

RECLAIM

Together We Rise

From Female Competition to
a European Community



Table of Contents

Introduction

to the Project & Team EAB

4

Project Partners

Forum 50% (Czech Republic)

6

Polish Robert Schuman Foundation (Poland)

7

Overview of the Project Activities

8

Training I

Katharina Mosene (Netzforma e.V.):
Challenging Hate: Strengthening Resilience
and Democratic Dialogue Online

9

Training II

11

Kristýna Drápalova

11

Member of the Prague City Assembly:

Insights from the Czech Republic

Aleksandra Niżyńska

14

Feminist Coalition Building:

Strategies for Inclusive and Sustainable Solidarity

Berlin Study Trip

16

Niklas Balbon

16

Veronika Šprincová

20

Sandra Marita Bilson & Thuan Madzharov

22

Helene Banner

24

Learning Journal

27

Part I

Introduction to the Project

How can women across Europe collaborate, support each other, and shape a stronger European community? This project places women's political participation and cross-border cooperation at its core. It encourages young women from different countries to raise their voices, engage in civic and political debates, and strengthen female representation in democratic spaces.

Despite Europe's diversity, women everywhere face similar barriers to political participation and leadership. RECLAIM creates a space for collective learning: instead of competing, participants exchange strategies, build solidarity, and develop tools to overcome structural obstacles. Through interactive workshops, skill trainings and encounters with inspiring European role models, they gain practical competencies in argumentation, tackling hate speech and disinformation, and advancing inclusive policies.

By connecting across borders, they strengthen transnational networks and prepare to shape tomorrow's Europe with more equity and cooperation.

RECLAIM is organized by the European Academy Berlin as the lead partner and their partners Czech Forum 50% & the Polish Robert Schuman Foundation.



The project is part of the EU-program CERV.



Introduction EAB & Team EAB

The European Academy Berlin (EAB) is an interdisciplinary institution fostering international dialogue, cross-cultural exchange and civic education. Since 1963, the EAB has been bringing people from around the world together. Through a diverse range of programmes and projects, the Academy actively contributes to shaping and advancing discourse on contemporary European affairs, aiming to bridge perspectives and cultivate informed dialogue.

Project responsibility TEAM EAB:



Carlotta During
Senior Expert



Magdalena Weißing
Project Manager



Mariami Mekvabishvili
Student Assistant



Feminism is not only a struggle for rights, but a collective act of reclaiming a voice and shared power in a world shaped by inequality. It reminds us that justice cannot stop at national borders, which is why projects like RECLAIM matter. They challenge global systems that profit from exclusion and instead center solidarity and equality in international decision-making. In reclaiming feminism, we move away from competition imposed on women and toward a community built on trust, empathy, and mutual empowerment. This shift is essential, because sustainable peace, democracy, and social progress are impossible without the full participation and protection of women and marginalized voices. Feminism, therefore, is not an ideology of division, but a transformative force that reimagines power as something we build together: across differences, across borders, and across generations.



Project Partners

Forum 50% (Czech Republic)



Fórum 50 % is a non-profit organization supporting equal participation of women and men in politics and public life. Although women in the Czech Republic comprise 50% of the population, their representation in politics is only 30% on average. It strives for more balanced decision making process including not only men's but also women's views and life experience.

Project responsibility TEAM Forum 50%:



Veronika Šprincová

Veronika Šprincová is a Gender Expert, Analyst and Lecturer at Forum 50 % where she represents in the governmental advisory Committee for the Institutional Safeguarding of Equality of Women and Men. She attended the Faculty of humanity studies at Charles University in Prague focusing on gender studies, where she was also a guest lecturer. From 2015 to 2019 she was also the Chairperson of the Gender Expert Chamber of the Czech Republic. Currently, she works on the topics of gender equality and representation of women in politics and public life.



Supporting young women in public life is essential for the health of democracy. When women are given the space to learn, connect and cooperate across borders and backgrounds, they are better equipped to overcome structural barriers that still limit their participation. Building networks based on solidarity rather than competition strengthens confidence, amplifies diverse voices and creates lasting foundations for more inclusive and representative political decision-making.



Polish Robert Schuman Foundation (Poland)



The Polish Robert Schuman Foundation is a non-governmental, non-political organization, founded in 1991. Its mission is to motivate Polish and European citizens to active civic participation and to promote European integration and foster the values on which it is based by engaging citizens in discussions, formulating demands, contacting national and European institutions. Activities of the Foundation include publishing expertise, organising workshops, seminars, media campaigns, educational and mass events, facilitating European voluntary movement, and combating disinformation in media. The Foundation cooperates with a wide range of institutions and CSOs in Poland and within and outside the EU.

Project responsibility Team Schuman Foundation:



Ewelina Górecka

Ewelina Górecka is director and member of the Board of the Polish Robert Schuman Foundation, professionally involved in the non-governmental sector for 20 years. She is expertized in regional and international projects in the field of European integration, European and civic education, intercultural dialogue and cross-sectoral cooperation and is actively engaged in advocacy activities and support for national and European networks of civil society organisations.

We should understand the term feminist in a broader sense - as one that focuses on inclusivity, particularly on social groups that have hitherto been overlooked. It is also about rights, representation, and resources, and about how solutions and ideas should be adapted to reality. Unfortunately, in many countries, including Poland, feminism - or even the use of feminist as an adjective - is immediately classified as radical and associated exclusively with left-wing movements. This often makes public debate on the topic more challenging and difficult. However, from my own experience, I know that the issues and ideas highlighted within the framework of feminist policy are addressed on many different occasions, in various discussions and projects, and among many diverse groups. This shows how relevant and necessary this approach is, especially in view of today's dynamics and future challenges."



Overview of Project Activities

Overview of this year's project activities (2025):

Project Kick-Off

24 September 2025, 12:00 – 13:30 h

**Strengthening Female Participation:
how we overcome inequalities through European cooperation**

Digital Workshop I

15 October 2025 | 14:00 – 18:00 h

**Challenging Hate: Strengthening Resilience and
Democratic Dialogue Online**

Digital Workshop II: 29 October 2025 | 14:00 – 18:00 h

**Feminist Coalition Building: Strategies for Inclusive and
Sustainable Solidarity**

Study Trip to Berlin

27 November, 14:00 h – 30 November 2025, 14:00 h

Training I

Challenging Hate: Strengthening Resilience and Democratic Dialogue Online by Katharina Mosene (Netzforma e.V.)

Netzforma* e.V. (Association for feminist net politics) is an NGO working on strengthening feminist perspectives on national and international internet politics. Katharina Mosene is a political scientist and works as a freelancer in the fields of cyber security, digital education and critical media education. She is a founding member of netzforma* e.V.



„My work is grounded in the belief that intersectional feminist politics are essential for protecting democratic spaces and ensuring that all voices, especially those pushed to the margins, can be heard. I see my role as actively challenging the digital infrastructures and power asymmetries that reproduce misogyny,



racism, and exclusion. By exposing systemic harms and advocating for intersectional, rights-based approaches, I aim to help transform our digital environments into spaces of safety, accountability and collective empowerment. Feminist research and practice, to me, are not optional add-ons but necessary tools for building a just technological future.”

Key Learnings

Digital violence, disinformation and hate speech function as structural gatekeepers, silencing marginalized communities, especially women, BIPoC, queer people, and people with disabilities and thereby weakening democratic participation and public debate.

Platform algorithms amplify discriminatory content: engagement-driven systems boost sexist, racist, and queerphobic material while disproportionately suppressing feminist, anti-racist, or queer perspectives. This creates epistemic violence and reinforces existing inequalities.

Gendered and intersectional patterns of harm are evident: young women, BIPOC women, LGBTQIA+ people and other marginalized groups experience significantly higher levels of online hate, leading to withdrawal from digital spaces and long-term psychological, social, and economic consequences.

Disinformation, Deepfakes and image-based sexualized violence intensify gendered oppression, targeting women in public life and contributing to systematic silencing, humiliation and threats to personal safety.

Policy frameworks like the DSA and AI Act show progress but remain insufficient from an intersectional-feminist perspective, failing to adequately address structural discrimination embedded in algorithms and moderation systems.

Feminist strategies of resistance include solidarity networks, counterspeech, community moderation, and digital literacy, all aimed at strengthening resilience and reclaiming democratic discourse.



Training II

Member of the Prague City Assembly: Insights from the Czech Republic by Kristýna Drápalova



Kristýna is an opposition member of the Prague City Assembly and an expert in public space. She studied art history at Charles University in Prague. She first worked in municipal politics as a political assistant, from which position she advanced the agenda of regulating advertising and cultivating Prague's historic centre, which has been heavily affected by overtourism. She was later elected as a member of the City Assembly for the Prague grassroots movement Praha sobě. From the opposi-

tion, in addition to the above-mentioned topics, she also focuses on oversight of the management of municipal property. In connection with her work, she has become the target of intimidation, illegal surveillance, and smear campaigns. Alongside her role in the Prague City Assembly, she co-founded the urban design studio STUDIO BISTRO, which helps develop knowhow in caring for public space and improving the quality of cities beyond Prague as well.



„For me, politics is an attempt to create a shared world – a world connected by understanding, where decisions about the future are made through dialogue, not force. Creating a shared world is possible at any time. If it's not possible in politics, it can be done in civic movements. If you've been disappointed in civic movements, you can build it in a neighborhood community or among your friends.”

Key Learnings – Politics as the Shaping of a Shared World

Politics Is About Creating a Shared World

- Politics should be based on dialogue, not force.
- The goal is to shape a shared reality where decisions about the future are made collectively.
- Public space plays a central role because it physically enables interaction across social, age, and class divides.

Public Space Is Political

- Public space reflects values, power relations, and economic interests.
- Issues like overtourism, commercialization, visual pollution, and misuse of municipal property deeply affect urban life.
- Caring for heritage (especially in a UNESCO city like Prague) requires long-term responsibility and protection from short-term profit interests.

Real Politics Is Complex and Often Difficult

- Coalition decision-making is complicated.
- Bureaucratic processes are slow and highly technical.
- Corruption and informal power networks shape outcomes behind the scenes.
- Media and social media often distort reality and political work.

Practical Lessons From Political Work

- Always document everything in writing (especially meeting minutes).
- Read last-minute materials carefully.
- Learn how approval processes work to successfully push your agenda.
- Understanding both the official system (laws, procedures) and the unofficial system (relationships, influence networks) is essential.

Opposition Work Is Different

- Being in opposition is lonelier and more defensive.
- Instead of setting the agenda, much time is spent uncovering power relations and monitoring contracts.
- Transparency and media visibility can serve as protection when confronting corruption.

Politics Is Emotional Labor

Political work involves:

- Legal disputes, police and court interactions.
- Managing party dynamics and internal self-reflection.
- Navigating ego, hierarchy, and gender bias.
- Coping with frustration, anger, humiliation, and minority status.

This is especially true for:

- A woman
 - A young woman
 - A person without business or corruption backing
- Emotional resilience is crucial.

Ethical Challenges in Progressive Politics

- Those focused on image often gain more visibility than those focused on substance.
- Staying sincere, responsible, and emotionally engaged without becoming cynical is a constant challenge.

Relationships and Self-Reflection Matter Most

- Building and maintaining relationships is central to political work.
- Internal party self-reflection is harder than policy drafting but far more important.
- Protecting one's emotional integrity and hope is part of responsible political practice.

Hope Is a Political Responsibility

- Hope must not be naïve or fabricated.
- Even in times of crisis, it is possible to create shared worlds
 - in formal politics
 - in civic movements
 - in local communities
 - among friends

**If change is blocked
in one space, it can be
cultivated in another**



Aleksandra Niżyńska: Feminist Coalition Building: Strategies for Inclusive and Sustainable Solidarity

Aleksandra Niżyńska is a partner at Gender Solution, a researcher and strategy consultant with 15 years of experience in think tanks, boutique innovation consultancies, leading global consulting company, as well as international organisations. She is co-founder of the Gender Equality Observatory – a monitoring initiative established in 2011, which evaluates the implementation of the gender equality principle in Central and Eastern Europe.



„The politics of voice and representation looks at how marginalised groups, particularly women and other underrepresented communities, express their views and whether these views are genuinely included in political decision-making. We have to constantly highlight the unequal power structures that often silence women or speak on their behalf, rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. We need to put in ongoing effort to ensure that marginalised voices are not only present but also taken seriously, especially when established institutions overlook lived experience or reinforce existing inequalities.”

Key Learnings

- Coalitions build collective power.
- Coalitions enable individuals and organisations to achieve social change that would not be possible alone by pooling resources, influence, and expertise.
- Feminist coalition building is values-driven.
- Effective feminist coalitions are grounded in trust, accountability, collaboration, and intersectionality, while allowing members to retain their own identities and priorities.
- Intersectionality strengthens legitimacy and impact.
- Understanding how gender inequality intersects with race, class, disability, sexuality, and migration status leads to more representative agendas and fairer outcomes.

- Power dynamics must be acknowledged and managed
- Unequal access to resources, platforms, and decision-making can undermine coalitions unless addressed transparently and intentionally.
- The politics of voice and representation matter
- Coalitions must prioritise lived experience, ensure that voices are not spoken for, and balance speaking with active listening to avoid tokenism.
- Care and wellbeing are political priorities
- Preventing burnout through collective care, realistic expectations, and supportive organisational cultures is central to long-term activism.
- Conflict is inevitable but manageable
- Feminist approaches to conflict emphasise empathy, dialogue, and collective problem-solving rather than blame.
- Allies can play a role without displacing leadership. Supportive involvement, particularly from men, should focus on amplifying women’s voices, sharing responsibility, and respecting women-led spaces.



Study Trip Berlin

Niklas Balbon: Finding the feminist approach in policy-making



Niklas Balbon is a research fellow at the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin, focusing on peace, security, and feminist perspectives in conflict. His work examines gender and conflict, post-war development, and feminist analyses of (post-)war economies, with a particular focus on Ukraine.

He has conducted field research in post-war Kosovo, contributed to studies on the Donbas war, and worked on feminist approaches to crisis prevention and peacebuilding through GPPi's Stabilization Lab project. His analysis has appeared in outlets including the Journal of Women, Policy and Politics, Carnegie Europe, and Voice of America.

„As a conflict researcher, I believe that we can only tackle today's global challenges if we dare to ask feminist questions. The global right is united by anti-feminism. If we want to prevail, we need to be united and persistent in fighting the patriarchal backlash.”



Key Learnings

Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. In 2025, women held only 29.1% of management roles in Germany, well below the European average of 35.2% (Destatis, 2025).

This raises an essential question:

Why are gender inequalities in leadership still so persistent?

Understanding the Root Causes: Militarised Masculinities

Niklas Balbon draws on the concept of militarised masculinities to explain how inequality is reproduced and how patriarchal systems maintain power.

This theory describes a socially constructed ideal of masculinity built around characteristics such as power, control, dominance, and aggression, while emotions like sadness, fear, and empathy are dismissed as weak or feminine.

Importantly, militarised masculinity is not limited to military institutions. Instead, it reflects a broader worldview that normalises violence and devalues care, a combination that reinforces hierarchical gender roles and entrenched patriarchal structures.

→ Balbon argues that feminism is essential to dismantling these systems and building more just and equitable societies.

A Diverse Landscape: The Many Faces of Feminism

Feminism has a long and multifaceted history. Balbon emphasizes that while liberal feminism served as an early foundation, later movements such as queer theory and intersectional feminism expanded and challenged earlier ideas. Rather than forming a single, unified ideology, feminism is a dynamic network of perspectives that continually critique and shape one another.

From Theory to Practice: Feminist Foreign Policy

One way feminist theory enters political practice is through Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). This approach aims to challenge patriarchal dynamics by placing gender equality at the center of diplomatic strategy. FFP actively incorporates women's perspectives and seeks to eliminate structural discrimination:

Feminist foreign policy is grounded in three core goals:



Implementing Feminist Foreign Policy: Four Levels of Action

For feminist foreign policy to have a lasting impact, it must be implemented across multiple levels of political and diplomatic work. Balbon identifies four key areas where change must occur:

1. Policy Decisions
2. Everyday Diplomacy
3. Programming
4. Institutional Structures and Working Conditions



Veronika Šprincová. Achieving equal representation in parliaments: A Czech perspective

Key Learnings

Women make up the majority of the Czech population, yet their representation in politics remains significantly lower, averaging around 30% across political levels. The highest representation is in the European Parliament (Czech delegation), while the lowest is in the national government. Czechia has never had a female head of state or government.

Globally, women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions. As of January 2025, only a small fraction of countries had women Heads of State or Government, highlighting that gender imbalance in political leadership is a persistent global issue, not only a national one.

Common explanations for the low number of women in politics often focus on individual shortcomings (lack of interest, lack of capability), but these narratives obscure deeper structural and systemic barriers.

Gender-specific barriers in politics operate on multiple levels:

- Individual level: internalized stereotypes, self-doubt and unequal expectations.
- Social level: traditional gender roles, societal norms and unequal care responsibilities.
- Institutional level: political party structures, internal processes and informal power networks.

Women in politics frequently face master suppression techniques, such as:

- Making women invisible
- Ridiculing or trivializing their contributions
- Withholding key information
- Creating double binds (damned if you do, damned if you don't)
- Blaming and shaming



Politics is still largely shaped by the idea of the “male” experience as the norm, while women’s experiences are treated as secondary or invisible. This reflects broader data and design biases, as described by Caroline Criado Perez in her book *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*.

Why balanced representation of women and men matters:

- Representation: democratic institutions should reflect the population they serve.
- Participation: equal access to decision-making strengthens democracy.
- Policy issues: women and men may prioritize different policy issues.
- Experience: diverse lived experiences improve the quality of political decisions.
- Justice: equal representation is a matter of fairness and democratic legitimacy.

The concepts of critical mass and critical actors are essential: positive change does not depend only on the number of women in politics, but also on individuals who actively promote gender equality within institutions, regardless of their gender.

Key takeaway:

Women’s lived experience is not a weakness, but a form of political competence.

Sustainable gender equality in politics requires addressing structural barriers, challenging gender norms and valuing diverse experiences as essential to democratic governance.



Sandra Marita Bilson & Thuan Madzharov: From Insight to Impact: Mainstreaming a feminist approach in all sectors

Sandra Marita Bilson is a strategic communications expert, podcast host, and workshop leader who brings passion and creativity to every project. She develops socially relevant content across a range of platforms and formats—including workshops, media, and seminars—while leveraging technology and AI to connect meaningfully with diverse audiences.



„From my perspective, feminist politics are not a nice-to-have, but a structural necessity, especially in tech, media, and politics, where narratives shape power. Drawing on my academic background in linguistics, social sciences, and cultural sciences, I use journalism, PR, social media, podcasting, public speaking, and educational formats to embed feminist principles and amplify intersectional perspectives. I see feminist work as a hands-on responsibility: reclaiming narratives and making intersectional representation visible across all digital and analog spaces. Feminist communication, for me, is about actively informing, educating, and transforming public discourse.”



Thuan Madzharov is a scientific advisor at a health-sector NGO and teaches marketing at the Berlin University of Applied Sciences (BHT). With a background as a registered nurse—an area in which she still works part-time—she brings deep clinical insight to her work. Previously, she worked in digital consulting, specializing in business and product development, brand and content strategy, and online marketing.

„My feminist perspective is shaped by my professional experience as a nurse and my work in health education, where women's health remains significantly under-researched, perpetuating the gender pain gap and practices of medical gaslighting. These structural blind spots have direct implications for patient safety, but it is encouraging to see that increasingly, research is addressing these

gaps. I am also very happy that more and more women are raising their voices, educating others, and bringing attention to issues that often remain overlooked. Seeing women speak up and bring attention to underrepresented topics, I am very happy to be part of the SWANS initiative and its network, which also advocates for visibility, recognition, and equitable opportunities for women, and contributes to advancing a feminist approach across all fields.”

Key Learnings

Power structures are not neutral, and gender-blind decisions often create invisible inequalities that a feminist lens can help uncover by revealing hidden patterns and systemic biases.

- It improves fairness and transparency.
- It strengthens innovation and inclusion.
- It highlights how economy, politics, and AI frequently reproduce bias.
- Prioritize intersectionality—experiences differ across gender, race, class, and more.
- Ensure transparency and accountability in decisions, data, and structures.
- Advocate for transformative change, not just small adjustments within existing systems.

Feminist mainstreaming means systematically considering and implementing gender equality in all areas

- Economy: Equal pay, discrimination-sensitive hiring practices, and inclusive leadership cultures.
- Education: Inclusive teaching materials, diverse content, and targeted promotion of leadership roles for young women.
- Technology: Diverse development teams, ethical and bias-aware AI, and inclusive product testing.
- Health: Gender-sensitive research, medical treatments that take different bodies and experiences into account, and understandable and accessible health information.

Keep in mind your ability to spot unfair structures and invisible patterns so you can design fair systems, build inclusive teams, and lead with greater awareness for everyone.

Helene Banner: Your voice, your space, your power: Building the confidence and presence to lead, speak and inspire with impact and authenticity



Helene Banner is a keynote speaker, leadership mentor and diversity advisor, following a decade as a senior communications official at the European Commission. She served as German speechwriter for President Jean-Claude Juncker and advised Ursula von der Leyen during her transition to President of the European Commission. She also worked as a spokesperson and as Head of Communication for the European Commission in Germany.

Drawing on her experience as a young woman in high-level leadership roles, she now helps professionals develop authentic leadership styles in competitive work environments and promotes transparent, diverse and mentally healthy organizational cultures. Helene holds degrees in political science and communications from the London School of Economics, Sciences Po Lille and the University of Münster, and has been a Visiting Professor at the College of Europe since 2019.

“To all powerful ladies out there: You don’t need to become stronger, tougher or more courageous in order to “make it” in your career. You are already strong.”



Key Learnings

How to speak confidently on panels

Speaking on panels, in meetings, or during presentations can feel especially challenging when you are the only woman in the room. This session with Helene Banner focused on building confidence, owning your space, and embracing authenticity as a source of strength.

Own Your Space: Verbally and Physically

- With your words
- With your body language
- With your unique perspective and contribution

Reframe Your Inner Voice

Confidence begins with the way you speak to yourself. Setting a positive intention, one that sparks joy, helps you show up as a contributor rather than a “guru.” Surround yourself with cheerleaders who reinforce your strengths.

- Small shifts in language also matter:
- Understand the “Three Languages of Power” in male-dominated environments, power often operates through:
 1. Territory
 2. Hierarchy
 3. Status

Recognizing these dynamics helps you navigate them with clarity and confidence.

- Your authenticity as a woman leader is your superpower.
- When you embrace your voice, claim your space, and reframe your internal dialogue, you strengthen your impact
- Don’t make yourself smaller: Take your space with words and physically, remember that you are a contributor, since you present 50% of society





Part II

Learning Journal

Aleksandra Leks

When you think back, how does it make you feel? What does this mean for your future?



Looking back, I feel a stronger urge to speak up and get active in the digital space and beyond. I am involved in many non-governmental organizations and public spaces that could contribute to education on women's issues. This is especially important nowadays, when feminism is being questioned. It might seem that we have achieved a lot, yet there is still much to be done. I feel the need to do more, especially with the resources I have.

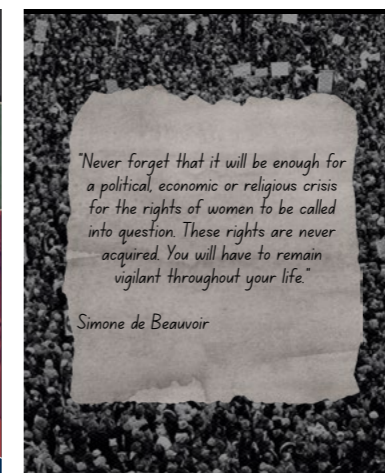
I am particularly inspired by the game we played, during which we took on various characters. I believe that implementing such deep, immersive activities in my projects will help—especially for male participants, who are increasingly radicalized and unaware of what women go through daily. It might be surprising, but unfortunately, many of my male colleagues do not realize the scale of issues women face. Many are shocked by how often I get harassed or catcalled, while for me and many other women, this is an average experience of being a woman.

As much as I understand that it is not our job to educate men, I would like to at least open up cross-gender safe spaces during my projects. I believe we need to engage the opposing gender to prevent radicalization and the demonization of women and feminism. It's either us or Andrew Tate and Nick Fuentes.



Nawojka, a semi-legendary early 15th-century Polish woman from near Gniezno, is considered Poland's first female student. Homeschooled in Polish and Latin, she disguised herself as "Jakub" around age 15 to enroll at the Cracow Academy (now Jagiellonian University), studying successfully for three years.

Exposed just before exams, she faced a potential death penalty but was spared due to strong academic support and sent to a convent, where she became abbess and taught nuns literacy.





Aneta Straková

First things first: thank you. I feel incredibly grateful for this amazing opportunity. I truly enjoyed the weekend.

For me personally, the most valuable takeaway from the weekend was the contacts I made. Networking in such a safe and supportive space made the experience truly worthwhile. To build a feminist future, we need to collaborate, and I'm so happy that my future colleagues are smart, inspiring women. This realization made me feel genuinely empowered. I also made some wonderful friends, especially from the Czech Republic, and I can't wait to meet them again and collaborate on feminist projects.

I've noticed that these human interactions are what help me grow the most—practicing active listening, having meaningful conversations, and navigating deep and challenging topics are always the best ways to really get to know people.

One thing I've already started applying in my life is the advice from Helene Banner. Her workshop was by far the best part of the weekend. She completely changed my mindset about presenting, especially when it comes to preparing for my presentations. Her presence alone was inspiring, and I'm so glad I got to meet such a badass woman in person.

Other presentations didn't go as deep, which I think is a shame, because the topics were engaging and very useful. One question that continues to stay with me is about feminist foreign policy—a concept I believe is extremely necessary in today's global context. How can we implement feminist thinking into diplomacy? How can we approach foreign policy differently? How should we handle conflicts, especially armed ones? How can feminism inform our response to the consequences of war, such as migration? So many questions. I definitely need to read some academic papers on this topic.



This essay is based on my Pecha Kucha presentation on the topic “What Does Not Kill You Makes You Stronger – Women in Society, Work, and Politics”, which I gave as part of the program, and is further inspired by my overall experience of the study trip.

Thanks to the dear Katarzyna Gattnar for the illustration.

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“But people will see me struggling.” — What a beautiful message to send: that we can be vulnerable and human in the public sphere.

“But people will talk about me.” — People talk regardless. Let them talk, and let yourself live.

“But why should it be me?” — If not you, then who? And if not now, then when? And let's not be self-centred. This is not just about you. It's about empowering women. It's about the bigger picture.

“But women who enter politics might not be feminists.” — True. And at the same time, men who are feminists can enter politics too. That's how democracy works.

“But seeing women fail will make society think women are incompetent.” — Or... it will lead to something far more powerful: more women on candidate lists, more women in office, more women in leadership positions.

Before all the “buts,” let's at least try. Because really — what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. Or should I say: makes us stronger? And to me, that is worth trying.

Anna Juchelkova



When I was thinking about my digital product, I was lost at first.

I am a very private person. I don't like participating in online discussions, and in general, the online space is often a source of anxiety for me.

When I returned from the Reclaim project back to Brno, a few days later, I was waiting at the bus stop and some man started harassing me with sexual comments. It wasn't the first time this kind of harassment happened, and unfortunately, as I expected, it wasn't the last. Nevertheless, a few days later, I was still thinking about how frustrating it is that we have to deal with disgusting comments, insults, or groping in public spaces. I felt angry, so I wrote down what happened to let it go, and that's when I came up with the idea for my digital project. To create an Instagram profile where women could share their stories of harassment. And since I used to often draw things that happened to me, I could illustrate them.

For a long time, I just stuck with the idea and the plan. I don't like posting my art anywhere, especially not on a public account. All the harassment I experienced happened in places with large concentrations of people. The old nonsense about how we ask for it and how we invite harassment does not correspond to reality. It happens right in front of people who don't notice it or simply look away so they do not have to help.

I will definitely stick with this project and see if it gains momentum and whether I start receiving stories from people who find me on Instagram. It would be interesting to see the diversity of places where harassment occurs.

Without Reclaim project I wouldn't have created this digital product, so I'm grateful that I stepped out of my comfort zone, and I'm curious to see what the project will bring me, whether it's hate or, on the contrary, shared experiences and support.





Bengisu Berispek

RECLAIM: Beyond Competition: Women Shaping Tomorrow's Europe

The significance of my reflections lies in a shift from understanding feminist approaches mainly as analytical or policy-oriented frameworks to experiencing them as lived, relational, and transformative practices. The RECLAIM study trip showed me that belonging and empowerment are not abstract ideals, but outcomes of intentionally designed spaces, narratives, and power relations. This has influenced how I think about my future work: I feel more committed to creating formats that combine structural thinking with care, safety, and collective agency.

A key moment during this learning process was recording my own podcast, *SHIFT Z - Belonging for Sustainable Transformation* as a special episode for the RECLAIM project: RECLAIMING BELONGING: Feminist Spaces, Policy & Collective Power as part of the program. For the first time, I shared my personal story in this format with a group of women. The space felt exceptionally safe, which allowed me to speak openly and vulnerably.

The feedback I received afterwards from women expressing that they felt inspired, seen, and strengthened was deeply affirming and highlighted the power of storytelling as a feminist and political practice.

Through this project, I noticed personal growth in my confidence and presence. Engaging with perspectives on feminist policymaking, “Your voice, your space, your power”, representation, and embodied leadership helped me connect my personal experiences more clearly with broader structural questions. Looking back, the experience makes me feel grounded, empowered, and deeply connected to the collective. In my day-to-day work, I will apply practices such as intentional listening, reflective dialogue, and conscious facilitation of group spaces. In particular, I plan to integrate these learnings into the Sustain.ALL Transformation Hub, where we host empowerment-oriented formats at the university. These spaces aim to foster belonging, participation, and shared leadership, translating feminist principles into concrete institutional practice.

I felt particularly empowered by the collective exchange and the emphasis on solidarity over competition. I plan to build on this empowerment by continuing to develop women-driven formats: such as podcasts, workshops, and community dialogues that centre care and co-creation.

I remain curious about how feminist and care-centered approaches can be scaled within institutional and political systems without losing their depth. I plan to continue exploring this through future projects, research, and creative experimentation. Podcast publication date: 03.03.2026

RECLAIMING BELONGING: Feminist Spaces, Policy & Collective Power

<https://open.spotify.com/show/4yqbqmK5S0nQqoSa7Yyplw>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/tr/podcast/shift-z-by-sustain-all/id1851861938?i=1000739813379>



Derya Yıldırım

After recently moving to Germany to pursue higher education, I initially believed that living in Europe as a woman would be easier. However, through my experiences in Germany and the discussions I had with other participants during the training, I realized that being a woman is not easy anywhere in the world. We are all navigating and struggling within this old patriarchal system in one way or another. But this project helped me understand something important: I am not the only one facing these challenges. There are women who make a difference every day, women who inspire me and others to become the best versions of ourselves.



My key moment came during the "Your Voice, Your Space, Your Power" training. Helene Banner said, "Your voice matters, maybe someone needs to hear it from you not from someone else." This phrase stayed with me. Her training helped me recognize the power of my own voice. I have professional training, work experience in crisis-related areas, and now academic knowledge as a master's student. What I needed was to stop listening to the "monkey voice" in my head. Thanks to her seminar, I now have the tools to quiet that voice. I am ready to reclaim my space.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the European Academy Berlin team. In just four days, we received incredibly valuable training, and thanks to the safe space you created, I felt truly empowered. I am already sharing what I learned in this program at my university and within the small student groups I am part of.

Thank you for including me in this process.



Reclaiming Our Voice:

Why Speaking Up Is a Collective Act of Resistance

“Maybe someone needs to hear it from you.”

This is not just a comforting phrase. It is a political call.

In patriarchal societies, women are not simply discouraged from speaking, they are systematically trained into silence. From a young age, we learn that being quiet is safer, that being agreeable is rewarded, and that naming harm will often cost us credibility, belonging, or protection. Silence becomes a survival strategy, not a choice. To reclaim our voice, then, is not an individual act of bravery. It is an act of resistance.

Patriarchy Thrives on Isolation

Across cultures, borders, and generations, women’s experiences under patriarchy follow disturbingly similar patterns:

- Our voices are interrupted, dismissed, or spoken over.
- Our pain is minimized, questioned, or reframed as misunderstanding.
- Our anger is labeled as “too much,” while our silence is expected.

These experiences are often framed as personal failures or isolated incidents. But they are not. They are structural. Patriarchy survives by making women feel alone because isolation keeps us quiet, and quiet keeps the system intact.

When we believe it’s “just us,” we are easier to control.

Reclaiming Our Voice Is a Collective Process

“Reclaiming our voice” does not mean shouting the loudest or speaking without fear. It means refusing to internalize silence as normal.

Sometimes reclaiming our voice looks like:

- Saying “I believe you” when another woman shares her story
- Naming harm even when it is uncomfortable
- Sharing our own experiences, not because we are ready, but because silence is heavier

Our voices are not reclaimed in isolation. They are rebuilt through connection, recognition, and shared truth.

When one woman speaks, she creates space for others to say, “Me too.”

Solidarity Is Not Optional, It Is Survival

Feminist solidarity is not a feel-good slogan. It is a survival strategy shaped by generations of resistance. Patriarchy depends on competition between women, on distrust, comparison, and division. Solidarity disrupts that logic.

Every time we support one another instead of questioning, blaming, or distancing ourselves, we weaken the system that benefits from our fragmentation.

Your voice might be the first time someone realizes:

- What they experienced was real
- What they felt was valid
- What hurt them was not their fault

That is why speaking up matters even when your voice shakes.

This Is Why We Speak

We speak because silence was never neutral. We speak because being quiet never protected us. We speak because our stories, when shared, become tools of resistance.

Reclaiming our voice does not require perfection or fearlessness. A tired voice is still a voice. A trembling voice is still powerful. What matters is refusing to disappear.

And if you ever wonder whether it makes a difference remember:

Maybe someone needs to hear it from you.



GIRL BOSSING
WILL NOT
GIVE YOU
FREEDOM

Joanna Wójcik



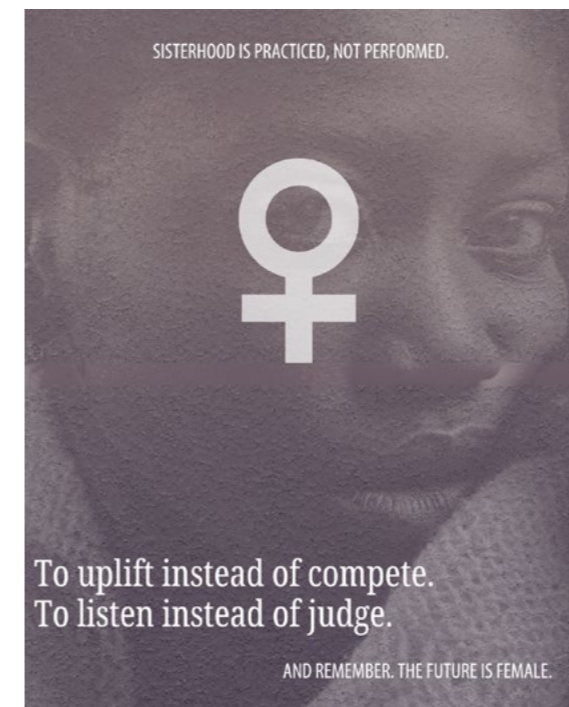
Judyta Madeyska

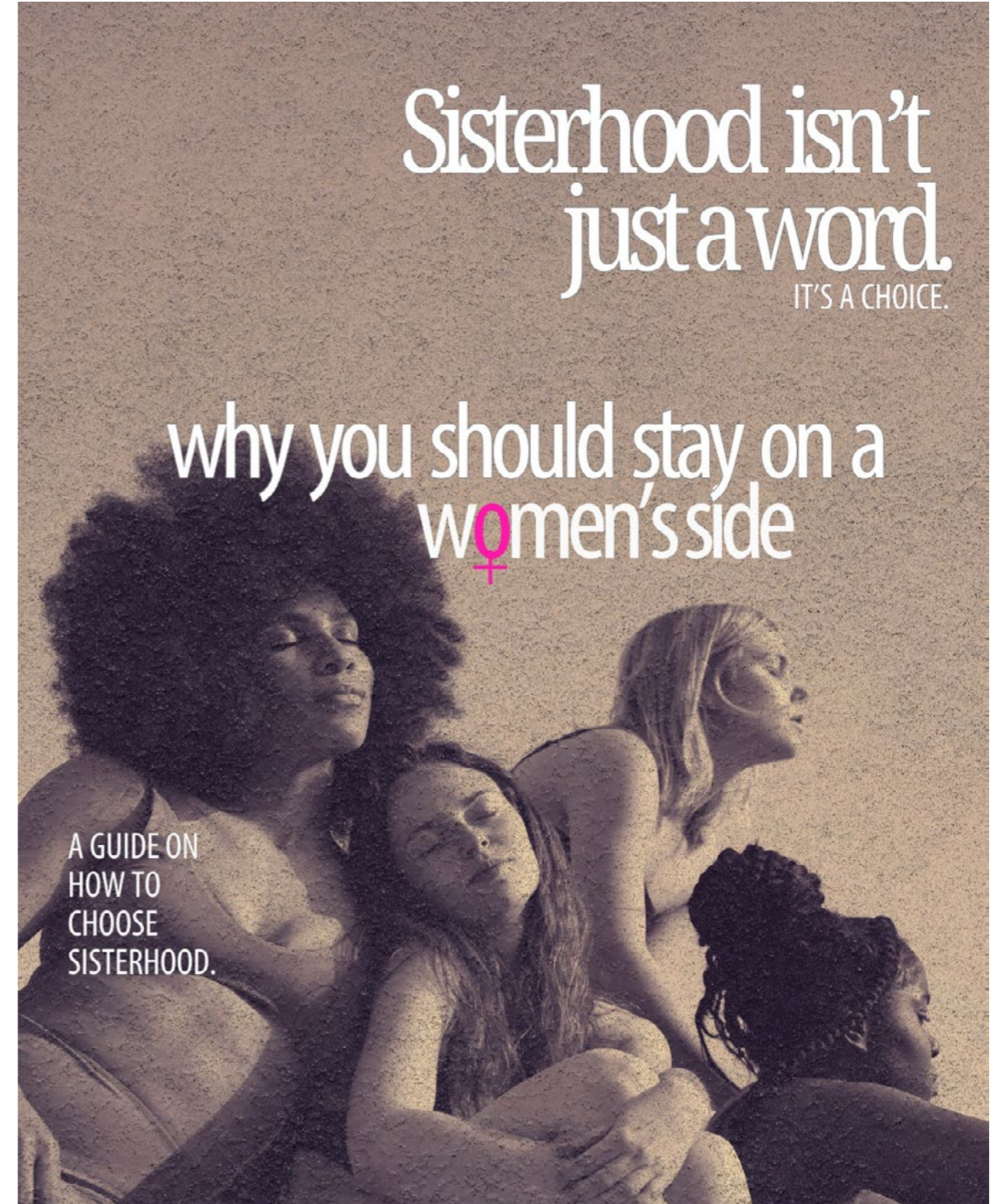
Participating in the RECLAIM project in Berlin was a deeply empowering and formative experience for me. The project focused on reclaiming our space as young women, particularly within political and public spheres,

but it went far beyond political participation alone. Through lectures and workshops, we explored confidence-building, public speaking, and how to exist without ever minimizing ourselves.

What impacted me most was the strong sense of sisterhood that emerged within the group. Despite coming from different backgrounds, we created a space of trust, encouragement, and mutual respect. I was extremely shy and nervous while presenting my Pecha Kucha presentation, yet I never felt judged or alone. The support, understanding, and solidarity shown by the other women gave me strength and confidence in a moment of vulnerability.

This experience made me reflect on the importance of sisterhood as a feminist practice, which is why it has become the central theme of my digital product.







Katarzyna Gattnar

My heart and my inspiration cup were fullest when we received (yes, it was a gift!) the speaker Helene Banner.

Through her powerful speech, she showed by example how often we deliver much more than just information and data in our presentations. We also deliver everything we embody: who we are, our values, our unique experiences, and everything we have been through and healed from. She captivated us with her presence and her honest interest in what the audience thinks and feels. In her brilliant approach, she moves away from the "business bro" performance based, timed, concise, and almost unbreathable format that we are forced to fit into in most patriarchal spaces, where we must present ourselves as presentable above all else.

Instead, she asks a powerful question:

What do I need as a speaker to create my comfort?

Through self-awareness, empathy, humility, and self-worth rooted in authenticity, she takes up space with confidence. She taught us about her tools, and the most surprising and my personal favorite was that we can choose an intention for our speech that sparks joy in us.

This way of combating stress feels natural. It is based on choosing trust, joy, and curiosity over fear and the inner critic, and it leads to excellence. She also emphasized the importance of having a circle of support and learning to ask for it intentionally. She further explained that much of the pressure is released when a speaker begins to see themselves as a contributor to the topic rather than an omniscient expert. From this stance, it becomes impossible to be embarrassed by a question because in this scenario, it is exciting that we can find out together.



CURIOUS FEMINISM



THE APPROACH FROM CYNTHIA ENLOE'S BESTSELLER, THE CURIOUS FEMINIST, SUGGESTS THAT IF AN INDIVIDUAL WOULD LOOK AT THE STATE OF THE WORLD AND AT THE POSITIONS OF POWER AND SIMPLY INQUIRE „WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?“, THEY JUST MIGHT START TO GRASP THE VAST LAYERS AND SPACES CONQUERED BY MASCULINE PRIVILEGE. THE QUESTION „DAMPENS OUR CURIOSITY ABOUT WHERE WOMEN ARE AND WHERE MEN ARE, ABOUT WHO PUT WOMEN THERE AND MEN HERE, ABOUT WHO BENEFITS FROM WOMEN BEING THERE AND NOT SOMEPLACE ELSE, ABOUT WHAT WOMEN THEMSELVES THINK ABOUT BEING THERE AND WHAT THEY DO WITH THOSE THOUGHTS WHEN THEY TRY TO RELATE TO MEN AND TO OTHER WOMEN. ANY TIME WE DON'T PURSUE THESE QUESTIONS, WE ARE LIKELY TO MISS PATRIARCHY.“

MILITARISED MASCULINITIES IS A TERM THAT DESCRIBES THE GLORIFICATION OF VIOLENCE AS A MATTER OF PROTECTION AND HONOR. IT DEFINES "REAL MEN" AS EMOTIONALLY CONTROLLED, PHYSICALLY STRONG, AGGRESSIVE, AND DOMINANT OVER WOMEN AND NON-DOMINANT MEN, AND IT PRAISES LOYALTY TO THE NATION, THE MILITARY, AND HIERARCHY. MILITARIES (AND MILITARISED SOCIETIES) RELY ON THESE IDEALS TO FUNCTION. ENLOE FURTHER EXPLAINS THAT THESE IDEALS ARE SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED AND CONTINUOUSLY REINFORCED THROUGH NATIONALISM AND PATRIOTISM, THROUGH STEREOTYPICAL PORTRAYALS OF MASCULINITY IN MEDIA, FILMS, AND POLITICAL SPEECHES, INCLUDING EVERYDAY LANGUAGE.



MILITARISED MASCULINITIES

THIS DEFINITION OF MASCULINITY IS NOT LIMITED TO PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERS. MEN ACROSS SOCIETIES ARE ENCOURAGED TO HOLD THEMSELVES TO THESE STANDARDS FROM CHILDHOOD, PLAYING WITH MINIATURE GREEN FIGURINES, WHICH INTRODUCE WAR AS SOMETHING EXCITING, AS A POTENTIAL WAY TO WIN AND RECEIVE PRAISE IN THE WORLD, AND VIOLENCE AS SOMETHING NORMAL AND INEVITABLE. THIS NORMALIZATION PERSISTS EVEN IN AN AGE IN WHICH WE HAVE THE TOOLS AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO NEGOTIATE PEACE AND ENOUGH RESOURCES TO KEEP IT. MILITARISED MASCULINITIES SHAPE POLITICS, FOREIGN POLICY, AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, MAKING WAR APPEAR NECESSARY AND MASCULINE, WHILE WOMEN ARE CAST AS THOSE WHO NEED PROTECTION, WHO SUPPORT THE WAR EFFORT, OR WHO REMAIN INVISIBLE.

ENLOE'S KEY FEMINIST MOVE IS TO ASK:
WHO BENEFITS WHEN MASCULINITY IS TIED TO MILITARISM,
AND WHOSE LABOR AND SILENCE MAKE IT POSSIBLE?

Katarzyna Soltysińska



Taking part in the Reclaim: Together We Rise program made me reflect on how limited women's representation still is. Even though we often hear that things are improving, many systems are still shaped in ways that make it harder for women to fully participate or be taken seriously.

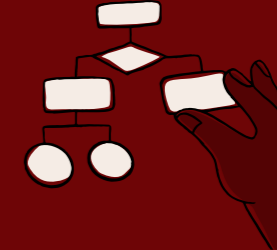
One of my biggest learnings from the program was how much systems still shape who gets heard and who doesn't. Policies, leadership structures, and corporate cultures are still largely built by men and for men, which means women often have to work harder just to be seen as legitimate. At the same time, I also realized how easy it is to forget about privilege, even within women's spaces. What stood out to me most was the environment itself it was supportive, open, and genuinely encouraging. Being surrounded by women who listened, shared experiences, and supported each other without competition made a huge difference.

To women trying to reclaim space in the public sphere: don't wait until you feel fully ready. Take space in the way that feels right to you, trust that your perspective matters, and support other women when they speak. Creating spaces like this showed me how powerful that kind of support really is.



YOU BROKE BARRIERS. YOU CLIMBED THE LADDER.

Now ask yourself: Are you building a bridge or pulling it up behind you?



If you don't lead for women, who will?



Mentorship isn't coffee chats. It's action.

- Advocate for **promotions**, not just advice.
- Open doors to **strategic** projects.
- Share your **network**: introduce, recommend, sponsor.
- Push women **forward** even when it's uncomfortable.
- Advocate for blind recruitment and bias-aware promotion policies.



Gender GAP

WOMEN

30.6% OF LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

43.4% OF THE TOTAL WORKFORCE

11% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women

28% OF STEM WORKFORCE GLOBALLY

GENDER PAY GAP REMAINS AT -20% WORLDWIDE

Companies with women in leadership positions are 20% more likely to outperform other companies. Yet, progress toward equality moves at a snail's pace. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025, at the current pace, it will take around 123 years to reach full gender parity worldwide.

Men in Leadership: Stop Watching. Start Acting.

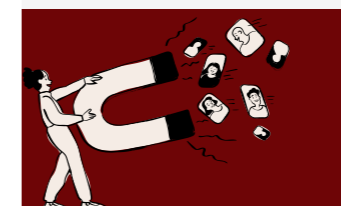
Gender equity isn't a "women's issue." It's a business issue. A leadership issue. A human issue.



- Sponsor women for **promotions** not just "support" them in words.
- **Challenge bias** in every meeting. Silence equals agreement.
- Share your power. **Invite** women into decision-making rooms.
- Measure your **impact**. Track how many women you've helped advance.

To all my (women) colleagues...

You don't need a title to lead.



APPLY EVEN WHEN YOU DOUBT YOURSELF. GROWTH COMES FROM ACTION.

PUSH YOUR WOMEN COLLEAGUES FORWARD. WHEN ONE RISES, WE ALL RISE.

SPEAK UP. OWN YOUR IDEAS. YOUR VOICE BELONGS IN EVERY ROOM.

CLAIM SPACE YOU EARNED IT AND YOU ARE EXACTLY WHERE YOU SHOULD BE.

2025 RECLAIM: Together We Rise

Empower Women by Women

in Corporate Leadership

Too often, women in leadership intentionally or not, fall into a "Queen Bee" mindset, sidelining younger women instead of uplifting them.

Katarzyna Soltysińska



Klaudia Sulej

The most important lesson I personally take away from the project is the power of women supporting women. During a few days in Berlin, I experienced firsthand how quickly and easily one can feel a sense of female solidarity. I returned deeply inspired by the stories of the

women I met there and motivated to take action.

Although I enjoyed most of the workshops, I felt there was a lack of perspective beyond the bubble of educated women from Western countries. I understand that the program had to stay within certain parameters, but I missed discussions on how to reach women who are less privileged—those from smaller towns and often without formal education. I feel that overlooking these groups in conversations only reinforces societal divides and mutual misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, this sparked my thinking about initiatives that could make a difference. Overall, I am very grateful for my participation in the project, as I met truly inspiring women—both participants and speakers, as well as organizers. Everything took place in a warm and safe environment. I returned home inspired and motivated to take action, particularly on behalf of less privileged women, who I often feel are overlooked in feminist discussions.



DESCRIPTION: Poster to print / Social media graphic promoting **an initiative to organize groups for women from smaller towns and villages**, giving them the opportunity to meet and start working together in one of the selected areas.

The first step would be a **thorough research** to identify towns and villages where such initiatives are lacking. Next, the **campaign would be promoted on social media and posters would be displayed in strategic locations**, such as local government offices, clinics, etc.

Women could join **one of three groups:**

1. Engagement in **local politics**
2. **Actions for the local community**
3. Thematic **support groups** for women – where everyone has the chance to share their experiences and challenges

At the initial stage, meetings would be moderated by **external facilitators, and experts** would be invited:

1. Political activists
2. Women involved in creating local community initiatives
3. Psychologists and psychotherapists

Meetings would be held **regularly**, and over time, the community of women could take the lead in setting the rhythm of activities and expanding their circles.

Konstancja Adach

Taking part in this project was honestly a turning point for me. I've always heard the word "empowerment" tossed around in professional settings, but it usually felt like a buzzword.



Through this experience, I finally felt what it actually means. Being in a space dedicated to supporting women changed the way I look at my own potential. It made me realize that I don't have to navigate my career as a solo mission; there is so much power in having a community that truly wants to see you succeed.

The highlight of the entire experience for me was the focus on public speaking. I've always been someone who gets a bit of a "shaky voice" when the spotlight is on me, but a specific moment during our practice sessions changed that. During Pecha Kucha, instead of feeling judged, I felt an incredible wave of support from everyone in the room. It wasn't about being a perfect orator; it was about the fact that my perspective mattered.

That was the first time I felt like I was actually "owning" the room rather than just trying to get through the presentation.

This project has changed how I see my future. Before, I think I was playing it a bit safe, but now I feel a new sense of confidence that I can carry into any boardroom or meeting. I've noticed that I'm not overthinking my contributions as much as I used to. I'm learning to trust my expertise. On a day-to-day level, I'm already applying this by speaking up more in small groups and being more intentional about how I present my ideas.

I've realized that if I don't advocate for myself, I'm doing a disservice to the work I've put in. When I think back on the past few weeks, the main thing I feel is relief and excitement. Relief because I realized I'm not alone in my struggles, and excitement because I feel like I finally have the tools to move forward. This experience didn't just give me "skills"—it gave me a different version of myself. I'm walking away feeling more resilient, more vocal, and genuinely ready to take on whatever comes next in my career.



RECLAIM

ALL HANDS ON THE TABLE

BUILDING CONFIDANCE STEP BY STEP

CLAIM YOUR PHYSICAL SPACE GROUNDING YOURSELF PHYSICALLY IS THE FIRST STEP TO VOCAL CONFIDENCE.

1

- **THE TABLE ANCHOR:** RESTING YOUR HANDS FIRMLY ON THE TABLE STOPS FIDGETING, OPENS YOUR CHEST FOR BETTER BREATHING, AND SIGNALS STABILITY TO YOUR AUDIENCE.
- **PLANT YOUR FEET:** STAND OR SIT WITH FEET FLAT ON THE FLOOR, SHOULDER-WIDTH APART. FEEL THE CONNECTION TO THE GROUND.
- **EYE CONTACT CREATES CONNECTION:** DON'T SCAN THE BACK WALL. PICK ONE PERSON, FINISH A THOUGHT, THEN MOVE TO ANOTHER PERSON.

2

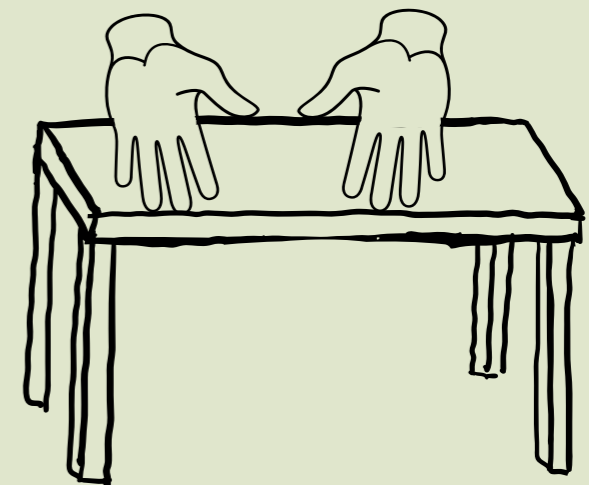
SHIFT FROM "PERFORMING" TO "SHARING" YOU ARE NOT THERE TO BE JUDGED; YOU ARE THERE BECAUSE YOU HAVE VALUE TO ADD.

- **SILENCE THE IMPOSTER:** REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE IN THE ROOM FOR A REASON. YOUR PERSPECTIVE IS UNIQUE AND NECESSARY.
- **REFRAMING ANXIETY:** THAT BUTTERFLY FEELING ISN'T FEAR; IT'S ADRENALINE. YOUR BODY IS GETTING READY TO DO SOMETHING IMPORTANT. USE THAT ENERGY.

3

PROJECT WITH INTENTION YOUR VOICE DESERVES TO BE HEARD CLEARLY WITHOUT APOLOGY.

- **THE POWER PAUSE:** DON'T RUSH TO FILL SILENCE. TAKING A BREATH BEFORE ANSWERING A QUESTION SHOWS THOUGHTFULNESS AND CONTROL.
- **ELIMINATE QUALIFIERS:** AVOID STARTING SENTENCES WITH "THIS MIGHT BE A BAD IDEA, BUT..." OR "I'M JUST WONDERING IF..." STATE YOUR POINT DIRECTLY.
- **SLOW DOWN:** WHEN NERVOUS, WE SPEED UP. DELIBERATELY SPEAK SLOWER THAN YOU THINK YOU NEED TO. IT CONVEYS AUTHORITY.



Kosovare Qerkinaj

The seminar was, all in all, a total success for me. I had a really great time and many meaningful learning moments. One of the most valuable parts of the experience was meeting new people from different regions and with very different personalities. I especially enjoyed interacting with women from Poland and the Czech Republic. These encounters gave me new perspectives on different topics and reminded me how enriching cross-border exchange can be.

One of my key takeaways from the seminar is that I should not be afraid to share my thoughts and speak in front of others. I realised that even though we are all different in many ways, we are united in our will to change something. This shared motivation created a strong sense of empowerment, both individual and collective. Another important learning was becoming more aware of the different situations people are in. Women are not disadvantaged only because they are women, but often also because of their cultural background, social class, or religion. This perspective challenged me to think more carefully and more intersectionally about inequality and privilege. It helped me understand that empowerment needs to include awareness of these layered realities.

One of the agenda points I was most excited about was the Pecha Kucha presentations, and they turned out to be one of my favourite activities of the weekend. There were many inspiring contributions, and creating my own Pecha Kucha was both a challenge and a meaningful opportunity. I chose to speak about Bisan Owda, a young journalist from Gaza, who has inspired me as a person and as a woman to be resilient and confident. Preparing and presenting about her strengthened these feelings even more. Through the seminar, I also noticed personal growth. I feel more confident when it comes to speaking up and sharing my opinions, not only in the seminar space, but also in public discussions and in my university classes. This is a big win for me. The last workshop, led by Helene Banner, was another strong moment of reflection. It encouraged me to focus more on my own intentions and to act according to my own expectations, rather than constantly trying to meet the expectations of others. This is something I want to carry with me beyond the seminar.

There are still questions that remain open for me. One of them is: Where are the women? When we talk about politics, we often think of paid positions and formal power. But so many women do important and beautiful work in activism and in everyday life, for example by caring for children and shaping the next generation. In a capitalist society, value is often tied to paid work, but unpaid care work and community work are just as valuable and political. Another open question is how to get



access to jobs in the political field. What are realistic entry points, and how can young women like me find ways into political spaces and institutions?

Overall, the seminar strengthened my confidence, broadened my perspectives, and deepened my motivation to be part of change. It reminded me that empowerment grows when we learn together, listen to each other, and support one another.

FROM COMPETITION TO COMMUNITY – A RECLAIM REFLECTION

ON FEMINIST SOLIDARITY, STORYTELLING, AND WHY
BISAN OWDA'S VOICE MATTERS

INTRODUCTION

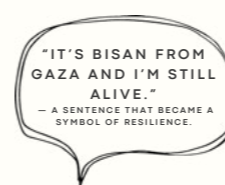
The RECLAIM project was, all in all, a total success for me. I had a truly great time filled with meaningful encounters and many learning moments. Meeting women from different regions and backgrounds, especially from Poland and the Czech Republic, gave me new perspectives and reminded me how powerful cross-border exchange can be.



1

WHEN EVERYTHING CHANGED

When the conflict escalated, Bisan lost her family home and her office where her filming equipment was stored. Yet she continued documenting life using only her phone.



WHY SHE INSPIRES ME

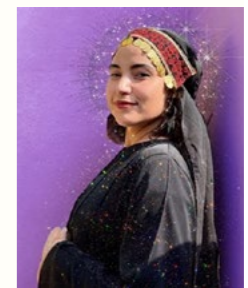
What inspires me most about Bisan is her clarity and courage. She shows that leadership does not require a title, it requires speaking up, preserving memory, and choosing humanity even in danger.

3

One of the most meaningful moments of RECLAIM for me was the Pecha Kucha presentation; not only because of the format, but because it allowed me to speak about someone who inspires me deeply.

MEET BISAN OWDA JOURNALIST · ACTIVIST · FILMMAKER FROM GAZA

Bisan Owda is a young Palestinian journalist, activist, and filmmaker from Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza. From early on, she chose storytelling as her way of engaging with the world; not only to report events, but to shape narratives and preserve memory.



STORYTELLING AS A TOOL FOR TRUTH

- Before the war, Bisan documented everyday life in Gaza: markets, families, culture.
- She studied filmmaking and journalism, focusing on youth, identity, and community.
- Through social media, she built a global audience by showing Gaza through a human lens.

2

REVIEW

RECLAIM created a space where such stories could be shared collectively. Through the project, I gained more confidence in speaking up and trusting my own voice.



WHAT DOES NOT KILL YOU MAKES YOU STRONGER

Bisan's storytelling reminds us that even in times of destruction, voices matter. RECLAIM reminded me that solidarity strengthens learning and courage. Together, we rise.

4



Markéta Gregorová

The RECLAIM project brightened my autumn at a time when I felt overwhelmed by the past, frustrated by the present, and insecure about the future. Before the first digital training in October, I deeply needed support from female friends and an encounter with inspiring young

activists and politicians to help me see things from a brighter perspective. From the very first online tour de table, I sensed that this wish would come true in Berlin, where I would finally meet all the remarkable participants from Czechia, Poland, and Germany in person.

I felt empowered by our warm breakfast, full of incredible and funny stories we shared, by the activities we engaged in together, and by all the things we learned and explored, both collectively and individually. I especially enjoyed the vibrant and relaxed dinner outside the Academy, where we deepened our relationships, found out more about each other's backgrounds, and even began planning follow-up meet-ups to stay connected after the project ended.

Thanks to the RECLAIM project, I feel I have drawn genuine inspiration and energy from our conversations, discussions, and from listening to my fellow participants. I am committed to continuing to build solidarity among us, potentially expanding our group with more of our female friends, and creating a network where we can open up, cultivate a safe space, encourage one another, fight for meaningful causes, and enjoy the journey together.



Facebook post

As a young woman, have you ever struggled to reclaim your space – in a classroom, on public transport, in a political campaign, in a courtroom, or in the media? Have you encountered master suppression techniques, faced waves of hateful reactions on social media, been underestimated by your own family, or felt injustice in situations that would likely have ended differently if you were a man?

These are the stories women around the world experience to varying degrees. Raising your voice, setting boundaries, and calling out misbehaviour are powerful acts of resistance. While women continue to face structural obstacles on their way to becoming politicians, CEOs or STEM experts, they can build on their shared experience of unequal opportunities. Female solidarity, cooperation, and sensitivity to intersectional and diverse backgrounds are the pathways to overcoming these barriers, gaining male allies, and co-creating systems where young women can speak freely, pursue their careers, and shape their lives with dignity and confidence.

I am committed to supporting my peers – in their life choices, their election campaigns, their businesses, and their personal growth. I will stand with them when disinformation campaigns target their social media profiles, when they negotiate fairer distribution of housework at home, and I will celebrate every success along the way. Together, we can become role models for others.

I believe that breaking gender stereotypes and building a society where all people – regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, origin, or sexual orientation etc. – are respected and can fully strive for happiness and dignity is possible through our shared effort and unwavering solidarity.



Nergis Zarifi

The RECLAIM study trip in Berlin was a turning point in how I understand feminist leadership in Europe. What struck me most was the shift from competition, which is often emphasized externally, to community, solidarity, and allyship. Instead of seeing women's political participation as an individual struggle, the program emphasized collective power and transnational learning, showing me that sustainable progress is built together, across borders.



A key moment was reflecting on European female biographies and learning about political participation in countries like Poland and the Czech Republic. Hearing how women navigate structural barriers differently highlighted that inequality is systemic, not personal. Meeting women from these countries and sharing experiences revealed the importance of a collective approach to advancing feminist politics across Europe. The city tour on Black and Queer Feminism in Berlin grounded theory in lived experience and reinforced the centrality of intersectionality.

Personally, I gained confidence in claiming space and using my voice strategically. Training on presence, authenticity, and leadership offered practical tools that left me feeling empowered. My voice matters, especially when contributing to collective goals. I plan to build on this empowerment by strengthening feminist networks in my own political work and continuing to learn from women across Europe. I remain curious about how transnational feminist cooperation can be institutionalized more effectively.

Message to my peers: To other women reclaiming space in the public sphere: you do not have to do this alone. Our strength grows when we share knowledge, address structural barriers, and stand in solidarity. Trust your voice and use it not only for yourself but to open doors for others.



From Competition to Community
I arrived carrying the old lesson:
that leadership must be proven,
that space is scarce,
that women advance
by outgrowing one another.

But Berlin shifted my understanding.

What I learned there
was not how to win,
but how to belong.

Not how to speak louder,
but how voices multiply
when they are shared.

RECLAIM taught me
that feminist leadership in Europe
is not an individual struggle
but a collective movement
built through solidarity,
through allyship,
through learning across borders.

We traced women's biographies,
written in different languages,
shaped by different political realities.
Poland.
The Czech Republic.

Listening to these stories,
I understood:
inequality is not personal.
It is structural.
And structures cannot be dismantled alone.

Meeting women from across Europe,
sharing experiences,
recognizing ourselves in one another,
made clear what progress requires:
community instead of competition,
cooperation instead of isolation.

Walking through Berlin,
Black and Queer Feminism
rooted theory in lived experience.

Intersectionality was no longer abstract
it was present, visible, necessary.
It asked who is missing
when power speaks,
and who is silenced
when leadership is narrowly defined.

**Somewhere along the way,
something shifted inside me.**

I learned to claim space
without apology.
To use my voice strategically,
authentically,
in service of collective goals.

**I learned that my voice matters
especially when it strengthens others.**

I carry this empowerment forward:
into my political work,
into feminist networks,
into spaces that still need reclaiming.

I remain curious
about how transnational feminist cooperation
can be sustained,
protected,
institutionalized
so that solidarity becomes structure,
not exception.

**Trust your voice.
Use it not only for yourself,
but to open doors
for others to enter.**

With solidarity and love
Nergis Zarifi



Romy Völker

ROADMAP TO RECLAIMING

SEE

- * Not all voices have equal access to platforms, resources, or influence
- * Public spaces reflect power: Urban design, safety, and representation shape who belongs
- * Call out suppression in rooms, streets, meetings
- * Name gendered patterns in time, invitations, recognition

NAME

REFRAME

- * Reframe streets for play, plazas for protest, benches for rest, spaces for care
- * Reclaim narratives through art, renaming, or memory culture
- * Taking care of your heart and your hope is a key part of political work
- * Support systems of mentors and allies are part of public participation

PROTECT

CONNECT

- * Collaboration over competition: From hierarchy to horizontal alliances
- * A shared world is always possible through politics or civic action
- * Take up Space: Your body, voice, and perspective belong
- * Expression creates influence
- * Prepare intention, message, and support: Presence grows courage in others

SPEAK UP

TRANSFORM

- * Ask: Who decides? Who benefits? Who carries the burden?
- * Mainstream Feminist Policy-Making

Reflection by Romy Völker

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Reclaim made it possible for an international team to work together on the issues that matter most to me. It gave me a feeling of belonging, of participating in a feminist space. The experience broadened my perspective with the insight that change doesn't only happen through institutions, but also through cultural expression, civic movements, and everyday acts of presence.

Feminist policy making enables long-term change because it integrates gender sensitivity into every phase of the policy cycle, from data and design to budgeting, implementation, and monitoring. Nevertheless, institutional change alone is not enough. Activism pushes boundaries and ensures that policies respond to lived realities. The project showed me how forming a collective around a shared purpose generates perspectives that institutions alone cannot produce.

A particularly meaningful moment was the *Desta – Decolonial city tour*. It revealed how power dynamics are reproduced in everyday urban space. It strengthened my belief that constant questioning is necessary and that speaking up matters, for myself and for those who are not heard. A takeaway I can apply daily is the idea of taking up space with intention. Preparing my message, understanding my purpose, and offering support to others is a form of collective empowerment.

Discussing our insights as a group within the scope of the project added multiple layers to the learning process through different perspectives. Realizing that others face similar challenges gave me energy to continue addressing them in the future. It also inspired me to join another collective with political purpose. This realization gives hope in a time of global political shifts and increasing backlash against gender equality.

Reclaiming is a matter of collective presence and mutual support. The exchange across countries and backgrounds reminded me that collaboration remains one of the strongest tools for shaping change.

Reflection by Romy Völker



Yupita Atuna



The RECLAIM study trip in Berlin was a turning point in how I understand feminist leadership in Europe. What struck me most was the shift from competition, which is often emphasized externally, to community, solidarity, and allyship. Instead of seeing women's political participation as an individual struggle, the program emphasized collective power and transnational learning, showing me that sustainable progress is built together, across borders.

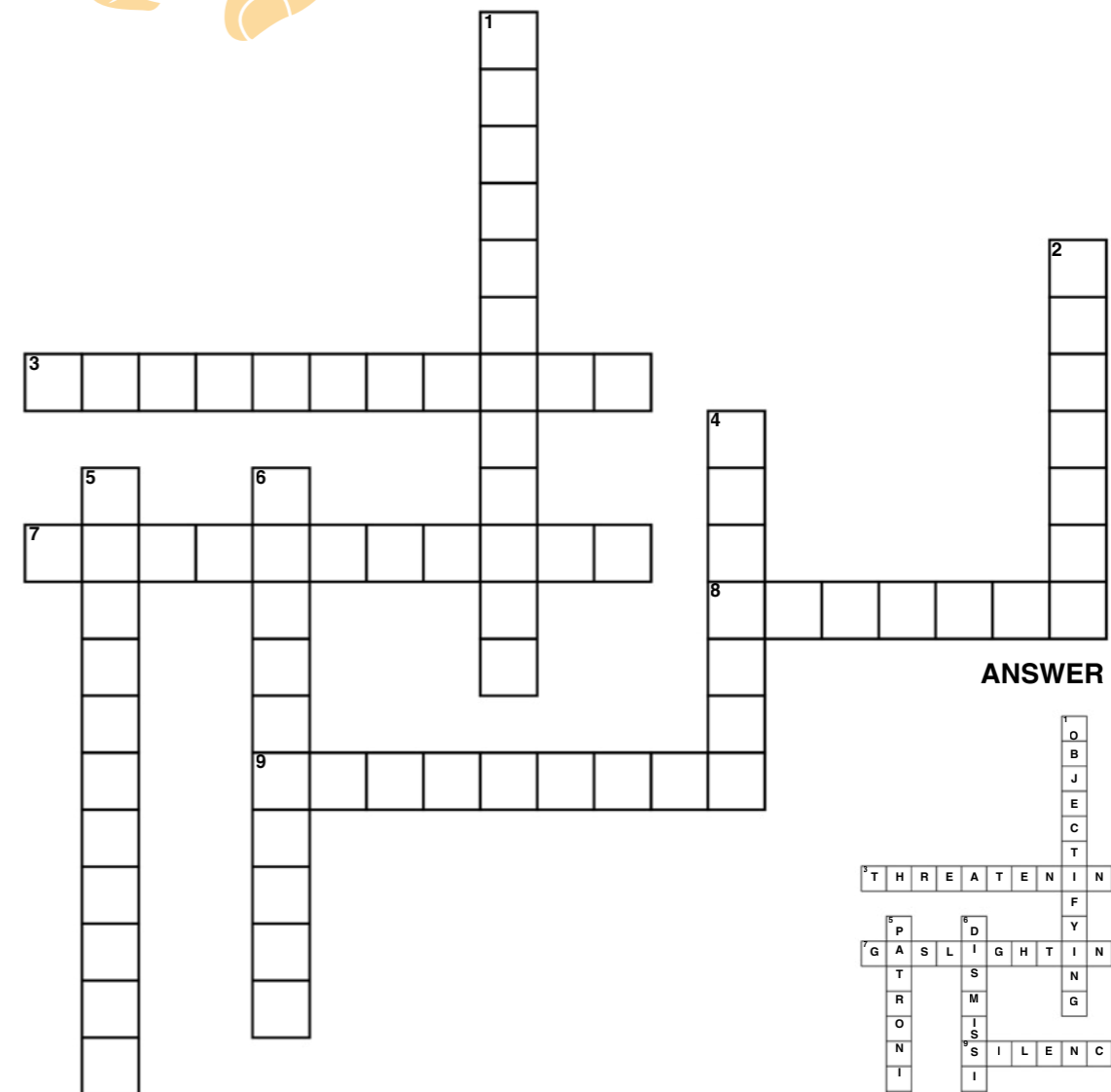
A key moment was reflecting on European female biographies and learning about political participation in countries like Poland and the Czech Republic. Hearing how women navigate structural barriers differently highlighted that inequality is systemic, not personal. Meeting women from these countries and sharing experiences revealed the importance of a collective approach to advancing feminist politics across Europe. The city tour on Black and Queer Feminism in Berlin grounded theory in lived experience and reinforced the centrality of intersectionality.

Personally, I gained confidence in claiming space and using my voice strategically. Training on presence, authenticity, and leadership offered practical tools that left me feeling empowered. My voice matters, especially when contributing to collective goals. I plan to build on this empowerment by strengthening feminist networks in my own political work and continuing to learn from women across Europe. I remain curious about how transnational feminist cooperation can be institutionalized more effectively.

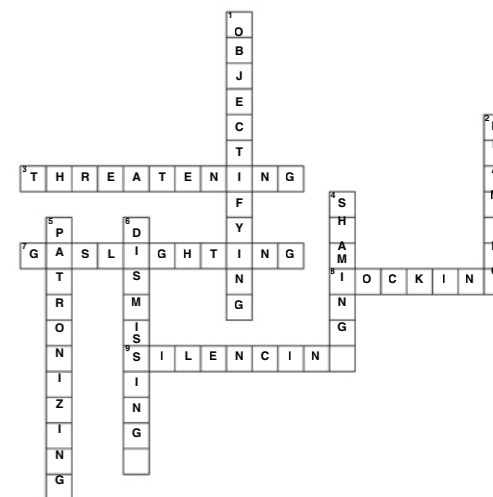
Message to my peers: To other women reclaiming space in the public sphere: you do not have to do this alone. Our strength grows when we share knowledge, address structural barriers, and stand in solidarity. Trust your voice and use it not only for yourself, but to open doors for others.



SPOT THE PATTERN



ANSWER KEY



Across

- [3] implied or explicit intimidation
- [7] denying reality or feelings
- [8] ridicule or belittling
- [9] Telling women to stop speaking

Down

- [1] reducing to appearance/body
- [2] holding women responsible for harm
- [4] Attacking a person's morality or character
- [5] talking down or infantilizing
- [6] minimizing opinions or experiences

This activity helps participants identify and name common psychological and verbal tactics used to undermine women in public and online spaces. Recognizing patterns is a first step toward reclaiming voice, presence, and power.

REFLECTION

1. Which tactics felt most familiar?
2. Which are hardest to recognize in real time?
3. Where do you most often encounter these patterns (online, classroom, street, workplace)?
4. What responses or boundaries help counter them?

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