are not appropriate for all groups, we asked respondents about a range of measures that might improve representation of women and people of different ethnicities, people with a disability, LGBTIQ+ people and First Nations people. Further information on the survey and report [here](#).

## Summit on Girls Getting Equal: Let's Invest in Girls

A study on Indonesian young voters published in 2018 showed that young voters' capacity to participate in democracy and to shape the society in future is limited as respondents display a relatively low accuracy in political knowledge, and there is gender gap in political knowledge among male and female participants. Following this, in 2019 Plan Indonesia conducted a Summit on Girls Getting Equal, Let's Invest in Girls, inviting prominent government officials and leaders, as well as activists. This event consisted of thematic dialogues on issues related to girls' rights. In a session called "She Votes for Her Rights", one of the takeaways was that advocacy and education on politics targeting young voters, especially women, election organisers, and legislative candidates need to be improved.

In 2021, Indonesian Political Indicators survey stated that as many as 64.7% of young people (17 - 21 years old) considered that political parties or politicians in Indonesia were 'not very good' or 'not good at all' in representing the aspirations of the people. These findings point out the urgency of education on politics and creation of spaces for young people to have their voices heard and considered in policy making and strategic planning, especially approaching the National Election in 2024.



## National Girls Summit and Girls Takeover Forum

In Vietnam, the first National Girls Summit held in 2018 supported girls to be involved in the decision-making processes at a formal level. To mark International Day of the Girl in that same year, 100 girls representing over 13 million girls from urban and rural parts of Vietnam led the National Girls Takeover Forum held at the National Assembly Office, engaging in discussions with government leaders. Following this, the National Assembly Committee for Culture, Education, Youth, Adolescents and Children held a meeting with respective ministries and government departments to consider the girls' statements from the forum, delegate responsibilities and critically, develop a strategic plan to empower child's rights – especially girls' rights according to the duty of each agency. Girls Takeovers have since become an opportunity for girls in Vietnam to step into the roles of decision makers, sharing their views on matters that are directly related to them and influential on their future.

This report builds on the Girls Get Equal campaign and Equal Power Now, providing specific findings and recommendations relevant to young people's political participation in Australia, Vietnam and Indonesia.

## II. Methodology

- **The research engaged young people (10-24) in Australia and in the Asia Pacific region through a series of workshops, data collection, and recommendation building.**

The core group of participants included 23 youth activists from Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam who co-developed the research question, conducted peer focus groups and online qualitative surveys, authored the foreword and co-edited the report. In Vietnam, an additional 20 children (10-14 years) of The Children's Council were engaged in offline peer-to-peer delivery of condensed workshops.

The research was coordinated by a team of Research Leads in Plan International Australia (Youth & Officer and Policy and Advocacy Manager) and Dr Bree Turner, alongside the expertise of Youth Engagement and Campaigns Coordinators in Indonesia and Vietnam. Ten youth participants across the region also took on Research Lead and Coordination Lead roles to facilitate stronger connections into youth-centric research and advocacy, and directly led on the data collection phase of the research. Youth consultants from Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam conducted the desk reviews and presented their findings, and contributed to varying parts of the research i.e. data analysis, and report writing.

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### Workshop steps

The youth-centred approach to this project involved four online workshops with youth participants across Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, facilitated by consultant, Dr Bree Turner. Virtual meetings and country-specific workshops were also held to further support the campaign and recommendation building process.

#### Workshop 1 | *Knowledge is Power*

Three desk reviews were presented by youth consultants from Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam to provide background information and evidence on youth political participation in each country. Youth participants were taught how to identify a research problem, develop a research question, how to design a methodology, and make ethical considerations when undertaking research.

#### Workshop 2 | *Dig Deep – research methods, ethics and data*

Participants refined their research questions and designed their methodology as well as their ethical practice. Participants were also taught how to collect, store and analyse data.

#### Workshop 3 | *Discovery – identifying your key findings*

Research Leads from Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam presented their data collection findings and analysis from each country and youth participants reflected on their ethical practices. The group made an action plan to refine their key findings and identify recommendations for report writing purposes.

#### Workshop 4 | *From Research to Action*

Youth participants were taught how to design a theory of change and started to create their own based on the research project and work to date. Participants were guided through an exercise to make clearer connections between their key findings and recommendations. Lastly, participants were shown a seven step process for advocacy so they could action their recommendations from the research.





## Desk Review

Desk reviews were conducted by youth consultants in Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam. These involved a canvassing of the existing literature on youth political participation in the region, seeking to understand the ways in which young people in all their diversity currently engage in political action and what would better support them engage.

## Methods

### *Qualitative Surveys*

Vietnam and Australia conducted a qualitative survey of 10 questions (excluding demographic questions). Youth participants distributed surveys to their networks, and in the case of Australia, shared via social media. There were a total of 38 responses accumulated for the Australian survey and 25 for the Vietnamese survey.

### *Peer Focus Group Discussions*

Virtual peer focus group discussions were facilitated by Indonesian youth participants and involved young

people from their communities. Through the use of Miro (online platform), and brainstorming discussion, participants responded to a range of questions around political participation. After this first process, discussion participants then reflected on their answers collectively, with a total of 2 peer groups conducted in Indonesia.

## Limitations

Limited timeframes around the data collection and analysis period meant that the peer focus group discussions and survey recruitment were dependent on peer networks of youth participants, and any youth engaged via social media in Australia based on Plan International Australia's audience. Thus, the data is indicative of these networks rather than statistically representative of young people in the region more broadly. As many of the youth researchers were also studying or working, the time available for focus groups was limited, which reduced the amount of broader youth participation. Though young people from rural regions in Indonesia and Vietnam were engaged, the smaller sample also results in indicative data.

## III. Background

### What is political participation? How is political participation defined by young women or gender diverse young people?

Political participation is often defined as having an active engagement with current affairs, political conversations<sup>1</sup>, and issues that impact young people's lives<sup>2</sup>. This includes taking any action to influence and better society<sup>3</sup>: a broader and more horizontal definition than the formal electoral politics of being in political parties or decision-making positions<sup>4</sup>. Political engagement incorporates everyday actions<sup>5</sup> on local levels<sup>6</sup> that seek to influence others and decision-making processes related to societal issues<sup>7</sup>. This can either be through individual forms such as writing an article for the local newspaper or by participating in mass strikes, having conversations with decision makers, protesting, and engaging in civic activities.

There is minimal evidence available on how young women or gender diverse young people themselves define youth political participation - the term is more defined by adults rather than young women themselves. The Equal Power Now report found that girls and young women associated the term 'politics' with formal ways of engaging in political spheres, rather than informal mechanisms. It also found that girls and young women felt it had negative connotations.

### What are the current ways that young people in all their diversity politically engage?

Young people in all their diversity possess a strong level of political involvement through direct action and community-building, supplemented by formal decision-making strategies, with some research indicating that young women engage in more political activities as opposed to their male counterparts<sup>8</sup>.

### Voting

Although some evidence suggests that young people's participation in formal political processes is declining, our review of existing evidence found that young people still feel that conventional politics such as voting and obtaining political party memberships are effective in expressing their opinions<sup>9</sup>. In Vietnam, research suggests more than 80% of youth voted in the 2014 elections<sup>10</sup>. However, young people tend to be more interested in tackling specific issues, especially ones that affect them directly<sup>11</sup>.

### Social media

Online youth activism is a key way girls and young women engage in politics in Australia and Indonesia<sup>12</sup>. The internet offers an avenue for young people to express their opinions and co-create an effective

public sphere for discussion<sup>13</sup>. Social media use can stimulate political behaviours in the real world, associated with increased offline political activity, such as voting or physically joining parties or causes<sup>14</sup>. Despite the importance of online spaces for political participation for young people, it is not a safe space for young women and gender diverse young people. When they speak out on issues that matter to them, young women and gender diverse young people are often targeted online because of gender, race, disability and sexuality<sup>15</sup>.

Access to the internet is a key barrier to political participation online, especially those in rural locations in Indonesia. Political content on sensitive themes may be limited online, which can impact on the quality of online information and the ability for young women and gender diverse young people to speak out on the issues that they care about.

### Protest

More often than not, we see young women, girls and gender diverse young people leading protests about the issues they care about. Young people in Indonesia are often involved in protest, especially against corruption and for democracy<sup>16</sup>. In Australia, young people are leading the climate protest movement<sup>17</sup>.

Restrictions of civic space and the right to protest is a global issue. In Australia, laws recently passed in the state of New South Wales severely restrict the right to protest, making the disruption of roads, transport and industrial facilities punishable by up to 2 years in jail and a significant fine. Protests such as the School Strikes for Climate will be severely restricted as a result of these laws.

### Roundtables

Roundtables allow young people to voice concerns and provide insights into policies to address issues that directly impact them<sup>18</sup>, communicating directly with the Government. This is common in Australia, and through a platform within the legislative body in Indonesia. This approach, however, lacks opportunities for young people in setting political agendas, are often short term and do not ensure gender equal and diverse representation.

### Social groups

Looking outside formal ways of engaging in civic spaces, young women, girls and gender diverse young people look to organising and youth led organisations to shift public opinion on particular issues<sup>19</sup>. In Australia, First Nations young women are at the forefront of many of these organisations, for example, Amelia Telford, a prominent youth climate change activist and previous National Director of Seed, Australia's first Indigenous Youth Climate Network. In Vietnam, youth unions have been cited as one of the



ways young women and girls are connected to and supported to participate in community level activities.

• **Do young women, girls and gender diverse young people feel they have the capacity, knowledge and support to politically participate?**

More than half of Vietnamese youth consider themselves to have the capacity to affect political matters. However, perceptions of capacity are impacted by gender norms and patriarchal structures, with girls from Vietnam surveyed as part of the Equal Power Now report stating that they do not have the required skills or knowledge to take on a leadership role.

• **What are the barriers and enablers to political participation?**

## Safety

The publicizing of sexual assault and discrimination in Australian parliament has reinforced beliefs that politics is unsafe for women and gender-diverse people<sup>20</sup>. Most Australian women between the ages of 18 and 24 do not view politics as an equal environment or believe that there has been an increase in safety in the past 12 months<sup>21</sup>. 30% of women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities said they would never consider a career in politics due to their cultural or ethnic background.

In Indonesia, there are safety concerns about expressing political opinions after the passing of Law 19, 2016, which focused on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE). This law can be utilised to penalise civilians, including young people - there were 324 legal cases recorded as a result of the ITE Law from 2016 - 2020, affecting journalists, activists, residents, artists, and even education personnel<sup>22</sup>.

## Representation

Literature shows that young people do not feel represented in Australia's political sphere<sup>23</sup>. The same sentiment is echoed in literature in Vietnam and Indonesia, especially in relation to income. Most youth representation comes from only a small group of young people<sup>24</sup>. Women, LGBTQI+ youth, young people with disabilities<sup>25</sup>, and youth in marginalised areas and isolated rural communities are often less represented<sup>26</sup>.

## Inadequate education

Education on both formal and informal political participation is lacking across all three contexts. Many young people are not provided appropriate understanding of democratic processes in school<sup>27</sup>. Additionally, teachers are often ill-equipped to prepare students with political knowledge. There are few opportunities for students to review political topics before engaging in politics informally and formally. Media, particularly social media, allows political education and mobilisation, which propels civic engagement, and action.

## Distrust of politics

In Australia and Indonesia, one of the most common challenges identified in the literature is young people's distrust of conventional politics and traditional institutions of governance<sup>28</sup>. While they feel their voices are heard by close circles of connection, authorities tend to ignore their contributions, making them feel insignificant<sup>29</sup>. The inclusion of youth organisations in the drafting of laws and policy development is often inadequate<sup>30</sup>.





# OUR RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on previous research undertaken by Plan International and the literature review for this research, we wanted to find out more about how young people want to be supported in their political participation and have their voices heard.

## Our research problem

Young people, particularly young women and gender diverse young people, want their voices to be heard and to be consulted on decisions that affect them, but there is a lack of representation of young women and gender diverse young people in formal political spaces and in other influential spaces, for example, traditional media.

By representation, we mean both equal representation based on gender, ethnicity, disability in formal political spaces, but also that the views of said communities and young people in particular are heard and acted upon.

Following workshop 1 and 2, where we reviewed the existing evidence base, we decided on four related research questions.

## Our research questions

- 1 | What opportunities, platforms and mechanisms (both formal and informal) currently exist for young people in all their diversity wanting to engage and be engaged in political discourse and decision making?
- 2 | What capacity do young people currently have to engage in these?
- 3 | What do young people perceive as the barriers and enablers to their participation in these?
- 4 | What are the most effective strategies or possible platforms/mechanisms to improve youth political participation, for young people in all their diversity?

## Key Findings

• Youth research leads and workshop participants conducted qualitative surveys and focus groups to better understand youth political participation in Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam. Researchers identified the following key finding:

### 1. Young people want to engage in politics, but want clearer pathways and support to enable their participation, and want to feel better represented in decision making.

Respondents felt that they were not meaningfully involved in decision-making processes, and Australian respondents felt powerlessness. Despite this, many cited shared goals of wanting to dismantle systemic and structural barriers and to achieve equality and fairness, and remained passionate about the changes they want to see in the world.

Critically, those who were actively involved in networks and clubs through their educational institute felt more supported in their political participation.

*Most of my friends are very involved in political activism, plus I work for a great organisation that advocates for students rights. Being a law student as well, I've learned a lot about political processes and accountabilities over the last five years.*

- Survey participant, Australia

It is through networks, peer groups, clubs and organisations that young people feel the most supported in their political goals and ambitions. Having an understanding of formal political processes is also an important enabler to participation.

Young people in Indonesia expressed a desire for more opportunities to participate in formal political processes, but noted that only major organisations are being heard by the government.

*[Major political organisation] has been recognised by the government, and if we were a part of that, our voices would be heard by them [the organisation] and they would find a way to make sure that the government would hear us.*

**- Focus group participant, Indonesia**

As this participant described, if they were involved with a major organisation recognised by the government there would be a better chance of being heard. This is perhaps a call to action for organisations with power to create more pathways for young activists and aspiring politicians.

## 2. Diversity and inclusion encourages participation

Diversity and inclusion are key factors to supporting more young people, particularly young women and gender diverse young people, to engage in political discourse and action. Respondents highlighted the need for better representation of diverse young people to influence decision making.

*Power comes from the community and those who have experiences [of racism, sexism etc] should be at the forefront of policy and structural change.*

**- Survey participant, Australia**

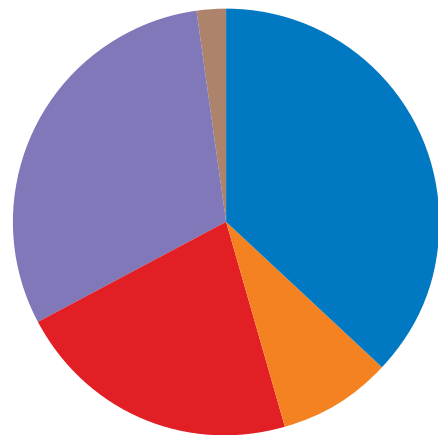
*I think current dialogue spaces are only representative of certain views. Instead, there should be more participation from disabled youths, youths with socio-economic disadvantages, youths from shelters, abused youths... so that the dialogue can provide multidimensional views.*

**- Survey participant, Vietnam**

Australian respondents wanted greater representation of young people in all their diversity within Parliament, and for youth with lived experience/s to be directly engaged in a non-tokenistic manner. While young people from Vietnam currently have a good mechanism for engaging young people through their Provincial Children’s Council, they also believe further action needs to be taken to ensure everyone is being actively included.

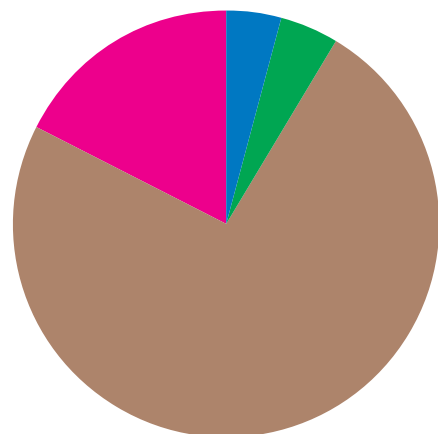
### Respondants from Australia

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> LGBTQI+	17
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> A person living with a disability	4
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	0
<span style="color: red;">●</span> A person of colour	10
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> None of the above	14
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> Prefer not to say	1



### Respondants from Vietnam

<span style="color: blue;">●</span> LGBTQI+	1
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> A person living with a disability	0
<span style="color: green;">●</span> Ethnic minority	1
<span style="color: red;">●</span> Religious minority	0
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> Other minority groups	0
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> None of the above	17
<span style="color: magenta;">●</span> Prefer not to say	4



### **3. Young people in Vietnam want to bridge the gap between young people and policy makers.**

Young people from Vietnam proposed the idea of having moderators or conduits between young people and those in positions of power in order to address the perceived power imbalance.

*I think it is important to have discussions with people who are in charge of us. When talking directly with the government, it is often difficult to answer [their questions]. In my point of view, if we are allowed to answer through some middle person, the question would be perceived with more depth, and we can have more appropriate and convincing answers.*

- Survey participant, Vietnam

They believe it could help in effectively interacting with policy makers and politicians and allow young people to feel more confident in sharing their concerns and suggestions for actioning change.

### **4. Young people in Indonesia have social media, but they want more.**

Respondents from Indonesia value their access to and participation on social media.

*When we are able to make good use of social media, our voices can be heard by all people. Either through writing or video, which could easily get viral on social media, I believe that when we make a good use of social media we can make an impact on the decisions made by the government.*

- Focus group participant, Indonesia

Although many saw social media as an effective way to educate themselves and have their voices heard, many believed it was not a substitute for formal platforms and opportunities. Respondents expressed a want for more formal political education in schools and opportunities to join youth advocacy groups and/or activist communities.

Research participants from Indonesia believe youth should take action and participate in politics and consider young people to be the driving force of Indonesian politics.

*Political participation in my opinion is how we, as citizens of our country, have an important role in the political process so not only adults but young people can also get involved in politics, especially because young people also have extraordinary ideas which could be implemented in the political and decision making process.*

- Focus group participant, Indonesia

If empowered through education, community resourcing and more formal political pathways, young people from Indonesia could see their extraordinary ideas become a reality.

### **5. In Australia and Indonesia, young people feel undervalued and powerless when it comes to participating in political movements.**

Many respondents acknowledged that opportunities to participate in activism and politics exist, however, many expressed a level of uncertainty in regard to what influence they could have on decision making, as well as social and political change more broadly.

*I do not really believe I will have any impact whatsoever. I only participate because I would feel guilty if I did nothing.*

- Survey participant, Australia

*The notion that someone like me can influence any decision making is laughable.*

- Survey participant, Australia

Furthermore, young people felt that they were not being taken seriously by decision makers due to their age.

*Youth political activism is never taken as seriously by politicians and in consultations because we're 'too young' to know what we're talking about.*

- Survey participant, Australia

Another survey respondent felt that young people's views were seen as 'irrelevant', and listed some other perceived barriers to their participation in political movements:





Elin interviewed by the media after taking over as Governor of East Nusa Tenggara

*Pushback from older people who feel that young people's views are irrelevant, the large amount of emotional energy it can take to be involved in activism, and the idea that we aren't making a difference.*

**- Survey participant, Australia**

Feeling as though they are not being taken seriously by decision makers on account of their age is evidently devaluing. As highlighted in the following quotes, even if young people are engaged to participate, they don't feel entirely empowered or validated.

*From participating in forums, I admit that I could give my opinions and be heard, but change was rarely seen. So, I felt like it was just a false hope.*

**- Focus group participant, Indonesia**

Young people see a power imbalance in the current political structures and view politicians as not responding to their concerns. This sentiment was shared amongst the majority of respondents and needs to be addressed in order to promote non-tokenistic youth engagement in political movements. For many young people, the current political environment is unwelcoming due to age, gender, race or ethnic identity, sexuality or disability. Additionally, political and societal messaging encouraging them to participate and vote in formal elections when they are of age is nominal. Young people feel undervalued, underutilised, and disempowered in terms of their participation in political discourse and spaces - and they want this to change.

Other barriers that contribute to feelings of powerless, especially in Indonesia, include conflicting values, education commitments and a lack of financial

resources. Respondents felt restricted by their families (who held conflicting values), as well as their education commitments, and a lack of financial resources to support their activism.

Many respondents depended on their parents financially with not all families having the means to provide material support for youth activism and political campaigns. As a result, young people seek alternative ways to mobilise.

*It would be impossible to support [campaigns] using my own money, so I find other ways to connect with youth [and mobilise].*

**- Focus group participant, Indonesia**

Although time is a valuable and essential resource for any kind of activism, it is also a limited one. Respondents, particularly in Indonesia, highlighted the importance of prioritising their education and noted that they had limited time to give to causes because of their school commitments.

Some young people also cited their family as a barrier to their political participation, especially in cases where their parents held conflicting values to them.

*My family did not let any of us take part in political movements. It is because they prioritise religion and think that it does not fit into the political discourse.*

**- Focus group participant, Indonesia**

Without the support of their families, respondents felt powerless to speak up or act. Their actions are therefore restricted to what they can do with limited time, at zero or minimal cost, and in spaces outside the family home.



## 6. Young people in Indonesia and Australia are discouraged from participating in politics, particularly in formal mechanisms for engagement, due to a lack of transparency and accountability within government.

Respondents in Australia and Indonesia believe there is a lack of accountability and transparency within government. Respondents spoke about their experiences in formal mechanisms to influence decision making and noted that they could not determine whether their views had been listened to or actioned.

*Overall, formal political processes exclude youth voices (even processes including youth forums and boards) because rarely are the priorities of young people addressed or actioned in an effective and inclusive way.*

- Survey participant, Australia

The current lack of transparency within decision-making processes and lack of commitment to fulfilling the demands and needs of young people was considered a significant barrier to their political engagement and participation by respondents, particularly those from marginalised communities and intersecting identities.

Respondents emphasised that there is a difference between an idea being discussed and an idea being actively engaged with through concrete actions. Some noted that when they had expressed their concerns or shared suggestions with policy makers in formal spaces, they rarely saw the results of their contributions in policies. Participants expressed the need for governments to respond more timely to the urgent matters they raise. They also suggested direct and consistent responses from Ministers to young people's formal engagement with them (e.g. letter writing) as one way to address the current lack of transparency and accountability in government.



# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were proposed by the youth activists and emerged out of the data analysis. Youth across Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam agreed that in order to address the barriers determined from key findings, and actively engage youth in political decision making processes, the following key recommendations should be taken into consideration:

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**1 Invest in, support and work with grassroots, youth led networks**

We need governments to support and work with grassroots youth-led networks, particularly those working with and for young women and gender diverse young people, and connect these to formal decision making processes. Governments can and should develop stronger relationships with youth led organisations to collaborate and consult in decision making processes.

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**2 Formal models to support young people in their diversity to have a say**

Invest in formal models that support young people to connect with decision makers, such as youth and children's councils, and ensure gender equal and diverse representation within these.

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**3 Education opportunities**

Incorporate learning about formal and informal methods of political participation as part of school curricula, and the opportunities and pathways to access these.

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**4 More transparency and accountability**

Make decision making processes more transparent, through more regular communication with young people on progress on the issues that are important to them, and in response to their engagement with formal political processes.

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**5 Increasing diversity of representation**

Support young women, girls and gender diverse young people from a range of backgrounds participate in formal political processes, especially those who are unable to participate because of a lack of financial resources and time, and those who are excluded and marginalised from political processes because of their ethnicity, sexuality, gender or disability.

In Australia, this research echoes the calls of the Represent Us report, calling for Parliament to become a safer and more inclusive space. Targets are one of the ways governments can ensure gender equal and diverse representation.

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## Conclusion

Throughout this project we have listened to what diverse young people in Australia, Indonesia and Vietnam want from political decision makers in their countries. As young women and gender diverse youth, we led the way in deciding what we wanted to discover from this project, the topics to discuss with our peers, the recommendations for change, and the campaigns to take action moving forward. Globally, young people are at the forefront of leading change, and are calling for their voices to be heard and actioned by their governments.



## WHERE TO FROM HERE?

We will be taking this report and our vision for meaningful youth participation to decision makers in Australia, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

We encourage decision makers and those of you working with young people, to consider our recommendations for change, and review the ways you can holistically engage youth in informal and formal decision making processes, and create more spaces where young people in all their diversity can participate.

Alongside our report launch our youth participants will be implementing their campaign actions to drive the recommendations supporting more meaningful youth participation.

We invite you to support our vision and [follow our journey for Voice for Change](#).

Members of the Young Health Programme show their support for Girls Get Equal



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Plan International Project Team

### Australia

Aashna Pillay, Jennifer Merryweather, Sawsan Alfayadh

### Indonesia

Aditya Septiansyah, Bambang Wicaksono, Christopher Immanuel, Nazla Mariza

### Vietnam

Trần Hữu Phương Anh, Trần Thu Quỳnh

## Project Consultant and Facilitator

Dr Bree Turner

## Youth Participants

### Australia

**Youth Coordination Lead:** Grace F.(she/her), Jemma R.(she/her).

**Youth Research Lead:** Bettina Z. (she/her), Emily B. (she/her).

Christina C. (she/her), Dani V. (she/they), Gracie P. (she/her), Iremide A (she/her), Jan S. (they/he), Janice R. (she/her).

### Indonesia

**Youth Project Lead:** Putri N. (she/her), Sarah A.W. (she/her).

**Youth Research Lead:** Aya S.H. (she/her), Khalishah L.N.R. (she/her).

Dhiya A.S.H. (she/her), Grestine (she/her), Wada G (she/her).

### Vietnam

**Youth Project Lead:** B.Y. Nhi (she/her)

**Youth Research Lead:** N. Hà My (she/her)

N. Bảo Ngọc (she/her), N.N Thuần Anh (she/her), N. Thuận Nhơn (he/him), N.H. Yến Nhi (she/her), & Provincial Children Council from Quang Tri, Vietnam.

## About Children Council Model in Vietnam

The Children Council is comprised of children representatives in provinces which periodically relate children's opinions and aspirations to local delegates and leaders on issues related to children. Issues can be raised to leaders at different levels, at village, commune, district, or provincial level. Children Council members collect opinions from friends and peers in the area where they study and live, consolidate, and express them in dialogue with local leaders and representatives. Children's opinions focus on topics about school environment and life, such as: safety in the online environment; child abuse and violence prevention; prevention of accidents, injuries and drowning of children; learning environment, educational methods in schools; entertainment and recreation issues in schools and residential areas; child marriage, and dropping out of school.

This is an initiative that Plan International Vietnam implements in partnership with the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union's Central Committee, starting from 2019. Members of Children Councils are publicly selected through schools and social assistance centres to ensure representativeness, with the approval of their parents or guardians. Decisions made by the Children Councils need to be passed by the majority of its members.

## Youth Consultants

Ananda Z., Imogen S., Kayshini L., My.H.N., Nhi.Y.B, Olivia C..

## Project & Report Contributors

Alex Stefanakis, Andrew Vagg, Bobbie Trower, Brent Dykes-Kirwan, Claire Knox, Pham Thi Thanh Giang, Robert McKechnie, Sharlene Shivaz

**And to all young people of the world, thank you for continuing to be leading actors of change.**

Girl takes part in #GirlsTakeover activity in Lai Chau province





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**PLAN.ORG.AU**

Plan International Australia  
18/60 City Road, Southbank VIC 3006  
GPO Box 2818, Melbourne VIC 3001  
Tel: 13 75 26 Fax: +61 (3) 9670 1130  
Email: [info@plan.org.au](mailto:info@plan.org.au)

ABN 49 004 875 807

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