

## Youth Perspectives on Key Issues Affecting Women

### **Discriminatory Laws and Lack of Affirmative Policies**

The United Nations definition of 'youth' is "persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years." Despite being a uniquely vulnerable group, human rights research and reports often overlook the need to consider the rights of young women as a separate category. Youth rights are often grouped with women's rights in general. However, the gender issues impacting young women should be addressed separately as youth are in a unique position and at a risk of double marginalization because of their age and gender. Children and youth often face discrimination different from women, including but not limited to discriminatory laws related to education, minimum age of marriage, sentencing of juvenile offenders, family relations etc.

### **Community Engagement and Education (from classrooms to PSAs)**

Gender stereotypes and narratives in school systems affect youth and influence their perspectives and opportunities. These stereotypes in educational structures are often reinforced with specific societal norms that further negatively impact the chances of young women to succeed. Gender stereotyping can perpetuate harmful and inaccurate ideas on youth abilities and their role in society. Teachers and society at large can unknowingly encourage gender-based behaviors that ultimately exclude young women from certain career trajectories. This is particularly the case with STEM where there is still a considerable gender gap. Specific policies and programs should be developed to target the gender bias in schools and social norms affecting young women's opportunities negatively.

### **Violence Targeting Women in Leadership Roles**

Young women holding or pursuing leadership positions are particularly vulnerable when it comes to online abuse as a form of harassment as the majority of social media users are youth. It is increasingly concerning as there has recently been an [escalation in online violence against women](#) due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It's evident that women, and young women, face the brunt of targeted harassment. Corporate as well as government policies should be developed to accelerate change in this field.

### **Gender Mainstreaming and Quotas in Government Institutions and Contracts**

Young women face gender as well as age-specific challenges that limit their political participation. Women feel more inclined to participate if they're represented by other women, so encouraging women's participation in politics through policies and legal reform will positively impact youth participation in politics as well.

### **Transformational Change - Barriers to a Diversity of Women in Leadership Roles**

There are numerous examples of transformational change occurring when youth initiate and lead movements. Two of the most famous and inspiring examples are the environmental movement sparked and led by Greta Thunberg and the girl education movement sparked and led by Malala Yousafzai. The main challenge is creating spaces and providing opportunities for young women to spark those changes. All organizations and structures should make a mindful effort to provide young women the stage and the space to share their ideas and cultivate support for their initiatives.

### **Challenges Women Face Organizing Outside Formal Structure**

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) face gendered risks, and young women have challenges specific to their age as well - lack of youth-specific affirmative policies and protections, greater social media presence (therefore a greater risk of online bullying and harassment) etc. Additionally, there is an age-specific bias against young women outside and even inside formal structures. Young women are often deemed unqualified to speak as an expert on a matter, and unrealistic standards are put on young women outside formal structures. Also, there are often no spaces dedicated for young women to present their views and perspectives. Lack of policies to ensure youth representation is prevalent across organizations in the field of human rights.