



Government Offices of Sweden



MINISTRY  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



# Summit for Democracy Cohort on Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Democracy Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)

---

## 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 information and communications technologies, we encourage the Government of the United States of America to consider the outlined recommendations when hosting the upcoming regional event on advancing technology for democracy.

<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/>

---

## GENDER EQUALITY & ICTS

ICTs have the potential to close gender gaps in women’s political participation. They can serve as tools for women to influence policy agendas, increase women’s access to campaign resources, strengthen networks of solidarity, and increase women’s representation in democratic agendas and processes. With social media, blogs, podcasts and promotional videos, women have bypassed traditional media outlets, such as TV and radio, to elevate their profile directly and access political decision-making. One of the major challenges, however, is access to ICTs: only 57 percent of women used the internet globally in 2022, compared to 62 percent of men. In the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the proportion is even lower; as of 2020, only 19 percent of women used the internet.<sup>2</sup>

While ICTs offer many opportunities to promote women’s political participation, technology can also be used to perpetuate misogynistic behavior and gender-based violence online as a strategy to intimidate and discourage women from participating in public life. There has been an alarming increase in online attacks and incidents of technology facilitated gender-based violence and abuse. According to the National Democratic Institute’s (NDI) [#NotTheCost campaign](#), “democratic backsliding, a rise in ‘strong man’ politics, and technological innovations” have created new “means of perpetrating violence against politically-active women.”<sup>3</sup> Women candidates and political activists report decreasing their internet use, abandoning their own websites and leaving social media altogether because they fear harassment and violence—this is also driving some women from politics entirely. Now is a critical moment to ensure ICTs are not used to fuel efforts to roll back women’s rights and discourage women’s political participation and leadership. The following recommendations offer concrete actions to advance technology for democracy, promote gender equality, and strengthen democratic resilience.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/bridging-the-gender-divide.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ndi.org/not-the-cost>

---

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- **Proposed action:** Leverage ICTs to 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.
- **Proposed action:** Develop strategies to expand women's access to ICTs, including in Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Use ICTs to facilitate opportunities for women and girls in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education and employment.

### **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. Recognize hate speech against women in politics and the media as a cybercrime and form of gender-based violence.
- **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.

### **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.

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

- **Proposed action:** Leverage ICTs to facilitate networks of women for mutual support and collaboration across political parties to promote opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and mentorship.
- **Proposed action:** Expand access to ICTs for women and civil society organizations (CSOs) to promote women's political empowerment and support women's mobilization against threats to democracy and women's rights.

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

- **Proposed action:** Use ICTs to create national systems to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data to inform policy decisions of national and local governments.

**Leverage UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda to strengthen democratic processes and institutions.**

- **Proposed action:** Integrate the WPS Agenda into post-conflict reconstruction and political transition processes to establish and strengthen democratic processes and good governance structures and increase the likelihood that ICTs will be used in ways that promote gender equality and democracy.

**Work collaboratively to develop strategies and tools to mitigate risks to women politicians, human rights defenders, and civil society leaders, including technology facilitated gender-based violence.**

- **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; leverage ICTs to track and report threats and violent incidents.
- **Proposed action:** Facilitate the safe use of ICTs for political organizing and advocacy to allow for communication during periods of conflict, instability, elections and political transitions.