

Time to face Gendered Realities.

Findings and recommendations for making SCI activities more safe and inclusive

IN A NUTSHELL

This booklet presents the main results of a survey conducted by SCI between June and September 2019. The survey aimed at understanding **how safe and inclusive SCI activities are when it comes to gender and sexuality** based on the personal experiences of three groups of SCI activists and volunteers: workcamp participants, workcamp coordinators and participants in international training courses and seminars.

Overall, the **survey collected responses from 119 people**, of which 82 from workcamp participants, 22 from workcamp coordinators and 15 from participants in international training courses and seminars.

The picture which emerged from the analysis of the responses – conducted by SCI International Secretariat and the Gender Blenders Working Group – is a mixed one. On the one hand, the experiences of the respondents reveal how SCI is able to adopt **good practices** when it comes to creating a safe and inclusive space for those who take part in its activities, regardless of their gender and sexuality. On the other hand, the responses shed light on a number of **gaps** which prevent some SCI volunteers and activists from feeling fully safe and included during the activities, thus negatively affecting their experience with SCI.

WHY IT MATTERS

We believe that for SCI to live up to our values of inclusion, immediate actions should be undertaken to fill the gaps emerged from the survey. A **rethinking of SCI's practices should thus take place**, in the view of making our movement fully inclusive and respectful of the different identities of the people who get involved in our activities.

With this in mind, we would like to suggest a number of recommendations and lay the ground for an improvement process.



MICROAGGRESSIONS



What is a safe space?

Space where participants feel that they will not be judged for who they are or for parts of their identity, they are not confronted with (micro)aggressions based on a lack of knowledge or understanding, and they feel free to share their emotions and express themselves (if they want to).

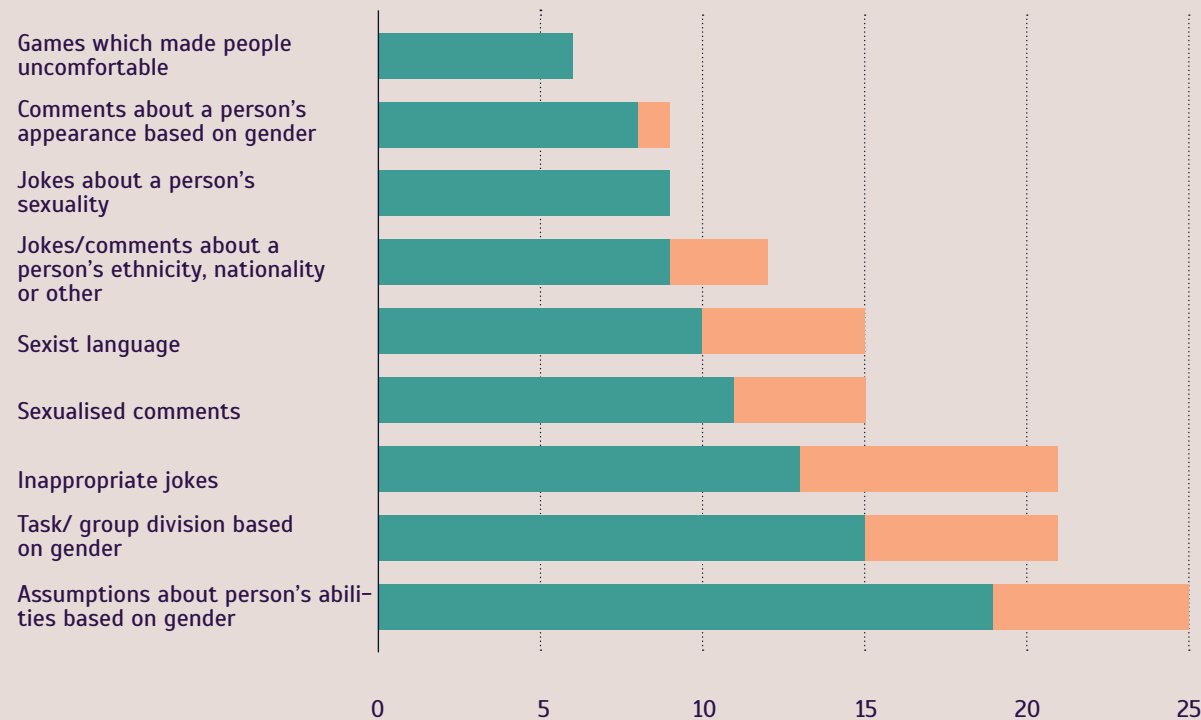
“Such a safe space does not just happen. It needs to be created and sustained.”
Free to Be You and Me toolkit, p. 13.



Behaviours which threaten the safe space, such as microaggressions, were common during workcamps. 45% of the respondents witnessed one or more of the following issues:

Behaviours witnessed/
experienced

■ reported by participants ■ reported by coordinators



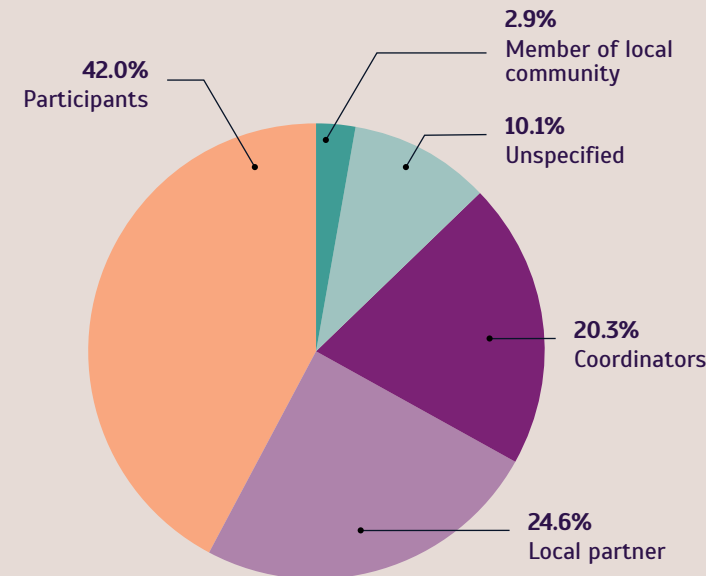
“Guests of the house where we stayed were staring at the girls as we were exiting the bathroom, they asked for our phone numbers and one even asked for sexual services to one of the participants. When rejected, they keep insisting.” – Participant

“I was told by the local coordinator in front of the whole group, that he isn't sure in what shower to put me in [male or female] because I am gay.” – Participant

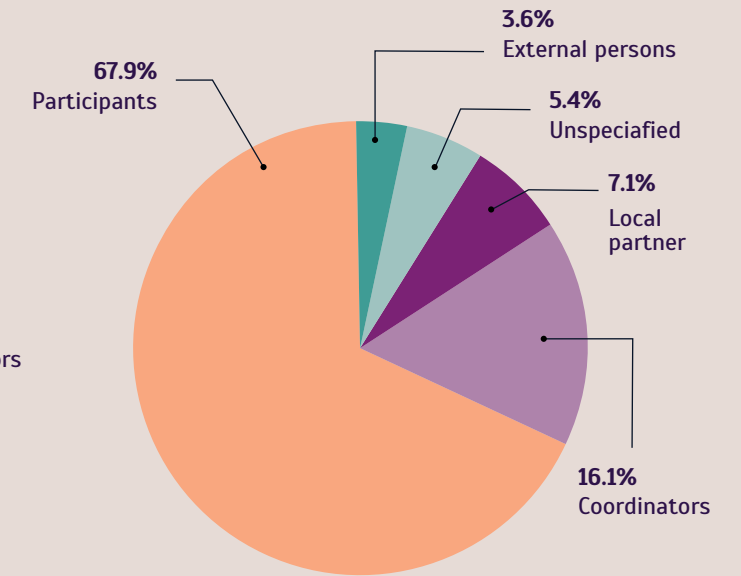
“[Local partner] said to [female coordinator] that a boy would be better to lead the workcamp.” – Participant



Who was responsible for these behaviours?



Who was the target of these behaviours?



40% of the respondents believed issues were correctly dealt with, 60% did not.



“When we organised a festival, there was a guest who touched girls inappropriately. When reported to local partner, we were told that ‘he is just a neighbour with problems, but he is not dangerous’. – Participant

“The coordinators did their best in helping and positioned themselves on our side, but most of the time they were oblivious to it.” – Participant

“Comments were made on the back and I realized it during the last days, so I decided not to react.” – Coordinator



Recommendations:

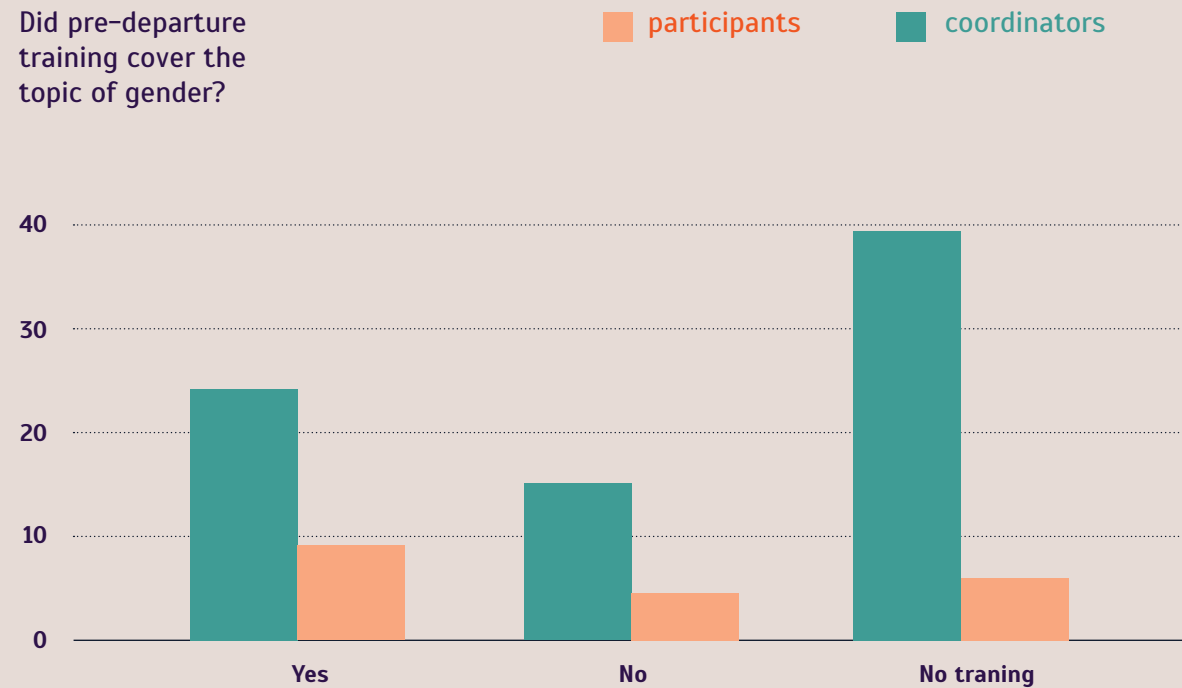
- The lack of a safe space during SCI activities negatively affects volunteers and activists' experiences with SCI. Creating a safe space is necessary for everybody to fully enjoy the time spent together, create human bonds based on respect and openness, and convey SCI's message that peace is achieved in everyday interactions among individuals with different identities and backgrounds.
- Camp coordinators as well as local partners should be properly informed on how to avoid these issues. This could be achieved by providing them with training covering the topic of gender. As we now have a record of real cases, these can be used as a tool for training.

PRE-DEPARTURE TRAINING



Workcamp participants and coordinators didn't always receive pre-departure training covering the topic of gender.

Did pre-departure training cover the topic of gender?



Among those who did receive it, some expressed appreciation about the quality of the training:

- it raised awareness on the topic of gender
- provided coordinators and participants with tools to deal with gender-related issues.



“It was useful in the sense that they pictured an example of a real problem that could happen in the camp” – Coordinator

“It made us aware of breaking down stereotypes” – Coordinator



Others expressed disappointment:

- not enough tools and knowledge to effectively deal with gender-related issues were provided.

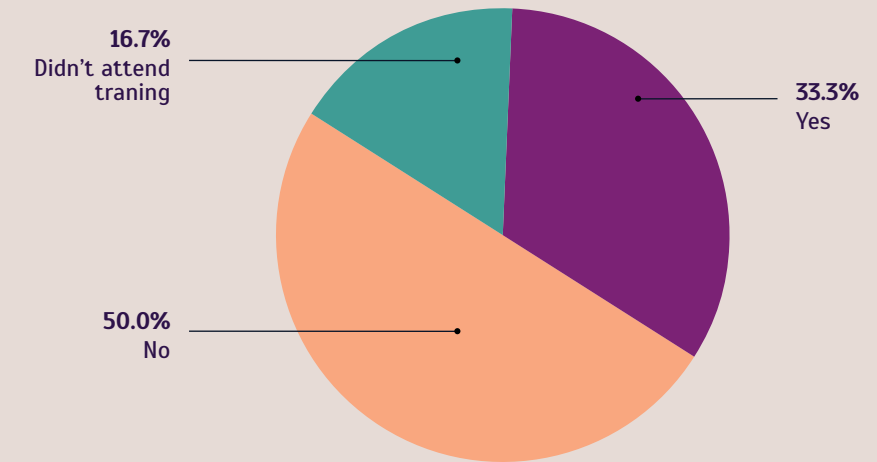


“[Training helped] to recognize the behaviors, yes, but it can be tricky to address.” – Coordinator

“It's good that [gender] was mentioned, but some actionable knowledge was missing.” – Coordinator



Did coordinators feel that their training made them confident to address microaggressions?



Recommendations:

- One key to prevention may be focused around coordinators, as they are the link between local partners and participants (the two main groups involved in microaggressions).
- Half of the coordinators did not feel prepared to deal with such situations. This is something which must be addressed by making sure that all coordinators receive pre-departure training covering gender. Specific tools (online courses, toolkits, etc.) should be created and made available for branches which don't have enough resources to organize and provide such training.
- Conversations need to take place with local partners about basic expectations for a safe space on workcamps.



Suggested links

How microaggressions are like mosquito bites

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDd3bzA7450> (1.58 min)

Everyday sexism

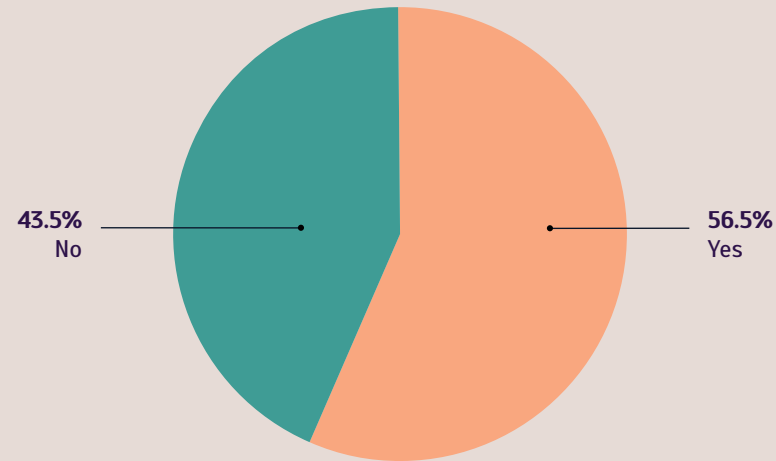
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhjsRjC6B8U&t=124s> (16.05 min)

APPLICATION PROCESS



More than half of the respondents said applications were limited by gender.

Were applications limited by gender?
E.g. x places for mates, x places for females.



Is limiting places by gender beneficial? Respondents' opinions differed:

For:

- It may be necessary in some cases to protect certain communities.
- 'Gender balance' can create more equality of mindsets.
- There should be a balance between male and female participants to ensure that women do not gravitate towards workcamps focused on care work and men towards workcamps focused on physical work.

Against:

- Participants should be chosen according to their skills and motivation, which do not depend on gender.
- Other factors besides gender influence group dynamics.
- Gender perspective (thus training on gender) is more important than gender balance – specifically coordinators should be conscious of gender issues.
- Binary gender division is limiting, discriminating and excludes those who do not identify as male or female.



Recommendations:

- The practice of limiting workcamp places by gender on OPS excludes many individuals. We should consider avoiding it.
- Group diversity is important, but is not necessarily achieved through '50% male, 50% female' quotas. Background, motivation and interest can be much better indicators.
- Branches and partners should change their workcamp posts on OPS not to limit applications by gender, unless there is a particular reason for doing so.

Sleeping Arrangements:

- 93% were happy with the sleeping arrangement, whether this was a single (54%) or mixed (39%) gender room, or other.
- Most (67%) did not have an option to choose between single or mixed rooms.
- In 37% of cases sleeping arrangements were NOT communicated properly in advance. A few respondents stressed that this should always be done.



Recommendations:

- Sleeping arrangements should always be made clear in advance, as for some people it can create uncomfortable situations. Information on the sleeping arrangements could be provided on the OPS page and/or the infosheet.



Suggested links

Like a girl

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs&t=27s> (3.18 min)

Understanding the complexities of gender

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRcPXtdKjE> (16.28 min)

Tea Consent

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8&t=19s> (2.50 min)

PRONOUNS



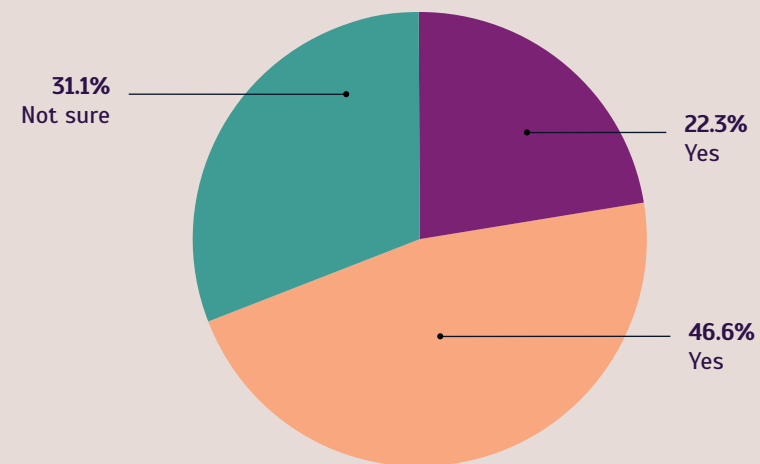
“Creating a safe space [...] has to place great importance in respecting people’s gender, and being careful not to assume another’s gender based on their physical appearance or societal understanding of what a man or a woman looks like [...] Asking for a person’s pronoun is a way to understand that a person that you may consider to be male-presenting may identify as a female, and vice versa [...] Gender [...] is a spectrum [...] normative language fails to give space to people who don’t conform to the gender binary [...] Many people [...] try to overcome the binarism of language by using ‘they/them’ as their chosen pronoun.” Free to be You and Me toolkit, p. 13.



The opportunity to choose one’s own pronoun was not always offered during the workcamps.

Did participants have the opportunity to choose their pronoun during the workcamp?

*Graph includes participants and coordinators



“It should be a must that the coordinators ask this at the beginning or create some safety space related to gender. Coordinators should be aware of this kind of issues.” – Participant
 “It’s grateful to be asked at the beginning. ‘What’s your name? What pronouns do you prefer?’” – Participant

“It is difficult to explain the importance to talk about this to the people that do not [know] about gender topics. Time was also limited [...]” – Coordinator

“This is a good thought to think about to ask in a next workcamp!” – Coordinator



Recommendations:

- One key to prevention may be focused around coordinators, as they are the link between local partners and participants (the two main groups involved in microaggressions).
- Half of the coordinators did not feel prepared to deal with such situations. This is something which must be addressed by making sure that all coordinators receive pre-departure training covering gender. Specific tools (online courses, toolkits, etc.) should be created and made available for branches which don’t have enough resources to organize and provide such training.
- Conversations need to take place with local partners about basic expectations for a safe space on workcamps.



Suggested links

Male and female are binary, but people aren’t

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2MEFj8q6rg&t=681s> (18.16 min)

Expressing myself my way

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITRdvGnpILU> (93.36 min)

Pink & Blue

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65iC2I4KEXo&t=98s> (3.08 min)

SPEAKING ABOUT PERSONAL ISSUES



One way to create a safe space during SCL activities is by clearly assigning (at least) one person from the support team who is available to speak about personal issues with the participants – including, for example, gender-related issues.

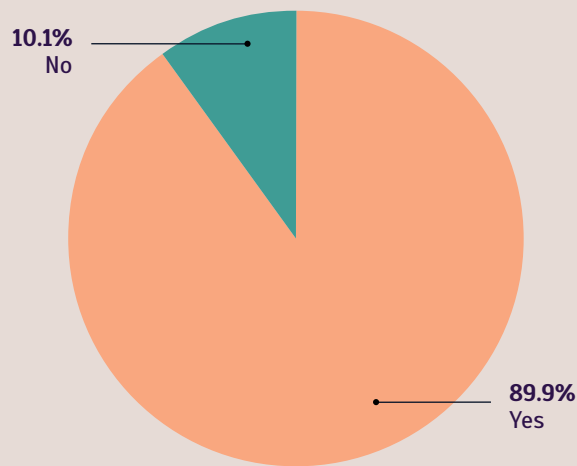
This role could be taken by the coordinator/s as well as members of the local partner organization, or by someone not directly involved in the activity (emergency contact number).

The person available to speak should be properly trained on how to cover this role, in order to convey a feeling of safety and trust to the participants who would like to open up to them.

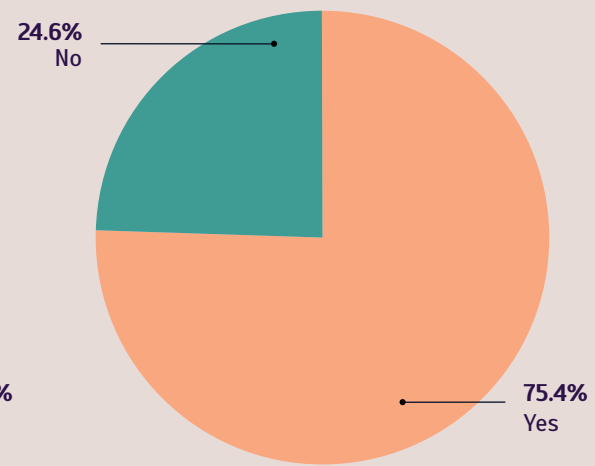


Settings during workcamps and other activities offered space to the participants to address issues. Indeed, most respondents reported that someone was available to speak to, and this person was trusted in a great majority of cases.

Was there someone available to speak to about personal issues?



Did you/ would you have felt comfortable speaking with this person about personal issues?



Despite such positive findings, there were still cases in which no-one was available to speak about personal issues or the person available did not seem trustworthy or prepared to talk about certain issues.



“If such a thing would have happened I would not have been very comfortable talking about it with the coordinator as he did not express our freedom to do so.” – Participant

“Not about gender. The only day I expressed my opinion about that [...] I felt people looked at me uncomfortable, and we didn’t talk about it.” – Participant



Recommendations:

- Coordinators should make sure to express their openness to talking about all kinds of personal issues in order to create a safe space for everyone.
- The designated contact person should be properly trained.
- Alternatively, two “Safe Contacts” can be appointed at the beginning of the workcamp or activity that feel comfortable in this role and are available for everyone to speak about issues.



Suggested links

Homophobia in 2018 – Time For Love

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anD9ZrMJT8k&t=104s> (4.27)

10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman

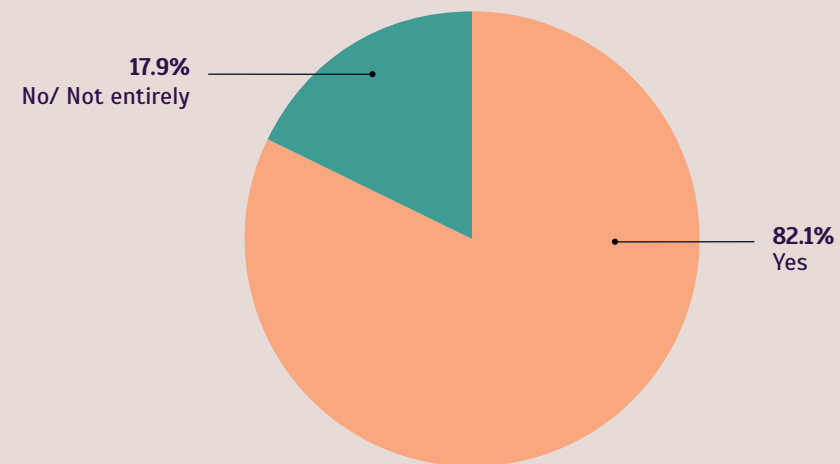
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1XGPvbWn0A> (1.56)

EVALUATION



The majority of the respondents considered the evaluation form as a safe space to speak about personal issues.

Was the evaluation form a safe space to express any issues you faced or could have faced?



However, some respondents complained about the fact that the form was not anonymous, was conditioned by the coordinator, or did not include questions about gender/sexuality.



The survey wasn't anonym[ous].” – Participant

“Even if it's anonymous, you write it there, you give it to the coordinator, (s)he can read it and have a reaction.” – Participant

“Not about gender/sexuality issues.” – Participant



Many coordinators expressed that they were not sure if/ how evaluations were reviewed, and some felt that the feedback was not acted on as much as it should be.



Recommendations:

- There must be another way for participants to report issues, without it being conditioned by coordinators.
- An anonymous reporting system, perhaps a centralised one for SCI, is needed for reporting serious issues that occur on workcamps.
- For many it is not clear whether feedback is taken into account or worked upon. It is essential that information from evaluations is taken seriously and discussed with relevant stakeholders (local partners, coordinators, etc.) and necessary measures are taken to ensure issues do not happen again.



Possible Implementations:

- Since not all participants and coordinators feel that their feedback is taken into consideration, one way could be to openly share the evaluation and conclusions taken out of it by the organization.
- To provide a safe space for participants to report issues and conflicts that occurred during the workcamp or activity, a possibility would be that organizations provide a safe platform for everyone to anonymously share those experiences (either on a regional or global level).



Suggested links

Comedy Short: Leading Lady Parts – BBC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fpDHNbjGivo> (10.01 min)

I've lived as a man & a woman – here's what I learned

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrYx7HaUIMY> (15.24 min)



Gendered Realities is a project organized by Service Civil International as an Annual Work Plan 2019 funded by the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe. Our aim is to better understand the different gendered realities existing in SCI activities, to address the topic in SCI and, based on the Assessment Tool, to draw conclusions to create safer spaces for everyone involved. For more information on the project, go to <https://sci.ngo/what-we-do/projects/gendered-realities>.

The *Free to Be You and Me* toolkit can be found at <https://sci.ngo/sci.ngo/981>.

The survey on SCI's gendered realities is still open! If you want to share your views and experience, go to tiny.cc/15kx7y.



SCI International operates with the support of the Europe for Citizens programme of the European Union.

Co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union



Published by the Association of Service Civil International ivzw, Belgielei 37, 2018 Antwerp, Belgium in 2019.

