

# ESDN Young Civil Servants Workshop

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## Discussion Paper

Transformative Policy – Addressing  
Intergenerational Equity

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## Introduction

This Discussion Paper will provide participants taking part in the European Sustainable Development Network's Young Civil Servants Workshop with some background information on the Workshop's focus, the topics that will be covered by speakers and presenters, as well as how the Workshop's interactive parts will be run.

The Young Civil Servants Workshop will be focusing on "Transformative Policy – Addressing Intergenerational Equity". The Workshop will take place in Vienna, Austria on 15-16 April 2024, and is being organized by the European Sustainable Development Network together with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology.

The background of this Workshop was born out of a recognition that intergenerational equity is an important topic also for civil servants working in public administrations across Europe, especially as it relates to transformative policies for sustainable development, as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, the ESDN wanted to pilot this type of event and target participants who are working in the civil service and who are a maximum of 35 years of age or have only been working in the civil service for 3 years or less. The ESDN also recognizes that today's young civil servants will most likely be tomorrow's policy implementers as they reach more senior level positions within their governments. The Workshop will have around 30 participants over the course of the two days coming from 9 different European countries.

The reason the ESDN chose the topic of "Transformative Policy – Addressing Intergenerational Equity" was that the ESDN is focusing its attention on transformative policies for sustainable development in the first half of 2024. There was already a Workshop that took place in Montenegro on 26-27 March on the topic of "Governance Transformations for More Effective SDG Implementation", and there will be the ESDN Conference 2024 taking place in Brussels, Belgium on 05-06 June on the topic of "Upgrading Europe: Building Transformative Policies to Reach the Sustainable Development Goals". The last two UN Global Sustainable Development Reports (2019 and 2023) have recognized and identified that transformation is necessary to reach the 2030 Agenda, and the ESDN wants to do its part to facilitate the knowledge and experience sharing between countries that can help ensure transitions for sustainable development happen. By their very nature, transitions are something that need to happen now to make things better for the future and future generations. In that vein, the topic of the Workshop fits in perfectly to this discussion and how to move forward with sustainable development policymaking.

The link to the Young Civil Servants Workshop and the theme of intergenerational equity comes from recognizing that the SDGs envisage a planet inhabitable not only for the present, but also for the future and are, therefore, inherently linked to the wellbeing of different generations. The workshop in Vienna will look at the area of transformative policies from an intergenerational equity perspective, and will seek to answer the questions: **What are the main challenges in this regard? How can we use intergenerational equity as a resource in policymaking? To what extent are the SDGs providing and supporting intergenerational equity and (how) can this be elevated in a post-2030 policy framework? What can young civil servants do to support this process?** These questions will serve as a guide through an interesting and exciting 1.5 days with inputs from experts, as well as a lot of time to exchange and develop ideas together.

Chapter 1 of this Discussion Paper will focus on the background discourse on intergenerational equity in sustainable development over the past decade and how sustainable development has taken future

generations into account since “Our Common Future” was published in 1987, which is often seen as the one of the core documents of sustainable development that explicitly reference future generations. It will also be interesting to see how other important sustainable development documents view the idea of future generations and equity between generations when it comes to sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda, the SDG Summit 2023, and the Summit for the Future, which will take place in September 2024 in New York.

Chapter 2 focuses on the importance of intergenerational equity in sustainable development policymaking. It features the topics from the keynote speakers on the one hand, about their experiences with the topic of intergenerational equity as they have experienced it within their ministries over the past decades. On the other hand, the other keynote presentation will focus on intergenerational justice in view of climate change.

Chapter 3 focuses on three keynote presentations that will take place on Workshop Day 2 in Session 3. The presentations will look at intergenerational justice as it relates to sustainable development. As sustainable development is highly future oriented, intergenerational justice plays a huge role.

Chapter 4 provides short introductions to the Exchange Table topics that will take place on Day 2 of the Workshop and focuses on good practice cases of governments taking transgenerational equity into account. The three countries in the focus are Austria, Finland, and the Netherlands. Participants will be able to view two out of the three good practices during the Workshop.

Chapter 5 outlines the three different interactive components of the Workshop that will take place on both days. The first interactive exchange is the moderated table discussions, which will take place on Day 1 of the Workshop. The second interactive exchange is the Fishbowl Discussions, which will take place on Day 2. The Exchange Tables, which will also be an interactive exchange, but have their own session and chapter in this Discussion Paper, is also very interactive. The final interactive component will be the excursion to the Technical Museum, where two different types of tours have been offered to further discussions on sustainable development.

The final Workshop documentation will be uploaded to the [ESDN website](#) under Workshops in the events menu. After the Workshop, keynote presentations will be uploaded to this page. An ESDN Policy Note will also be published shortly after the Workshop concludes and can be found on the [ESDN website](#) under publications and policy briefs.

# Chapter 1: Background Discourse on Intergenerational Equity in Sustainable Development

This chapter focuses on providing the background on the discourse on intergenerational equity in sustainable development over the years and how sustainable development has taken future generations into account since “Our Common Future” was published in 1987, which is often seen as the one of the core documents of sustainable development that explicitly reference future generations. It will also be interesting to see how other important sustainable development documents view the idea of future generations and equity between generations when it comes to sustainable development, including the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, the SDG Summit 2023, and the Summit for the Future, which will take place in September 2024 in New York.

## Our Common Future – The Brundtland Report

The discourse on sustainable development, going all the way back to “Our Common Future”, which is also known as the Brundtland Report, from 1987, has always had an element of intergenerational equity to it. §27 of the Brundtland Report, which attempts to define sustainable development and is one of the definitions that is still most commonly used and referred to today, defines sustainable development as, **“development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”**.

The Report paints a dire picture in §25 and §26 of the effects humanity’s consumption of environmental capital has even back in the late 1980s, as well as what it would mean for future generations should this not change. The passages highlighted below have been done so by the ESDN Office.

§25 Many present efforts to guard and maintain human progress, to meet human needs, and to realize human ambitions are simply unsustainable - in both the rich and poor nations. They draw too heavily, too quickly, on already overdrawn environmental resource accounts to be affordable far into the future without bankrupting those accounts. They may show profit on the balance sheets of our generation, but our children will inherit the losses. **We borrow environmental capital from future generations with no intention or prospect of repaying.** They may damn us for our spendthrift ways, **but they can never collect on our debt to them. We act as we do because we can get away with it: future generations do not vote; they have no political or financial power; they cannot challenge our decisions.**

§26 But the results of the present profligacy are rapidly closing the options for future generations. **Most of today's decision makers will be dead before the planet feels; the heavier effects of acid precipitation, global warming, ozone depletion, or widespread desertification and species loss. Most of the young voters of today will still be alive.** In the Commission's hearings it was the young, those who have the most to lose, who were the harshest critics of the planet's present management.

Almost 40 years later, humanity still depletes natural capital at unsustainable levels. However, whereas those making decisions back in the late 1980s might no longer be alive to feel their effects, decision-makers now, can feel the very real effects that humanity has on the planet, including climate change, disease, increased frequency of natural disasters, heat waves, floods, loss of biodiversity, etc. The price of inaction

is no longer something that will only be felt by future generations but is something that can be felt in real time. To stop the effects from impacting future generations in an even stronger way, intergenerational equity needs to be a part of policymaking.

The article “Intergenerational equity and the Sustainable Development Goals”, which was published in the journal “Sustainability” in 2018 by Otto Spijkers, provides an apt conclusion from a review of the main documents on sustainable development, dating back to 1972 with the Stockholm Declaration, and whether, and to what extent, they mention future generations and intergenerational equity. He then also applies this to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

The article draws two conclusions. The first conclusion drawn from the analysis of the important documents for sustainable development is that the protection of the planet is important, but important not for its intrinsic worth as such, but because it serves as a resource for development.

The second conclusion that is drawn is in relation to the attention that intergenerational equity was receiving, and it being perceived, mostly by the developing world, as a threat to the interests of people in the present, as would the attention have shifted to future generations, then it might come at the expense of the poor people of the current generation. The Stockholm Declaration did not address this dichotomy and tension between intergenerational equity and intragenerational equity. However, the Brundtland Report, as stated above, wanted to convince that this dichotomy should not be a dichotomy and that both were interlinked – present and future – intergenerational equity and intragenerational equity.

However, this tension resurfaced in principle 3 of the Rio Declaration, which states “The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations. Then, the Johannesburg Declaration tilted the balance in favor of intragenerational equity, and the Rio+20 Summit tilted the balance back in favor of intergenerational equity.

When looking at the SDGs, which was the main premise of the article, the author asks whether the SDGs were able to find a proper balance between intra- and inter-generational equity. It can be noted that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs do not explicitly reference intergenerational equity, and the references to rights and equity apply almost exclusively to intragenerational equity.

However, the SDGs are about sustainable development and sustainable development is all about development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, the SDGs should be interpreted and applied in that way, so that they achieve this aim.<sup>1</sup>

## 2023 HLPF, SDG Summit, and the Global Sustainable Development Report

Looking at documents and events that have taken place since the article mentioned above was published in 2018, such as the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 and the SDG Summit, which was held in September 2023, as well as looking towards the Summit for the Future, which will be taking place in

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<sup>1</sup> Spijkers, O. (2018) ‘Intergenerational equity and the Sustainable Development Goals’, Sustainability, 10(11), p. 3836. doi:10.3390/su10113836.

September 2024, it can be seen that intergenerational equity is not explicitly referenced and future generations only marginally, with the exception of the Summit for the Future.

The Resolution A/RES/78/1 from the United Nations General Assembly in October 2023 on the High-Level Political Forum mentions future generations a total of three times in §9, §21, and §43.

§9 We commit to bold, ambitious, accelerated, just and transformative actions, anchored in international solidarity and effective cooperation at all levels. We will promote a systemic shift towards a more inclusive, just, peaceful, resilient and sustainable world for people and planet, for present and future generations.

§21 The 2030 Agenda remains our commitment to the children and youth of today so that they may achieve their full human potential, as critical agents of change and torchbearers of the 2030 Agenda for current and future generations.

§43 We commit with united efforts, political will and firm actions to advance concrete, integrated and targeted policies and actions to fulfill the vision of the 2030 Agenda and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We pledge to act now, for present and future generations, turning our world towards a sustainable and resilient path by 2030, and leaving no one behind.

These passages seem to suggest a shift in rhetoric that is more aligned with the Brundtland Report's assessment that inter and intra generational equity are intertwined, and that both are goals that need to be achieved for sustainable development.

The SDG Summit, which took place a month after the HLPF, makes mention of future generations only once in its informal summary and that is in relation to climate change and limiting global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius for both current and future generations.

The Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 also only refers to future generations once, when one does not include the annexes, which reference the ministerial declaration from the HLPF in 2016, and is again tied to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and the warming of the earth being a threat to future generations to meet their own development goals.<sup>2</sup>

## Summit for the Future 2024

The aim of the Summit is twofold: accelerate efforts to meet existing international commitments and take concrete steps to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. This will be achieved through an action-oriented outcome document called the Pact for the Future, which will be negotiated, and endorsed by countries in the lead-up to and during the Summit in September 2024. The result will be a world – and an international system – that is better prepared to manage the challenges being faced now and, in the future, for the sake of all humanity and for future generations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of crisis, times of change: Science for accelerating transformations to sustainable development, (United Nations, New York, 2023). p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future>.



The Pact for the Future Zero Draft was published 26 January 2024, and as stated above will become the output document from the Summit for the Future and will be developed over the coming months. The Pact for the Future will already commit to concrete actions in 5 overarching areas: (1) Sustainable development and financing for development, (2) International peace and security, (3) Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation, (4) **Youth and future generations**, and (5) Transforming global governance.<sup>4</sup>

The Summit for the Future, as the name would suggest, is future oriented and mentions future generations twelve times in a 20-page document and places emphasis on how important it is for sustainable development to take this into account.

It will be interesting to revisit this topic after the Summit takes place in September 2024 and evaluate the results as it pertains to equity for future generations and see whether stronger commitments arise than have in past meetings and documents dealing with sustainable development.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-co-facilitators-zero-draft\\_pact-for-the-future.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sotf-co-facilitators-zero-draft_pact-for-the-future.pdf)

## Chapter 2: Importance of Intergenerational Equity in Sustainable Development Policymaking

This chapter focuses on the importance of intergenerational equity in sustainable development policymaking. It features the topics from the keynote speakers on the one hand, about their experiences with the topic of intergenerational equity as they have experienced it within their ministries over the past decades. On the other hand the other keynote presentation will focus on intergenerational justice in view of climate change.

### Reflections from over 20 years of Sustainable Development Policymaking

Apart from addressing the main questions of the Workshop when it comes to intergenerational equity: What are the main challenges in this regard? How can we use intergenerational equity as a resource in policymaking? To what extent are the SDGs providing and supporting intergenerational equity and (how) can this be elevated in a post-2030 policy framework? What can young civil servants do to support this process?, it will be interesting to hear from more experienced civil servants how they view intergenerational equity from within their ministries and how this important topic may have changed over time.

### Intergenerational Justice in View of Climate Change

The recent ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in favor of a complaint by senior Swiss women shows, that climate change is not only a future threat affecting young people but poses a relevant threat to the elderly now. Obviously, our task must be to assure that the different risks occurring at different times, in different places and with different likelihoods are all taken account of - but that is no easy task.

## Chapter 3: Intergenerational Justice for Sustainable Development

This chapter focuses on three keynote presentations that will take place on Workshop Day 2 in Session 3. The presentations will look at intergenerational justice as it relates to sustainable development. As sustainable development is highly future oriented, intergenerational justice plays a huge role. The keynote presentations will be followed by fishbowl-style discussions that will seek to involve everyone. A more in-depth description can be found in chapter 4 on the interactive exchanges.

### The Role of Multi-stakeholder Partnerships in Transformative Change: Towards justice and intergenerational Equity?

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are often acknowledged for the transformative potential. This transformative potential of the SDGs lies in their ability to inspire collective action, promote integrated approaches to sustainable development, and create a pathway towards a more prosperous, equitable, and resilient future for all that connect multiple SDGs. One specific policy tool that has received scrutiny over the last years are multi-stakeholder partnerships. MSPs are collaborative arrangements involving multiple actors from different sectors, including governments, businesses, civil society organizations, academia, and international organizations, working together to address complex societal challenges and achieve common goals. In MSPs, stakeholders pool their expertise, resources, and networks to leverage complementary strengths and perspectives, foster innovation, and create shared values. In the context of the overarching topic of the workshop, this presentation will first provide an overview of how the concept of intergenerational equity relates to the SDGs, before analyzing the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder partnerships as a transformative policy supporting intergenerational equity.

### Climate and Environmental Rights for Future Generations

**Children and their rights are particularly affected by the climate crisis in several ways.** On the one hand, the climate crisis naturally affects the future of children and future generations in particular. On the other hand, children are especially vulnerable due to their physical and cognitive development, as the UNICEF report "[The Climate-changed Child](#)" shows. The climate crisis jeopardizes every child's fundamental right to health and well-being, especially in regions of the Global South, but also in Europe. Nevertheless, children are not given sufficient consideration in climate policy and decision-making.

**[General Comment 26 \(GC 26\) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child](#)**, published in 2023, makes it clear that the effects of climate change not only violate the children's right to a healthy environment, but also a number of other children's rights enshrined in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, such as education, health services, clean drinking water and hygiene. GC 26 therefore emphasizes the fundamental and urgent need for all countries and other key stakeholders to take action to protect the environment and children's rights.

Parties to the Paris Agreement committed that States should respect, promote, and consider the rights of children, as well as intergenerational equity, when taking climate action. Therefore, **UNICEF is in favor of putting children and children's rights at the center of all climate policies - all climate policy and**

**legislation has to serve children and young people today and in the future. Children have to stay high on the political agenda regarding the impacts of a changing environment on their wellbeing and health, as well as their need for special protection and investment**, particularly with respect to adaptation and climate finance. This means i.a. to pursue climate targets more ambitiously, to strengthen child participation, to empower every child and young person with education and skills to be champions for the environment, to improve the resilience of critical infrastructure for children to adapt to the effects of climate change, to increase climate financing and compensations with a focus on children in areas most affected by climate change, to improve access to climate justice for young people and increase responsible economic behavior that respects the dimension of ecological children's rights. **Taking action to achieve child rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child across the SDGs including economic opportunities, nutrition, health, education, equity, water, energy, and peace will be contingent on addressing and adapting to climate change.**

## **Meaningful Participation: How to involve youth in decision and policymaking**

In this keynote, we will dive into meaningful participation and youth involvement. The aim is to increase understanding on the importance of youth participation and to explore good practices to deliver youth involvement on a daily basis.

## Chapter 4: Exchange Tables on Transgenerational Equity

This chapter provides short introductions to the Exchange Table topics that will take place on Day 2 of the Workshop and focus on good practice cases of governments taking transgenerational equity into account. The three countries in the focus are Austria, Finland, and the Netherlands. The following texts should help prepare participants for what will be discussed at the tables. Everyone will be able to visit two out of the three tables.

### Austria - Children and Youth Impact Assessment

The Children and Youth Impact Assessment is a crucial instrument that puts children and young people at the center of rulemaking and mainstreams their needs and interests in all policies. Since 2013, the Impact Assessment in Austria allows all new legislative and regulatory proposals to be evaluated for the potential consequences they could have for children, and young people. This assessment is an integral part of the Austrian Youth Strategy, making decision-makers more aware of the potential consequences of their proposed laws.

### Finland - The Finnish Agenda 2030 Youth Group

In Finland, the participation of young people in the national implementation of the UN's Agenda 2030 has, since 2017, been promoted by The Agenda 2030 Youth Group. The group is set up under the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development chaired by the Prime Minister.

The Youth Group has two main goals: to promote the SDGs and to participate in the planning and implementation of measures for sustainable development. They participate in the meetings of the National Commission and have been closely involved with processes, such as drafting of the Strategy of the National Commission on Sustainable Development 2022-2030.

The Group currently consists of 16 people aged 15 to 30 years old, and two equal co-chairs. Since 2024, the senior co-chair of the Youth group acts as one of the National Commission's two vice-chairs.

The Group is free to organize their activities independently, and have, for example, organized workshops, discussions, and study trips. The Group is appointed and funded by the Prime Minister's Office, while the Finnish National Youth Council Alliance coordinates and manages its activities and its membership application process.

### Netherlands - Intergenerational Test

The Dutch Exchange Table will be hosted by Mare de Wit, policy advisor on intergenerational equity in water and climate adaptation strategies, and Sydney van der Post, policy officer at the SDG-team of the MFA.

Mare and Sydney are curious to hear about the approaches to intergenerational equity of your respective countries. One discussion-starter they would like to introduce is the following:

- Is a specific ministry/department responsible for intergenerational equity within your country? How do you cooperate on this with all involved parties?
- We face a challenge when it comes to responsibility being taken on intergenerational equity, it is 'everyone's topic' and therefore also 'no one's topic'. Who takes the lead?

## The Dutch Approach to Intergenerational Equity

The way in which The Netherlands (NL) approaches intergenerational equity is twofold. Firstly, we strongly believe in meaningful youth participation to ensure young generations today have a say in policy development and implementation. This has been structurally integrated in the work of various ministries, for example by having young climate advisors and a youth advisory commission on foreign policy. Furthermore, the introduction of a regulatory policy tool strives to improve the quality of our policies by analyzing new policies through the lens of different dimensions: here, now, elsewhere, and later. We are currently developing a 'generational test'. This test will enable policy makers to think about the long-term impact of their policy, both for current as well as for future generations. Secondly, NL works to strengthen its focus on the concept of future generations. The SDG Team aims to strengthen interdepartmental cooperation on this topic and has, for example, brought 'future generation chairs' to all ministries. In addition, NL will be co-facilitator of the Declaration on Future Generations at the upcoming Summit of the Future.

## Intergenerational Equity in Water and Climate Adaptation

Together with a group of young professionals, an initiative is set up that will explore how the Dutch government can better involve, safeguard, and monitor the voices of young people within policy developments in the fields of Water and Climate Adaptation. Mare leads this initiative as a quartermaker on behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management), the Office of the Delta Commissioner (National Delta Programme), and Rijkswaterstaat (Executive body). It is important to learn how past decisions have shaped our present and how we can now introduce new policies with the consequences for future generations in mind.

## Chapter 5: Workshop Interactive Exchanges

This chapter outlines the two different interactive components of the Workshop that will take place on both days. The first interactive exchange is the moderated table discussions, which will take place on Day 1 of the Workshop. The second interactive exchange is the Fishbowl Discussions, which will take place on Day 2 directly after the keynote presentations.

### Moderated Table Discussions

The moderated table discussions will take place on Day 1 of the Workshop. Participants will separate into three different groups, which will be led by three table moderators. The purpose of this interaction is to discuss and find potential answers to the following questions:

1. How can we use intergenerational equity as a lever in policymaking?
2. How can supporting intergeneration equity be elevated in a post-2030 policy framework?
3. What can young civil servants do to support this process?

Participants are highly encouraged to bring forth examples of how their country deals with these questions, as well as put forth potential solutions to these questions and encourage the thinking about the future of sustainable development even after the 2030 Agenda. It also puts the focus on what young civil servants can achieve within their own work environments within ministries.

The results of the different group discussions will then be presented by the table moderators directly afterwards and question by question. These results will also inform the Workshop's Policy Note, which will strive to present the Workshop results in a concise (4-5 paged) document.

### Fishbowl Discussions

The Fishbowl Discussions will be on Day 2 of the Workshop as part of Session 3: Intergenerational Justice for Sustainable Development after the three keynote presentations. The style of the Fishbowl is such that the three keynote presenters will take the stage first together with the Workshop moderator. The questions that will be in the focus are:

1. How to address the young people in the civil service?
2. What do we do from 2030 onwards in the civil service?

Once the three presenters have had time to reflect on the questions, participants will also be asked to approach the stage and join in the discussions and share their ideas and questions with the group. Participants will then be able to continuously switch out with one another, as well as ask questions.

The results of these discussions will also be featured in the Workshop Policy Note.

### Technical Museum Tours

#### Energy – From Muscle Power to Power Plant

Our world today is powered by electricity. Our guided tour shows how appliances were operated and how heavy work was carried out before the electric age.

On our journey back in time, we find out how people harnessed the power of water or wind as early as the Middle Ages – and why we are now returning to these “old” forms of energy to generate power in an eco-friendlier way.

However, we also take a look at other major past and present forms of energy: from steam engines to nuclear power stations, from large power plants to small wearables.

## Ingenious Women

Science and research have also always been the domain of women. In this guided tour, we shine a spotlight precisely on those women whose outstanding accomplishments were often forgotten by historians.

Marie Curie, Ada Lovelace, and Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky – these and many other women did groundbreaking pioneering work and contributed significantly to technological history with their work, knowledge, and creativity.

For a long time, the accomplishments of women went unnoticed; they were often overshadowed by their famous brothers, fathers, or husbands. Therefore, we placed the focus of our guided tour on the achievements of these outstanding women.