



Government Offices of Sweden



MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



# Summit for Democracy Cohort on Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Democracy Youth

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## INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

Gender equality is an imperative for thriving democracies. Any effort to build strong democracies and inclusive institutions will be flawed if it excludes or marginalizes half the world's population. Countries where women prosper also tend to be healthier democracies.<sup>1</sup> Hence, empowering women and safeguarding democracy go together; gender equality is a prerequisite for inclusive democracy.

Around the world, gender equality and women's rights to participate in public life are being undermined by the same forces that are pushing back on democracy. For instance, gendered disinformation and online abuse against women in politics are increasingly used to erode the gains on gender equality, women's empowerment and democracy. Efforts towards more inclusive and equitable democracy are taking place but need to be strengthened and accelerated.

The recommendations of the Summit for Democracy's Gender Cohort, co-led by Sweden, Romania, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and International IDEA, provide suggestions to strengthen democracy by striving for gender equality. Considering the close link between gender equality, democracy and the participation of youth, we encourage the Government of Costa Rica to consider the outlined recommendations when hosting the upcoming regional event on promoting the role of youth in political and democratic spaces.

<sup>1</sup> "Exploring the Links between Women's Status and Democracy", Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2023. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/exploring-the-links-between-womens-status-anddemocracy/>

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## GENDER & YOUTH

Youth are the leaders of the future. Yet, people under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions, with fewer women than men in these roles.<sup>2</sup> Research by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) found that out of 2.2 percent of parliamentarians under the age of 30, less than 1 percent are young women. The marginalization of youth—including young women—from politics leads to missed opportunities to strengthen democracy-building processes and institutions. Gender equality as a prerequisite for democracy requires tailored efforts to engage both young women and men. Barriers to the inclusion of youth in politics must be addressed, including gendered forms of discrimination and violence.

Youth have the power to inculcate new values and shape norms and procedures within legal and political institutions towards more inclusive and equitable practices. To strengthen democratic resilience, it is critical that politically aspiring young women and men are empowered to engage in politics and that their inclusion is supported by political parties. In order to address the pervasive under-representation of women in politics, young women need to be strategically recruited and encouraged to enter and stay in politics, including by male party members and mentors. Additionally, men—including young men—must be educated on how to be allies for women in politics and on strategies to challenge gendered forms of discrimination. The following recommendations offer concrete actions to empower youth, promote gender equality and build democratic resilience.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Identify and address harmful and discriminatory gender norms and practices in political, legal and educational systems and processes.**

- **Proposed action:** Develop public advocacy campaigns tailored for women/girls and boys/men with messages to dismantle harmful stereotypes and promote gender equality and shared decision making in both the private and public spheres. This includes campaigns to encourage the political participation of youth in all their diversity.

### **Eliminate violence against women in politics (VAWIP) and address the proliferation of technology facilitated gender-based violence and abuse.**

- **Proposed action:** Adopt legal standards on zero tolerance for all forms of gender-based violence including online and between/within political parties.
- **Proposed action:** Address technology facilitated gender-based violence and abuse in collaboration with social media companies. Increase coordination between online platforms and law enforcement entities in order to identify and respond to threats and hold perpetrators accountable.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-political-participation.pdf>

**Engage men and boys in transforming discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviours that prevent gender equality and women's political empowerment.**

- **Proposed action:** Build the capacity of men and boys to become strategic allies and advocates for gender equality by challenging discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviors in societies, within organizations and political parties.
- **Proposed action:** Develop national/regional networks of male political leaders as champions for gender equality and the political empowerment and leadership of youth—including young women—in public life.

**Foster conditions that promote women's political empowerment, leadership and representation in decision making.**

- **Proposed action:** Support strategic networks and access to resources by earmarking funding for women's political empowerment and leadership programs, including targeted programming for youth; convene networks of women for mutual support across political parties to promote opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and mentorship of young women.
- **Proposed action:** Invest in women's economic empowerment; promote a more equitable distribution of care work between men and women; encourage media actors to recognize and address gender stereotypes in the coverage of women in politics and promote a culture of equality and equity.
- **Proposed action:** Call upon political parties to adopt inclusive and transparent policies and practices to proactively support gender equality and the political empowerment of youth. This includes adopting gender equality commitments within political parties' policy frameworks and political parties adopting candidate lists that alternate men and women candidates to enable women to compete equally.

**Implement policies and legal reforms for achieving gender equality in political and public life.**

- **Proposed action:** Identify gaps in legislative frameworks to eliminate discriminatory laws and policies, including addressing conflicts between formal laws and customary laws and practices.
- **Proposed action:** Integrate gender equality in broader democracy agendas and leverage existing international gender frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Istanbul Convention and the Women, Peace and Security agenda to strengthen gender equality in democracy building endeavors.

**Incorporate gender responsive planning and budgeting in policies and resources allocation.**

- **Proposed action:** Create national systems to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data to inform policy decisions of national and local governments.
- **Proposed action:** Adopt gender budgeting to ensure that resources are equitably distributed and promote the empowerment of women and girls.

**Leverage the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda to strengthen democratic processes and institutions.**

- **Proposed action:** Improve coordination between the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda, and democracy-building efforts. This includes adopting WPS National Action Plans as mechanisms for advancing women's role in peace building, governance and security efforts, alongside efforts to promote the participation and contributions of youth.
- **Proposed action:** Integrate the WPS Agenda and the YPS Agenda into post-conflict reconstruction and political transition processes to establish and strengthen democratic processes and institutions and good governance structures.

**Work collaboratively to develop strategies and tools to mitigate risks to women politicians, human rights defenders, and civil society leaders.**

- **Proposed action:** Partner with democratic governments, civil society, law enforcement, and women in politics to develop strategies to identify and respond to risks women face; tools to track and report threats and violent incidents; and rapid response plans.
- **Proposed action:** Redefine security more broadly to encompass the day-to-day safety needs of women and girls and provide women with security training to mitigate threats and increase safety.