

LIBERAL POLICY FOR  
GENDER  
EQUALITY

# NO DEMOCRACY WITHOUT DEMOCRATS

SILC is a liberal foundation that promotes democracy. Our main goal is to strengthen organizations and individuals in their struggle for democracy and human rights.

© Swedish International Liberal Centre, 2020

**Published by Silc**, in collaboration with Afek Tounes, Sylva Lyudey, Vente Venezuela and Liberalerna.

**Financial support from SIDA.** The donor does not necessarily share the views expressed.

**Graphic design:** Martin Larsson

# LIBERAL POLICY FOR GENDER EQUALITY





# INTRODUCTION

Any serious political party aspiring to win seats in decision making bodies and to govern responsibly needs a plan, a policy, a programme of reform. Liberal parties, believing in reason as the foundation of political action, are likely to have elaborate views on a broad spectrum of political issues. A liberal party needs a plan for the economy, for taxation and for allowing free entrepreneurship. A liberal party will have a plan for elevating the mind and levelling the playing field through education and culture, by making sure basic as well as higher education is accessible and the cultural sector is left free to express itself. A liberal party concerns itself with ensuring a broad provision of social services and health care. A serious liberal party also concerns itself with the question of ensuring equal opportunities for women and men.

Gender equality, as enunciated in liberal ideology, is the right of every individual to live life according to one's own preferences. Discrimination based on gender is an aberration. Freedom of movement is to be guaranteed equally to women and men, with the right to not be subjected to violence. Reproductive health should be accessible. In business, in the public sector, and in politics, the role of a decision-maker needs to be granted for competence and character, which is equally distributed between both sexes.

This booklet is an attempt to collect some comparative insights on how liberal parties address the issue of gender equality. Depending on where you are, the contended policy areas for gender equality differ.

The issue of equal participation in decision making is at a very basic level and is one of the UN sustainable development goals (goal 5.5). The discussion is common in most countries.

Domestic violence is also an issue known, unfortunately, to all societies. But from there we can move into many different policy areas that are not always associated with gender equality. Does, for example, the tax system create equal incentives for men and women to work? Is the public transport system equally welcoming for women and men? Do schools enable equal results for girls and boys, or is one of the sexes at a disadvantage?

Herein, we gather ideas from liberal parties within very different contexts. The liberal party *Vente Venezuela* operates in a context of state collapse and severe repression, mustering thousands of freedom lovers for political change. *Afek Tounes* was part of the unity government after Tunisia's transition to democracy and now holds seats on all levels as an opposition party and a force for good governance. The Ukrainian liberal party *Syla Lyudey* is sprung out of civil society movements and governs and holds seats in many municipalities in Ukraine, also away from the larger cities where liberalism tends to be more en vogue. Lastly, the *Liberalerna* party of Sweden has been in and out of coalition governments in Sweden since the country's inception of democracy in the 1920s.

To the best of our ability, we have both tried to provide a comparative policy overview and to include interesting case studies from each country.

Each and every one of us should be able to lead the life we have reason to value. Each person has the right to choose studies, occupation, clothing and partner – regardless of one's gender. You have the right to decide over your own body and to be treated with respect. In essence, you have the right to live your life as you want it – regardless of gender.

# AFEK TOUNES

The Tunisian woman, an asset for the prosperity of Tunisia.

In spite of historical achievements and equality of rights, Tunisian women still face many legal, social, economic and personal challenges under the 2014 constitution. In fact, despite the adoption of a law on elimination of violence against women and the institutionalization of gender, certain discriminatory practices persist, both in the legislative framework and in society. Social relations are limiting women's social and economic choices, preventing the freedom of choice in several areas and thus hampering their active participation in power positions and decision-making. This worsens the imbalance between the roles of men and women.

In both the labor market and decision-making, gender-related divides persist. Regardless of their level of education, professional skills and the weight of their responsibilities within and outside the family, many Tunisian women face unemployment, marginalization, exploitation, violence, lack of access to health services and lack of self-realization opportunities.

Moreover, the general situation of women in Tunisia can be diagnosed through the following paradoxes:

- Illiteracy affects 19% of the population, but 41.5% of women in rural areas.
- At the same time, 42.2% study in higher education, as opposed to 23.2% of boys, and women represent 67% of university graduates.
- However, the unemployment rate for female graduates is 38.3%, as opposed to 16.5% for men.
- The professional advancement rate is 30% for women and 70% for men.

- 47.6% of women aged 18-64 have been victims of violence at least once in their life.

Social and economic fragility reaches its peak when it comes to women with disabilities and women from rural areas. This is despite government and non-government programs aimed at reducing early school leaving, promoting inclusion and social and economic empowerment.

In Afek Tounes, we are convinced that it is of utmost importance to do everything we can to preserve and strengthen the achievements of the Tunisian women. Based on the principle that the state must guarantee the same rights and freedoms to both men and women, Afek Tounes works to eliminate all discriminatory practices against women and to pursue their socio-economic empowerment. This is to increase their participation in the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres of society. Our measures aim to create necessary conditions to improve the status and ensure protection of society's most disadvantaged people.

It is essential to strengthen women's role in society. To guarantee their social well-being we must offer adequate living conditions and ensure full and equal participation in various fields. We believe in equality of opportunity and we have a vision of a future where men and women, regardless of their socioeconomic situation, will have the same rights and opportunities to access jobs, finances and to run businesses, to participate in decision-making and to benefit from public services, all in fairness and safety.

Better access to funding sources, better access to employment and better access to services. These are the three main objectives of Afek Tounes' vision.



# SYLA LYUDEY

Ukraine is still a rather patriarchal country with a high influence of the church, and gender stereotypes are widespread. In most families, parents teach their children based on these gender stereotypes - what a boy should be and what a girl should be. Ukrainian schools, which in practice did not undergo any modernization, reinforce gender stereotypes - there are separate classes on needlework and cooking for girls and labour classes for boys.

At universities, there are more men at technical faculties and more women in philology. After graduating from higher education, women usually do not build their careers, but devote their lives to their family or choose the lowest paying jobs. These are nurses, teachers, social workers and basic level officials.

In the business sector women are almost not represented at all, especially in the large and medium businesses. Furthermore, politics in general is considered the exclusive privilege of men, and the few iconic female politicians usually compete only with other women or adopt a masculine way of political competition.

But over the past six years, since the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, changes have been made to the electoral process in Ukrainian legislation and a gender quota of 30% on election lists has been introduced. With the quota of 30%, women made up only 12% of those who entered the Parliament after the first election. And in 2019 women made up 21% of the new parliament members. This indicates that gender quotas are working. In 2020, thanks to the significant work of the faction of members of parliament and civil society, called the «Equal Opportunity», the electoral legislation was once again

changed. Now election lists must include 40% women and at least two among every five candidates on the list must be women. We will probably be able to see the results of these legislative changes after the local elections this year.

In addition, political parties themselves play a great role in gender policy, as they can voluntarily form their lists for the elections on a fifty-fifty basis. Another important element of supporting women in politics is the functioning of women's wings and associations, as well as the formation of a gender program of a political party. The Power of People political party is currently the only one in Ukraine where an expanded gender programme has been developed, which includes the following blocks: political participation of women, economic participation, entrepreneurship and employment, parental leave, education, infrastructure, accessibility and inclusion, healthcare and sexual and domestic violence against women.

# VENTE VENEZUELA

We plan to improve women's access to education by promoting more private investments and direct citizen subsidies which will broaden opportunities. We should improve the education on gender and enhance merit and equality before the law. We should have greater inclusion and inclusive competition. In sectors such as politics and business there is a need to promote more representation of women.

With that referential axis, added to the fact that Venezuela is a country in crisis - inflation, poverty, and inability of the authoritarian regime to provide for its people – a methodology was designed that originated from the fact that more than 50% of Vente party members are women and about 40% of the leadership positions are held by women.

In 23 states we carried out meetings attended by female representatives of 125 regional organizations. We presented our plan and discussed the regional situation.

The diagnosis showed indicators of a forced exodus, exceeding 4 million people, mostly men aged 15-39. Between 2011-2020, there was an increase in women-headed households from 38% to 60%. Due to the exodus of men, most of those were single women households. Furthermore, 16% of young women left their studies due to pregnancy, childcare or obligations at home and 22% did not consider it important to continue due to similar reasons.

To combat this development, Vente's vision of free development was presented along with the work that promotes female leadership in relevant areas. This was framed to generate strength in women so they can, as any citizen, use the opportunities that our proposal will promote in the country and get ahead of themselves based on their knowledge, merits and abilities.

The twenty-three meetings showed great results and the organizations showed interest in participating in this type of activities, where a political party opens spaces to listen and discuss issues affecting their society.

We would like to highlight the opportunity of co-operation between our female political leadership and women from participating organizations. Most of them expressed great interest in joining a network that allows them to show their work, organize joint projects and accompany the implementation of our ideas in their communities. The network will facilitate carrying out the proposals that we have raised and that arose in the workshop meetings:

- Training of women leaders to develop activities in their communities, focusing on mitigating the main detected vulnerabilities and bringing capacity-building tools to enable them to make their own decisions based on their interests and future projections. These interests include nutritional administration, autonomy information, economic and financial strategies, sexual and reproductive health and civic values.
- Training at a second level, including access and management of technologies and networks, design of a strategy for reactivation of production with entrepreneurship tools, formulation of community projects and agri-food activity in rural communities.

All of the above is based on tools that promote strengthening of citizen capacity based on liberal values, inclusion of women not as receptive subjects but as executors of programmes. This will facilitate the transformation of their current role towards one that is active in their own development.



# AFEK TOUNES

## **Political Empowerment**

We should strengthen women's role in society, offer adequate living conditions and guarantee equal participation in various fields. This is to ensure a future where women and men, regardless of socioeconomic status, should have the same rights and opportunities to work, run business, participate in decision-making and benefit from social services without facing discrimination.

## **Education and Employment**

Establish a comprehensive system to improve living, transport and working conditions of women in rural areas. Facilitate access to social security. Strengthen the connection between businesses and universities to ensure talent identification. Develop training for young women to improve the employability and facilitate integration into the labour market. Ensure proper application of labour rights.

## **Healthcare**

Improve women's access to health care services in order to ensure their well-being. Emphasize their rights and educate them about the possibilities to take legal action in case of abuse, mistreatment or if they are refused certain services.

## **Parenthood**

### **Violence Against Women**

47.6% of women aged 18-64 have been victims of violence at least once. Physical and psychological violence are most common, followed by sexual and economic violence. Women in rural areas and with disabilities are more exposed. This is despite government and civil society programmes to empower women and reduce school withdrawal. We must increase supervision of law application to tackle this.

## **Sexual Violence**

# SYLA LYUDEY

## **Political empowerment of women**

Syla Lyudey has a women's wing, gender quotas for election lists, regular gender mainstreaming trainings and yearly audits on gender strategy within the party. There should be gender quotas on the state level for election lists. Introduce programmes to support women politicians on all levels with education and training.

## **Employment and Education**

Labour code that guarantees a friendly working environment, equal job access and working conditions for men and women. Stronger legislation on rights of parents who take care of children. Legal action against employers not adhering to discrimination legislation. Calculation of women's work at home as working experience. More male teachers. More STEM opportunities for girls. Updated sexual education.

## **Healthcare, including sexual and reproductive rights**

Equal access to healthcare. Improvement of women's clinics. Stronger protection of women's reproductive health. Information about the importance of breast screening and preventive medical check-ups for men. A more inclusive approach to medical services and better social security for medical workers.



### **Parenthood**

The state should pay for two years of parental leave and encourage more men to take parental leave. Employers should pay for two weeks of leave after childbirth to mothers and fathers. Introduction of possibilities to balance between family and career. Investment in the kindergarten system to improve both quality and quantity. Child support from the state in case one parent refuses to pay after divorce.

### **Violence Against Women**

Ratification of the Istanbul Convention on Violence Against Women. Establishment of shelters for victims of domestic and sexual violence. More work with prevention and criminalisation of sexual and domestic violence – more cooperation between responsible institutions. Anti-discrimination work within the police force.

### **Sexual Violence**

# VENTE VENEZUELA

## **Political Empowerment**

There should be spaces and networks provided that encourage women to participate in politics. However, we also need to make female leadership in different areas of civil society visible. For example, we should make visible the work of mothers, which has become the central nucleus of the family and society, and use that leadership to empower women in society.

## **Education and Employment**

Access to education must be improved by promoting more private investment and direct citizen subsidies. Sexual education should also be improved. Better inclusion of women by enhancing merit and equality in employment. Promote more female representation in business and politics. Initiatives to strengthen women's participation as executors – rather than subjects.

## **Healthcare**

Construction of capabilities for and eventual transition to an all private healthcare sector with direct subsidies from the state to citizens with less power. The free market competition will force prices to be kept down without government meddling.

**Parenthood**

We want to learn from maternity and paternity policies that are taking place in the world in order to propose a reform based on best practices.

**Violence Against Women**

The conditions in Venezuela have contributed to a culture that encourages sexual exploitation of women and sexual slavery, where forced prostitution and human trafficking are not uncommon. These cases must be investigated thoroughly, the perpetrators brought to justice and the victims compensated.

**Sexual Violence**

The current situation in Venezuela has increased violence in general. In particular, sexual and reproductive health of women is heavily affected. Maternal mortality, teenage pregnancy, STDs and unsafe abortions have all increased. There is an urgent need for healthcare reforms to take care of these issues. Family planning and use of contraceptives should be encouraged.

# LIBERALERNA

## **Political Empowerment**

Women's ability to shape society requires equal conditions in all areas of life, including politics. Both Swedish and EU institutions should be gender equal.

## **Education and Employment**

Break down gender norms prevalent in the education system – equality starts in the classroom. Discrimination should be costly for the perpetrator and employers should strive to eliminate all discrimination. Same work, same salary – this should be ensured by yearly wage surveys in larger workplaces. Ensure career development in “women's professions” and raise the salaries.

## **Healthcare**

Secure sexual health and reproductive rights worldwide. Apply a gender perspective to healthcare and organize all care around individual needs. Sexual education should be improved to reduce unwanted pregnancies, and the current Swedish laws on abortion should be kept. Women have the right to decide over their own body.

### **Parenthood**

Increase parental leave by two months (one for each parent) and encourage parents to share leave by offering an equality bonus. Make it possible to choose between longer parental leave or higher allowance. Parental insurance and leave should be updated to include various family structures. Raise the ceiling for allowance for care of sick children. Altruistic surrogacy should be allowed.

### **Violence Against Women**

Strengthen the juridical systems and support of victims. Punish violence with honor motives stricter. Increase the knowledge of honor violence in the police, the courts, healthcare, school and social services. Suspend any support of organizations working against equality and integration. Raise the allowance for women's shelter organizations.

### **Sexual Violence**

Sexual activity without consent is rape. People under 18 years should not be considered "married" in Sweden, even if married abroad. Strengthen protection for victims of domestic violence and increase the penalty for spousal abuse. Improve the investigation capacity for sexual crimes. Abolish the prescriptive period for sexual crimes against children. Protect children against forced marriage.

# YOUR OWN IDEAS

**Political Empowerment**

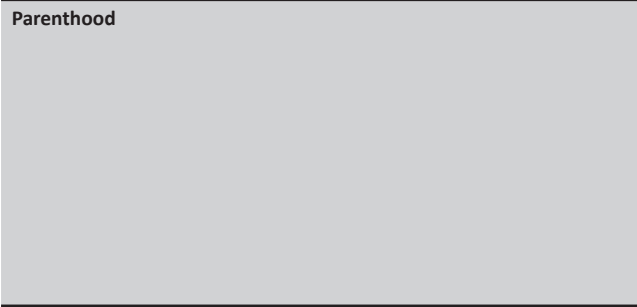


**Education and Employment**

**Healthcare**



**Parenthood**



**Violence Against Women**

**Sexual Violence**



**This publication was made possible by  
contributions from:**

Jonas Norell

Pedro Urruchurtu

Olga Nemanzhyna

Kabil Daoud





SILC  SWEDISH  
INTERNATIONAL  
LIBERAL  
CENTRE