



World Forum for Democracy

Strasbourg, 19-21 November 2018

Theme : Women's participation in public and political affairs and combating violence against women

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In 1918, courageous women formed women's rights movements to challenge their exclusion from public and political life. In many countries, their bravery won them the right to increased democratic participation. Nearly a century later the #MeToo movement brought into sharp focus the pervasive extent of violence against women in all walks of life. But must we wait another century for the next seismic shift in the way that women are perceived and treated? Or is now, with global consciousness raised, a moment to assess what more must be done?

Because while so much progress has been made towards gender equality, there remain enormous divides between the lives of men and women that need to be understood. This is illustrated by some stark examples:

- One in three women worldwide has suffered from physical or sexual violence and every second woman has experienced sexual harassment by men
- Less than a quarter of those elected to assemblies around the world are women
- There is a 26% gender gap in participation in the global labour market and the gender pay gap stubbornly persists.

These facts lead us to two key objectives.

First, in the wake of #MeToo, we need the ideas and strategy that will eradicate all violence and discrimination against women.

Second, we need to look across the piece at gender equality in public, private and economic life – and ascertain what more we can to achieve them.

So at this year's World Forum for Democracy, we need to ask ourselves the hard question. Are unequal power relations between women and men at the heart of why women are still victims of gender-based violence? Are gender role stereotypes still preventing women from reaching equal treatment in public, political and economic affairs? Might we all – men and women – stand to benefit from greater equality?

If the answer to these questions is yes, what does this mean for the current state of democracy?

The 2018 edition will address these themes based, among other things, on the extensive work of the Council of Europe, including the European Social Charter, the CoE's Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and other relevant standards and tools that feed into the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

However, our purpose is to identify not only what further activity we might undertake, but to help spur ideas and actions that others can take, too. After all, this is the World Forum for Democracy, not only the Council of Europe's.

The format of the World Forum for Democracy 2018

The World Forum for Democracy is a unique platform for political decision-makers and activists to debate solutions to key challenges for democracies worldwide. By identifying and analysing experimental initiatives and practices, the Forum highlights and encourages democratic innovations at the grassroots and their transfer on a systemic level in order to strengthen the foundations of democratic societies. The Forum thus contributes to the evolution of democracy and the development of more participatory and inclusive structures and institutions. This is a moment to think big and make change.

Plenary sessions will be an opportunity to discuss with speakers from all continents, political perspectives and walks of life and to frame the questions. The labs will allow participants to test innovative initiatives that offer responses to the key questions below. They will address the diverse range of experiences women are facing, and share evidence about efforts that have led to the strengthening and protection of women's rights and a balanced representation of women and men in public life and decision-making.

Key questions for possible panels and labs

1. Before #MeToo, female-led initiatives have fought for a hundred years for women's rights. When will their fight be over?
2. Is women's increased participation and representation the key to free women from sexual violence and discrimination?
3. Which legal mechanisms successfully promote women's human rights and equal representation of women? What are existing legal gaps that need to be closed?
4. What measures do governments, as well as regional and local authorities; need to undertake in order to trigger faster change towards gender balance in decision-making?
5. What needs to change in our current system of representative democracy in order to encourage and increase adequate representation of women and their interests?
6. What experiences can private and public actors exchange about the promotion of women in leadership positions?
7. How can women be better included and their skills better rewarded in various economic fields?

8. What is the role of public authorities and business in order to increase the positive benefits of new technologies for women's rights and participation?
9. What contribution can the media and other opinion leaders, including men, make to change the discourse and give more visibility to women leaders and more attention to their skills and needs?
10. What is the influence of transnational women's organisations and other international organisations for gender-mainstreamed global governance?
11. What improvements in the education sector would contribute to removing stereotypes and prejudices that prevent women from considering leadership positions?
12. What specific measures should be taken to increase the representation of women from different backgrounds?