The Youth Legislative Impact program trained more than 45 young people in Panama in inclusive, political leadership. The program ended with the co-creation and presentation of a citizens' initiative based on the principles of gender equality, environmental sustainability, and intersectionality. It promotes all three of ParlAmericas’ programmatic pillars, namely gender equality, climate action and legislative openness, by fostering youth civic engagement.

In the first phase of the program, the young leaders participated in three interactive webinars held on June 9, 16 and 23, to learn from parliamentarians, civil society organizations, and other experts. In the second phase, the young leaders worked together to develop a citizens’ initiative for regulating ecotourism in Panama, in which they incorporated what they had learned during the first phase. The citizens’ initiative, which was presented to the National Assembly on September 15, 2021, on the International Day of Democracy, takes into account local communities, Indigenous peoples, youth, and women in the development of ecotourism, to contribute to an inclusive post-pandemic recovery in Panama.

The following resources were developed through the program:

- **Graphic recording: “Effective and Inclusive Leadership for the Environment.”** Amazink!, 2021
- **Graphic recording: “Intersectionality in Decision-Making.”** Amazink!, 2021
- **Graphic recording: “Citizens’ Initiative for Ecotourism.”** Amazink!, 2021
- **Intersectionality exercise: Privilege Walk.** ParlAmericas, 2021
- **Instructions for the Legislative Analysis Workshop.** ParlAmericas, 2021
Development and presentation of a citizens’ initiative for ecotourism

Twenty-three participants from the first phase of the program committed to working together to develop and present a citizens’ initiative on ecotourism. With the support of Ms. Ana Gilza Córdoba, the Public Policy Advisor for this project, the group of young leaders held five working sessions from July to September 2021, and modelled good legislative practices such as stakeholder consultations, research, the use of quality data, and building consensus through dialogue, using innovative digital tools for exchanging ideas.

Through a prioritization exercise, the young leaders defined four priorities to guide the development of the citizens’ initiative on ecotourism:

- Equality, gender, and communities
- Comprehensive environmental education
- Environmental sustainability and protection
- Governance and partnerships
Once these collective priorities had been established, participants were divided into four working groups to conduct research, discuss, and make proposals in relation to their respective priority areas. These were later presented to the entire group and evaluated according to criteria such as viability and level of impact. These priorities and proposals are reflected in the following provisions of the final version of the citizens’ initiative:

- Inclusion, environmental sustainability, social mobility, ethnic and cultural diversity, public-private partnership, and gender sensitivity are established as its guiding principles;
- Ecotourism is proposed to be incorporated into formal and informal education, including teaching resources based on Indigenous traditional knowledge;
- Training is proposed to promote the professionalization and increase the competitiveness of ecotourism in Panama, with a focus on engaging women and vulnerable populations;
- The participation of communities that offer tourism services is encouraged in ecotourism planning, implementation, and promotion; and
- The creation of a tourism quality certificate is suggested, to be given to individuals or legal entities that provide ecotourism services with consideration to factors such as inclusion, gender equality, and community development.

The citizens’ initiative was presented by a group of the young leaders to the National Directorate for the Promotion of Citizen Participation of the National Assembly of Panama on September 15, 2021, as part of activities organized for the International Day of Democracy. The Directorate of Legal Affairs of the National Assembly ruled that the citizens’ initiative is viable on October 25, 2021, and it is now in the process of becoming a draft bill. The final version of the citizens’ initiative is available here.

**Media appearances**

As part of the presentation of the citizens’ initiative, the young leaders participated in several interviews in Panamanian media, including radio and television programs. In these interviews, they highlighted the importance of young people's participation in democracy, the need to apply a gender and inclusivity lens in laws and public policies, and the objectives of the citizens’ initiative for ecotourism, which aims to promote social and economic benefits for vulnerable populations.

**Jonathan Pimentel, program participant**

“With this legislative proposal, we want to emphasize the importance of youth by making specific proposals that help make our country greater. Today we are building democracy.”

**Marínés Tapiero, program participant**

“It is important to strengthen our laws to highlight women’s contributions in the sectors where tourism activities are carried out.”

**Isabel Marín, program participant**

“We wanted to present a legislative proposal that would protect and preserve the environment, in addition to supporting everyone whose livelihoods depend on tourism, either because they live in the protected area or because they frequently carry out this type of activity.”
The complete agendas and resources related to this activity are available at the FONAMUPP website. The press release can be found here.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Each of these contributions was essential to turning this initiative into a model program for the region in terms of citizen participation and the creation of inclusive political leaderships. We would also like to thank each and every program participant, especially:

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About FONAMUPP

The National Forum of Women in Political Parties (FONAMUPP) is a non-governmental organization in Panama that seeks to promote political participation under equal conditions, strengthen women’s leadership through awareness-raising and training in their political rights, and provide women in political parties with analysis tools, training and advice. Through its programs, FONAMUPP supports the political leadership of young women in Panama.

About ParlAmericas

ParlAmericas is the institution that promotes parliamentary diplomacy in the inter-American system. Composed of the 35 national legislatures in North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean, ParlAmericas promotes cooperative political dialogue, facilitates the exchange of good legislative practices, and produces tailored resources to support parliamentarians in their work. The International Secretariat of ParlAmericas is headquartered in Ottawa, Canada.

Through its Gender Equality program, ParlAmericas promotes gender mainstreaming in parliamentary agendas and work, and, in close collaboration with civil society partners, promotes women’s political leadership, including that of the next generation of women leaders.

Canada

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