

REPORT

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**Women's experiences
in the Synodal process**



World Union of
Catholic Women's
Organisations

WORLD
WOMEN'S
OBSERVATORY

Women's Experiences in the Synodal Process

Introduction

The **Synod 2021–2024** called the Church to embrace **communion, participation, and mission**, emphasizing the need for renewal and stronger relationships. Women's participation remains **crucial**, yet as the Synod's **Final Document** acknowledges, women "continue to encounter obstacles in obtaining a fuller recognition of their charisms, vocation, and place in all the various areas of the Church's life," despite their essential contributions to faith communities, social outreach, and leadership roles (n. 60). The document further urges the **full implementation** of opportunities already provided in **Canon Law**, recognizing that "what comes from the Holy Spirit cannot be stopped." As the Church moves into the **implementation phase** we seek to **amplify women's voices**.

The World Women's Observatory (WWO) of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO), guided by its mission of "listening to transform lives," carried out a survey that created space for women to share how they experienced the Synodal process: whether their voices were heard, what obstacles they faced, and what hopes they carry for the future. The survey also asked whether concrete steps have followed since the Synod, and how women see their role in the Church's ongoing path of renewal.

The survey gathered responses from women who took part in the Synod at different levels – from the parish and diocesan stages to national, continental, and Roman Assemblies. Their voices reflect a diversity of contexts and experiences, but they are united by a desire to contribute fully to the life and mission of the Church. The objective was to evaluate how women experienced the Synodal process at its different levels, how their voices were received, and what challenges remain. The survey also sought to identify what concrete actions have followed the Synod, and to capture women's hopes and recommendations for the future.

A central focus of this report is to compare women's experiences across these different levels of the Synodal process. By looking at how participation, recognition, obstacles, and follow-up initiatives were perceived at parish, diocesan, national, continental, and Roman levels. The report highlights both shared concerns and significant differences. This comparative approach is essential for understanding where progress is most visible, and where more work is needed to ensure that women's voices are heard and acted upon throughout the Church.

This report presents the main findings of the survey, organised around women's experiences of participation, the barriers they encountered, the degree to which their contributions were valued, the actions undertaken since the Synod, and the challenges and recommendations they identify for the future.

Methodology

To understand women's experiences of the Synodal process and the actions that followed, the World Women's Observatory invited women from around the world to share their reflections through an online survey conducted between March and May 2025. Available in English, Spanish, French, and Italian, the survey offered a voluntary (and anonymous) space for women to speak freely about the opportunities, barriers, and hopes they encountered in the Church. The survey was therefore conducted before the release of the Pathways document, although its publication had already been announced at the time.

The survey reached women across all continents. While responses were strongest in Europe and North America, contributions from Africa, Asia, Oceania, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East brought important perspectives that enriched the overall understanding of women's experiences, even when the numbers were too small for broad generalization.

The survey was organized into four sections. The first focused on demographics and participants' involvement in the Synodal process, including their roles and context. The second explored their experiences during the Synod, such as whether their opinions were heard and the obstacles they faced. The third looked at post-Synod developments, including the extent to which outcomes reflected women's hopes and any concrete actions undertaken. The first three sections consisted of multiple-choice questions. The final section invited participants to look ahead by identifying challenges, proposing initiatives, and suggesting changes to strengthen women's participation and leadership. This section primarily used open-ended questions. The full list of survey questions can be found in Addendum 1.

The mix of both multiple-choice and open-ended questions, gave women the chance not only to highlight trends and patterns but also to tell their own stories, share their reflections, and offer suggestions for the future. Multiple-choice questions were examined with quantitative data analysis to identify trends and patterns across different regions and roles, while open-ended responses were read carefully to uncover recurring themes by qualitative analysis. By looking at the numbers alongside these personal insights, the survey captures both the breadth of participation and the richness of lived experience, keeping women's voices at the heart of the Church's ongoing journey.

It is important to note that a significant number of respondents from the United States were affiliated with an organization actively promoting the reconsideration of the female diaconate. While some of these women expressed feelings of limited inclusion within the Synodal process, their responses provide valuable insight into how groups engaged with specific questions of women's ministry experience participation. Their contributions enrich the analysis by highlighting both the potential and the tensions present when particular pastoral concerns intersect with broader Synodal discussions.

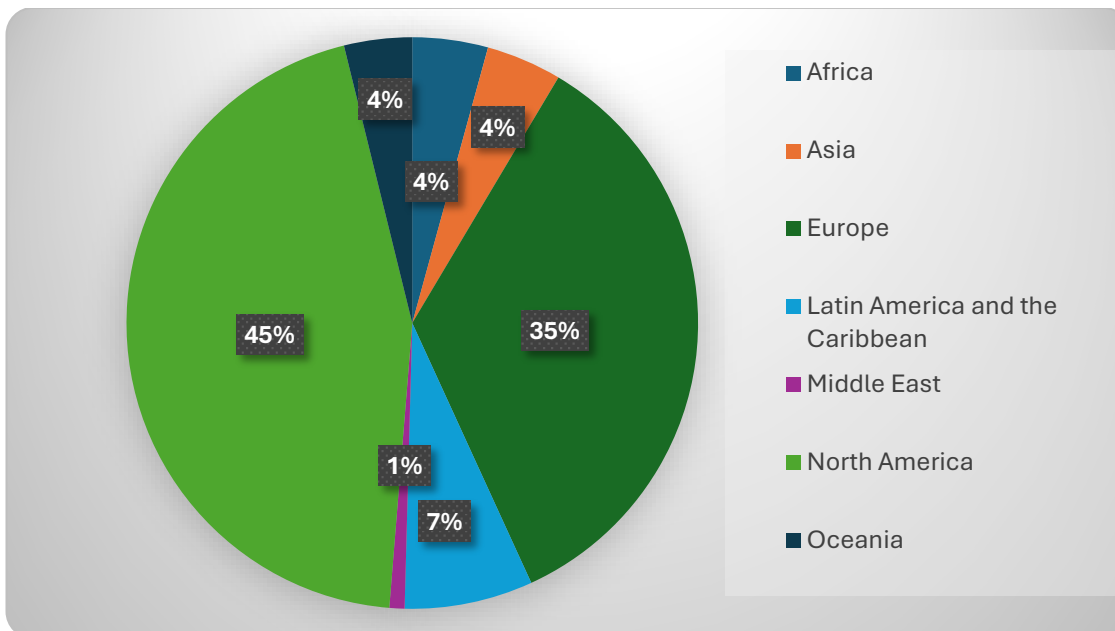
Results

1. Participant Profiles: Demographics and Involvement in the Synodal Process

This study gathered the participation of 234 women involved in the synodal process. It is important to note that reported percentages and observed trends that follow in the rest of our analysis may be influenced by the overrepresentation of certain regions or Synod stages, and may not fully reflect the experiences of participants from less-represented areas or levels.

Demographics

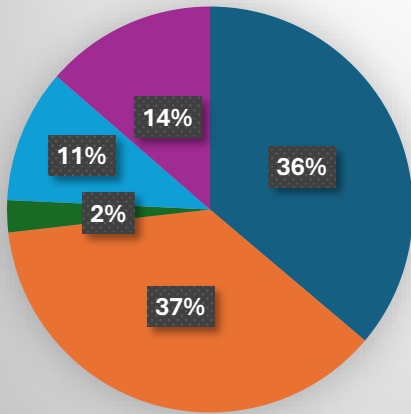
Although women from all continents responded, the majority of participants were from Europe and North America. In the other continents, around half of the respondents took part in the Roman Assemblies, so it is not possible to make estimates for the lower levels in these geographical areas.



Levels of involvement

Respondents reported involvement at different stages of the Synod: parish, diocesan, continental, and the two Roman assemblies. The majority participated at diocesan or parish level, which is as expected since of course in these stages more people were involved. Fewer respondents were present at national, continental and Roman levels. Although we had 32 participants who were part of the Roman Assemblies (all continents are represented in this group) which is more than half of the women that were present at the stage so we can make some generalisations based on this number. Only on a national level the number of respondents was too low to draw meaningful conclusions.

Are you a member or have you been a delegate for the synodal process at diocesan, national or continental levels?

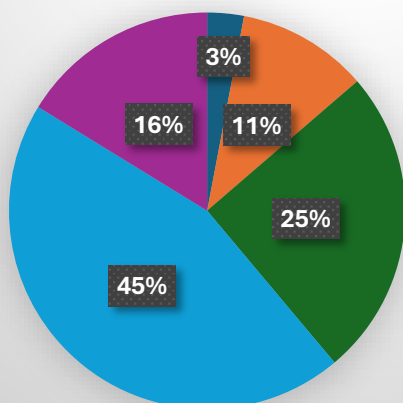


- I am/was a member of a synodal team at parish level
- I am/was a member of a synodal team at diocesan level
- I am/was a member of the synodal team at the national level
- I was a member of the Continental stage
- I was a member of the 2 Roman Assemblies

2. Experiences During the Synod

Women were asked whether their opinions were heard and whether they were actively involved in decision-making. Most reported that they were “usually” or “always” listened to (61%), although experiences differed across various contexts.

Has your opinion been heard during the work of the synodal process?



- 1. No
- 2. Rarely
- 3. Several times
- 4. Usually yes
- 5. Always

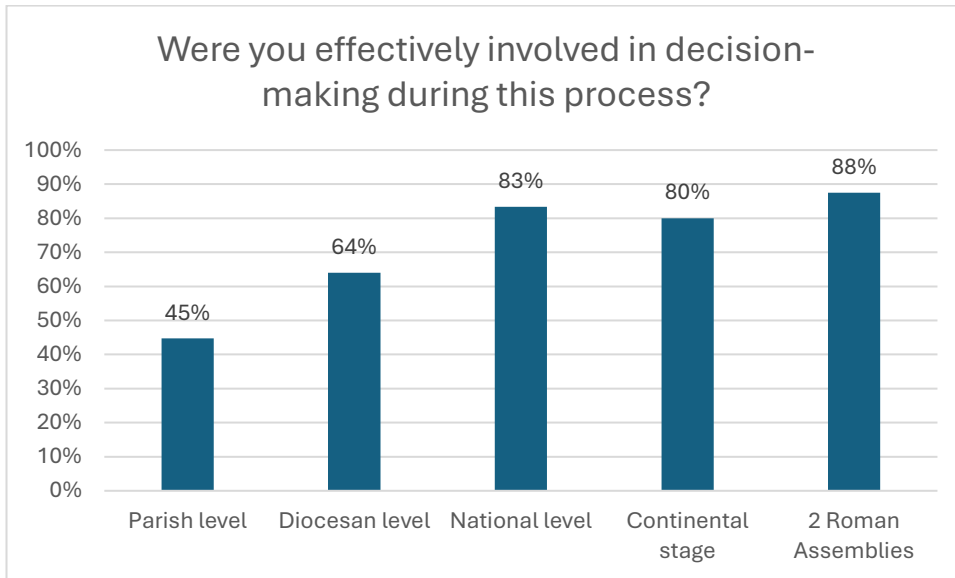
It is noteworthy that the higher the level at which women were included, the more likely they felt their opinions were heard. When combining “always” and “usually” responses, the percentages were as

follows: parish level (50.6%), diocesan level (62.8%), national level (66.7%), continental level (68%), and Roman Assemblies (75.1%). When we compare the general results for the continents, we can conclude that women felt most listened to in Latin America (70.6%) and less heard in North America (59%).

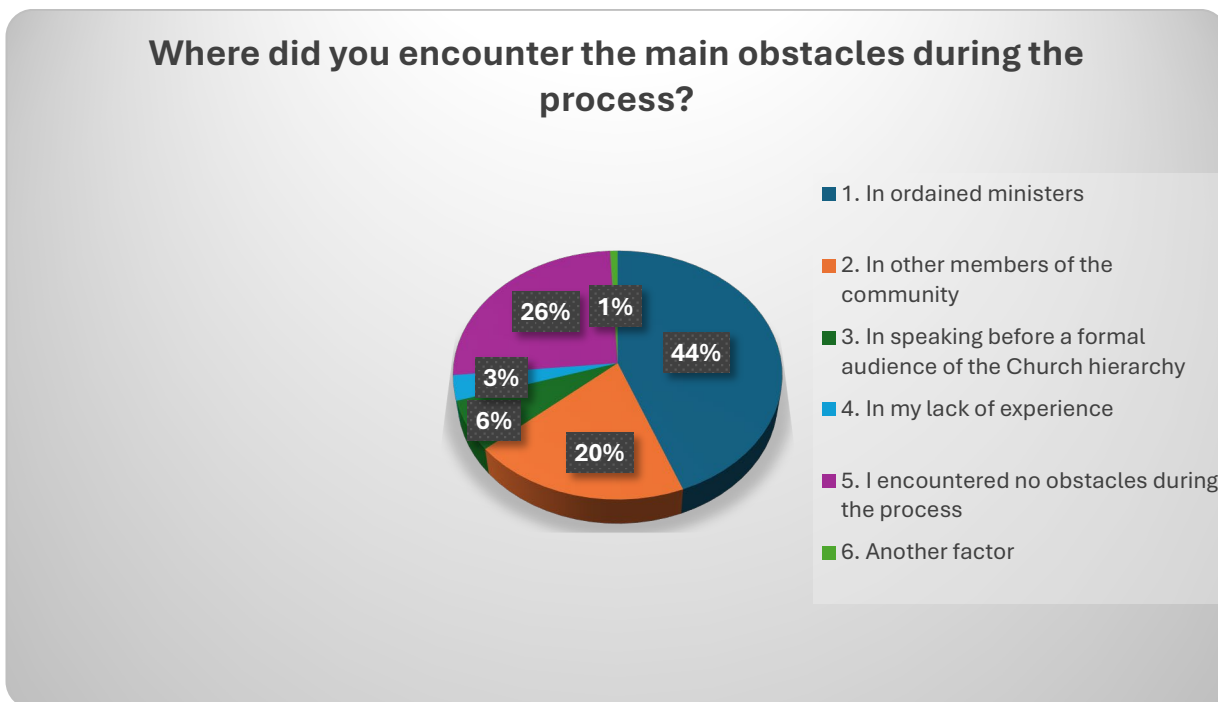
Regarding inclusion in decision-making throughout the process, we found a similar percentage (62%) to the previous one (61%), suggesting that for these women feeling heard was closely linked to being involved in decision-making.



Interestingly, the higher the level at which women were included, the greater they felt involved in decision-making, ranging from only 45% at parish level to a stunning 88% in the Roman Assemblies. On the continental level people felt most involved in Africa, 90% (note that the majority of these women were part of the Roman Assembly) and the less in North America (only 52.4%). It is worth noting that the results from North America tend to lower the overall averages, which may affect the interpretation of trends across regions. Even in Europe scores are significantly higher (63%).



Participants also identified the key obstacles they encountered during the Synod. The main obstacle reported was related to ordained ministers (44%). Many of the women reported no obstacles (26%).



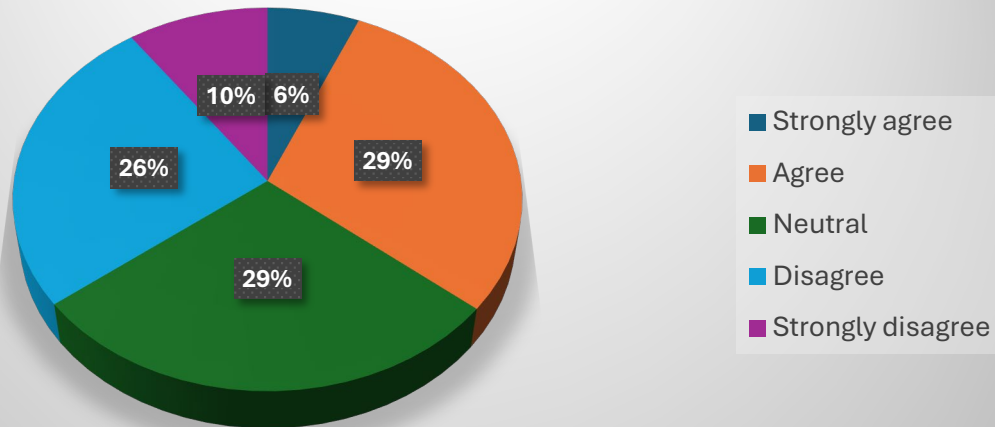
The general pattern—ordained ministers ranked first and “no obstacles” ranked second—was consistent across different continents and levels.

3. Post-Synod Developments

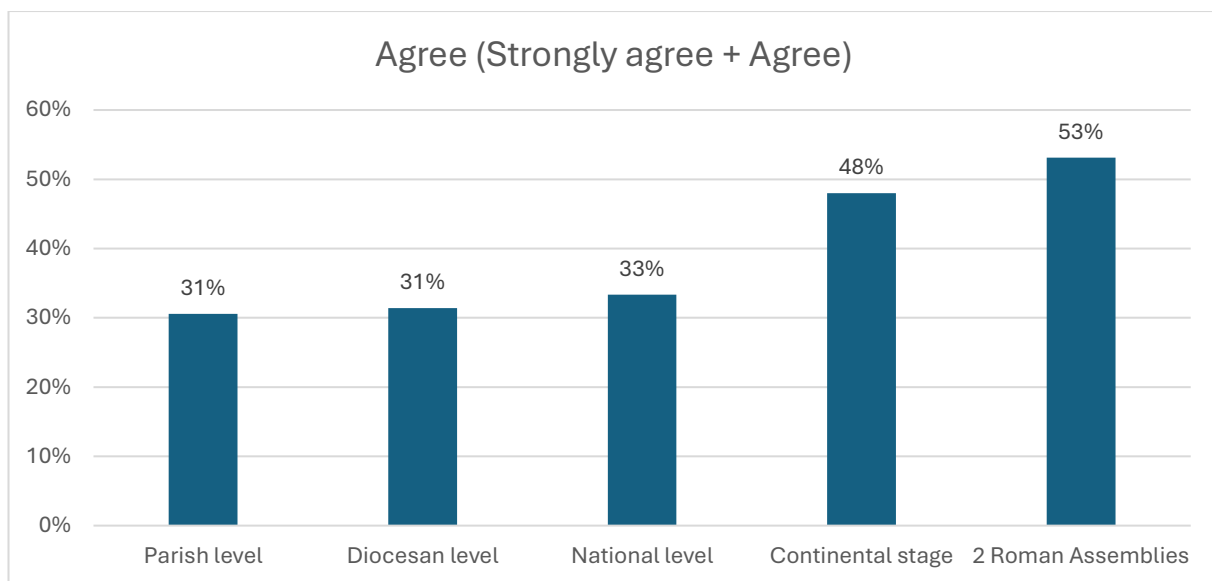
The first question in this section is whether the participants felt that the outcomes of the Synod reflected women’s hopes and aspirations. Answers were mixed, with a nearly equal division between agree, disagree and neutral, signalling both progression and frustration. On the positive side of the spectrum

(strongly agree and agree) we see 35% of respondents, and 36% on the negative side (strongly disagree and disagree).

Do you feel the outcomes of the Synod reflect the hopes and aspirations women expressed during the process?



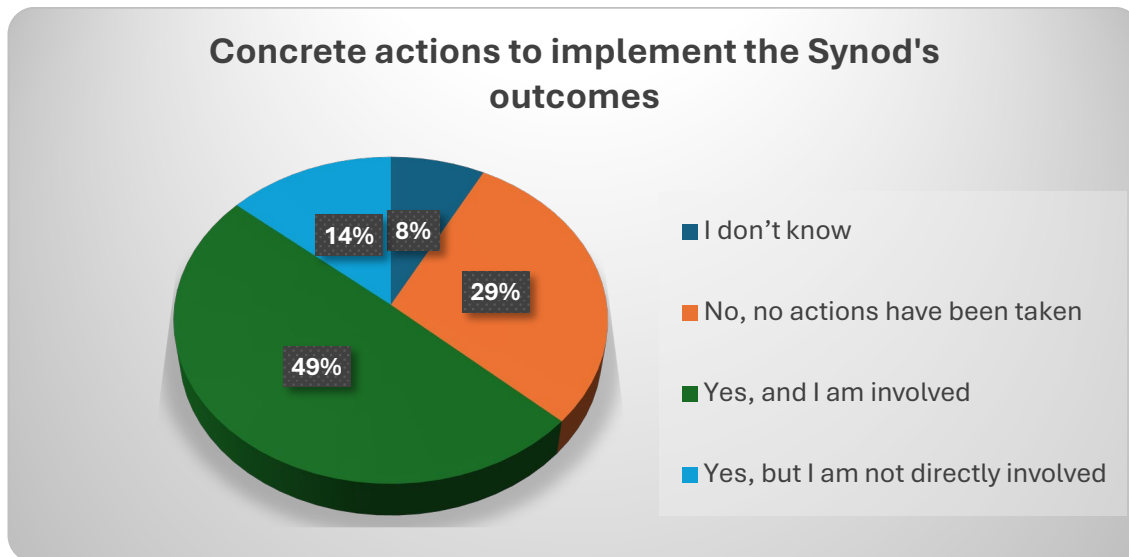
Examining the numbers across different synodal levels reveals significant differences. At the Roman Assemblies, a majority of women (53%) responded positively. This positivity decreases at each successive level, with only 31% of women at the parish level feeling that their hopes were reflected in the outcome of the synodal process.



As we compare the continents, we can see that in Africa and Asia there is a strong majority that agree and strongly agree (60%, with most of the participants being part of the Roman Assembly) which is in contrast with the results of North America where only 26% falls on the positive side of the spectrum.

Again, these results have a negative impact on the general numbers, because there is a significant difference with the European number (35%).

The second question in this section asked whether their local communities had undertaken concrete actions. Overall, most women (63%) reported positive initiatives, while 29% noted that no follow-up had taken place.



When comparing results across levels, the highest positive responses were reported at the continental level (88%), followed by members of the Roman Assemblies (75%), while the parish level recorded a smallest share of favourable answers (54%). Involvement in post-synodal actions was also highest at the continental and Roman Assembly levels (both around 70%) and lowest at the parish level (35%).

Again, we observe significant differences between the continents. North America reported the lowest positive responses (53% answered “yes”), compared with 90% in Africa—where the majority of women surveyed were present in the Roman Assemblies—and 65% in Europe, highlighting that North America scored significantly lower than Europe. Across all continents, the majority of women were involved in post-synodal actions, with the exception of North America (38%).

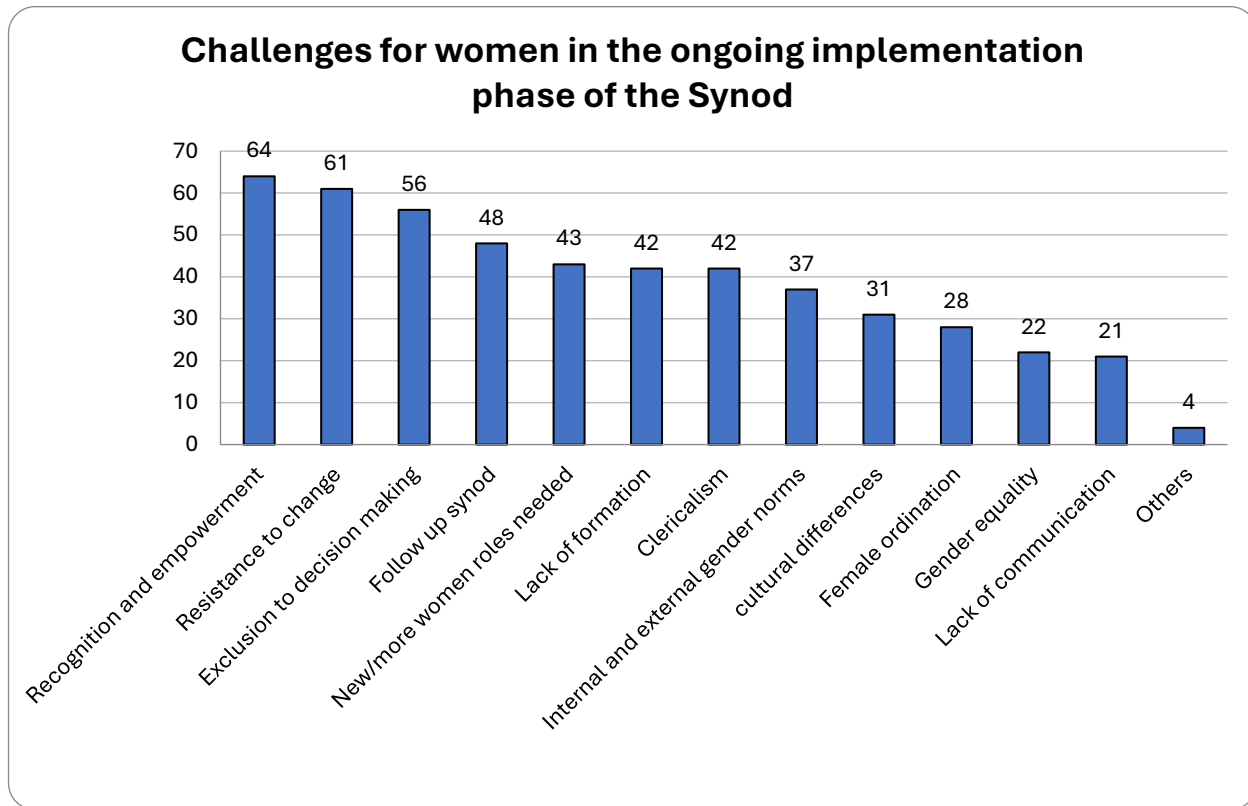
This uneven implementation underscores the gap between consultation and tangible change. The difficulty of translating being heard into action remains inconsistent across dioceses and organisations, with the greatest challenges at the parish level and in the North American region.

4. Looking ahead

4.1 Challenges

The first question in this section asked women to identify up to three challenges they foresee in the ongoing implementation phase. A qualitative analysis was conducted, and twelve categories were identified. We found the highest scores in the categories Recognition and empowerment (14 %),

resistance to change (12%) and exclusion to decision making (11%). In the graphics you can see how many people mentioned the category. In total we had 499 challenges named.



For greater clarity in interpreting this figure, the following section provides a brief overview of the identified categories and their corresponding content.

Recognition and empowerment: Women are feeling a lack of support, lack of voice and lack of recognition. For example, one woman answered this: *“The voice of women is often dismissed or listened to in a token manner, which is what happened particularly during the diocesan consultation and regional phases. So intentional steps needed to ensure this doesn't persist. There's fear around challenging (male) authority that wields power so “laws” that empower women (religious) are needed.”* Someone else stated: *“Women need to be more encouraged to raise their voice in the assembly.”*

Resistance to change: Conservatism and structural barriers are commonly encountered by women in general, and within the synod in particular. At times, women feel that message is: “it has always been like this, so no need to change.” There is a fear of trying out new things, a fear of failure.

Exclusion to decision making: While many women are deeply involved in the devotional, caring, and practical life of the Church, they are often excluded from governance and decision-making. Even when present in parish councils, women frequently feel that their voices are not taken seriously. Ensuring meaningful representation in decision-making structures remains a significant challenge.

Follow up synod: Participants often felt heard during the initial consultation round of the synod, but many observed a lack of feedback, transparency, and concrete outcomes afterward. Not all dioceses followed up on the final document, leading to discouragement and the perception of a lack of interest at higher levels. This has weakened motivation at the grassroots.

New/more women roles needed: There is a strong call for new roles for women in governance, liturgical life, and formation. Suggestions include allowing women to preach the homily on Sundays, ensuring that women proclaim at least one reading, introducing quotas for women in leadership positions, and involving women in the formation of priests.

Lack of formation: This category reflects the need for greater opportunities for women's theological and pastoral formation, including scholarships to support their studies. There was also a strong call for the formation of clergy and parishioners in synodality.

Clericalism: As described by Pope Francis at the beginning of the synod, clericalism is *"an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation, that interprets the ministry received as a power to be exercised rather than as a free and generous service to be given."* Participants identified clericalism as a key obstacle to women's inclusion, noting that it fosters inequality and limits participation.

Internal and external gender norms: sometimes women have the feeling that they should not be part of the decision making, sometimes clericalism is also internalised by women. Externally, there are still fewer women recognised as leaders, including in society at large.

Cultural differences: Women's experiences and opportunities in the Church vary greatly depending on the diocese, country, and cultural context. Some dioceses show more openness and inclusivity, while others remain very traditional, making it difficult to create a unified approach. In some places, women feel freer to participate and raise their voices, whereas in other cultural contexts, the role of women in both Church and society remains more restricted. This cultural diversity is both a richness and a challenge for moving forward together.

Female ordination: A large majority of responses express a desire for the diaconate to be opened to women, seeing this as a first concrete step toward greater participation. Some also mention women's ordination to the priesthood, while others suggest the creation of new ministries that could be opened to women through a form of ordination. For many, this is not merely a question of functionality, but a recognition of women's vocation and gifts.

Gender equality: A recurring theme is the call for equal opportunities for men and women in different roles within the Church. This includes practices such as proclaiming the readings, serving at the altar, or taking on responsibilities in parish life. Some also mentioned that while women need more opportunities, there is also a need for greater involvement of lay men at the parish level. At its heart, this category expresses the desire for fairness and inclusion, where roles and responsibilities are not determined by gender but by gifts and willingness to serve.

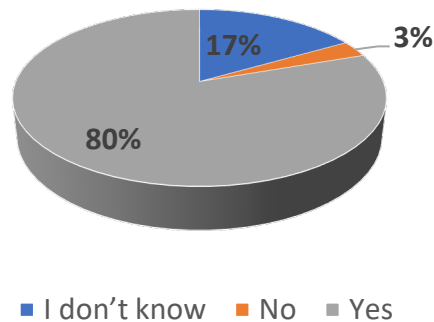
Lack of communication: Many participants noted that information about the synod, especially at the diocesan level, was not widely available or clear. This left many feeling excluded or unsure about how they could contribute. More transparent, consistent, and accessible communication is needed to ensure that people can participate meaningfully.

If we compare the different levels of participants, we see that at the parish level, the most frequently mentioned challenges are follow-up to the synod, recognition and empowerment, and resistance to change. At the level of the Roman Assemblies, recognition and empowerment emerge as the main challenge, followed by exclusion from decision-making and the need for new or more roles for women.

4.2 Initiatives to strengthen women's role and actions taken

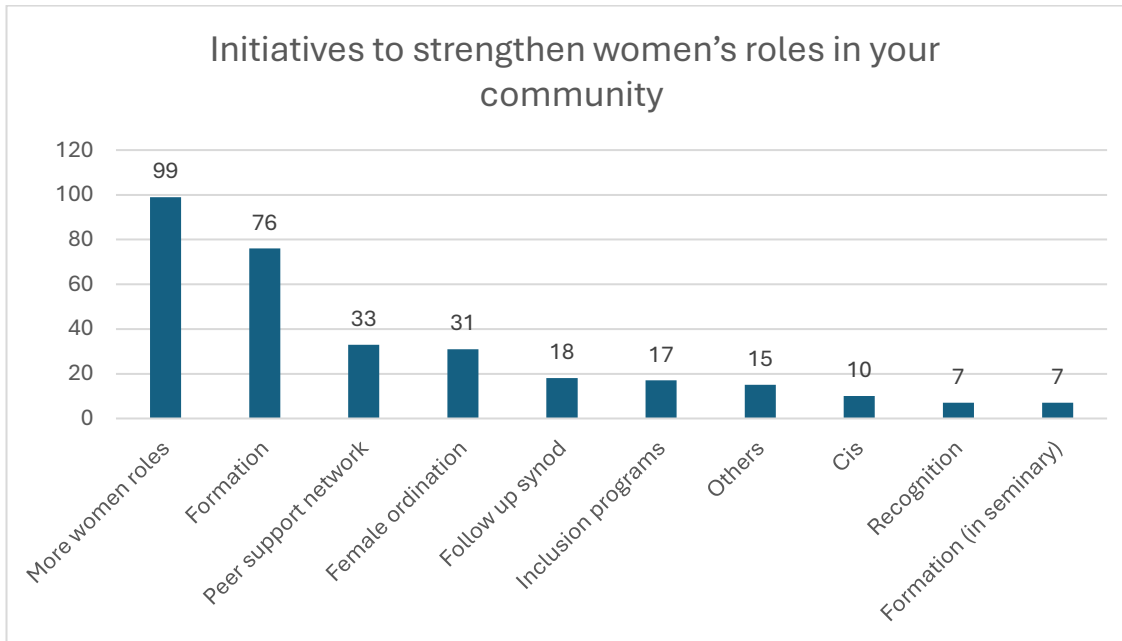
The 80% of respondents were happy to encourage or help out with initiatives that would strengthen women's role in their own community or in the Church in general. Only 3% of women said they were not willing to do so.

Would you like to take or encourage initiatives to strengthen women's roles in your community or Church?



The results were very similar when compared over the different levels of the synodal process with 79% at parish level to 81% at the Roman Assembly level.

In the second part of this question participants had the opportunity to name 3 different actions that would help to strengthen women's roles. It is important to note that only women who responded "yes" proceeded to answer the second part of this question concerning the actions taken. In total, there were more than 300 actions proposed. Again, we tried to group them into categories. The first two categories stand out: new roles for women and formation.



More women roles: Many participants expressed a desire for concrete structures that guarantee women's voices and presence. These included organisational structures, such as participation in parish councils (PCC), finance committees, or the creation of parish or diocesan women's councils, ensuring that women are consistently represented at decision-making levels. New ideas were also proposed, *such as "the setting up of curial offices (local and universal) for the presence and voice of women in all aspects of the life and mission of the Church"*. Participants highlighted the importance of not only being part of these structures, but also taking on more **leadership roles** in dioceses and parishes, including more paid positions. Others called for **expanded liturgical roles** (lector, acolyte, preaching) and **new ministerial responsibilities**, such as preparing marriages and baptisms.

Formation: A recurring theme was the need for more formation opportunities for women, ranging from theology and canon law to leadership and practical pastoral skills. Suggestions included scholarships for women, as well as training in public speaking, conflict resolution, and community organizing. Mentorship programs in parish were often mentioned. As one respondent wrote: *"Scholarship programmes especially for women to study theology and other leadership programmes."* Formation was seen as key to empowering women to take on leadership roles and to strengthen their theological grounding.

Peer support network: Participants suggested creating spaces where women can support and encourage one another. These could take the form of empowerment circles or parish-based or international women's groups. Not only in our Church but also ecumenical. One respondent emphasized: *"Every parish should have a women's group, to foster community among the women of the parish."* Such initiatives aim to provide solidarity, share experiences, and collaborate on new projects.

Female ordination: often a call to opening diaconate to women.

Follow-up to the synod: Some respondents stressed the importance of follow-up, monitoring, and accountability in the synodal process. Proposals included reviewing diocesan and parish committees in light of synodality. — for example: *“the committees should be reviewed with regard to synodality (members, agendas, consultation processes).”*

Inclusion programs: There were also calls for broader initiatives to ensure inclusion, such as community outreach projects, and awareness campaigns. One example described: *“Community Outreach Projects: Initiate outreach programs that address pressing social issues affecting women and girls in the community, such as education, health care, and economic empowerment.”* These programs link women's empowerment and advocacy in the Church and society.

Others: Some initiatives fell outside the main categories but highlighted creative ways of supporting women. These included making childcare available at parish meetings, organising more spiritual and community-building events, increasing the involvement of lay men, promoting gender equality at the parish level, and conducting further research.

CIS (Conversation in the Spirit): Several participants highlighted the importance of learning and practicing synodal methods, such as Conversation in the Spirit. One suggested: *“Education on the basic/fundamental meaning of being a synodal Church — the equal dignity in baptism and Conversation in the Spirit. This must sink deep and the method used at all levels.”*

Recognition: Beyond structural changes, participants emphasized the need for greater recognition of women's dignity, baptismal equality, and contributions. This involves not only formal inclusion but also cultural change: seeing women as essential partners in the mission of the Church, rather than secondary or optional voices.

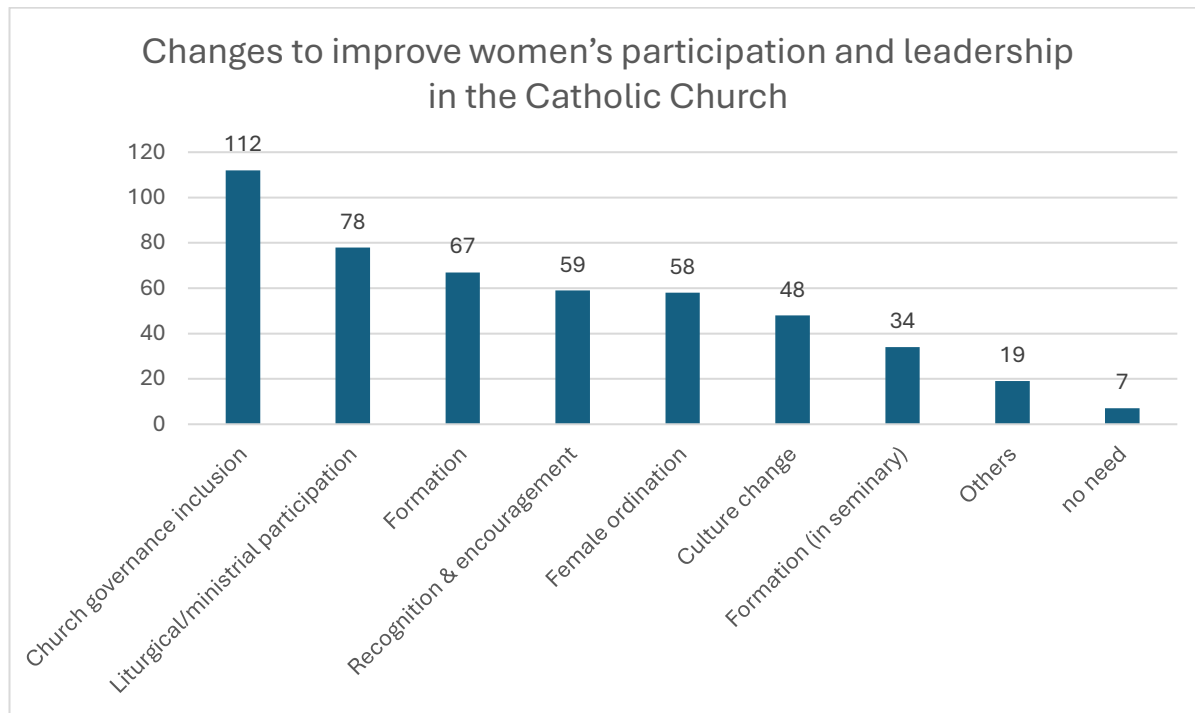
Formation in seminary: A distinct but important initiative concerned the education of seminarians. Respondents emphasised the importance of providing formation in synodality to challenge clericalist attitudes, rethink the role of women in the Church, increase the number of female lecturers, and incorporate relational formation alongside theological and philosophical content. As one participant put it: *“Seminary formation on synodality focused on helping seminarians to rethink ‘woman’ in the Church.”* This was seen as crucial for ensuring lasting cultural change.

The top two priorities remained the same across all levels, with only the order differing. At the parish and diocesan levels, the focus was primarily on creating more roles for women, whereas women at the continental level and in the Roman Assemblies were more focused on formation.

4.3 Proposed changes to improve women's participation and leadership in the Catholic Church

In this question respondents had the opportunity to name three changes that would improve participation and leadership for women. In total we had 482 responses. Again, we analysed different categories. The

three main categories were church governance inclusion, liturgical/ ministerial participation and formation.



Church governance inclusion: Strengthening women's participation in decision-making bodies at all levels of the Church, from parish councils to dioceses and Vatican departments, so that their voices influence policies and governance. For example, opening to women those existing roles that do not require ordination, such as certain vicar positions. Another subcategory focused on co-responsibility in decision-making with members of the clergy. For example, one woman stated: *“Establish many more opportunities for women in decision-making positions within Church governance — such as diocesan curial offices, episcopal conference commissions, theological colleges and seminaries, and Vatican departments.”* Another participant proposed new governance structures like: *“Establishment of a mediation body composed of lay men and women, religious and non-religious, and clerics: so that in the event of a conflict (with the parish priest in particular), recourse is possible.”*

Liturgical & ministerial participation: Many participants asked for women to take a greater role in liturgical life and pastoral ministry. This included proclaiming the Gospel, preaching, leading retreats and taking on pastoral leadership in parishes. Such participation was often described as a way to normalize women's visibility and leadership in the Church. For example, one woman wrote: *“Normalizing women playing key roles including reading the gospels where necessary, preaching, directing retreats.”* Or propositions to create new ministries like this one: *“Create a new judicial ministry in ecclesiastical*

tribunals entrusted to women, deploy or reform ecclesiastical lawyer ministries in service of dialogue. Women in official (paid) positions, women in judicial bodies."

Formation: Providing theological education, leadership training, and mentoring opportunities for women to prepare them for roles in Church leadership and pastoral care. Subcategories focused on leadership development, mentorship programmes, and discernment. An example was: *"Develop theological education and leadership training for women and include many extra scholarships for them to be able to access these programmes and courses."*

Recognition & encouragement: Several responses highlighted that women's leadership is already present in the Church, but often overlooked or undervalued. Participants asked for greater recognition and encouragement of these contributions, both publicly and structurally. This recognition would also inspire younger women to step into leadership. One woman emphasized: *"Recognition and Support of Women Leaders: Actively recognize and elevate the contributions of women in various ministries, promoting their roles as leaders within the Church. This could involve public acknowledgment of women's work, storytelling initiatives that highlight female figures in church history, and creating platforms for women to share their experiences and insights in church settings."*

Female ordination: A number of respondents explicitly named the need for ordination of women, often pointing first to the diaconate, but also mentioning the priesthood. Others emphasised that, even without immediate ordination, women should be invited to serve in liturgical and sacramental leadership roles appropriate for lay ministers. As one contribution stated: *"Accept that women are being called by God and by their communities to become ordained ministers in the Catholic Church, and, in the meantime, encourage greater involvement of women in liturgical ministries, especially preaching at Mass and taking on pastoral leadership roles in parishes."*

Culture change: Underlying many proposals was the recognition that cultural transformation within the Church is essential. Respondents spoke of the need to overcome clericalism, rethink ecclesiology, and build a culture that values the equal dignity of all the baptized. One woman explained: *"Reform the ecclesiology and clericalism in the Catholic Church—whether of clerics or laypeople."* Others stressed that such change requires both theological reflection and concrete practices that dismantle exclusion. There were also calls for more youth engagement in the Church, also the need for a more synodal Church in its structures (more discernment in common by conversations in the Spirit, more follow up...). So that synodality can become a living practice instead of a onetime event.

Formation in seminaries: Another significant proposal was the inclusion of women as teachers and formators in seminaries. This was seen as crucial to shaping the next generation of priests to appreciate women's perspectives and gifts. A clear example came from one respondent: *"Women as an essential part of the formation of seminarians, serving as prime formators and teachers. This requires a general rule that will make it a requirement for all seminaries to have women."* Also to adapt the content of the formation as said in earlier questions.

Others: Finally, participants suggested a wide range of additional changes that did not fit neatly into the main categories. These included community building, pastoral outreach, more paid positions for women, research initiatives, and mechanisms for abuse prevention.

No need: by including this category we also wanted to give voice to the women who said they felt there was no need for more initiatives for women participation and leadership.

When we examine the different levels of participation in the synod, some differences emerge between the main categories. At the parish level, the most represented category was liturgical and ministerial participation, whereas at all other levels, church governance inclusion had the highest rates. At the continental and Roman assembly levels, formation and recognition & empowerment ranked among the top three priorities. At diocesan level, the top three included formation and liturgical/ministerial participation, while at parish level, they comprised church governance inclusion and female ordination.

This survey provides insights into the participation, experiences, and aspirations of women in the Synodal process, highlighting both significant progress and enduring challenges. Of course, we can only talk about the women that participated in our survey, based on their reactions we try to make some more general conclusions. Overall, the findings suggest that women increasingly feel heard at higher levels of the Synod, yet a clear gap remains between consultation and the feeling of meaningful influence on decision-making. Moreover, while post-Synod actions have been initiated in many communities, their implementation remains uneven.

A key finding of this study is that the level of participation in the synod strongly shapes women's perceptions of being listened to and involved. At the parish and diocesan levels, women's experiences are often mixed, with many reporting that their voices were heard but not always translated into tangible influence. By contrast, participation at the continental and Roman Assembly levels was associated with significantly higher perceptions of both being listened to and being included in decision-making. This suggests that broader, more diverse, and higher-level forums may provide greater opportunities for women's voices to be recognised and valued or maybe that women who made it to this level felt already more recognised by having the chance to participate here. However, the discrepancy between local and higher levels highlights the unevenness of synodality in practice, raising the question of how to motivate grassroots participation without the risk that it becomes limited to consultation without real influence.

Regional differences also emerged as a critical factor. Importantly, the overrepresentation of certain regions and levels in this study must be acknowledged as a limitation. Women in Africa, Asia, and Latin America generally expressed higher levels of satisfaction with both their participation and the outcomes of the Synod, while respondents from North America consistently reported lower levels of being heard, included, and seeing concrete follow-up. These differences may reflect broader cultural and ecclesial dynamics, but also can speak about the background of our participants in the North-American region. In general, we feel that in some contexts enthusiasm for renewal and synodality is stronger, whereas in others, resistance to change and structural conservatism remain more entrenched.

The mixed responses regarding whether the outcomes of the Synod reflected women's hopes highlight a tension between progress and frustration. On the one hand, women involved in higher levels of the process were mostly positive, which could signal an openness to women's voices and recognition of their contributions. On the other hand, at parish level, the results were strongly negative and there was more frustration and demotivation. This gap between listening and acting was also visible in the difference between listening and inclusion in decision-making processes, as mentioned earlier. The obstacles identified by women in the current phase of the Synod were perceived as being most frequently encountered in collaboration with ordained ministers.

When we look ahead to the implementation phase with the survey participants, we can see that the main challenges are the need for more recognition and empowerment, overcoming resistance to change and how to deal with the (feeling) of exclusion from decision-making. These findings suggest that synodality cannot be reduced to consultation alone, but must also entail accountability, structural reform and cultural transformation. Other frequently mentioned challenges were ensuring follow-up of the synod, the need of more and new roles for women, lack of formation (for women and for clergy), and clericalism.

The survey also sheds light on women's vision on how to strengthen women's role for the future of the Church. Across contexts, participants consistently emphasized more (and new) roles for women in governance, liturgy, and pastoral ministry. These calls for the greater involvement of women in ministerial and leadership positions reflect a deep desire for parity not merely as a matter of function but of vocation and dignity. Alongside this, formation emerged as a recurring theme: women identified the need for greater theological and leadership training for themselves, as well as for seminarians and clergy, to challenge entrenched clericalism and foster a synodal culture. Such proposals underline that sustainable change requires both structural reforms and shifts in mindset, supported by education, dialogue, and ongoing discernment. Those two were the main focus of the answers on how to strengthen women's roles, other ideas that were mentioned were peer support networks, ordained ministers for women, better follow up for the synod reflections as well as inclusion programs for marginalised groups in the Church. We could conclude that the main focus of the vision for strengthening the role of women differs according to the level of women's participation in the synod. On the higher levels the need for more formation was stronger, whereas on lower levels women felt a greater need of more women roles in the Church.

Another important dimension highlighted in the results is women's willingness to contribute actively to renewal. Of course, it is worth noting that these women were also willing to participate in a survey on the synodal process. The overwhelming readiness of participants to encourage or engage in initiatives to strengthen women's roles (over 80%) demonstrates both a strong sense of responsibility and a valuable resource on which the Church can draw. The proposed actions for change—ranging from the establishment of women's councils and mentorship programmes to the promotion of inclusion in formation seminaries and curial structures—gives concrete ideas to the Church for enhancing women's

participation. What women envision is not simply token inclusion but a deeper rethinking of ecclesial culture that embraces co-responsibility, transparency, and equality rooted in baptismal dignity.

In general, our participants proposed the greatest number of changes in the area of church governance inclusion. Other prominent areas were increased liturgical and ministerial participation, as well as creating more opportunities for formation. They were closely followed by the need for more recognition and empowerment and the question of female ordination. We can see some differences according to level of participation. At parish level, the need for change was expressed most strongly in terms of liturgical and ministerial participation. This is, of course, immediately visible at that level. All other levels, however, stated that the most important change needed was church governance inclusion.

Taken together, these findings point to three overarching conclusions. First, women's participation in the Synod has already borne fruit in terms of greater recognition and inclusion, particularly at higher levels. Second, significant challenges remain in translating listening into decision-making and consultation into action, especially at the parish level. Third, women themselves are not only calling for but actively proposing and committing to initiatives that can strengthen synodality and the Church's mission.

The implications for the ongoing synodal journey are clear: progress toward a truly synodal Church depends on addressing the structural and cultural barriers that limit women's participation as stated in n.60 of the final document. There is a need to ensure follow-up and accountability at all levels, and investing in formation that equips both women and men for shared leadership, as well as a reform of formation in seminaries. The strong call for new roles, liturgical participation, and governance inclusion signals a pressing need for institutional reforms, while the emphasis on recognition and empowerment underscores that synodality is as much about culture as it is about structure.

In conclusion, the experiences and insights of the women in this study affirm both the promise and the fragility of synodality. Women's voices are being heard, but whether they will shape lasting change depends on moving from consultation to transformation. The findings invite the Church to "embrace synodality not as a one-time event but as a living practice", that honours the equal dignity of all the baptized, ensures co-responsibility, and allows women's gifts to enrich the mission of the Church in every context.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This survey confirms that women's participation in the Synod 2021–2024 has been both meaningful and limited, reflecting the broader tension identified in the Synod's Final Document (n. 60): despite essential contributions to the life of the Church, women continue to face barriers to full recognition and participation. Guided by the mission of the World Women's Observatory of WUCWO—"listening to transform lives"—this study has sought to amplify women's voices and provide a comparative account of their experiences across different levels of the synodal process.

The findings indicate three central conclusions. First, women's voices are increasingly being heard, particularly at higher levels of the Synod, where recognition and influence were reported more strongly. Second, challenges remain at the local and parish levels, where consultation often does not lead to meaningful influence in decision-making, creating frustration and discouragement. Third, women are not only identifying obstacles but also actively proposing solutions: from new roles in governance and ministry to stronger formation for both laity and clergy, and from peer support networks to cultural shifts that address clericalism and gender inequality.

In light of these insights, several recommendations emerge for the Church as it moves into the implementation phase of the Synod:

1. **Ensure accountability and follow-up at all levels.** Synodality cannot be reduced to consultation; mechanisms must be established to guarantee that contributions are not only heard but translated into action, especially at the parish and diocesan levels.
2. **Expand women's roles in governance and decision-making.** Existing opportunities in Canon Law should be fully implemented, while new structures—such as women's councils or greater inclusion in curial and diocesan leadership—should be considered to ensure co-responsibility.
3. **Promote formation for both women and clergy.** Women should have greater access to theological and leadership training. Meanwhile, seminarians and ordained ministers should undergo training that addresses clericalism, values synodality and incorporates women's perspectives into priestly preparation.
4. **Recognize and encourage women's contributions.** Beyond structural reforms, cultural transformation is necessary. Public acknowledgment of women's leadership and storytelling initiatives that highlight female contributions in the Church can strengthen recognition and inspire younger generations.
5. **Encourage grassroots motivation.** To avoid discouragement at the local level and to ensure a synodal Church on all levels, dioceses and parishes should invest in inclusive practices, feedback mechanisms, and visible opportunities for the synod to shape pastoral priorities.

In conclusion, this report underscores both the promise and the fragility of synodality. Women's participation in the Synod has already borne fruit in terms of recognition, but its long-term impact depends on whether the Church embraces synodality not as an event but as a living practice. By dismantling structural and cultural barriers, ensuring accountability, and investing in formation and recognition, the Church can move closer to realizing the vision of communion, participation, and mission

articulated at the beginning of the Synod. Women's voices are not only calling for change; they are offering concrete pathways and involvement through which the Church's renewal can become a reality.

Addendum 1: Questions used in the Survey

Section 1: Demographics

1. Name (optional)
2. Email (optional)
3. Are you a member or have you been a delegate for the synodal process at diocesan, national or continental levels?
 - I was a member of the 2 Roman Assemblies
 - I was a member of the Continental stage
 - I am/was a member of a synodal team at diocesan level
 - I am/was a member of a synodal team at parish level
 - I did not participate in any of these instances
 - Other (please explain)
4. Geographical Area
 - Africa and Madagascar
 - Asia
 - Europe
 - Latin America and the Caribbean
 - Middle East
 - North America
 - Oceania
5. Would you consider the number of women within the synodal action group of your (parish, diocese, institution) as being:
 - More than the number of men
 - Equal to the number of men
 - Less than the number of men
 - I don't know
6. Why do you think you were summoned?
 - Because I am a theologian
 - Because I am considered as a good secretary
 - Because of my pastoral background
 - Because I am an employee in the structure of the Church
 - I don't know
 - Because of another reason (explain):.....

Section 2: Experience During the Synod

7. Has your opinion been listened to during the work of the synodal process?

- No
 - Rarely
 - Several times
 - Usually Yes
 - Always
8. Were you effectively involved in decision-making during the process?
- Yes
 - No
 - I don't know
9. Where did you encounter the main obstacles during the process? (Select all that apply.)
- In ordained ministers
 - In other members of the community
 - In speaking before a formal audience of the Church hierarchy
 - In my lack of experience
 - Other (please explain): _____
 - I encountered no obstacles during the process

Section 3: Evaluating Post-Synod Developments

10. Do you feel the outcomes of the Synod reflect the hopes and aspirations women expressed during the process?
- Strongly disagree
 - Disagree
 - Neutral
 - Agree
 - Strongly agree
11. Has your diocese, parish, or organization undertaken any concrete actions to implement the Synod's outcomes?
- Yes, and I am involved
 - Yes, but I am not directly involved
 - No, no actions have been taken
 - I don't know

Section 4: Looking Ahead

12. What challenges do you foresee for women in the ongoing implementation phase of the Synod? Briefly mention a maximum of 3 challenges:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

13. Would you like to take or encourage initiatives to strengthen women's roles in your community or Church?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If yes, please name up to 3 initiatives you would like to see or lead:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

14. To improve women's participation and leadership in the Catholic Church, what changes do you propose? Indicate a maximum of 3 possible changes