NEXTGEN LIBERALS ACTION REPORT

Prepared within a framework of the NextGen Liberals Mentorship Programme

LIBERAL INTERNATIONAL

D66 internationaal

TOWARDS EQUALITY
INLW
International Network of Liberal Women

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Introduction

In politics across Europe, young people and women are still underrepresented. There are fewer of them in parliaments and local councils, fewer in party leadership, and fewer in the rooms where decisions are made. Changing that takes more than encouragement. It takes people who have been there and are willing to share what they know, and it takes relationships that last after the conference is over. That was the idea behind the NextGen Liberals Programme.

The Programme was organised by Liberal International with the support of D66 Internationaal, the International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLRY) and the International Network of Liberal Women (INLW). From 2 to 4 October 2026, fifteen young liberals met in Istanbul with five mentors from these partner organisations. Some of the mentors are serving or former liberal politicians. Others have spent years working in civil society. Each mentor was paired with a group of three participants and stayed with that same group for the whole programme. We chose this 1:3 format on purpose. It is small enough for real conversations and for trust to build quickly, and it lets participants learn from people with very different careers and generations of experience.

The three days built on one another. On the first evening, each mentor met their group, and together they talked about expectations and set shared goals. The second day centred on a mentoring lunch and an afternoon of group discussion. That is where the themes of this report took shape, and where mentors helped participants think about potential allies and the people they needed to reach. On the third day, each group sat down in a Writing Lab and drafted its own part of this report, with its mentor guiding the work. Before leaving, every group agreed how and when it would stay in touch over the following six months.

This report is the result of that work. It was written by the participants and their mentors and prepared for the 65th Congress of Liberal International, held from 2 to 7 November 2026. It has three parts.

The first part, Chapters 1 to 5, contains our policy recommendations. **Chapter 1** looks at what active and long-running conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia mean for women. It argues that women should be treated as participants in peace and recovery, not only as people who need protection. **Chapter 2** proposes that every party leader take personal responsibility for guiding one young woman politician for a year. **Chapter 3** makes the case for cross-party meetings and for talking with people we disagree with. **Chapter 4 f**ocuses on mental health, and on building spaces of solidarity for liberals who work under pressure, threats or burnout. **Chapter 5** sets out practical steps parties can take to help more women reach leadership positions and to protect them from harassment and violence in political life.

Introduction

The second part, **Chapter 6**, describes the mentorship model itself. It explains how groups were matched, why we brought together different generations and sectors, how the three days were structured, and what we learned along the way. We wrote it so that any liberal party or organisation can pick it up and run something similar.

The third part, **Chapter 7**, is our success roadmap. It sets out what we want to achieve in the twelve months after the Programme and how we will know whether we are on track. It covers the mentor check-ins, a mid-point call for all the groups, bringing participants into the wider liberal network with D66, and finally an assessment of whether other member parties can adopt the model.

We hope this report is useful in **two ways**:

1. As a set of concrete proposals, and
2. As proof that investing in the next generation of liberal leaders works when it is done with care and followed through.

We would like to thank D66 Internationaal, IFLRY and INLW for their support in making this Programme possible. We are especially grateful to the mentors, who gave their time, experience and honesty so generously, and to every participant who brought their ideas, energy and commitment to Istanbul and to the pages that follow.

CHAPTER 1

From Protection to Participation: Gender Dimensions of Active and Protracted, Frozen Conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia

Armed conflict affects women and girls differently from men and boys, and the harm outlasts the fighting. Comparing an active conflict (Ukraine) with a protracted, frozen one (Georgia) across five areas (physical safety, displacement, health, political participation and recovery) shows that the difference between them is one of visibility rather than severity: in Ukraine, risks are documented in real time, while in Georgia they persist as chronic poverty and exclusion that attract diminishing international attention. In both, women are largely absent from the processes that decide how these risks are addressed. In 2024 women were only 7% of negotiators in peace processes worldwide, and less than 1% of funding for Ukraine's recovery supports gender equality. This proposal sets out eight recommendations to bring women and young people, especially those displaced by conflict, into the negotiations, recovery planning and party politics that shape their future.

1. The Problem

Civilians make up the majority of those affected by armed conflict, and women and girls, including refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), face particular risks (UN Security Council, 2000). They are often targeted within war strategies, enduring sexual violence, forced displacement, loss of livelihoods and restricted access to public services (Kangas et al., 2014). Resolution 1820 recognized that women and girls are specifically targeted by sexual violence as a tactic of war (UN Security Council, 2008).

1.1 Physical Safety and Gender-Based Violence

In active conflict, sexual violence against civilians and detainees serves as an instrument of intimidation, coercion and torture. OHCHR documented 1,004 confirmed cases of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine between February 2022 and July 2026, cautioning that the figure is incomplete due to underreporting and restricted access to occupied territories. The pattern is not uniform: in detention, most documented victims are men, whereas in Russian-occupied territories women and girls are overwhelmingly the primary targets of rape, gang rape, forced nudity and threats of sexual violence, mostly within residential settings (OHCHR, 2026).

In protracted, frozen conflicts, the risk becomes less visible but remains enduring. In Georgia, IDP women living in collective centers report significantly higher rates of sexual harassment and sexual violence than other women. These risks are linked to economic dependency: over half of surveyed women lacked personal income (compared with less than a quarter of men), and financial necessity was a primary reason abused women returned to violent households. Over 70% of women considered existing legislation inadequate, and only 4% were aware of domestic violence shelters (Ashwill and Lacroix, 2017). Civil society organizations near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with Abkhazia report that donor priorities have shifted toward Ukraine, while Abkhazia itself has no domestic violence legislation, no shelters and no official statistics (Le Pavic, 2024). Female activists in Georgia face harassment and rape threats without adequate protection, and GREVIO's

monitoring could not cover occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (GREVIO, 2022). Globally, women's organizations in conflict zones receive just 0.4% of total aid (UN Women, 2025).

1.2 Displacement and Material Security

Forced displacement removes the housing, income and social networks on which women's security depends. In Georgia, 290,257 people were registered as IDPs in 2021, 53% of them women; 39% of IDP women were unemployed and 41% lacked sufficient income for basic necessities such as food (UN Women Georgia, 2024). Decades after the initial conflict, nearly 40% of displaced persons still live in collective centers with substandard conditions and poor access to services (UN Women, 2025). In Ukraine, about 3.7 million people were internally displaced and 6.9 million had sought refuge abroad as of February 2025, with women and children accounting for roughly 63% of refugees (Council on Foreign Relations, citing IOM). Conflict sharply increases vulnerability to trafficking, particularly among displaced women and children (ODIHR, n.d.), and displaced women in Ukraine provide up to 56 hours of unpaid childcare per week (UN Women, 2025).

1.3 Health and Psychosocial Well-being

In Ukraine, the destruction of medical facilities, power outages and water shortages have made childbirth increasingly dangerous for the country's 2.5 million women of reproductive age (UNFPA, 2026), with the WHO verifying over 2,870 attacks on healthcare facilities by February 2026 (WHO, 2026). In Georgia, healthcare exists but is costly, unequal and poorly adapted: IDP women face financial barriers and lack specialized reproductive and psychosocial services (GREVIO, 2022; UN Women Georgia, 2024). Psychological harm is severe in both contexts. Among Georgian IDPs, 23% suffer from PTSD, yet only one-third have accessed mental healthcare; in Ukraine, 42% of women are at risk of depression, and an IOM survey found depression among 53% of IDPs. With mental health receiving only 1% to 2% of health financing globally, long-term care remains out of reach (UN Women, 2025).

1.4 Political Exclusion and Decision-Making

In 2024, 90% of peace processes worldwide included no women negotiators; women were 7% of negotiators and 14% of mediators (UN Women, 2025). Two women took part in Ukraine's delegation to the 2014–2015 Minsk talks, but women have played no substantive role in high-level negotiations since the 2022 full-scale invasion (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). In Georgia, women's share of participants in the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) rose only from 15% in 2019 to 20% in 2024, and 95% of surveyed IDP women had never joined conflict transformation initiatives, citing a lack of information, financial resources, hope and safety (UN Women Georgia, 2024). Exclusion extends to party politics: women make up 54% of Georgia's electorate, yet party platforms rarely address gender (ISET, 2023), internal party gender policies are weak or absent (UNDP, 2022), and displaced women are virtually absent from formal decision-making bodies (Social Justice Center, 2025).

1.5 Recovery and Reconstruction

Recovery frameworks decide who benefits from reconstruction, yet gender is routinely marginalized. Ukraine's ten-year recovery needs are estimated at nearly USD 588 billion, but less than 1% of funding supports gender equality or women's empowerment; civil society and donors have formed the Alliance for Gender Responsive and Inclusive Recovery for Ukraine to close this gap (UN Women Ukraine, 2025).

In Georgia, recovery means long-term socio-economic integration rather than physical rebuilding. The 2022–2024 National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security was the first to allocate a dedicated budget for conflict-affected and displaced women (UN Women Georgia, 2024), after earlier action plans were adopted without funding (GREVIO, 2022).

2. Comparative Findings

Table 1. Gender risks in an active and a protracted (frozen) conflict

Area	Active conflict: Ukraine	Protracted (frozen) conflict: Georgia
Safety and GBV	1,004 confirmed cases of conflict-related sexual violence (2022–2026)	Higher harassment and violence in collective centers; 4% aware of shelters
Displacement	3.7m IDPs, 6.9m refugees; women and children 63% of refugees	290,257 IDPs, 53% women; 39% of IDP women unemployed
Health	2,870+ attacks on healthcare; 42% of women at risk of depression	23% of IDPs with PTSD; one-third accessed mental healthcare
Participation	No substantive role for women in high-level talks since 2022	20% of IPRM participants; 95% of IDP women never involved
Recovery	Less than 1% of recovery funding for gender equality	First dedicated WPS budget (2022–2024 plan)
Main challenge	Scale and urgency of harm	Invisibility of chronic harm; shifting donor attention

Sources: as cited in Section 1.

3. Policy Recommendations

Political participation comes first, because it decides whether the other measures are designed with, rather than for, the women and young people they affect.

3.1 Seats at the Table

Recommendation 1. Make gender-balanced delegations a condition of EU support for negotiation and dialogue formats.

Formats concerning Ukraine and Georgia, including the Geneva International Discussions and the IPRM, should include at least 30% women among delegates, rising to parity, and publish participation figures every year. Women's share of IPRM participants has risen by only five percentage points in five years, and women have had no substantive role in talks on Ukraine since 2022.

Recommendation 2. Give women's organizations, displaced women and young people a formal role in recovery planning.

The Ukraine Recovery Conference process and the Alliance for Gender Responsive and Inclusive Recovery for Ukraine should secure them seats on national and municipal recovery planning bodies, so that those most affected by displacement help decide how reconstruction funds are spent.

3.2 Money That Follows Commitments

Recommendation 3. Earmark and track a gender-equality share of recovery funding.
Less than 1% of recovery funding currently supports gender equality, against needs of nearly USD 588 billion. Donors should apply gender budgeting and tagging to recovery instruments, including the Ukraine Facility, set a measurable target for gender-responsive spending and report progress publicly every year.

Recommendation 4. Sustain funding where international attention has moved on.
Donors should give women's organizations in both Ukraine and Georgia flexible, multi-year core funding, and not treat support for the two as a trade-off. Successors to Georgia's 2022–2024 action plan should keep and increase the dedicated budget for conflict-affected and displaced women.

3.3 Parties Open to Women and Young People

Recommendation 5. Adopt binding internal gender policies in liberal parties.
European liberal parties and their partners in Ukraine and Georgia should adopt written gender equality policies, with targets for women on candidate lists and in leadership bodies, gender-responsive platforms and annual public reporting. In Georgia, women are 54% of voters, yet parties rarely address gender in their platforms or internal rules.

Recommendation 6. Build a pathway into party politics for displaced women and young people.
Youth wings and political foundations should run leadership, mentoring and candidate-training programs for displaced women and young people, link them with elected representatives across Europe, and draw on the Youth, Peace and Security agenda (UN Security Council Resolution 2250, 2015) alongside Women, Peace and Security.

Recommendation 7. Make participation safe and practical.
Displaced women cite a lack of information, money, hope and safety as barriers to participation. Programs should cover travel and childcare costs, offer local and online formats and reach collective centers directly. Parties should adopt codes of conduct and confidential reporting for harassment, including online abuse, and Georgia should implement GREVIO's recommendations on protecting women human rights defenders.

3.4 Services and Data

Recommendation 8. Close service gaps and improve data.
Fund survivor-centred GBV services, documentation of sexual violence and reparations in Ukraine; fund specialized services, shelter awareness and economic support for displaced women in Georgia; build long-term psychosocial support into recovery plans. Collect sex- and age-disaggregated data and seek monitoring access to occupied Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

4. Conclusion

Ukraine and Georgia show two sides of the same problem: where conflict is active, harm to women is urgent and visible; where it is protracted, harm becomes chronic and slips out of view, together with the funding to address it. Bringing women and young people into the rooms where peace, recovery and policy are decided is a matter of rights and a condition for durable peace and democratic resilience in Europe, including in EU candidate countries such as Ukraine and Georgia. European liberal parties can lead by example, starting with their own candidate lists, youth wings and partnerships.

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CHAPTER 2

Party leaders should be responsible for guiding one young women politician for a year

CORE IDEA

If political parties want more young people and women to participate, those already in leadership positions should take responsibility for opening the door.

1. Why is our proposal necessary?

Political parties need to take greater responsibility for developing the next generation of political leaders, particularly young people and women.

Many young people and women remain outside political life, not because they lack ideas or potential, but because entering politics can feel distant or inaccessible. In some contexts, traditional and patriarchal structures still reinforce the idea that politics is mainly a space for men. Women may lack confidence to put themselves forward, while the limited visibility of women in leadership positions means there are too few women inspiring and supporting other women.

Young people face additional barriers. Some do not believe political participation can produce real change. Others may distrust political parties or political leaders, particularly where politics is associated with corruption. A mentorship programme will therefore only work if it is credible, transparent and able to demonstrate concrete opportunities and results.

Our proposal

Party leaders and senior political figures should mentor at least one young woman or young political leader every year.

The initiative can begin within the liberal political family – we should start at home – but it should not remain exclusively liberal. Liberal parties and organisations can share the model with other political groups and encourage its adoption across parliaments and political institutions.

2. Which barriers could we face?

Resistance within political structures.

Some established political figures may see initiatives supporting young people or women as unnecessary, or as challenging their position. The programme needs visible leadership support and a clear message that mentoring develops participation and leadership rather than undermining existing leaders.

Lack of confidence and role models.

In traditional or patriarchal environments, some women may not see politics as a space for them. If women do not see other women participating, leading and achieving results, it can be harder to imagine themselves doing the same.

Distrust of politics
Young people may not want to be mentored by political figures they do not trust. Perceptions or experiences of corruption can make political mentoring unattractive rather than inspiring. Transparency in the selection of mentors and mentees is essential.

The feeling that nothing will change
A programme will struggle to attract participants if it offers only meetings and conversations. Participants need to see that engagement can lead to something tangible: a skill, a network, an opportunity, a project, greater responsibility or influence on an issue that matters to them.

Different realities require different approaches
Our group discussion showed that interest in political training and mentoring varies greatly by context. For example, participants noted strong interest in training among some young people in Ukraine, while engaging women in Bosnia and Herzegovina may require a more immediate and practical connection to issues that matter in their lives. One message will not work everywhere.

3. How could the programme work?

Open and transparent applications
Create a public application process with clear criteria explaining who can participate, what mentoring offers, and what commitment is expected from mentors and mentees.

Go beyond existing political networks
Recruit not only through party structures, but also through universities, youth organisations, women's organisations, community groups and other relevant networks.

Introduce politics before asking for commitment
Offer a short introductory course or event explaining political participation, how political institutions work, and what the mentorship can offer.

Make mentors visible and allow choice
Present mentors publicly – their experience, areas of expertise and what they can offer – and allow applicants to express a preference for a particular mentor or profile.

Agree on concrete objectives
At the start of each mentorship, mentor and mentee should agree on a small number of clear objectives and an expected result for the year. Mentoring should lead towards action, not only conversation.

Share the model
Liberal organisations should present the proposal to other political groups in parliaments and political institutions and encourage wider adoption.

4. How do we reach people outside our political environment?

This should be a central part of the recommendation. If recruitment is limited to people already active in political parties, the programme will not expand participation.

Instead of asking: "How do we find young women interested in politics?"

Ask: "How do we reach young women interested in changing something in their community, even if they do not yet see politics as the way to do it?"

The outreach campaign should start with issues and impact rather than with political careers. It should show real examples of young people and women who identified a problem, became involved and achieved something concrete.

Universities and international-relations programmes can be one channel, but not the only one. Outreach should also include people interested in education, women's rights, entrepreneurship, environment, local development, culture and social issues.

The message should be simple: politics is one of the ways in which people can turn the issues they care about into change. The campaign itself must be attractive, accessible and credible to people who currently feel that politics has little to offer them.

5. Recommendation for the Action Report

We recommend that political parties establish a structured annual mentorship programme through which party leaders and senior political figures mentor young people and women with leadership potential.

The programme should use transparent and open applications, actively reach beyond existing party networks, provide introductory political education, allow participants to learn about and express preferences for potential mentors, and establish clear objectives and measurable outcomes for every mentoring relationship.

Liberal parties and organisations should lead by example by implementing the model within their own political family and subsequently sharing it with other political groups and parliamentary organisations.

If we want more young people and women to participate in politics, we should not wait for them to find their own way into the system. Political organisations must also open the door.

CHAPTER 3

Cross-Party Meetings: Speaking with Opponents

Strengthening Women's Participation in Politics and Leadership Through Dialogue and Cooperation

Executive Summary

Women's meaningful participation in politics is fundamental to representative democracy, inclusive governance, and effective decision-making. However, women continue to face barriers to political advancement, including unequal access to networks, limited leadership opportunities, gender stereotypes, discrimination, and harassment.

Cross-party dialogue offers a constructive way to address shared challenges while respecting political and ideological differences. It enables women from different political backgrounds to exchange experiences, challenge assumptions, strengthen leadership skills, build professional relationships, and identify opportunities for cooperation.

The urgency of progress is reflected in global representation figures. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), women held 27.5% of parliamentary seats worldwide as of 1 January 2026, representing only a 0.3-percentage-point increase from the previous year. Taiwan's establishment of the Pan-Pacific Women Parliamentarians' Alliance and the Asian Women Parliamentarians' Alliance on 24 April 2026 illustrates how cross-party cooperation can support regional engagement and parliamentary collaboration.

This report argues that effective cross-party meetings should go beyond discussion and generate practical, sustained outcomes. Their value lies not in achieving political uniformity, but in creating opportunities for mutual learning, constructive disagreement, stronger relationships, and collective action towards fairer political participation.

1. Learning from Different Perspectives, Ideas, and Experiences

Inclusive leadership requires the ability to listen, learn, and engage constructively across diverse political and social perspectives. Women in politics bring different experiences, priorities, and approaches to public service. Exchanging these perspectives can broaden understanding, challenge established assumptions, and generate solutions that may not emerge within a single political group.

Cross-party discussions can also reveal shared priorities despite differences in political platforms. Issues such as community well-being, social welfare, youth empowerment, and inclusive decision-making may provide opportunities to identify common objectives and exchange effective practices. By engaging with opposing viewpoints, political leaders can move beyond partisan echo chambers, strengthen their policy approaches, and develop broader coalitions capable of addressing complex societal challenges.

Learning across political differences is particularly valuable when participants recognise that no single perspective provides a complete understanding of every issue. Openness to different experiences can strengthen both individual judgement and the quality of collective decision-making.

2. Receiving Feedback and Using Challenges to Improve

Political leadership requires resilience, adaptability, and a willingness to reassess ideas. Women leaders may operate under heightened public scrutiny while also navigating institutional barriers and gender-based expectations. In this context, constructive feedback and respectful disagreement can become valuable tools for professional and strategic development.

Engaging with opposing arguments helps participants identify weaknesses in their reasoning, anticipate counterarguments, refine policy proposals, and improve communication and negotiation skills. Rather than treating every challenge as an obstacle, participants can use it to reconsider assumptions and strengthen their responses.

However, constructive criticism must be distinguished from personal attacks, discrimination, and intimidation. Productive dialogue requires an environment in which participants can question ideas without undermining one another's dignity or credibility. Such an environment enables women leaders to demonstrate not only resilience, but also pragmatism, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

3. Building Personal Connections and Finding Common Ground

Sustainable political cooperation depends on trust as well as shared objectives. Opportunities to engage beyond formal party competition can help participants recognise one another's experiences, establish meaningful professional relationships, and create channels for future collaboration.

Finding common ground does not require abandoning political identities or compromising fundamental principles. It requires identifying specific areas where cooperation can produce mutual benefit, including fair access to leadership, transparent candidate selection, support for emerging women leaders, and safer political environments.

These connections can be particularly valuable for young women, first-time candidates, and those without established political networks. Cross-party mentoring, professional exchanges, and continued communication can turn individual meetings into lasting relationships that support women's participation and leadership.

4. Understanding That Learning Does Not Require Agreement

Political disagreement is an essential feature of pluralistic democracy. The ability to learn from another person should not depend on agreeing with that person's political position. Likewise, cooperation on a shared objective does not require consensus on every other issue.

Cross-party dialogue is most effective when participants listen carefully, engage critically with opposing arguments, and remain open to insights that challenge their existing views. This approach allows women to preserve their political independence while cooperating on specific issues of common concern.

Recognising the legitimacy of different perspectives does not weaken political conviction. Instead, it demonstrates that principled disagreement and constructive cooperation can coexist. For democratic institutions, this distinction is essential: political diversity should be a source of informed debate rather than an automatic barrier to collective progress.

5. Recognising That Assuming We Are Always Right Limits Change

Meaningful progress requires the willingness to question our own assumptions and recognise the limitations of our perspectives. When individuals regard their own views as unquestionably correct, they risk dismissing relevant evidence, overlooking alternative solutions, and turning dialogue into a competition rather than a learning process.

Intellectual humility—the recognition that our knowledge and understanding may be incomplete—is an important quality of effective leadership. It enables individuals to acknowledge mistakes, reconsider established positions, and respond constructively to new information without abandoning their core principles.

For cross-party meetings, this means approaching discussion with curiosity rather than defensiveness. Participants should be willing not only to articulate their own positions but also to examine why others may hold different views. Such openness can improve policy discussions, strengthen mutual understanding, and create opportunities for innovation and institutional reform.

6. From Dialogue to Institutional Change: Recommendations

While cross-party dialogue can strengthen relationships and leadership skills, sustainable progress also requires institutional action. Political parties and parliamentary institutions should consider the following measures:

- Establish clear shared objectives. Identify realistic priorities for cooperation while respecting ideological differences.
- Ensure inclusive and balanced participation. Provide meaningful opportunities for women of different ages, backgrounds, and levels of political experience to contribute.
- Promote respectful disagreement. Establish ground rules that encourage active listening, evidence-based discussion, and constructive criticism without personal attacks or discrimination.
- Expand mentoring and leadership development. Create cross-party networks and opportunities to develop negotiation, public speaking, policy analysis, and political communication skills.
- Address structural barriers. Review candidate selection, leadership pathways, accessibility, and mechanisms for preventing and addressing harassment and discrimination.
- Translate discussion into action. Conclude meetings with practical recommendations, agreed responsibilities where appropriate, and realistic timelines.
- Evaluate progress. Review whether meetings have strengthened networks, improved leadership skills, generated joint initiatives, or contributed to institutional change.

These measures can help ensure that cross-party meetings become sustained platforms for learning, cooperation, and accountable progress rather than isolated or symbolic events.

Conclusion

Cross-party meetings offer an opportunity to strengthen women's political participation through diverse perspectives, constructive feedback, meaningful relationships, and cooperation across ideological divisions. Their effectiveness depends on participants' willingness to listen, learn, reconsider assumptions, and identify common objectives without requiring political uniformity.

Nevertheless, dialogue alone cannot remove the structural barriers that limit women's advancement. It must be accompanied by fair institutional processes, inclusive leadership opportunities, effective protection against harassment, and continued support for emerging leaders.

Taiwan's cross-party alliances of women parliamentarians provide a relevant example of institutionalised cooperation with regional and international ambitions. Such initiatives create opportunities to exchange experiences and consider how different political systems can improve women's participation in decision-making.

The objective is not to eliminate political differences, but to ensure that those differences do not prevent mutual learning, equal participation, or constructive action. When disagreement is approached with openness, respect, and a commitment to practical outcomes, women across the political spectrum can strengthen their leadership and contribute to more inclusive, responsive, and representative democratic institutions.

CHAPTER 4

Mental Health and Resilience: Building Spaces of Solidarity for Liberals Under Pressure

Background

Liberal activists and politicians live through war, forced exile, repression, harassment and violent responses to peaceful protest. Others carry the quieter weight of burnout and isolation in shrinking democratic spaces. These experiences are big political issues. Yet when committed people are exhausted, traumatized or alone, democratic movements lose their energy and continuity.

Resilience is a precondition for sustained political engagement. Mental health in politics should be treated as a shared responsibility of liberal organizations. Parties that defend human rights should also care for the people who defend them.

Our Proposal: Five Routes of Support

People need different kinds of help at different moments. We propose five complementary routes, from everyday peer support to intensive care for those in acute difficulty, and finally to a lasting record of what we learn.

1. Intervision groups (ongoing peer support)

Small, regular, facilitated groups of 6-8 activists from different countries and contexts, meeting online or in person. Members bring real political and personal challenges and work through them with structured peer feedback. These groups build lasting trust and a solidarity network between gatherings.

2. SOS phone line (immediate support)

A confidential helpline for activists and politicians in acute distress, staffed by trained professionals and peer volunteers, in several languages and reachable through secure channels such as Signal. It is the first point of contact and refers people to the other routes.

3. Workshops (learning and prevention)

Themed sessions, online and in person, on coping with trauma, burnout, fear and moral injury, as well as digital and physical safety, boundaries and sustainable activism. Workshops bring together people from different countries, so participants share experiences of war, exile and protest and see that they are not alone.

4. Week program (intensive support for people in serious difficulty)

A residential week for those who are severely affected, for example after prolonged conflict, detention, violence or forced exile. It combines professional trauma-informed care, individual and group sessions, rest and a safe community. Participants can be identified through the SOS line, intervision groups or referral by their party, with travel, visa and cost support provided.

5. A book based on our experience (shared stories and practices) with an Internet archive

A published book that grows out of the other routes and is built to be used, not only read. Each chapter pairs a real story from an activist in war, exile or protest with practices that came out of our intervision groups, workshops and week program. Readers can pick it up in a hard moment and find something to do, not just something to understand.

- Stories first, practices second. Each chapter opens with a lived experience, followed by exercises, reflection questions and short rituals for the situation it describes, such as fear, burnout, exile, loss or returning to work.
- Usable alone or in a group. Chapters can be read in any order, worked through by one person, or used as the agenda for an intervision group or party meeting.
- Pages meant to be used. Space for notes, pull-out pages and short guides for moments of crisis, such as "when you cannot sleep" or "after a protest."
- Links to the other routes. The SOS line and the gatherings are named throughout, so the book is a door into the wider support system.
- Consent and safety. Every contributor decides whether to be named, anonymized or left out, and risks for people in repressive contexts are handled with care.
- The book itself would be archived online in the form of a website.

Who We Call: Participants and Selection Criteria

Support is organized in four circles, from the widest to the most urgent. People can move between circles as their situation changes: inward when it worsens, outward as they recover, and some may later return as peer facilitators.

1. Liberal family

Who: Members, staff and leaders of member parties and affiliated organizations in relatively stable circumstances, who want to stand in solidarity.
Selection criteria: Active link to a liberal party or organization; commitment to confidentiality and safe-space principles; readiness to listen and support. Peer facilitators need relevant experience and trauma-informed training.
Main routes: Workshops; the book; volunteering in intervision groups and the SOS line

2. Activists and politicians under pressure

Who: Activists, candidates, elected officials and party staff facing harassment, smear campaigns, threats, shrinking democratic space or prolonged burnout.
Selection criteria: Active political or civic work in the liberal family; ongoing pressure or exhaustion; nomination by the party or self-nomination, with no proof of hardship required; balance of countries and contexts in each group.
Main routes: Intervision groups; workshops; SOS line

3. Priority groups

Who: Young people in politics, women and LGBTQ+ activists, who often carry compounded pressure such as discrimination and online abuse.
Selection criteria: Belonging to one or more of these groups and active in liberal politics; reserved places in every route; priority for travel grants, visa support, interpretation and childcare; option of dedicated groups.
Main routes: All routes; dedicated intervision groups where there is demand

4. Directly affected

Who: Activists and politicians in conflict zones, in exile, or who have been detained, threatened or exposed to violence because of their political work.
Selection criteria: Direct experience of war, exile, detention or violence linked to political activity; acute distress or a request for help; referral with consent via the SOS line, an intervision group or a party contact; professional assessment of fit.
Main routes: SOS line first, then the week program; later intervision groups and the book (with consent)

Principles for all circles

- **Consent and choice**: No one is placed in a circle without agreeing, and everyone can move between circles at any time.
- **Confidentiality**: Selection data is kept to a minimum, stored securely and never shared without consent. Participants from repressive contexts can take part under limited or no disclosure.
- **No proof of suffering**: People are not asked to prove how much they have been through. A short, respectful conversation is enough.
- **Fairness across contexts**: No group is treated as more deserving than another. Needs differ, and decisions are explained transparently.
- **Review**: The panel responsible for selection reviews the criteria each year based on participant feedback.

Principles for All Five Routes

- **Confidentiality and safety**: Secure channels and no public disclosure of participants without consent.
- **Trained facilitation**: Mental health professionals combined with peer facilitators who have lived similar experiences, using trauma-informed and culturally sensitive approaches that do not impose one understanding of mental health on everyone.
- **Inclusion**: Priority for those in conflict zones and exile, young people, women and LGBTQ+ activists, with interpretation, travel and visa support, and online options.
- **Destigmatization**: Parties should speak openly about mental health and treat it as a political and organizational issue.

Outcome: A Safe Online Platform for Liberal Activists

The five routes should lead to a lasting result beyond individual events: a secure website that serves as the home of this support network. It would keep the work alive between gatherings and reach people who cannot travel.

What the platform offers

- **Entry point to all routes**: Information and registration for intervision groups, workshops and the week program, plus a clear, always-visible link to the SOS line.
- **Peer community**: Private, moderated spaces for activists to connect, with groups by region, language or shared experience (young people, women, LGBTQ+ activists, exiled activists).
- **Resource library**: Practical materials from the workshops and the book, such as short practices and guidance for moments of crisis, in several languages.
- **Stories and voices**: A space for testimonies shared only with consent and with options for anonymity.

- **Directory of support**: Trusted contacts, partner organizations and professional help, organized by country and need.
- **Network and events**: A calendar of gatherings and online sessions, and a way to stay in touch after each event.

Safety principles

Many users will come from repressive contexts, so safety decides the design.

- **Privacy by design**: Collect as little personal data as possible, with no tracking or advertising, and clear control over what is visible.
- **Anonymous and pseudonymous participation**: People can take part without using their real names.
- **Secure access**: Encrypted communication, strong login protection and hosting in a jurisdiction with strong data protection.
- **Quick-exit and low-profile options**: Features that let users leave the site fast and access it discreetly on shared or monitored devices.
- **Moderation**: Trained moderators, clear community rules and a process for responding to threats or abuse.
- **Independent security review**: Regular audits by digital security experts before launch and at set intervals.
- **Accessibility**: Multiple languages, mobile-friendly design and low-bandwidth access.

Expected Outcomes

- A working **SOS line** that gives activists and politicians in acute distress immediate, confidential support and a path to further help.
- A **network** of intervision groups and workshops connecting liberals across countries and contexts, with lasting peer relationships and shared practices.
- A **week program** that offers intensive, professional care to those most affected by war, exile, detention or violence.
- A **book of stories** and practices that breaks the silence, reduces stigma and gives parties and activists something they can use directly, without being a manual.
- A **safe online platform** that ties all routes together and keeps the community connected between events.
- **Stronger party structures** with wellbeing included in the training of members and leaders, designated contact people, and rest and recovery built into campaign and activist workloads.
- **Policy impact**: insights from the programme feed into Liberal International resolutions and advocacy on protecting activists, supporting exiled political communities, access to mental health services, and accountability for violence against peaceful protesters.

Suggested Implementation

- **Pilot phase**: Start with intervision groups and the SOS line, add workshops, then develop the week program and the platform. Collect stories and lessons throughout, so the book grows from real experience.
- **Platform phases**: Planning and consultation with activists and digital security experts; launch with essential features; then grow with the moderated community and the book content.
- **Book timeline**: Gather contributions during the first one to two years, then edit and publish, with translations and free digital access.

- **Partnerships**: Youth and women's networks within the liberal family, mental health organizations, organizations supporting exiled activists and human rights defenders, digital rights and security organizations, and liberal foundations or publishers.
- **Governance**: A small advisory group including activists, mental health professionals and digital security experts, with transparent rules on data and access.
- **Funding**: Contributions from member parties and liberal foundations, with a reserved share for participants who cannot cover their own costs and for security audits and maintenance.
- **Review**: A short annual report on reach, lessons learned and improvements.

Conclusion

A movement that asks people to stand up for freedom should also help them stay standing. These five routes offer support at every stage: listening, learning, crisis response, recovery and a shared record that carries the experience further. A safe platform keeps this community connected and growing. Resilience built together is solidarity, and solidarity is at the heart of liberalism.

CHAPTER 5

Mindful Planning for Women

Introduction

Women remain underrepresented in political life across Europe. Data from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union show that women hold roughly one third of seats in the national parliaments of EU member states. The European Parliament, with a share closer to two fifths, has seen its gender balance slip rather than improve in recent elections. Women make up around or above 40% of parliamentarians in several Nordic and Western European countries, but much less in parts of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. Women hold far fewer posts as heads of government, ministers, party leaders and mayors, and they remain a minority in local councils, where political careers often begin. In many countries progress has been slow and in some it has stalled.

For this reason, the goal cannot be limited to enabling women to take part in politics in a formal sense. What matters is active and meaningful participation: women who are able to join parties and movements, to stand as candidates with a realistic chance of being elected, to hold leadership positions and to exercise real influence over decisions rather than occupying symbolic or marginal roles. Formal equality of rights does not automatically guarantee equality of opportunity, and the obstacles women face are often structural rather than individual. These include unequal distribution of unpaid care work, limited access to funding and networks, gendered stereotypes in media and public discourse, political violence and harassment, and organisational cultures built around the habits and availability of those who have historically dominated politics.

Political parties occupy a central place in this picture. Because they select candidates, allocate positions on electoral lists, distribute campaign resources and shape internal career paths, parties act as the main gateway to political office. Where parties adopt transparent, inclusive and supportive practices, they open that gateway and enable women to progress from membership to candidacy and leadership. Where selection processes are informal or dependent on closed networks, parties become gatekeepers, reproducing existing inequalities and limiting the pool of talent from which political leadership is drawn. Research on candidate selection and on the effects of quotas and internal party rules points to the same conclusion: what happens inside parties is often decisive for who ends up on the ballot.

This paper therefore proposes an approach of mindful planning for women's political participation. Mindful planning means deliberately identifying the barriers women face at each stage of the political pathway, from entering a party and building a profile to being nominated, campaigning, winning office and advancing into leadership, and designing structures that address them. Rather than relying on goodwill or expecting women to adapt to systems not built with them in mind, it calls for intentional, evidence-based measures that enable women's participation, sustain their engagement and support their progress into positions of leadership. The recommendations that follow are intended to help political parties and policymakers do exactly that.

Policy objectives

Women's participation is important for democratic representation because political institutions should reflect the diversity of societies they tend to serve. If there are women involved in the political life of a country then in the process of political decision-making women can contribute their experience and perspectives to the development of policies that respond to the needs of different groups in society.

These policy recommendations aim to incorporate gender equality in the political system and propose practical measures that can help overcome the barriers women face throughout their political careers. The main focus is on the role of political parties and their initiatives in creating an environment where women can participate actively, stand as candidates, access political resources and progress into leadership positions as everyone else.

Our main objectives are to increase women's participation in politics, strengthen women's political representation, have a more inclusive political environment, strengthen women's pipeline to leadership positions, ensure access to equal opportunities, address harassment and violence against women in politics and improve accountability within political parties.

The goals of the report also align with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals especially Goals 5 and 16 – Gender Equality and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions respectively. Goal 5.5 encourages the full and effective participation of women and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making. Goal 16.7 highlights decision making that is responsive, inclusive, participative and representative. In this way, the goals of these SDGs complement the purpose of the report which claims that political participation of women entails not only equality in rights but also institutional mechanisms that ensure meaningful participation.

Finally, the purpose of the report is to inspire political parties to apply a reflective approach to planning by pinpointing obstacles, developing measures and measuring their effectiveness. The general idea is to create political institutions where women can participate on equal grounds, have influence and reach leadership positions.

Recommendations

Political parties play a crucial role in ensuring women's equal participation in politics. Beyond formal commitments to gender equality, parties should adopt practical measures that address structural barriers, encourage active participation and support women's progression into leadership positions.

1. Integrate Gender Impact Assessments into Party Planning

Political parties should systematically assess how their activities, policies and internal procedures affect women's participation. Gender equality should be considered at every stage of planning and decision-making.

Practical implementation:

- Introduce gender impact assessment checklists for events, training programmes and internal policies.
- Consider scheduling, accessibility, safety and care responsibilities when organising activities.
- Apply gender-responsive budgeting and regularly evaluate the effectiveness of implemented measures.

2. Monitor Gender Representation and Strengthen Accountability

Collecting and reviewing data is essential to identifying inequalities within political parties. Regular monitoring can help parties understand where women remain underrepresented and develop targeted responses.

Practical implementation:

- Monitor women's representation among speakers, delegates, trainers, candidates and party leadership.
- Establish measurable targets for women's participation and representation.
- Review progress regularly and promote transparent candidate selection and equal access to party resources.

3. Provide Flexible Participation Options and Childcare Support

Political activities should be organised in ways that recognise different working schedules and caring responsibilities. Flexible arrangements can reduce barriers that prevent women from participating consistently in party life.

Practical implementation:

- Schedule meetings at accessible times and avoid unnecessarily late hours.
- Offer online or hybrid participation options where appropriate.
- Provide childcare facilities or financial support for childcare expenses where resources permit.

4. Strengthen Women's Pathways to Leadership

Equal participation requires more than women's presence at political events. Political parties should create opportunities for women to develop their skills, gain experience and progress towards decision-making and leadership positions.

Practical implementation:

- Establish mentoring programmes that connect aspiring women politicians with experienced leaders.
- Offer training in leadership, public speaking, political communication and campaign management.
- Ensure women's equal access to decision-making bodies, visible responsibilities and candidate nomination processes.

5. Prevent and Address Harassment and Violence Against Women in Politics

Harassment, intimidation, hate speech and gender-based violence can discourage women from entering politics or continuing their political careers. Political parties should establish clear standards and mechanisms to prevent and respond to such incidents.

Practical implementation:

- Adopt a code of conduct and a policy addressing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH).
- Establish confidential reporting mechanisms and clear procedures for handling complaints, including protection against retaliation.
- Facilitate access to psychological, legal and practical support for women experiencing harassment, online abuse or political violence.

CHAPTER 6

The Mentorship Model

How the 1:3 mentorship worked in practice: a model other liberal organisations can replicate

Alongside its policy recommendations, this report sets out the mentorship model that produced them. The model brings together Liberal International (LI), D66 Internationaal, International Federation of Liberal Youth (IFLRY) and International Network of Liberal Women (INLW), and is built so that other liberal organisations can run it themselves.

Mentorship structure

The programme is organised around five mentors, each responsible for a group of three participants. This 1:3 ratio makes the mentorship meaningful and personal, and is designed to seed durable relationships that continue after the event.

Element	Detail
Mentors / trainers	5 mentors from D66, IFLRY and INLW, who may include senior or former liberal politicians and experienced NGO figures
Group size	3 participants per mentor (15 participants in total)
Focus	Long-term mentorship, network-building and finding allies
Continuity	Mentor–mentee relationships intended to continue beyond the Programme, anchored by LI and D66

The matching method

Each of the five mentors is matched with a fixed group of three participants and works with the same group throughout the Programme and for the six months that follow. Matching happens before the programme when mentors meet their group for the first time during an introductory call. Afterwards, the first session of the programme in-person covers further introductions, each participant's expectations and a set of shared goals for the Programme. Keeping the same group together from the first evening to the final hand-over gives the trust time to grow into a lasting working relationship.

An intergenerational and cross-sector approach

The mentors are drawn from D66, IFLRY and INLW, and may include senior or former liberal politicians as well as experienced figures from NGOs. Bringing a national party, the international liberal youth movement and the international liberal women's network together under the umbrella of Liberal International gives the model two dimensions:

- **Intergenerational**: established politicians pass on practical political experience directly to the next generation of liberal leaders.
- **Cross-sector**: participants learn from both party politics and civil society, and gain access to allies and stakeholders in both.

Structure across the three days and beyond

The mentorship runs as a continuous thread across the three days and extends for six months afterwards, so that the relationships built in Istanbul translate into a durable network.

Phase	When	Focus and mentor activity
Matching	Day 1, evening	Mentors meet their group of three: introductions, expectations and shared goal-setting for the Programme.
Guided mentoring	Day 2, mentoring lunch and afternoon	Structured 1:3 sessions over lunch, followed by group brainstorming on report themes. Mentors help participants identify allies and connect with stakeholders.
Co-creation	Day 3, Writing Lab	Each mentor group drafts a section of the NextGen Liberal Action Report, with the mentor coaching the group through the writing.
Commitment	Day 3, closing plenary	Mentors and mentees agree a follow-up plan and check-in cadence for the months ahead.
Follow-up	Months 1–6 after the Programme	Monthly virtual mentor check-ins, plus a mid-point group call at month 3 to track progress on participants' goals and report dissemination.
Network handover	Month 6	Closing reflection and integration of participants into the wider liberal network sustained with D66 and partners.

Practical outcome: this report

The central practical outcome of the mentorship is the NextGen Liberal Action Report, drafted collaboratively by the five mentor groups and presented at the 65th Congress of Liberal International (2–7 November 2026). The report has three parts: policy recommendations for increasing youth and women's participation in liberal politics; this account of the mentorship model; and a success roadmap for sustaining the relationships and the wider network.

Lessons learned and guidance for replication

For liberal organisations that want to run the model themselves, the Programme points to five principles:

- Keep groups small and stable. A 1:3 ratio, with the same mentor and group from start to finish, makes the mentorship personal and allows trust to build quickly.
- Mix generations and sectors. Pairing experienced politicians and NGO figures with emerging leaders transfers experience that is hard to gain any other way.
- Give every group a shared task. Co-writing a section of a real report turns mentoring into joint work with a visible result.
- Agree the follow-up before people leave. A written plan and check-in cadence, set at the closing plenary, carries the relationship beyond the event.
- Anchor the network with a committed partner. Linking the follow-up to an established party (here, D66) and to LI keeps the network active after the Programme ends.

CHAPTER 7

Success Roadmap

Milestones and indicators for sustaining the mentorship and the wider network beyond the event, anchored with D66

The value of the mentorship lies in what happens after the Programme. This roadmap sets out clear milestones and measurable indicators for sustaining the mentor–mentee relationships and the wider liberal network over the following year, anchored with D66.

Milestones and success indicators

Milestone	Goal	Success indicator
End of Programme	Each group agrees a follow-up plan and check-in cadence with its mentor.	5 of 5 groups have a written follow-up plan; all 15 participants set personal goals.
Month 1	First virtual mentor check-in held; Action Report finalised for the Congress.	Report submitted on time (last week of October); first check-in completed by all 5 groups.
Month 3	Mid-point group call; participants report early progress on their goals.	Where possible, at least 70% of participants report a concrete step taken (new role, project or alliance).
Month 6	Closing reflection; participants integrated into the wider liberal network sustained with D66 and partners.	Majority of mentor relationships still active; participants connected to ongoing LI–D66 network activity.
Month 12	Model assessed for replication by other LI member parties.	At least one partner organisation commits to running the mentorship model.

How the roadmap is sustained

- **Regular contact**: monthly virtual check-ins between each mentor and their group of three keep the relationships active for six months.
- **Shared checkpoint**: the month-3 group call brings all five groups together to review progress on personal goals and on dissemination of this report.
- **Network handover**: at month 6, participants are integrated into the wider liberal network sustained with D66 and partners.
- **Replication**: at month 12, the model is assessed so that other LI member parties can adopt it, with the aim of at least one partner organisation committing to run it.

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