PARTICIPATORY ACTION (PAR) RESERCH ON GENDER INEQUALITY: INSIGHTS FROM FEJUST STUDENT PROJECTS

POL2332-GENDER İN INTERNATİONAL DEVELOPMENT

2023-2024 FALL

Executive Summary

Between 2022 and 2024, students of the FEJUST Gender in International Development course engaged in a series of Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects. Working in groups, they produced videos or photovoice artefacts and accompanying reports on different aspects of gender inequality in Turkey, situating these within both national and international development debates.

The process was designed not only as an academic exercise but as a way to practice feminist epistemic justice: to treat lived experience as evidence, to challenge silencing practices, and to build plural forms of knowledge. What emerged were diverse projects—on marriage traditions, femicide, girls' education, the beauty industry, unpaid care, and women's political participation—that together offer a rich map of how gender inequality is experienced, narrated, and contested in contemporary Turkey.

The 2022–2024 cohort exemplifies the ethos of the Jean Monnet Chair on Feminist Epistemic Justice in the EU and Beyond (FEJUST). Through PAR, students learned to see whose knowledge is dismissed, whose experience is erased, and how alternative epistemologies can resist silencing. They produced counter-narratives that connect the intimate and the structural, showing how gender inequality in Turkey is not only a local problem but part of global patterns of epistemic injustice.

These outputs are more than classroom assignments—they are artefacts of feminist epistemic resistance, contributing to the FEJUST agenda of pluralising knowledge, amplifying silenced voices, and linking academic learning to public and policy debates.

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1. About the 2022-2023 Cohort

The participatory action research (PAR) projects presented in this brief were undertaken by the 2023–2024 cohort of the Gender in International Development course, taught under the framework of the Jean Monnet Chair on Feminist Epistemic Justice in the EU and Beyond (FEJUST). Building on the pioneering work of the previous year, this cohort engaged even more deeply with the possibilities and limits of youth voice in a challenging political environment.

The class brought together over thirty undergraduate students, with women again forming the clear majority but with a slightly higher number of men compared to the previous year. This gender profile is itself instructive: while women continue to carry the bulk of interest and responsibility in gender studies, the increased male participation suggested that the language of equality is gradually becoming less marginal for men. In mixed groups, this often produced moments of genuine dialogue across gendered experiences, while women-only groups remained important safe havens for frank, unfiltered reflection.

The cohort also reflected the growing diversity of Turkish higher education. Alongside Turkish students from urban and rural backgrounds were international students who brought comparative perspectives, drawing parallels with their own societies in the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. This diversity enriched the projects with a transnational awareness, underscoring how gender inequality is never purely local but always linked to broader global structures. Students with bilingual and bicultural identities frequently acted as bridges in their groups, situating Turkish realities within wider global currents of inequality and resistance.

Yet what defined the 2023–2024 cohort most was their acute awareness of the risks of voice. From the beginning, students debated not only what to research but also where and how their work should circulate. The decision taken collectively echoed the previous year but with sharper articulation: no public exhibition, no high-profile showcase. The classroom would serve as the safe space in which their work could be screened, critiqued, and debated without fear of misinterpretation, trolling, or political backlash. Some students chose to go further, sharing their artefacts selectively on personal social media channels, where conversations could unfold in trusted networks. Others preferred to stop at classroom circulation, emphasising safety over reach.

This insistence on safe space was not timidity but strategy. It was a claim to epistemic agency: to decide not only what to say but on what terms, in which venues, and under what conditions. In refusing the assumption that publicness is the only path to legitimacy, students enacted feminist epistemic justice in practice. They demonstrated that protecting voice is not about retreat but about cultivating the conditions in which it can grow.

Above all, the 2023–2024 cohort made visible that youth are not passive recipients of knowledge but co-producers of it. Their films and photovoice projects, rooted in lived experiences and linked to international debates, speak to the urgency of their generation. By choosing safe circulation, they refused silence on one hand and forced exposure on the other. In doing so, they carved out a third path: strategic, situated, and deeply political.

2. Themes and Topics Chosen

The range of topics selected by the student groups reveals both the breadth of gender inequality and the acuity of youth perspectives in tracing its everyday manifestations. Rather than focusing only on abstract policy debates, students grounded their work in lived experiences, cultural practices, and pressing social issues that are highly visible in Turkey but resonate globally. Marriage traditions, femicides, women's education, beauty norms, care work, and political representation emerged as recurring focal points. Together, these topics provide a mosaic of how patriarchy, nationalism, neoliberalism, and conservative populism intersect in shaping women's lives.

Marriage traditions offered one of the most vivid entry points into these dynamics. Students critically examined customs such as the red virginity belt, *kız isteme* (a cultural practice of asking permission from the girl's parents to marry her) and bride price, practices that appear celebratory but function to regulate

women's sexuality and autonomy. These rituals were not treated as isolated remnants of the past, but as adaptive tools through which patriarchy renews itself in the present. Students observed that such traditions persist even in modern urban settings, defended under the guise of cultural heritage. In their analysis, the private sphere of family life becomes a site where national identity and patriarchal control converge, making the regulation of women central to the reproduction of community and state alike.

Femicides and gender-based violence constituted another urgent cluster of projects. Students engaged deeply with Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and highlighted how this political decision was both symbolic and material: it signaled the state's willingness to treat women's safety as negotiable, while simultaneously undermining international norms. Students argued that femicide is not only a crisis of violence but a crisis of recognition. The state's denial, its refusal to classify murders as systemic or to support feminist organisations, represents a form of epistemic injustice in which women's testimonies are dismissed and their deaths depoliticised. Through their films and photovoice projects, students insisted on naming femicide as political violence, an argument that aligned them with transnational feminist networks while asserting their own generational urgency.

Education, particularly the challenges faced by girls, was a theme that allowed students to interrogate the development discourse itself. Campaigns such as *Haydi Kızlar Okula* were acknowledged as important but critiqued as insufficient. Students drew attention to the rural–urban divide, economic barriers, and persistent gender norms that push girls out of school or into early marriage. Their reflections questioned whether education systems are designed to challenge inequality or simply to channel women into limited, socially sanctioned roles. In linking local experiences with global debates, students underscored that education is not automatically emancipatory but must be embedded in broader transformations of social norms, labour markets, and political representation.

Another group of projects illuminated the beauty industry and its pervasive role in shaping women's identities and economic opportunities. Students revealed how neoliberal capitalism commodifies women's bodies, making beauty both a product and a discipline. From advertising campaigns to workplace dress codes, they traced how appearance becomes a condition of employability and social mobility. Importantly, they emphasised that the industry operates not simply as an individual burden but as a structural system that naturalises inequality while profiting from it. Their work shows how consumer culture sustains gender hierarchies under the guise of choice and empowerment.

3. Link to Development and International Dimensions

The 2023–2024 cohort brought forward a set of projects that both echoed the concerns of the previous year and introduced new angles shaped by the shifting political and social landscape. Their work underscored that gender inequality is not a single-issue problem but an interlocking system sustained by cultural practices, institutional silences, and global markets. What distinguished their contributions was the insistence on seeing these practices not as isolated, temporary problems but as recurring structures that adapt and reproduce themselves, even in spaces where progress is claimed.

Femicide and state denial. Gender-based violence emerged as one of the most urgent concerns. Students explored the deepening femicide crisis, paying particular attention to the consequences of Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. They argued that this was not simply a bureaucratic change in treaty obligations but a symbolic act of denial—an official statement that women's safety is negotiable. By refusing to classify killings as systemic or to collect and publish reliable data, the state, they suggested, participates in a politics of erasure. Students portrayed femicide not only as violence committed by individuals but as political violence enabled by state inaction, weak law enforcement, and the silencing of feminist organisations. Their projects revealed how denial itself becomes part of the harm, stripping survivors and victims' families of recognition while normalising violence as private misfortune rather than public crisis.

Tradition as governance of women's bodies. Marriage rituals such as the red virginity belt, bride price, and kız isteme—the ritual of asking the girl's hand in marriage—were another focal point. Students demonstrated how these practices, often celebrated as cultural heritage, function to regulate women's bodies, sexuality, and consent. Far from being confined to rural or conservative households, students

showed that these rituals remain embedded even in urban, educated settings, defended in the name of tradition. The persistence of these practices highlights how patriarchy adapts to modernity, using the language of heritage and cultural pride to justify control. By documenting these rituals through photography and video, students transformed what is often hidden within private family life into public knowledge, revealing the extent to which women's autonomy is still conditioned on rituals of approval and exchange.

Girls' education beyond access. Education, too, was interrogated with sharp criticality. While acknowledging the symbolic value of campaigns like Haydi Kızlar Okula ("Girls to School"), students stressed that enrolment figures tell only part of the story. They documented how poverty, harassment, and early marriage continue to truncate girls' schooling, turning education into a fragile promise rather than a transformative right. Their analysis questioned whether education policies are designed to genuinely challenge patriarchal barriers or whether they simply measure success through numbers, leaving structural inequalities intact. By linking their findings to Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, students emphasised that education cannot be treated as a stand-alone achievement. Instead, it must be understood as part of a broader ecosystem of empowerment that includes family dynamics, labour market access, and freedom from violence.

Beauty as discipline. Building on the previous cohort's critiques of beauty norms, students this year expanded the analysis to include the global dimensions of the industry. They highlighted how multinational corporations and global advertising campaigns shape women's aspirations, turning insecurity into a commodity. From the promotion of skin-lightening products to workplace dress codes that enforce narrow aesthetics, their projects illustrated how beauty operates simultaneously as an economic necessity and as a mechanism of discipline. Students captured the tension between discourses of empowerment—"be your best self"—and the material realities of exclusion, exploitation, and inequality. By situating local experiences within the global neoliberal economy, they showed how beauty culture is not simply a matter of individual choice but a structural system that thrives on the commodification of women's bodies.

Urban mobility and the gendered city. A striking innovation of this year's cohort was the focus on urban infrastructure and mobility. Students argued that Turkish cities are designed around male mobility patterns, privileging roads, cars, and long commutes while ignoring the "trip-chaining" realities of women's daily lives. Women who juggle childcare, eldercare, and work often rely on short, multiple trips that are made invisible in transport data and budgets. By sidelining these realities, urban design reproduces exclusion, making mobility itself a gendered privilege. Students stressed that what is not counted in data is not funded in budgets, and thus the invisibility of women's travel needs becomes a form of structural discrimination. Their projects urged policymakers to rethink transport and urban planning through the lens of care, safety, and accessibility.

Political exclusion as democratic deficit. Finally, students turned their attention to women's absence from political leadership. They pointed to the stark statistics—women comprising just 18 percent of parliament and even fewer in local councils—and argued that this is not simply a problem of representation but a crisis of democracy. A parliament that is overwhelmingly male, they insisted, produces policies that fail to reflect women's realities and perspectives. Their analysis emphasised that women's exclusion is not the result of individual failure but the outcome of systemic barriers such as resource inequality, discriminatory norms, and entrenched networks of male dominance. By connecting their critique to feminist activism, EU equality frameworks, and international benchmarks such as CEDAW, students positioned women's political participation as both a national responsibility and a global imperative.

The themes chosen by the 2023–2024 cohort highlight the architecture of inequality as youth see it. Violence denied, traditions weaponised, education curtailed, beauty commodified, mobility constrained, and politics monopolised—all of these practices intersect to sustain gendered hierarchies. What gives these projects their force is not only the analysis of inequality but also the insistence on situating local realities within global debates. Whether invoking international conventions, global consumer markets, or the Sustainable Development Goals, students consistently refused to treat Turkey's challenges as isolated.

Instead, they mapped how the local and the global reinforce one another, underscoring that the fight for gender justice must operate on both levels simultaneously.

4. The PAR Process and Epistemic Transformation

For the second year of the Gender in International Development course, participatory action research (PAR) once again proved to be more than an assessment tool. It was a catalyst for epistemic transformation, turning students into co-researchers whose knowledge mattered not only within the classroom but as contributions to broader struggles for gender justice. Yet while the 2023–2024 cohort built on the pioneering work of their predecessors, their experience unfolded in distinct ways, shaped by the size, diversity, and political climate that defined this year group.

As with the 2022–2023 cohort, the PAR process disrupted traditional hierarchies of learning. Students moved away from essays and exams into collective artefact-making, where knowledge had to be visualised, narrated, and shared. But this year's cohort was larger and more demographically diverse, with a notable presence of international students and a slightly higher participation of men. This diversity mattered. It created richer conversations across gendered and cultural experiences: in some groups, male students were challenged to confront perspectives they had never previously considered, while international students drew comparisons with gender inequalities in their own societies, situating Turkey's challenges within global debates. At the same time, women-only groups retained their importance as safe havens where candid reflection could flourish, unencumbered by the pressures of mixed-gender settings.

The process was again emotionally charged. Students confronted femicide, marriage rituals, harassment, and exclusion—topics that touched not only on policy but on their lived and familial realities. They described moments of anger, grief, and exhaustion when engaging with testimonies of murdered women or recalling stories of friends forced to leave school early. Yet, rather than paralysing them, these emotions became resources for solidarity. In their groups, students processed these emotions collectively, discovering that vulnerability could strengthen bonds and sharpen critique. This echoes a feminist epistemological insight: that emotions are not distractions from knowledge but integral to how injustice is recognised and resisted.

One of the most striking innovations of the 2023–2024 cohort was their introduction of new thematic lenses through PAR. While the previous year had concentrated heavily on traditions, femicide, and education, this year's projects added an entirely fresh dimension by interrogating urban mobility and the gendered city. Students revealed how transport planning privileges male commuting patterns, while women's everyday mobility—short, care-related trips—remains invisible in data and budgets. This expansion of themes demonstrated that PAR was not confined to reiterating well-known issues but could break new ground, exposing how inequality is embedded in physical infrastructures as much as in cultural norms.

The question of circulation—the "where" and "how" of sharing knowledge—was also approached differently this year. Like their predecessors, students declined to stage a public exhibition, citing the risks of backlash and misinterpretation in Turkey's polarised climate. But whereas the 2022–2023 cohort largely framed this decision in terms of safety, the 2023–2024 cohort went further. They theorised it as a form of epistemic resistance: a refusal to accept that visibility in hostile spaces is the only marker of legitimacy. By choosing the classroom as their primary venue and selectively sharing work on personal social media feeds, they claimed agency over the terms of circulation. This move reframed the relationship between knowledge and publicity, showing that safe spaces are not retreats but infrastructures of justice where voices can be nurtured without being drowned out.

The students' reflections also revealed sharper awareness of political risk. In many groups, significant time was devoted not only to choosing a topic but to debating the potential consequences of representing it. Could a photovoice project on femicide attract online harassment? Would a video critiquing marriage rituals be misused or misread in ways that harmed participants or their families? These deliberations underscored how deeply the political climate shaped the process of research itself. For students, producing knowledge was not only about analysing inequality but about navigating risk, negotiating consent, and exercising strategic restraint.

By the end of the semester, students described themselves in transformed terms. They no longer saw themselves as learners confined to the classroom but as epistemic actors capable of diagnosing social problems and proposing solutions. The PAR process had changed both what they knew and how they knew it. On the one hand, they deepened their understanding of gender inequality across domains—from the politics of violence to the economics of beauty and the infrastructures of mobility. On the other, they came to see knowledge as relational, contested, embodied, and political. This dual transformation—of content and of capacity—was central to their journey.

In short, the 2023–2024 cohort extended the legacy of the first year but made it their own. They built on established themes while introducing new ones, reaffirmed the need for safe spaces while reframing them as sites of epistemic resistance, and engaged with the risks of visibility in a more deliberate, strategic manner. Their projects demonstrate that feminist epistemic justice is not static but evolving, constantly reshaped by the contexts and voices of those who enact it. Theirs was not a simple repetition of last year's achievements but a renewal, proof that each generation of students can open new paths for seeing, knowing, and resisting inequality.

5. Messages and Audiences

If there was one thing the 2023–2024 cohort refused to do, it was to remain quiet. Their projects pulsed with urgency, carefully crafted not just to describe inequality but to confront audiences with it. Each film and photovoice series carried a deliberate message: that what is too often treated as normal, private, or inevitable is in fact political, unjust, and open to change. While the classroom remained the primary site of exchange, students shaped their work with multiple audiences in mind—peers, families, policymakers, and the wider society.

Confronting tradition as control. The groups working on marriage rituals designed their projects as interventions into everyday family life. Their message was clear: customs such as kız isteme ("asking for the girl's hand"), bride price, or the red virginity belt cannot be dismissed as quaint heritage. They are instruments of control that police women's choices, sexualities, and futures. By filming and photographing these rituals, students aimed their message first at their peers—asking them to rethink practices many had taken for granted—and then at older generations, challenging the idea that "tradition" is immune from critique. Their underlying demand was that cultural pride cannot come at the expense of women's autonomy.

Naming femicide as political violence. The groups tackling femicide set their sights on both the public and policymakers. Their message was blunt: femicide is not a series of isolated tragedies but a systemic form of political violence, sustained by the state's denial and withdrawal from international commitments. By combining testimonies, data, and stark imagery, they sought to shock audiences out of complacency. To classmates and friends, the projects whispered solidarity—acknowledging the shared fear and anger of living in a society where gender-based violence is routine. To policymakers, the message was more confrontational: that inaction and denial make them complicit, and that justice requires recognition, accountability, and the re-establishment of robust protections.

Rethinking education. Projects on girls' schooling addressed their message to both peers and development policymakers. To fellow students, they posed unsettling questions: who has disappeared from your classroom, and why? To families and communities, their message was that access is meaningless without retention, safety, and freedom from early marriage. And to policymakers, they insisted that success cannot be measured in enrolment statistics alone but must address structural inequalities that prevent education from becoming truly transformative. Their work resonated far beyond Turkey, echoing critiques of global development campaigns that instrumentalise girls' education while neglecting its deeper political context.

Exposing the beauty industry. The groups who studied beauty norms crafted their message for multiple audiences at once. To peers scrolling through social media, they asked: are your choices truly your own, or are they shaped by a system profiting from your insecurity? To employers, they demanded an end to discriminatory dress codes and grooming expectations that treat conformity to narrow aesthetics as professionalism. And to regulators and policymakers, their call was for accountability: restrictions on harmful products, transparency in advertising, and policies that address the structural exploitation hidden

behind "empowerment" slogans. Their work sought not only to critique but to spark everyday conversations in spaces where beauty culture silently governs behaviour.

Making cities work for women. Perhaps the most innovative messaging came from groups focusing on urban mobility. Their projects exposed how transport and infrastructure planning silently exclude women by ignoring the trip-chaining realities of care. Their message was aimed at both local authorities and international development actors: what is not counted in data is not funded in budgets, and the result is a city that works for cars but not for caregivers. To peers, they made the politics of everyday movement visible, showing how something as mundane as a bus stop or a sidewalk reflects gendered assumptions about whose mobility matters.

Politics without women is not democracy. Finally, groups addressing political exclusion spoke with a voice at once critical and hopeful. To their peers, the message was mobilising: politics does not belong to men alone, and silence is complicity. To the wider public, they framed women's absence from parliament and councils as a democratic crisis, not merely a gender issue. And to policymakers, they demanded concrete reforms: quotas, resources, and serious measures to dismantle the systemic barriers keeping women out of decision-making roles. Their projects positioned inclusion not as optional but as a precondition for democratic legitimacy.

What tied these projects together was the recognition that messages travel differently depending on the audience. Some artefacts were designed to spark uncomfortable conversations at family dinner tables, others to reach policymakers through the language of international benchmarks, and still others to provoke dialogue on social media. This layered strategy reflected the students' nuanced understanding of activism in a constrained environment: when the public sphere feels unsafe, change can still begin in classrooms, peer groups, and online micro-publics.

The refusal of a public exhibition also shaped the way audiences were conceived. By choosing to keep their work within safe spaces or circulate it selectively, students demonstrated that impact does not require exposure to hostile publics. In fact, they redefined participation itself, showing that knowledge can be powerful when it is strategic, relational, and carefully targeted. This reframing of audience was itself an epistemic act—an insistence that voice matters not because it is loud but because it is intentional.

The cohort's projects reveal a chorus of youth voices speaking to different audiences in different registers, but united by a refusal of silence. Their work challenged peers to recognise inequality in their own lives, families to rethink cherished traditions, policymakers to act with urgency, and publics to see that justice is everyone's responsibility. In doing so, they modelled what feminist epistemic justice looks like in practice: knowledge that is situated, deliberate, and unafraid to speak back, even when it must choose its audiences carefully.

6. Challenges Faced

No project that seeks to expose gender inequalities in contemporary Turkey can unfold without obstacles, and the 2023–2024 cohort encountered these at multiple levels: personal, political, and practical. Their reflections reveal not only the weight of the topics they engaged with but also the structural barriers that shape knowledge production under precarious conditions.

The first and most striking challenge was once again visibility. While participatory action research is premised on circulation—photovoice exhibitions, public screenings, or social media outreach—students quickly recognised that making their projects visible beyond the classroom was far from neutral. This year's cohort expressed even sharper hesitations than their predecessors, shaped by a deepening sense of political fatigue and risk. Speaking openly about issues such as femicide, harassment, or the gendered burden of care work was felt to carry the potential for misinterpretation, online trolling, or even hostile targeting. The choice to keep their artefacts within the classroom, or to share only in carefully curated digital spaces, was thus not an act of withdrawal but of resistance. By controlling the conditions under which their work circulated, students claimed agency over their voices. Safe spaces—whether physical in the seminar room or virtual in private social media channels—were understood not as retreats from politics but as preconditions for feminist epistemic justice.

Practical challenges also loomed large. As in previous years, students struggled with the uneven availability of technical resources. Some groups worked only with mobile phones and improvised editing software, while others faced difficulties aligning schedules in a semester marked by hybrid teaching and busy academic calendars. Coordination itself became a pedagogical lesson: negotiating creative differences, balancing workloads, and ensuring that all voices were heard required patience and mutual recognition. What might have seemed like logistical friction was in fact formative, teaching students that collaborative knowledge production is necessarily messy and requires the same attentiveness to power and inclusion as the issues they were documenting.

Perhaps the most profound challenge, however, lay in the emotional terrain of the projects. Engaging with stories of femicide victims, reflecting on their own encounters with harassment, or revisiting discriminatory practices in education was painful and, at times, overwhelming. Several students spoke of the emotional labour of sitting with testimonies or visual material that made injustice starkly visible. Yet rather than paralysing them, these emotions became part of the process. Working in groups allowed for collective processing: anger, grief, and frustration were transformed into solidarity and commitment. Students recognised that affect was not a distraction from knowledge but a constitutive element of it. Their emotional engagement mirrored feminist epistemologies that insist that the way we feel is inseparable from how we know.

In this way, the challenges faced by the 2023–2024 cohort were not simply obstacles to overcome but integral to the epistemic transformation they underwent. The political climate heightened their sensitivity to the risks of voice; limited resources underscored the creativity required for grassroots knowledge production; emotional strain revealed the depth of their investment in justice. Each challenge became, paradoxically, part of the evidence of why participatory methodologies matter: they expose not only inequalities in society but also the inequalities in the very conditions under which knowledge is made.

7. Policy and Practice Recommendations: Youth as Epistemic Agents

The most striking lesson of the 2023–2024 participatory action research projects is that youth are not simply learning about gender inequality; they are actively generating new knowledge and new strategies for resistance. Their artefacts, reflections, and recommendations reveal a generation unwilling to remain passive in the face of persistent injustices. Instead, they positioned themselves as epistemic agents—producers of grounded, situated, and politically charged knowledge that speaks directly to policymakers, educators, and civil society.

Across their projects, students articulated a series of urgent recommendations that stemmed not from abstract theorising but from lived realities. On the issue of femicide, they called for recognition of these killings not as isolated crimes of passion but as systemic political violence requiring structural responses. Their demand was clear: reinstate the Istanbul Convention, strengthen national data collection, and fund feminist organisations that provide critical support for survivors and families. For students, justice begins with naming violence as political and refusing its depoliticisation.

In the area of education, students urged a shift away from a narrow focus on enrolment figures toward addressing the structural conditions that push girls and young women out of school. They recommended policy interventions that tackle harassment in educational spaces, alleviate the economic pressures that lead to early marriage, and challenge the cultural norms that normalise women's withdrawal from public life. Their insights align with international frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals but add the vital reminder that access without empowerment is hollow.

Students working on beauty norms and commodification pointed policymakers toward the regulation of advertising practices and workplace dress codes that reinforce gendered inequalities. They highlighted the urgent need for media literacy programmes that equip young people to resist toxic beauty ideals and the exploitation of women's insecurities by global corporations. For them, addressing gender inequality means recognising that neoliberal economies profit from perpetuating women's subordination under the guise of empowerment.

On political representation, the message was direct and uncompromising: without women in decision-making, democracy itself is diminished. Students called for legally binding gender quotas, dedicated resources for women candidates, and mechanisms to dismantle the informal male-dominated networks that currently govern access to power. Their perspective reframed women's representation not as a symbolic goal but as a necessary condition for the legitimacy of democratic governance.

Perhaps most importantly, students emphasised the role of safe spaces as infrastructures of justice. Their refusal to stage a public exhibition and their insistence on controlling the circulation of their projects revealed a sophisticated political critique: voice without safety is another form of silencing. They urged educators, policymakers, and international organisations to recognise the importance of environments where young people can articulate their perspectives without fear of backlash. This insight has direct policy implications, pointing to the need for institutional practices that prioritise care, protection, and agency in participatory initiatives.

These recommendations amount to more than a list of reforms; they form a youth manifesto for gender justice. They insist that tradition cannot be used to justify control, that violence must be recognised as political, that education must be transformative, that beauty should not be commodified, and that politics without women is illegitimate. Above all, they demand recognition of young people as co-producers of knowledge whose voices are indispensable to policymaking.

For FEJUST, these projects demonstrate that participatory methodologies can do more than teach—they can transform. By amplifying youth voices, they enact feminist epistemic justice in practice, showing that the struggle for equality is not only about redistributing opportunities but also about redistributing epistemic authority. Youth are not the audience of reforms; they are already shaping the agenda. To ignore their insights is to forfeit the chance for genuine transformation.

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