

PARLIAMENTS FREE OF SEXISM AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT



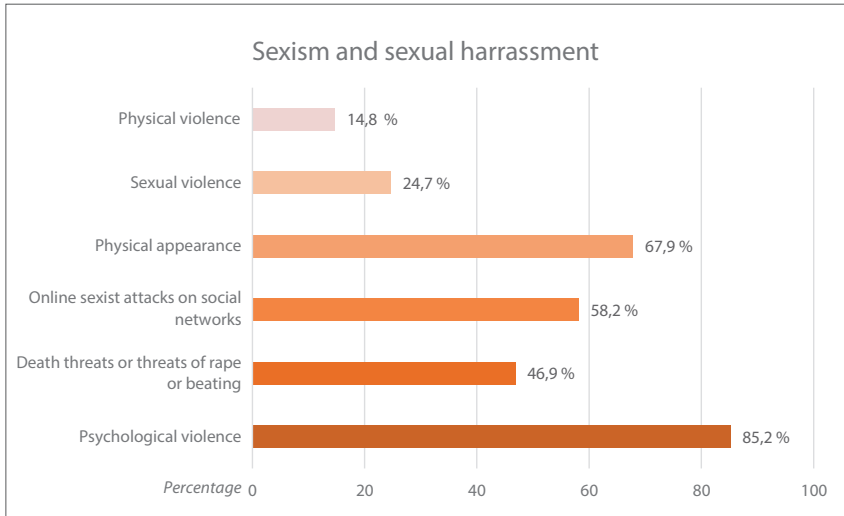
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Parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment

Gender-based violence affects women in all aspects of life. Politics is no exception. Despite the impact on victims, on the respect of fundamental rights, human dignity and on the good functioning of democracy, sexism and harassment are trivialised and often dismissed as the price women have to pay for being in politics. To redress this, it is crucial to start talking and raise awareness of sexism and violence against women in politics and bring about a change of mindsets. It is equally important to strengthen policies, legislation and other measures to put an end to sexism and violence against women in politics.



Acts of sexism, abuse and violence against women in parliaments in Europe

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union/PACE Study: *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe.*

Sexism, sexual harassment and violence against women: serious barriers to women's political participation



■ Sexism and violence against women in politics affect the foundations of democracy: they interfere with women's right to fully and equally participate in political life and express their views; limit their right to vote and to run for public office; and ultimately undermine the representativeness and the legitimacy of elected institutions.

■ Sexism and violence against women in parliament hold back women's access to leadership positions and impair their ability to fulfil their elected mandate. Equal participation of women and their access to positions of political leadership and decision-making at all levels are fundamental for achieving gender equality and to ensure a well-functioning democracy. Women's rights to participate, both as voters and candidates, on equal terms with men, are protected under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Articles 7 and 8).

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■ On average **29% per cent of parliamentarians in the Council of Europe member States are women**. This is far from parity and significant and speedy progress is needed to achieve the sustainable development goals for a planet 50/50 by 2030.

PACE Action

- ▶ Recommendation 2152 (2019) and Resolution 2274 (2019) "Parliaments free from sexism and sexual harassment" which raise awareness of the issue, draw attention to obligations to uphold women's rights, including the right to a life free from violence, and put forward concrete recommendations for action to address the situation.



- ▶ **#NotInMyParliament** initiative by PACE President, Liliane Maury Pasquier, to raise awareness of the prevalence of sexism and sexual harassment, their impact on women parliamentarians and encourage action to stop sexism in parliaments.
- ▶ Recommendation 2157 (2019) and Resolution 2290 (2019) “Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality” which calls upon the member States and national parliaments to renew the political commitment to gender equality, to adopt guidelines for non-sexist language at the Council of Europe and undertake measures to ensure women’s equal political representation.
- ▶ Modification of the Code of Conduct for members of the Assembly introducing the explicit prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct and the obligation to take account of the Council of Europe rules on the protection of dignity.
- ▶ Revision of the Guidelines for the observation of elections by the Assembly to ensure the issue of violence against women, sexism and sexual harassment are systematically taken into account in the context of election observation by the Assembly.
- ▶ Regular awareness raising, information and training for Parliamentary Assembly members on the issue of sexism and violence against women, including dissemination of an “Information Kit” for parliamentarians and the Secretaries of national delegations.

Recommended actions for National Parliaments

■ Actions to ensure a safe working environment, a parliament free of sexism and sexual harassment, require first and foremost **strong commitment at the highest political level and change of mind-sets**. The following actions are based on the recommendations of the IPU/PACE Joint Study and good practices identified at the level of national parliaments. They include but are not limited to:

- ▶ Create a zero-tolerance environment for sexist behaviour, psychological and sexual harassment and gender-based violence in parliament including through implementation at parliamentary level of Council of Europe standards, in particular the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism, Assembly Resolution 2274 (2019) on Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment and other relevant regional or international instruments.
- ▶ Conduct surveys on the prevalence of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament and take action to remedy the situation.
- ▶ Set up appropriate complaints and investigation mechanisms which are confidential, fair and responsive to victims' concerns.
- ▶ Ensure that victims of harassment and assault are aware of and have access to assistance and advice services that are confidential and put the victims' rights at the centre.
- ▶ End impunity for perpetrators by introducing and applying disciplinary sanctions. In this context, consider reviewing immunity rules which afford immunity from prosecution to members of parliament for sexual harassment and violence against women.
- ▶ Design and run training programmes for all persons working in parliament on issues related to respect in the work place, sexism, harassment and programmes and mechanisms in place to tackle these issues.
- ▶ Initiate, support and implement policies and legislation to ensure parity in political and public life.
- ▶ Encourage and provide incentives to political parties to ensure better representation of women in decision making.
- ▶ Encourage political parties to establish codes of conduct and take action to challenge gender stereotypes, patriarchy, misogyny and the culture that tolerates and condones acts of violence and harassment of women in political life.

- ▶ Engage proactively men in all activities to prevent and combat sexism, harassment and violence against women. Consider compulsory training on workplace codes of conduct and ethics.
- ▶ Build partnerships and work with the media to promote non-sexist representation of women and tackle harmful gender stereotypes and sexism.
- ▶ Initiate, promote and encourage education programmes from a very young age to foster a culture of respect, tolerance, non-discrimination and equality.

Measure progress using this checklist

- ▶ Has your parliament clearly stated that harassment and hate speech towards female politicians and parliaments are unacceptable? Does it have a code of conduct for members which clearly condemns sexual harassment and sexist hate speech?
- ▶ What are the complaint mechanisms in place to prevent and sanction harassment and hate speech towards female politicians and parliamentarians?
- ▶ Is your parliament collecting data and conducting surveys to measure the prevalence of harassment and hate speech against women politicians and parliamentarians?
- ▶ Does your parliament organise and promote public debates to raise awareness of the issue of harassment and hate speech towards female politicians and parliamentarians and its consequences on personal, political and public life and democracy?

Useful reference standards

- ▶ *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention, CETS No. 210)*
- ▶ *Recommendation Rec (2003) 3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making*
- ▶ *Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States to prevent and combat sexism*
- ▶ *Assembly Resolution 2274 (2019) and Recommendation 2152 (2019) on Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment*

- ▶ *Assembly Resolution 2101 (2016) on Systematic collection of data on violence against women*
- ▶ *Assembly Resolution 2111 (2016) on Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation*
- ▶ *Assembly Resolution 2084 (2015) on Promoting best practices in tackling violence against women*
- ▶ *Council of Europe Rule No. 1292 of 3 September 2010 on the protection of human dignity at the Council of Europe*

Practical tools

1. Inter-Parliamentary Union Guidelines for the Elimination of Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women in Parliament.
2. Council of Europe [video](#) and [action page](#) to promote the fight against sexism, on the basis of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism.
3. [Handbook for Parliamentarians](#) on the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

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