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13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament (13SWSP)

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Report on the Summit

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Cover: **Participants at the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament,**
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The 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament (13SWSP) was held on 6 September 2021 in Vienna (Austria) on the theme *Women at the centre: From confronting the pandemic to preserving achievements in gender-responsive recovery*. Over 26 of the world's leading women legislators took part in the Summit which was organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in partnership with the Parliament of Austria and the United Nations. The full List of participants is available on the IPU [event website](#).

The 13SWSP Preparatory Committee, established on the basis of gender-balanced nominations from all the IPU Geopolitical Groups, guided the substantive preparations for the 13SWSP. The Committee selected the theme and sub-themes of the Summit, identified the motions and drafted the concept notes for the panel debate sessions.

The 13SWSP was held in two segments – virtually on 17 and 18 August 2020 and in-person on 6 September 2021. The in-person Summit preceded the in-person Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (5WCSP) which was held on 7 and 8 September 2021 also Vienna (Austria). The outcomes of the deliberations of the 13SWSP fed into the proceedings of the 5WCSP thus making gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls a priority on the agenda of all parliaments.

Executive summary

On 6 September 2021, the world's top women legislators gathered in Vienna for the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament (13SWSP) hosted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Parliament of Austria and the United Nations. The Summit was held on the occasion of the Fifth World Conference of Speakers of Parliament (5WCSP). Twenty-six women Speakers of Parliament attended what was the first global in-person gathering for many of the participants in nearly two years.

The theme of the Summit was *Women at the centre: From confronting the pandemic to preserving achievements in a gender-responsive recovery*. The Speakers of Parliament discussed the essential role of women during the pandemic, as well as how the post-pandemic recovery could lead to progress in gender equality.

The economic downturn brought about by the pandemic had added to existing inequalities in many ways. Women typically earn less and have less secure jobs than men. With plummeting economic activity, women are particularly vulnerable to layoffs and loss of livelihood. During the first month of the pandemic, informal workers worldwide lost an average of 60 per cent of their income. Some of the sectors hardest hit by the pandemic were feminized sectors, such as the retail, beauty and hospitality industries. Women also have less access to land and capital, which makes it harder for them to bounce back and rebuild their businesses.

Women lead on the front lines of the pandemic response. They make up 70 per cent of the global health and social care workforce. They are more likely to be frontline health professionals, especially nurses, midwives and community health workers. These professionals are sacrificing their health for the safety of society.

Furthermore, the pandemic has increased care and domestic work which disproportionately falls on women. Women do 2.6 times more care and domestic work than men. Most of this work is unpaid, which means that even if women's domestic care workload is increasing their gainful employment is not.

The Summit discussed these pressing developments while acknowledging women's role in the pandemic response and charting the way forward in strengthening gender equality through COVID-19 recovery efforts.

The Summit was divided into two main sessions. The first session *Women in the pandemic: A tribute to everyday heroes* featured interactive debates anchored on women in the health care sector, women's unpaid care work, and women's lack of access to social protection. The women Speakers agreed that while women composed the majority of the health care sector workforce and worked in the frontlines, they were more likely than men to be in lower paid jobs and be less represented in health care leadership positions. There is therefore an urgent need to encourage and support women to be represented in all public and private spheres of leadership.

Moreover, the Speakers discussed the need to value and redistribute unpaid domestic care work that burdened many households. While it is important to financially support and compensate domestic care work, there is also a need for strong incentives to have women in the workforce. The Speakers agreed that domestic care work must not be seen as a woman's job only but as work that should be equally shared between men and women.

The Speakers also discussed the need for universal and gender-responsive social protection schemes. Many of the participants argued that there was no bigger discrimination than exclusion from pension schemes and social security. Today, 60 per cent of women worldwide are not covered by any type of social protection. Social protection is an integral part of the discussion on economic growth and gender equality which is why social protection policies must be amended to equally benefit men and women.

The second session *Women in the post-pandemic recovery: Preserving achievements, furthering progress* featured interactive debates on a COVID-19 recovery agenda with focus on achieving gender parity, advancing women's economic empowerment, and eradicating gender-based violence.

Gender parity in parliaments is a crucial step in advancing gender transformative societies post-pandemic. There must be more voices in parliament that reflect the everyday situation of women and girls in order to achieve inclusive policies that will respond to the derailment of gender equality in the pandemic as a result of, for example, the lack of economic protection of working women or the increase of gender-based violence.

The participants acknowledged that there could be no equality in the workplace if there was no equality in the home. The gender pay gap is a sum of different factors, one of which is the cultural expectations of caregiving. Even in situations where women and men both work

full time, it is the woman who is more likely to spend more time on childcare or household activities. This affects a woman's likelihood of getting promoted and from there the woman's and man's earning potential diverges. Policies must therefore be put in place to incentivize both women and men to share the burden through, for example, paid parental leave and child support.

As daunting challenges related to violence against women and children arise in the COVID-19 pandemic, Speakers must strengthen their efforts to eradicate such violence. The Speakers agreed that without drastic cultural and economic change, women would continue to suffer. Violence against women and children is firmly rooted in political and social factors which is why policies must address its root causes, among other, by empowering girls and ensuring they have equal access to education.

The women parliamentary leaders agreed that a transformation of the economy and society through a feminist lens was needed. The COVID-19 crisis provided an opportunity for that kind of transformation and gave a clear message on what must be changed. It is the duty of parliamentarians to lead the feminist transformation of our global system, to ensure the just allocation of resources and equal opportunities. The outcome of the 13th Summit of Women Speakers of Parliament confirmed that women Speakers were eager to lead the way.