



Council of Europe

**Study Identifying Barriers to Women's (Women Candidates') Political Participation
in Georgia**

Council of Europe Project: "Supporting Transparency, Inclusiveness and Integrity of Electoral
Practice and Process in Georgia"

*The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s). In no case should they be
considered as representing an official position of the Council of Europe.*

Diane Bunyan
Nino Liluashvili
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Introduction

This study is being undertaken within the framework of the Council of Europe project “Supporting Transparency, Inclusiveness and Integrity of Electoral Practice in Georgia”, in cooperation with the Central Election Commission of Georgia and the Gender Equality Council.

The study is based on conducted *in person* interviews with women (including women candidates, who did not won seats at the representative bodies, both on national and municipal levels) from diverse political groups and questionnaires filled online.

The current document summarizes findings of the study of barriers to women’s full political participation in Georgia. The findings are based on existing studies of barriers to women’s political participation, individual interviews with women candidates (majoritarian and on proportional party list) and Central Election Commission representatives, as well as questionnaires developed for women candidates and political parties.

Within the scope of the study issues pertaining to social and structural barriers to the participation, stereotypes, access to finances, work-life balance, election environment, attacks on the candidates and other were discussed and examined.

From the political groups the following participated in the survey: **Republican Party of Georgia, Strategy Agmashenebeli, Lelo for Georgia, Georgian Dream, United National Movement, European Democrats, the Citizens** as well as **independent candidates**.

Interviews were also held with four (4) **Central Election Commission representatives**.

Two online questionnaires were developed, one to be filled in by the representatives of the political parties and another by the women candidates.¹

1. Background

Half the citizens of Georgia are women, to attain their full human rights they should be able to exercise an equal role as men in shaping the laws and policies of the country and the local areas they live in. Effective democracies are those where everyone regardless of their sex, disability, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, language or social or economic origin, from a variety of different backgrounds is confident that their rights and freedoms are recognised and actively protected by the state. This is not just a matter of basic fairness, equal sharing of the power to make decisions between women and men including those from different backgrounds and communities bring different life experiences, knowledge, and insights that will strengthen and enrich democracy.

The Council of Europe has been active for many years in promoting and recognising gender equality as a human rights principal and a fundamental criterion for democracy. There has

¹ Templates of the surveys in Georgian can be found at:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfyHSa4Q6MwVAm1jPY0aIL-7wqF6zJDX3JI6xr-AnyzS7LVtw/viewform> and

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdP6IzIWPVusSg5KjiffY4kFi5yUMV4YAZX1K4NC4J2xswqew/viewform>

been progress, but the reality is that in many member States women do not enjoy equal rights and status and this is reflected in their political empowerment. The Committee of Ministers Recommendation on “Balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making”² is nearly 20 years old. As of 2021 but there are only 8 Council of Europe member countries that have achieved least 40% of women in their national parliaments: Sweden, Andorra, Finland, Norway, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, and Portugal.

The lack of substantial progress on achieving the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making is the reason why it is one of the 6 key priorities of the Council of Europe’s Gender Equality Strategy³ for 2018-2023.

According to Global Gender Gap Report 2022 by World Economic Forum (WEF) gender parity is not recovering. It will take another 132 years to close the global gender gap. As crises are compounding, women's workforce outcomes are suffering and the risk of global gender parity backsliding further intensifies. The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks the current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment). It is the longest-standing index which tracks progress towards closing these gaps over time. Women’s political participation is the dimension where the least progress has been achieved. Georgia is no exception to the trend, having the lowest score in the area of women’s political empowerment. dimension (0,248 points from the maximum of 1.000)⁴.

Figure #1: Georgia, Economy Profile 2022



² <https://rm.coe.int/1680519084>

³ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/gender-equality-strategy>

⁴ World Economic Forum, the Global Gender Gap Report, 2022: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/in-full>

* Global Gender Gap Report 2022

According to the graph, Georgia has slightly improved its score in 2022 (57th place) in comparison to its ranking in 2021 (60th place).

Georgia has made progress after many years of campaigning saw changes introduced to the electoral system and mandatory gender quotas in party lists for the 2020 Parliamentary elections and the 2021 local elections. This led to an increase of the number of women candidates and members of parliament to just over 20%. The IPU Women in Politics Index 2021⁵ has Georgia at 113 out of 188 nations in the percentage of women elected to the national parliament and behind the worldwide average of 25.6% and the Europe (without the Nordic countries) average of 29.1%.⁶

However, the root causes of women's lack of political empowerment remain. These include stereotypical views and assumptions about the different roles of women and men leading to unequal sharing of household and caring responsibilities, women being disadvantaged in economic life, political cultures involving long working hours being incompatible with women's traditional roles within families. Women are also subject to harassment and bullying, during campaigning and when elected, including increasing levels of on-line violence and threats.

Political parties are reluctant to select women as candidates in majoritarian seats as they assume that voters will be reluctant to elect them. Women politicians are not prominent in leading roles in parties and do not have a high profile in the media. This invisibility means that women politicians are not seen as been the norm.

The situation will not change without a real change in attitudes and actions by party leaders at all levels and political institutions.

2. Aims of the study

For a variety of often perfectly rational reasons outlined above women have doubts about putting themselves forward as candidates and political parties do not see women candidates as helpful to their prospects. The challenge is how to bring about the necessary structural change in political parties, parliament, and regional and local councils as well as societal cultural change. The aim of this study is to assist the Electoral Commission of Georgia to support and encourage these changes.

⁵ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2022-03/women-in-parliament-in-2021>

⁶ <https://www.ipu.org/women-in-politics-2021>

This study will look at international policy and legal instruments and, also recommendations from the Council of Europe to member States for enhancing women's political empowerment.

It will outline some good practices that have been used in other Council of Europe member States to increase the numbers of women coming forward to stand for election and being elected.

The views and real-life experiences of women who have stood for election, and their assessment of the factors that supported them and other women to come forward and seek election and the barriers that they faced will inform the study. This information combined with an analysis of the international obligations and recommendations and good practices from other Council of Europe member States will be used to suggest some practical actions that the Gender Equality Council of the Central Election Committee of Georgia could take that would make a real difference to the number of women becoming politically engaged, interested in standing in an election, being selected as candidates, getting elected and playing a full role in shaping policy and taking decisions at national, regional and local level.

3. Context

The global Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic world-wide impact on the gains women had made in the achievement of their rights over many years. Women were at the front line of caring both paid as health and social care workers and because they had to bear the burden of unpaid care disproportionately. Domestic violence increased and the options to escape from violent situations became more difficult. Women's paid employment decreased as did funding for voluntary and community organisations that supported the most disadvantaged women and girls. Post pandemic economic support and recovery plans have often neglected the needs of women.

Other developments in the wider international and regional context have increased these challenges and pressures including a backlash against the human rights of women, the persistence of violence against women, an increase in sexist hate speech, including on-line, budgetary cuts and austerity impacting on access to economic resources and for individual women. This also means that it is more difficult to fund and resource the institutional mechanisms required to ensure that any gender equality laws and policies at local and national level are enforced and monitored effectively.

Gender equality is one of the key indicators to measure how developed a country is. Georgia's articulated objective to become a member of a European family implies country's approximation to not only European economy and legislation but also sharing fundamental values, including those of gender equality.

The issue of gender equality is important for Georgia reputationally. One of the actions Georgia needs to take to be given candidate status for becoming a member of the EU is that it “Consolidates efforts to enhance gender equality and fight violence against women” ⁷

The Council of Europe study on Women’s Political Representation in the Eastern Partnership Countries ⁸ was published in 2016 before the pandemic but the key issues identified in that as in many other studies that have the greatest impact on women’s political empowerment remain the same. These are:

a) Aspects of Electoral Systems

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their attainment are one of the country’s declared priorities. The achievement of gender equality is the fifth (5th) of 17 Sustainable Development Goals laid out in the Sustainable Development Agenda.

In 2016, Georgia nationalized sustainable development goals and formulated targets corresponding to national goals. Among them is Target 5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.

Among the national indicators and target indicators of the task are 5.5.1 the proportional number of seats held by women in the parliament and local government; and 5.5.1.1.

Proportional number of directly elected female mayors.

2016 baseline indicators of these tasks are quite low: the proportional number of women in the National Parliament - 15%; Proportional number of seats occupied by women in local government - 12% and proportional number of directly elected female mayors - 0%. There is no 2030 target indicator for tasks 5.5.1 and 5.5.1.1. in the nationalised SDGs document.

The Venice Commission Report of the impact of electoral systems on women’s representation in politics (2009)⁹ concluded that the most favourable electoral system was a proportional representation (PR) list system with legal thresholds, closed lists with mandatory quotas for women candidates in strict rank order combined with effective systems for non-compliance.

In 2020, to ensure the essential equality of men and women and to eliminate inequality, the Parliament endorsed the Constitutional changes amending the Parliamentary and Local Election laws by introducing mandatory gender quotas.

As the result of mandatory gender quotas more women were able to secure a mandate in 2020 Parliamentary elections and the number of women MPs amounted to 20.7% which is a significant increase as compared to women’s representation in the previous convocations of the Parliament (12% in 2012 and 15% in 2016). Despite the progress, the number of women majoritarian candidates is low, with only one majoritarian candidate being elected to the Parliament. According to several political parties “the lower number of female majoritarian

⁷ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/opinion-georgias-application-membership-european-union_en

⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/16806c3fa5>

⁹ [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2009\)029-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)029-e)

candidates may be due to concerns about online or other attacks on women’s personal lives”- reads the OSCE/ODIHR election observation report. ¹⁰

2021 elections also resulted in women’s increased representation in Local Self Government Bodies. The increase comes at the expense of women elected through the proportional party list. The number of women elected through proportional representation system amounted to 31.4%, majoritarian system – 7.6% and only 1.92% for women mayors. These statistics can be explained by existing practice of the candidate selection. While gender quotas strictly regulate number and rank-order of underrepresented gender candidates on the party lists, these regulations (gender quotas) do not apply to majoritarian or mayoral candidates, thus in 2021 elections women made only 10% of the mayoral candidates (26 women of total 239 candidates) and 17% of the majoritarian candidates (448 women of total 2,769 candidates).

It is expected that the number of women in the parliament will increase to at least 37 MPs in 2024 under fully proportional system elections, and by 2028, when every third candidate on the proportional party list will be a woman, the number of women MPs will reach 50.

As to what interviewed women candidates themselves think of the mandatory gender quotas, all respondents agreed that most of the women candidates managed to secure mandate largely due to the quotas.

Also, most of the interlocutors agreed that timeframe set for the gender quotas is not sufficient since changes and equal representation of men and women in politics take time. Gender quotas are a definite step forward, however, quantitative change does not necessarily entail qualitative change of a policy and political practice.

In addition, the challenges and barriers women candidate face do not fade away after a women candidate is elected. According to respondents their working environment is not gender sensitive and/or gender friendly.

b) Gender stereotypes and sexism

Gender stereotypes are the long standing and persistent social and cultural attitudes and assumptions about the different characteristics and roles that women and men are perceived to have because of their gender. These stereotypes have a fundamental impact on the different economic and social position of women in Georgia. The consequence of this is that the historical power relations of men over women remain and without this changing gender inequality, including in the political sphere will remain.

Stereotypical assumptions are also manifest in relation to ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, and other characteristics, and are likely to be stronger in rural and more isolated communities meaning that the intersectional impact on women results in an even greater inequality.

The most extreme manifestation of sexual stereotypes and sexism is violence against women and girls and domestic violence.

Gender stereotypes lead to sexist attitudes and behaviours defined by the Council of Europe¹¹ as: *“Any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based on the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the private or public sphere, whether online or offline”*

A survey of women parliamentarians carried out by the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)¹² found of those women parliamentarians surveyed:

*85% had suffered psychological violence; 25% had been sexually harassed, in 75% of these cases this was by their own parliamentary colleagues.
58% had been the target of on-line sexist attacks.*

In 2021 CRRC Georgia published research on online psychological violence directed at majoritarian women candidates - “Violence Against Women in Politics on Facebook”¹³. According to CRRC Georgia this type of psychological violence seeks to delegitimize women as political actors, undermining their trustworthiness, competence, and visibility in political and public spheres. It negatively affects the way women are portrayed and therefore, how they are perceived.

The study finds significant differences between mean rates of online violence for women and men, with women receiving around three times the rate of online violence (around 2% of comments) than men (0.6%).

The Study also found that the most frequent form of online violence observed was against the credibility, competence, and trustworthiness of candidates, notwithstanding candidate’s gender. Attacks on the credibility and trustworthiness of candidates comprised the largest share of online violence faced by candidates. The next largest category identified against candidates of comprised misogynistic comments and general offence (see figure 2 below).

Women received more comments relating to party-related abuse, objectification, diversion of attention, intelligence, appearance, family/personal life and, importantly, stereotypical gender roles, the latter representing an 11%/1% difference ratio between women and men candidates.

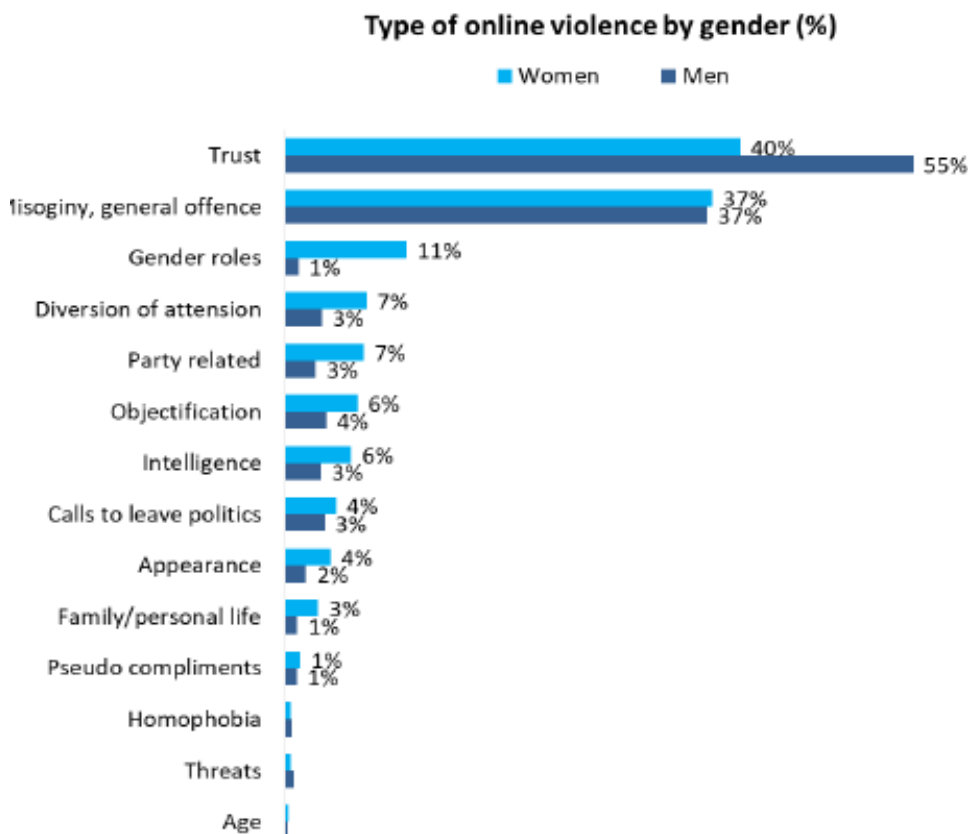
¹¹

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168093b26a>

¹²<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

¹³ https://crrc.ge/uploads/tinyMCE/documents/Completed-projects/NDI_FACEBOOK_REPORT_23March2021_ENG.pdf

Figure #2: Share of the types of online violence by gender of majoritarian candidates



According to the research women in particular received online violence based on stereotypical understandings of gender roles in society. More than one tenth (11%) of all online violence that women majoritarian candidates received on Facebook made some reference to the commenter’s understanding of the role a woman should have in a society (compared to only 1% of men). These comments typically suggested that the commenter believed that women should remain at home, in a family, in a kitchen, and doing housework rather than being active outside home.

Interlocutors and interviewees confirmed finding of abovementioned research. All interlocutors noted that they have been and are being attacked through social media. Several respondents mentioned that they have been targeted by journalists during interviews and/or TV programs on air. As with regards to the social media, it was noted that attacks on social media against politicians is a relatively new phenomenon, in Georgia and in European countries in general. Interviewees noted that amongst the forms of online attacks and harassment, footages containing details of a personal life are especially detrimental. It was also assumed that whereas such a harassment may not be that harmful to male candidates, as in a masculine society it can be perceived as a “proof of masculinity”, women are especially vulnerable to this type of harassment, and is tantamount to a political killing. It was also said that in the public eye some women may seem to be successfully dealing with humiliating and harmful information against them, however women eventually fade away from active politics and political arena.

In Georgia the impact of sexism on women standing as candidates was manifest in the OSCE/ODIHR reports of the Parliamentary elections noting:

“Several parties and civil society groups noted their concerns that women candidates would be specifically targeted during the election campaign by their opponents, and that even the potential of the threat discouraged women’s participation in the electoral process.”¹⁴

This was despite the General Code of Ethics and Conduct in Public Entities and the Code of Ethics for Members of Parliament adopted by the Georgian Parliament and the “Ethical Principles” adopted for the 2018 Presidential Elections with the aim of encouraging a peaceful campaign environment where candidates and their representatives agreed to carry out their campaigns without any discrimination and refuse to use hate speech.¹⁵

The media coverage of the campaign noted that:

“women candidates were at times stereotypically presented as successful mothers.”¹⁶

Women will only be confident to seek to be selected as candidates if they feel there is a safe environment to campaign and a safe environment for them to act once elected.

There is evidence that voters’ attitudes are changing. UNDP in Georgia conducted an attitude survey, Men, Women and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes¹⁷ this found that in 2019 60% of all those surveyed agreed that the involvement of more women in politics would benefit the country. In 2013 66% agreed that politics was a man’s rather than a women’s domain – 56% of women and 77% men. In 2019 this had fallen to 52% - 42% of women and 63% of men. Attitudes are changing fastest amongst younger citizens.

This report also tried to tentatively assess society’s acceptance of women candidate belonging to the ethnic minorities. Below is a figure from “Future of Georgia” study conducted by CRRC – Georgia.¹⁸

¹⁴ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/4/480500.pdf>

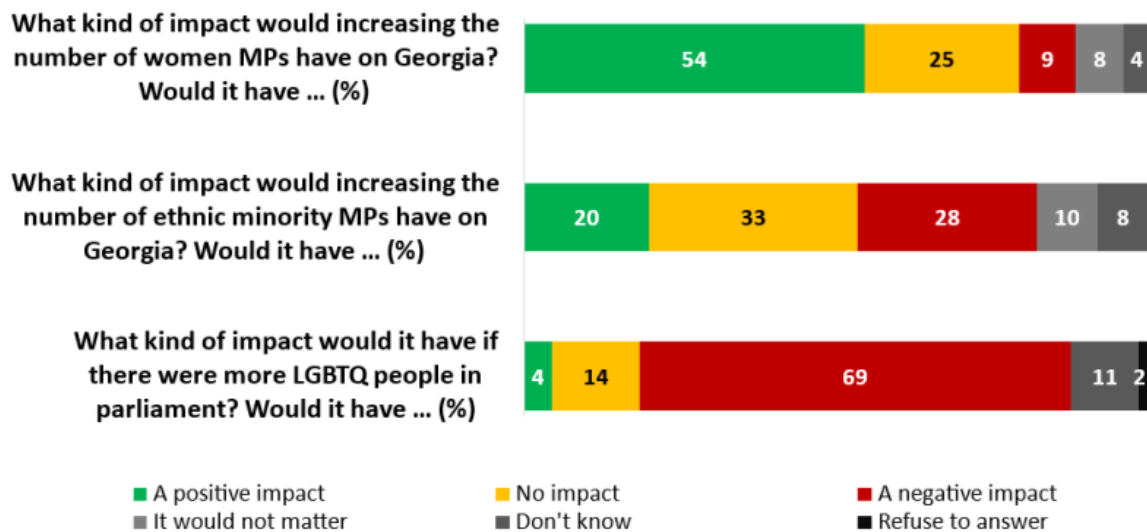
¹⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/gec-2021-1-report-gender-equality-strategy-implementation-in-the-membe/1680a1bfce>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/men-women-and-gender-relations-georgia-public-perceptions-and-attitudes>

¹⁸ „Future of Georgia“ http://mikeladzefoundation.org/uploads/files/2021-05/1620725030_final-fog_eng_08_04_2021.pdf

Figure # 2; Would increasing the number of female, LGBTQ, or minority MPs be a good thing?



According to the study 54% of study respondents think that increasing the number of women MPs would have a positive impact on Georgia. Only 20% have positive attitudes towards increasing the number of ethnic minority MPs. Through generalization of this information population’s acceptance of women candidates belonging to the ethnic minorities can be inferred.

c) Economic factors

Women in Georgia are at a disadvantage in employment. Although more women than men have higher educational qualifications the gender pay gap remains. In 2019 women were paid on average 36.2% less than men.¹⁹ This is due to a combination of factors including pay disparities, job segregation and under representation in the labour market. Women in Georgia are also less likely to own their own businesses or have access to other financial resources.

The Council of Europe study on Women’s Political Representation in the Eastern Partnership Countries²⁰ found from interviews with women who had been political candidates that lack of access to financial resources was the second greatest barrier they faced after gender stereotypes and assumptions.

There is a cost to being selected as a candidate as it involves attending conferences and meetings and getting known in the party, and some women felt that the selection was also biased towards those who could contribute more to the party funds. However, the greatest issue for those interviewed in the study was the cost of the campaign itself. Women had to fund leaflets and, in some cases travel from their own personal resources. Women tend to

¹⁹ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/opinion-georgias-application-membership-european-union_en

²⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/16806c3fa5>

regard money as being for the family not for themselves. Spending money on a political campaign is regarded as spending money on themselves.

Women from ethnic minorities, disabled women, younger and older women, those from rural and more remote areas are even more disadvantaged economically and therefore have additional barriers to their political participation.

d) Caring and family responsibilities

According to UNDP study “Men, Women, and Gender Relations in Georgia: Public Perceptions and Attitudes” women identify their responsibilities in the household as the main constraint to greater political participation. Men are much more likely to hold traditional ideas about gender and work and act as the major deterrent to women’s political engagement. Men are far more likely to say that it is primarily a woman’s responsibility to care for her family, and that this role is more appreciated. Participating in politics is seen as a “luxury” few women can afford. 48% of Georgians believe that women’s main duty is to take care of the family rather than to seek a professional career.

Women are more likely to have a caring role and therefore have fewer opportunities to take part in political life.

EU statistics show that on 13.8% of women opposed to 1.2% of men are not in paid employment because they are looking after children or an incapacitated adult.²¹ 80% of care is informal (unpaid) 75% of those carers are women. Women take the burden of care. Women in the EU spend an average of 22 hours a week on care and household work, men spend on average 9 hours a week.²²

The situation in Georgia is even more sharply divided. 70% of women in the UNDP Survey on Gender Relations in Georgia²³ were always or usually responsible for childcare and that women do nearly all the cooking and cleaning in Georgian homes.

Political life and campaigning often require long hours spent away from the home and that is not compatible with caring and family responsibilities. Formal meeting times may not fit with school times for example, and it may also be difficult for women to be part of the informal meetings with colleagues where policies are discussed and agreed.

e) Political Parties

Political parties are key to women’s political involvement. They are the gatekeepers to women standing as candidates and where they are on the party lists, they decide who gets support with campaigning and who takes responsibilities and roles in the various structures

²¹

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/annual_report_ge_2022_printable_en.pdf

²² ibid

²³ <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/men-women-and-gender-relations-georgia-public-perceptions-and-attitudes>

once elected. If women are not able to use their knowledge, skills, and experience to influence policies they are much less likely to seek re-election.

Political parties are increasingly named as one of the key factors causing women's low political representation. It is argued that the political set up of the parties' favour men, with their inner political circles and allegiances. Lack of internal democracy in political parties and disregard of meritocratic principles lead to non-transparent procedures of member recruitment and promotion, candidate selection as well as to a decision making by only one person and that person's inner circle.

The OSCE/ODIHR reports on the Parliamentary elections in 2020 ²⁴ found:

"The media coverage of women politicians reflected their limited role within parties and governmental structures.... There were no programmes specifically devoted to gender equality issues and women candidates were at times stereotypically presented as successful mothers,"

The report of the local elections in 2021²⁵

"The underrepresentation of women in the campaign demonstrates a need for greater commitment to ensure adequate representation in politics"

If women do not see other women like themselves as role models, they are much less likely to consider standing as a candidate themselves. They are also more likely to vote, to become involved as members of political parties, and to consider standing for election if they see their interests and concerns raised and discussed as part of political discourse.

This requires the political parties themselves to challenge their own stereotypical views of women candidates as potential vote losers but as assets to the party.

Public attitudes to women in politics are changing gradually. The UNDP Survey of public perception and attitudes to gender relations in Georgia in 2020²⁶ found that 60% of those surveyed believed that the involvement of more women in politics would benefit the country, 72% of women believed this. Political parties need to be responsive to these changes particularly in the views of younger people.

International policy and legal instruments for enhancing women's political empowerment with an emphasis on the Council of Europe Acquis.

1. Introduction - overview

Georgia has signed and ratified international treaties and conventions that are fundamental to the political empowerment of women. These include key United Nations Conventions

²⁴ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/480500>

²⁵ https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/a/515364_0.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/men-women-and-gender-relations-georgia-public-perceptions-and-attitudes>

such as **The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW)** ²⁷ and **The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)** ²⁸ that are required to be implemented in national law. As a signatory Georgia must report at periodic intervals on its progress and to respond to questions and comments raised by the relevant monitoring committee.

a) Legally enforceable rights

The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its protocols (ECHR) ²⁹ gives Georgian citizens rights that can be enforced by the European Court of Human Rights. Once national law has been exhausted an individual can take their case to the Strasbourg Court. Case law from the Court is binding on the state that is the subject of the ruling and other states are encouraged to take account of the decisions. Several decisions of the court refer to the Venice Commission documents or resolutions and recommendations of the Committee of Ministers and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe where they are considered to be best practice and therefore become part of the case law.

The UNDP report *Gender Equality in Georgia: Barriers and Recommendations*³⁰

“Since 2017, Georgia has taken significant steps to promote gender equality and eliminate violence against women through changes in legislation or policy, including measures to implement the country’s international obligations. However, there are still significant gaps in legislation, policy, and practice that require in-depth, complex, and continuous work of the State.”

The Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-23 ³¹ outlines a programme of work supporting the country to bring legislation, institutions, and practice in line with European standards and Georgia’s obligations as a Council of Europe member State. This includes challenges on addressing gender equality and women’s participation in political decision making.

b) Political rights and obligations

As a member of the Council of Europe Georgia has obligations to implement the relevant policies, resolutions and recommendations from the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of European Municipalities and Regions and the Venice Commission.

²⁷ <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

²⁸ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

²⁹ https://echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.undp.org/georgia/publications/gender-equality-georgia-barriers-and-recommendations-2021>

³¹ https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=090000168097fe8f#_Toc12291692

Georgia is also a participating member of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and thus is politically bound to implement the decisions of that body. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) observes elections and provides reports on how far the elections meet international standards and advise and make recommendations for improvements.

2. Summary of Recommendations from Council of Europe bodies relevant to women's political empowerment

This report summarises the key points from the recommendations from Council of Europe bodies grouped under the factors that have the most impact on women's political empowerment.

More detail can be found in the attached Appendix 1.

a) General

The key recommendations for women's political empowerment are in the **Committee of Ministers Recommendations on Balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making from 2003**.³²

Balanced participation is considered in these recommendations to be at least 40% of women and men in decision making roles.

The recommendations invite member States to consider positive action measures to encourage more women to stand for election and to be elected. These include:

- introducing quotas;
- consider limiting the number of mandates that can be held simultaneously;
- changing the timetables and working methods of parliaments and local and regional councils so that elected representatives can reconcile their family commitments with those of their elected office.

Political parties could consider:

- directly contacting women who might have the skills to take political and public decision-making roles;
- supporting mentoring and shadowing schemes and training programmes for women candidates and those elected;
- facilitating networks of women within parties and of those who have been elected;
- using the education curricula to promote the role of women in democracy;
- ensuring that women from all communities and parts of society particularly the most disadvantaged are supported to become candidates and get elected.

Nearly 20 years later from these recommendations being agreed progress has been slow. For this reason, the Council of Europe has included the balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making as a key objective in its first **Gender**

³² <https://rm.coe.int/1680519084>

Equality Strategy 2014-2017 ³³ and currently in the second **Gender Equality Strategy 2018-23.** ³⁴

The other key objectives are also relevant these are:

- prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism;
- prevent and combat violence against women and girls;
- ensure equal access of women to justice;
- achieve gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures and protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls.

The current Gender Equality Strategy will review the effectiveness of the 2003 recommendations and regularly monitor progress through reports from member States.

Other significant and relevant recommendations on key issues are grouped under the headings below.

b) Elections and the legal framework

The Venice Commission Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics suggests that the electoral system most likely to increase the number of women elected is a proportional representation system with closed lists particularly those that have a 'zipper system' where every other candidate is a different sex. The changes introduced in Georgia show this to be the case.

Other key recommendations are from the **Parliamentary Assembly Resolution on Mechanisms to ensure women's participation in decision making** ³⁵ and **Recommendation - Thresholds and other features of electoral systems which have an impact on the representivity of parliaments in Council of Europe Member States.** ³⁶

These include:

- Any positive actions introduced, such as quotas for women, must be enforced with effective sanctions in place for non-compliance. For example, party lists not being accepted if they do not meet the required numbers in the required order;
- It is important to monitor the results of any positive actions to ensure that they are effective in raising the number of women elected;
- the bodies monitoring elections should themselves be gender balanced and have the relevant expertise and understanding on gender equality issues as well as the necessary human and financial resources to carry out effective action to ensure that the process does not disadvantage women;
- gender disaggregated data on voter registration, voting and on candidates and those elected should be gathered. This should include data on disability and ethnicity on a

³³ <https://edoc.coe.int/en/gender-equality/5992-council-of-europe-gender-equality-strategy-2014-2017.html>

³⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093618-gbr-gender-equality-strategy-2023-web-a5/16808b47e1>

³⁵ https://havasari-infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/19_PACE-Resolution-1489_2006_ENG.pdf

³⁶ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17811>

gender disaggregated basis. The data should be monitored and progress or otherwise reported to the relevant government body overseeing elections.

c) Gender stereotypes including sexist language and behaviours, violence against women and discrimination

The Committee of Ministers Recommendations to member States on preventing and combating sexism³⁷ is the key document for this area. There are additional relevant proposals in the **Parliamentary Assembly Recommendations - Promotion of parliaments free from sexism and sexual harassment**³⁸ and in **Recommendations - The role and responsibility of political leaders in combating hate speech**³⁹ and for local government in the **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Resolution Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level.**⁴⁰

- Effective laws against direct and indirect discrimination and combating violence against women are essential to change the reality and the perception of women's role in society. These laws need to be widely understood and enforced and cover hate speech and violent behaviour during elections and directed at women representatives.
- Codes of practice for behaviours are useful for elections and to cover the day to day running of institutions such as parliament and local and regional councils. However, these are only useful if they are widely understood and agreed and are enforced. Unacceptable behaviours should have consequences such as sanctions against the perpetrators if a complaint is upheld.
- Staff and elected representatives need to know how make complaints and that these will be treated confidentially and investigated fairly.
- It is important that political leaders both refrain from using hate speech and stigmatising language themselves and condemn instances of it particularly from their own colleagues as soon as possible. Silence may be interpreted as approval or support.

The media plays a key role in combatting sexism and hate speech.

Recommendations from the **Parliamentary Assembly Combatting sexist stereotypes in the media**⁴¹

- Legislative measures need to cover all media, including the internet, social media and on- line sexist hate speech. As on- line hate speech disproportionately affects women it is recommended that expert advice is provided on how to deal with online

³⁷

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168093b26a>

³⁸ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/27615/html>

³⁹ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/27636/html>

⁴⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a0c056>

⁴¹ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17893&lang=en>

sexism including procedures for swiftly reporting and removing harmful and unwanted material.

- Media should be encouraged to adopt and implement self-regulation policies including that reporting/commenting on women's appearance or way they dress, their marital or family status rather than their role as candidates or elected members is not acceptable.

d) Political Parties

Key recommendations are from the **Parliamentary Assembly Resolution Political parties and women's political representation** ⁴² and **Promoting diversity and equality in politics** ⁴³ and for local government **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Resolution Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life.** ⁴⁴

Political parties have the key role in selecting women candidates and ensuring their election as well as facilitating their on-going contribution once elected.

Recommendations include:

- having a commitment to gender equality in the statutes or constitution of the party;
- ensure that parties have codes of behaviour for members and that these are understood and adhered to with clear and transparent processes for making and investigating complaints and effective sanctions;
- actively organising campaigns and activities to attract women members;
- ensure that bodies that select candidates are trained and understand gender equality and are diverse in their membership;
- make the process for being selected as a candidate transparent and accessible to all women party members;
- consider adopting measures to encourage women to stand as candidates as including in majoritarian seats – e.g. all women shortlists, contributions to campaign expenses;
- set up training and mentoring programmes, including capacity building programmes, media training, public speaking and ensure that broadcasting time during elections shows women as well as male candidates;
- consider the needs of those with family commitments including by funding childcare and holding meetings and events at times that women can attend;
- establish gender equality committees within the party that have an input into party policies.

e) Political Institutions

Key recommendations are from the **Parliamentary Assembly Resolution Assessing the impact of measures to promote women's political representation.** ⁴⁵

⁴² <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19134&lang=en>

⁴³ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=24812>

⁴⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680719848>

⁴⁵ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=22745>

These include:

- encourage parliaments and other bodies to arrange timetables and sessions so that those with family responsibilities are not excluded;
- support effective and enforced codes of practice for behaviours in relation to hate speech, sexism, and discrimination;
- provide training on gender equality for staff and elected representatives;
- provide resources both human and financial for any gender equality bodies;
- ensure that any data produced is done on a gender disaggregated basis.

Good Practices on political empowerment of women

Many member countries of the Council of Europe recognising that there is a problem with the number of women wanting to be candidates for political office, being selected and getting elected at all levels of government, have adopted a wide variety of actions to address this.

Some of these actions have been enacted through the adoption of legislation such as the introduction of enforceable quotas for women in electoral lists or by linking the public funding of political parties to specific requirements on numbers of women candidates or women elected.

However, many are supportive actions organised by civil society organisations supporting gender equality and some are where political parties themselves have adopted policies and actions themselves to increase the number of women in decision making roles within their own organisations and to increase the number of women elected. There are also some examples where political structures, parliaments and local and regional councils and their representative bodies have adopted policies and practices themselves to support women in their roles as elected representatives.

Below is a summary of some relevant good practice examples with links for more information.

a) Quotas and public funding of political parties

At least 19 Council of Europe member States have adopted legislative quotas for seats in their parliaments. More have adopted them for sub national bodies. They are most effective when there are sanctions to enforce them, such as refusing party lists which do not have the legal number of women on the lists and in the mandated positions.

Some countries have adopted financial penalties and rewards for political parties promoting women candidates and increasing the number of women elected. These are only effective when the financial penalty or award is substantial enough to have a direct policy impact. In most examples these are shown to favour smaller parties.

One positive example is France where in addition to funding political parties, candidates who get at least 5% of the vote and whose financial reports are approved, can be reimbursed 50% of campaign expenses not including their personal expenses.

<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/gender-targeted-public-funding-for-political-parties.pdf>

b) Awareness raising, training, coaching, and mentoring

The most common actions focus on raising women's awareness of the importance of participating in the democratic process, encouraging them to become candidates and supporting them when they have been selected as candidates by increasing their skills and confidence.

Several examples target specific groups of women who are least likely to be involved in politics. A Portuguese project targets women between the ages of 16 and 30 introducing them to campaigning around issues important to them.

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/portugal/bringing-young-women-politics-project-woman-woman>

The Council of Europe in Ukraine has a handbook of activities to use with disadvantaged young women to introduce them to their democratic rights as citizens and to raise awareness of gender stereotypes and how to challenge them.

<https://rm.coe.int/young-women-eng-web/1680a016e4>

The National Women's Council of Ireland runs grassroots activities for women across the country including consciousness raising and networking activities with the aim of encouraging women to vote and to stand as candidates. Their *Women Rising* campaign held large meetings with candidates for parliament for women to raise their issues and concerns and to elaborate a women's manifesto to be put to all political parties.

They also supported first time women candidates from all parties through the campaign (all were elected), providing networking opportunities and training courses including dealing with the media. They reviewed what worked and the barriers the women faced after the election.

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/ireland/grassroots-campaign-empowers-women>

Women are very under-represented at local and regional level in Germany a scheme, Helen Weber Kolleg, targeted at addressing this runs a competition for outstanding local women politicians where the reward is mentoring and training programmes including supporting women in their political ambitions. These mentees share their experience with other women in local communities to encourage them to stand.

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/germany/women-power-politics-helene-weber-kolleg>

In the UK a non-party political organisation 50:50 Parliament runs campaigns and programmes to increase the number of women in parliament. One campaign stems from

research showing that women are reluctant to put themselves forward as candidates and being asked to stand by someone else can be the catalyst that encourages them to do so. The #askhertostand campaign gets people to identify women they know are active in their local community or who they know are passionate about public services and policies and ask them if they would consider standing for election with support from the 50:50 organisation. Women can also sign up themselves and receive peer to peer support and can attend events both online and in person. The feedback has been very positive, and women have felt much more confident in putting themselves forward as candidates as a result.

<https://5050parliament.co.uk/sign-up-to-stand/>
<https://5050parliament.co.uk/ask-her-to-stand/>

The Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality in Portugal have produced an awareness guide and a toolkit “In politics women can do it”, have run training courses nationwide as well as a national campaign “women make democracy better” with advertisements on billboards on national tv and cards in public places. They have also produced a handbook for teachers “Gender and Citizenship”.

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/portugal/toolkit-training-and-awareness-campaign>

c) Political Parties

Political parties have a key role to play in involving and promoting women. They are both gatekeepers and potential enablers of women’s political empowerment both through the internal structures of the parties and as candidates and holders of elected positions. To attract and keep women members parties need to ensure that meetings are held at convenient times and in accessible and safe spaces so that women can attend. Some have adopted a policy of paying expenses for those requiring childcare. Women’s wings and organisations can build solidarity and give women the opportunity to gain experience. They can also be a useful way for parties to understand the key issues and concerns of women voters.

The OSCE/ODIHR has a “*Handbook on Promoting Women’s Participation on Political Parties*” with examples of arguments for increasing women’s involvement in political parties and examples of strategies that have been successful.

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/120877>

Some parties have adopted their own quota systems for the selection of candidates and for positions within the party.

In 1993 the UK Labour Party adopted a policy of *all women shortlists* for a designated number of winnable seats or where women were standing down. This meant that the local party representatives had a choice of only women potential candidates for majoritarian seats. Following the parliamentary elections in 2019 51% of Labour MPs are women. The same policy is applied at local level. There is a discussion about whether a similar policy should be adopted for candidates from ethnic minorities.

In Iceland there is no legal gender quota for elections, political parties set their own rules, but all have adopted voluntary quotas of at least 40% of women on party lists of candidates and in party structures.

Women are more likely to want to join a political party and to vote for it if it promotes issues that they feel strongly about.

In 2019 parliamentary elections in Spain an anti-feminist party campaigned to overcome some gender equality legislation, this meant that these issues were important in the campaign and political parties made public statements reaffirming their commitment to women's equality and in the run up to the election passed legislation on equal pay. The election led to Spain having 47% of its MPs women one of the highest in Europe. 65% of cabinet positions are held by women.

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/05/spains-parliament-leads-europe-in-gender-equality-despite-rise-of-far-right/>

Nisi Labouristi party in Malta introduced a voluntary quota for women candidates and on the national executive of the party. They also ran campaigns showing women in decision making roles in the party and publicised policies to encourage women's role in political and public life.

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/malta/party-strategy-increase-womens-political-representation>

The Women's Political Network in Montenegro is a coalition of 16 political parties working together to improve the status of women in society and to increase the number of women in decision making.

<https://eige.europa.eu/about/our-work/cooperation-eu-candidate-countries-and-potential-candidates/good-practices/womens-political-network-wpn-montenegro>

d) Countering sexism and violence

Women experience high levels of violence and harassment as candidates and once elected. Several countries have examples where actions have been taken to counter this.

IPU/PACE research "*Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe*" highlights the levels of sexism, harassment and violence experienced by women parliamentarians and staff working in parliaments.

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

IPU "*Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament.*"

These are comprehensive guidelines for parliaments to implement to address the issues. It covers:

- Assessing the existing legal frameworks and policies.
- Collecting data and evidence.
- Establishing and implementing a policy covering: awareness raising, training, support and counselling, security, and remedies.
- Evaluating and monitoring.

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2019-11/guidelines-elimination-sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliament>

Some specific examples of addressing sexism include:

The National Women’s Council of Ireland have produced a “*Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties.*” The aim of the toolkit is to progress a more inclusive, kinder, more civil and gender sensitive approach to politics online and offline.

https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC_Toolkit_SocialMediaAbuse_2022FINAL.pdf

Poster displayed in the House of Commons UK with details of the behaviour policy

<https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/conduct-in-parliament/ukparliamentbehaviourcode.pdf>

Political Parties in Sweden run training courses on *Domination Techniques* what they are and how to counter them. These are strategies of social manipulation, often unconscious used by a dominant group to maintain its power. This might include, ridicule, withholding information, shaming and so on.

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/sweden/tools-combat-domination-techniques>

A CSO CESI runs street stalls during elections as part of a “*Pillars of Shame*” Campaign to highlight which parties are not complying with the legal but often ignored 40% quota for women candidates. The only sanction for non-compliance is a reduction in the small amount of State funding to the political party.

They also collect examples of sexist and discriminatory language from politicians and other public figures on their website and have a monthly vote on which is the worst.

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/croatia/political-parties-pillory>

The Council of Europe have produced a useful handbook with practical and concrete measures to combat sexism and to promote gender equality at local level in Georgia.

<https://rm.coe.int/guide-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism-at-the-local-level-in-georgia/1680a3e961>

Media

Media professionals need to understand and address the perpetuation of sexist images and content on women’s equality. A project in Romania provided training courses on gender

equality. These had a significant positive impact on how the media portray women and address women's issues.

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/romania/modernising-old-fashioned-media>

e) Political Structures

The way parliaments and local governments operate can present barriers for women considering standing for election and when they have been elected. These include working in an environment that has been designed around the needs of men, meeting unreasonable demands to be available 24/7 and combining family responsibilities with political work.

The Interparliamentary Union (IPU) have produced a useful toolkit for parliaments to assess themselves on how gender sensitive they are.

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/toolkits/2016-11/evaluating-gender-sensitivity-parliaments-self-assessment-toolkit>

MotheRED is a new campaign in the UK giving grants of up to 2000 euros to mothers wanting to stand as candidates for Parliament to offset the costs of childcare during campaigns. It is part of a wider non party political campaign "this mum votes" to make the UK Parliament more accessible to parents with caring responsibilities. Research shows that having children is no barrier to men being selected as political candidates but is for women.

<https://workingforwalthamstow.org.uk/content/sign-help-get-more-mums-politics>

Once women have been elected, they still face many obstacles. In recognition of this, the Association of Basque Municipalities, (EUDEL) have produced a Welcome Manual for women elected officials that aims to help women meet these challenges and to identify common strategic issues and build consensus and alliances.

https://charter-equality.eu/exemple-de-bonnes-pratiques/encouraging-womens-socio-political-participation-through-networks.html?ref_id=319

Recommendations

The following are concrete recommendations for action by the Gender Equality Council of the Central Electoral Commission of Georgia. Some are proposals for direct actions for the GEC itself and others that the GEC should raise with and encourage other key institutions such as political parties and parliament and local authorities to take to promote diversity and gender equality in political life in Georgia.

The continuing stereotypical assumptions about women's roles are the main reasons for women's on-going lack of political empowerment in Georgia. These are compounded by other factors including disability, age, caring responsibilities, living in poverty or in a remote region, being from a religious or ethnic minority, or their sexual orientation that make it even more difficult for women to play their full role in political and public life.

This situation will only change when the prevailing gender stereotypical assumptions and attitudes are challenged and society and institutions including political parties and parliaments commit to implementing real structural changes that lead to women having equal access into political decision making. Only then will women be able to participate and to have real voice and influence so that their presence in political decision making is normalised. This change will require the active involvement and commitment of men as well as women, only then will gender equality be seen not as a marginal issue but as a necessary pre-requisite for a fairer society for the benefit of all.

The recommendations below are based on the following:

- Suggested actions **from the women interviewed/online questionnaires filled in by political party representatives** that would help to address some of the barriers that they encountered and assist other women in Georgia to be selected as candidates, get elected and be able to be effective representatives.
- A review of the key recommendations from Council of Europe bodies on actions that could be taken by member States at national and local level that would improve women's political empowerment.
- A review of good practices adopted in other Council of Europe member States that could be relevant for Georgia.

Recommendations for the steps that the Central Electoral Commission of Georgia could take itself:

- Ensure that the curriculum in schools covers basic information about human rights and democracy including the importance of all citizens, regardless of their sex, ethnicity, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation having the rights and opportunity to take part. The curriculum should also include a specific focus on gender equality including raising awareness of the problems of sexism, discrimination and violence against women and girls and how this has an adverse impact in Georgian society.

- Support “train the trainers” programmes for CSOs to enable them to run workshops for disadvantaged young women based on the Council of Europe toolkit Participation for women and girls from disadvantaged groups in political and public decision making at local level.
- Provide on a non-party political basis and in all parts of the country access to information/training/ networking events. Training modules should cover personal safety public speaking and information about how parliament and local authorities work. These should be available both in person and on-line.
- Run well publicised campaigns encouraging members of the public to ask women who are active in their communities or have an interest in public service to think about standing for election and inform them of the support available.
- Collect, publish, and use relevant gender disaggregated data on an intersectional basis to support their work.
- Continue the gender mainstreaming approach to their work and target initiatives on those women least likely to take part in elections, as voters and candidates. Including those who are excluded due to their disability, age, ethnic origin or religious belief, poverty, caring responsibilities, or sexual orientation.
- Identify and assess the impact of the initiatives taken to increase women’s political empowerment.
- Consider running a paid intern programme aimed at the most disadvantaged young women to give them experience of working with the CEC.
- Promote and establish dialogue platforms and networks aimed at enhancing women’s political empowerment, including women candidates.

The following are recommendations of where the CEC could seek to encourage and support other key bodies to take actions to support women’s empowerment.

a) Government and local and regional authorities

- Encourage parliament to undertake an assessment using the IPU “*Gender Sensitive Parliament Toolkit*”⁴⁶ and get commitment from all political parties in advance to take action to address any issues raised.

⁴⁶ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/toolkits/2016-11/evaluating-gender-sensitivity-parliaments-self-assessment-toolkit>

- Encourage parliament to use the IPU “Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament.”⁴⁷ to undertake a survey, adopt and implement a policy to tackle this with an accessible complaints procedure and effective sanctions.
- Suggest that an independent survey is commissioned to understand the levels and impact of abuse and hate speech online and in person experienced by elected representatives while undertaking their work.
- Encourage the introduction of mandatory gender sensitive training for all MPs and members of local and regional councils at the start of each mandate covering gender equality as a requirement for democracy, discrimination law, definition of sexism and harassment, how to prevent, identify and react to hate speech on and offline and the required standards of behaviour expected of them as elected representatives.
- Consider providing a welcome manual for newly elected representatives with basic information about how the organisation runs including how decisions are made, budget setting, key staff, and their responsibilities.
- Encourage local and regional authorities to sign the CEMR Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life and implement Article 2.⁴⁸

b) Political parties

Encourage political parties to:

- Make a public statement from the party leader that women’s political representation is encouraged and supported and is an essential requirement of a democratic society.
- Use the OSCE/ODIHR “*Handbook on promoting women’s participation in political parties*”⁴⁹ to assess and improve their own practices.
- Provide their own internal mentoring and support schemes for women members to encourage their political empowerment.

⁴⁷ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2019-11/guidelines-elimination-sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliament>

⁴⁸ https://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf

Article 2 covers political representation. Signatories recognise the principles of balanced participation on women and men in decision making, regulate their own procedures and standards of conduct to eliminate stereotypical forms of behaviour including language and harassment, adopt measures to enable elected representatives to reconcile their private, work and family life by ensuring that working methods, timetables allow all elected representatives to participate fully.

⁴⁹ <https://www.osce.org/odihr/120877>

- Introduce transparent processes for selection of candidates and ensure that the bodies doing the selections are gender balanced and have training in gender equality.
- Ensure that the party members, particularly those in leadership positions understand and are committed to the principle of gender equality and that this is not just an issue for women but requires the support of men.
- Introduce and enforce standards of behaviour for party members regarding sexist and discriminatory behaviour and hate speech.
- Provide mentoring and support to women once they are elected including training courses online where appropriate.
- Ensure that their elected representatives sign and abide by the Code of Ethics for Members of Parliament and the Ethical Principles for campaigns including not allowing hate speech, sexist, or discriminatory behaviour.
- Commit publicly to take action to address violence against women and girls and to implement the national and local gender action plans.
- Introduce paid intern programmes at national and local level aimed at the most disadvantaged young women to give them experience of political life and to support the work of women MPs, mayors, and councillors.

c) Media

Encourage all media outlets to:

- Adopt a code of ethics against gender stereotypes and provide training in gender equality, sexism, and discrimination.

Appendix 1.

International policy, legal Instruments and Council of Europe acquis

General non discrimination

United Nations Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW)⁵⁰

By signing the convention Georgia undertook to comply with the requirement set out in Article 2 to include the principle of equality of women and men in their national constitution and to ensure the practical realisation of the principles by laws and other means. Signatories are required to produce regular reports on their progress to the UN committee. Georgia made the 6th Periodic Report in 2020 and is awaiting the final report. Issues discussed report were the need to introduce specific legislation on the issue of violence against women and girls, the participation of women in political life and the impact of gender stereotypes and sexist language and behaviour.

European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its protocols (ECHR)⁵¹

Article 14 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex in relation to all the rights covered.

Article 3 of Protocol No. 1: Parties undertake to hold free elections at reasonable intervals by secret ballot, under conditions which will ensure the free expression of the opinion of the people in the choice of the legislature.

Balanced Participation of women and men in decision making

Committee of Ministers Rec (2003) Balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.⁵²

This is a key text. Member States are required to report on progress on implementing this recommendation and progress is monitored by the Committee of Ministers.

Recommends that the governments of member States:

- I. commit themselves to promote balanced representation of women and men by recognising publicly that the equal sharing of decision-making power between women and men of different background and ages strengthens and enriches democracy;
- II. protect and promote the equal civil and political rights of women and men, including running for office and freedom of association;

⁵⁰ <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

⁵¹ https://echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf

⁵² <https://rm.coe.int/1680519084>

- III. ensure that women and men can exercise their individual voting rights and, to this end, take all the necessary measures to eliminate the practice of family voting;
- IV. review their legislation and practice, with the aim of ensuring that the strategies and measures described in this recommendation are applied and implemented;
- V. promote and encourage special measures to stimulate and support women's will to participate in political and public decision making;
- VI. consider setting targets linked to a time scale with a view to reaching balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making;
- VII. ensure that this recommendation is brought to the attention of all relevant political institutions and to public and private bodies, in particular national parliaments, local and regional authorities, political parties, civil service, public and semi-public organisations, enterprises, trade unions, employers' organisations and non-governmental organisations;
- VIII. monitor and evaluate progress in achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public life, and report regularly to the Committee of Ministers on the measures taken and progress made in this field.

The recommendations invite member States to consider a range of legislative and administrative measures including:

- consider introducing positive action measures and adjusting or reforming electoral systems if appropriate to facilitate a more balanced participation of women and men;
- consider limiting the holding of different mandates simultaneously;
- consider adopting measures to improve the working conditions of elected representatives including supporting measures to ensure that working methods and timetables enable elected representatives to reconcile their work and family life.

Suggested supportive measures include:

- setting up a data bank of women willing to serve in political and public decision-making positions;
- facilitating networks of women elected representatives at all levels of government;
- develop and support mentoring networks and work shadowing programmes;
- incorporate gender equality and its role in promoting democracy in education curricula;
- ensure that women from all parts of the society are encouraged and supported to be part of any programmes.

The recommendation suggests that member States monitor a range of measures to show progress, or the lack of it, and that the outcome of this monitoring be published regularly.

Progress on the issue has remained slow but remains a key focus for the Council of Europe.

Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023⁵³

Since 2014 the work of the Council of Europe has been focussed through the gender equality strategy. The implementation of the guidance and recommendations on gender equality are monitored by annual reports from the member States.

The first strategy 2014-2018 had 5 key themes:

- Prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism.
- Prevent and combat violence against women and girls.
- Ensure the equal access of women to justice.
- Achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.
- Achieve gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

The second strategy 2019-2023 added an additional key theme:

- Protecting the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls.

The 2018-23 Strategy adopts an intersectional approach to gender equality to ensure that all women benefit from gender equality policies and protections and that their multiple identities are recognised.

The strategy also recognises the role of men and boys as critical in making progress on gender equality. They are both responsible as participants and actors for change and beneficiaries of gender equality policies.

Actions on balanced participation in political decision making include:

- Review the effectiveness of Rec (2003) 3 on Balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making.
- Continue to regularly monitor progress on women's progress in decision-making
- Encourage and support actions in member States.
- Identify good practices.

Legal framework for Elections

United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁵⁴

Article 25 of this states that:

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity

⁵³ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093618-gbr-gender-equality-strategy-2023-web-a5/16808b47e1>

⁵⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;

(b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;

(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.

The law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The UN Human Rights Committee carries out periodic reviews of Human Rights in the signatory states. The committee has just concluded (July 2022)⁵⁵ the consideration of the 5th periodic report from Georgia and its written conclusions are awaited. The Committee Chair recognised the States party commitment to human rights and urged that Georgia act on the recommendations. Participation in public affairs and the electoral process are issues that have been covered in the discussions. The press statement following discussions noted:

“While noting the June 2021 electoral reforms, the Committee expressed its concern about reported electoral irregularities in Georgia and called on the State party to ensure prompt, effective and independent investigations into such allegations. It also asked Georgia to foster a culture of political pluralism by ensuring a safe and secure environment for media workers to operate.”

Venice Commission

Code of Good Practice on Electoral Matters (Code of Good Practice)⁵⁶

Establishes the key components of democratic elections. The following all have a direct impact of women’s participation and political empowerment.

- **Universal suffrage** – all eligible citizens have the right to vote and to stand as candidates. However certain factors make it more difficult for women to exercise this right, including the limiting factors of stereotypical and cultural assumptions about their role in society. Women may be excluded due to the size of the deposit required for candidates due to their financial position or the difficulty of reconciling family life with the role of an elected politician.

⁵⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/un-human-rights-committee-issues-findings-hong-kong-macao-georgia-ireland>

⁵⁶ [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-STD\(2003\)034-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-STD(2003)034-e)

- **Equal Suffrage** – every vote has equal weight and is equally important. The interests and concern of women should be addressed as part of political campaigning and women candidates should have equal access to representation in the media.
- **Free suffrage** – all views should be able to be heard freely. Political campaigns should be free from violence and intimidation including sexism and free from discriminatory remarks and allegations.
- **Secret suffrage** – all voting should be in secret. One person voting on behalf of a family – should be banned as should intimidation of voters at polling stations. All of these are likely to have the greatest impact on women.

Report on the Impact of Electoral Systems on Women’s Representation in Politics.⁵⁷

Electoral systems have an impact on women’s chances of being elected. List systems generally lead to more women being elected, and those that adopt enforced quotas of women in winnable positions on the lists are most successful of all. This is borne out by the experience in Georgia where the increased number of seats elected to parliament by the list system was increased as well as the adoption of quotas had led to an increase in the number of women elected both nationally and in the subsequent local elections.

Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly

Mechanisms to ensure women’s participation in decision-making Res 1489 (2006)⁵⁸

Includes recommendations to member States to:

- Set national objectives of achieving at least 40% of women in governmental and elected bodies
- Monitor progress, collect, analyse and disseminate gender disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data
- Raise awareness in the media
- Reinforce institutional mechanisms
- Introduce/strengthen framework law and government programmes to monitor and assess progress and implementation.

Rec 1898 (2010) Thresholds and other features of electoral systems which have an impact on the representivity of parliaments in Council of Europe member States⁵⁹

Recommends that member States consider:

- reforming their electoral systems to one more favourable to women’s representation;
- Ensure that constitutions that cover gender equality and anti discrimination measures allow positive actions to address inequalities;
- accompanying these changes with measures such as gender-sensitive civic education and the elimination of gender stereotypes and “built-in” bias against women candidates, in particular within political parties, but also the media;
- limiting by law the number of political posts (at local, regional, national or European level) which can be held simultaneously

⁵⁷ [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2009\)029-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)029-e)

⁵⁸ https://havasari-infohub.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/19_PACE-Resolution-1489_2006_ENG.pdf

⁵⁹ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17811>

- encouraging political parties to voluntarily adopt gender quotas and to take other positive action measures, also within their own decision-making structures, and especially in the party structure responsible for nomination of candidates for elections
- accompanying these changes with measures such as gender-sensitive civic education and the elimination of gender stereotypes and “built-in” bias against women candidates, in particular, within political parties, but also within the media and trade unions.

Sexist Language and behaviours, violence and discrimination

Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)⁶⁰

Georgia ratified the Convention in May 2017

The Istanbul Convention recognises violence against women as a human rights violation. By ratifying the Convention Georgia has undertaken: to promote and effectively implement policies of equality between women and men and the empowerment of women; to protect women against all forms of violence; and to prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence. To offer a holistic response to violence against women and domestic violence and to involve all relevant parties including all spheres of governance and public agencies, national human rights bodies and civil society organisations.

Despite positive legislative changes there remain major issues with compliance and levels of violence against women and girls and domestic violence remain high.

In addition to the above Georgia has also agreed, as a member State of the Council of Europe to politically binding commitments and international good practice including to consider recommendations and resolutions from the Venice Commission, from the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE).

Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism⁶¹

For the purpose of this Recommendation, sexism is:

Any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex,

⁶⁰ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=210>

⁶¹

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168093b26a>

which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of:

- I. violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or
ii. resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons; or
- II. creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; or
iv. constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or a group of persons; or
v. maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Sexism and sexist behaviour happen at all levels, individual, institutional and structural so measures to prevent and combat it need to be taken at all levels.

Actions that can be taken include:

Legislation and policies

- introduce laws that condemn sexism and define and criminalise sexist hate speech including remedies for victims of sexist behaviour;
- recognise the intersectional aspect of sexism;
- work with a wide range of partners to design the policy and legal framework to raise awareness and gather support.

Awareness raising

- public figures and institutions should condemn sexism and sexist behaviours
- toolkits and handbooks should be produced for different sectors with practical examples: Combatting Sexism at local level.

Internet, social media and on-line sexist hate speech

This disproportionately affects women including women politicians and candidates.

Suggested actions include:

- legislative measures that define and criminalise incidents of sexist hate speech are applicable to all media;
- establish and publicise online resources providing expert advice on how to deal with online sexism, including procedures for swiftly reporting/removing harmful or unwanted material.

Media, advertising and other communication products and services

This could apply to political campaigns and include:

- sexual images or objectification of women and men, girls and boys;

- derogatory or trivialising reporting about women's appearance, dress and behaviour rather than balanced and informed discussion of their views and opinions;
- unbalanced representation and the lack of meaningful participation of women in diverse professional and informative roles (experts, commentators), especially with respect to minority women.

Suggested actions

- Urge and provide support for the participation of the information and communication technology, media and advertising sectors in the drafting, adoption and implementation of self-regulatory policies and mechanisms for the elimination of sexism, including sexist hate speech within each sector.
- Encourage the promotion of positive images of women as active participants in social, economic and political life, and of positive images of men in non-traditional roles such as carers. Provide incentives or rewards for good practice, for instance through public funding.

Public sector

Women working in the public sector, including those elected or members of decision-making bodies, at all levels, frequently face challenges to their dignity, legitimacy and authority owing to sexism and sexist behaviour.

Suggested actions include:

- Include provisions against sexism and sexist behaviour and language in internal codes of conduct and regulations, with appropriate sanctions for those working in the public sector, including elected assemblies.
- Support initiatives and investigations undertaken by parliamentarians, civil society organisations, trade unions or activists to address sexism in the public sphere.
- Ensure training of public sector employees on the importance of non-sexist behaviour in working with the public, as well as with workplace colleagues. Such training should include the definition of sexism, its different manifestations, ways to deconstruct gender stereotypes and biases, and how to respond to them.
- Promote the strengthening and implementation of internal disciplinary measures for sexism in the public sector and in all decision-making and political bodies, for instance through cutting or suspending responsibilities and funds, or through financial penalties.

Resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly 1751 (2010) Combating sexist stereotypes in the media⁶²

Women are the victims of sexist stereotypes in the media. Either under-represented or presented in a sexist way reinforcing gender stereotypes.

⁶² <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17893&lang=en>

Recommendations to member States include:

- encourage members of parliament to adopt non-sexist language and not to resort to sexist stereotypes in the course of their parliamentary activities;
- urge members of parliament to demand that female candidates and elected representatives have the same access to the media as their male counterparts.

Parliamentary Assembly Rec 2152 (2019) Promotion of parliaments free from sexism and sexual harassment⁶³

- The issue of violence against women in politics should be specifically addressed including in the context of elections

Rec 2274 (2019) Promotion of parliaments free from sexism and sexual harassment⁶⁴

- Parliaments should have independent complaints mechanisms and agreed sanctions for perpetrators
- Confidential counselling for victims should be available
- MPs and parliamentary staff should receive training on sexism and sexual harassment
- Violence against women and sexism and sexual harassment should be included in the guidelines for election observation.

Rec (2275)2019 The role and responsibility of political leaders in combating hate speech and intolerance⁶⁵

Politicians have both a political obligation and a moral responsibility to refrain from using hate speech and stigmatising language, and to condemn promptly and unequivocally its use by others, as silence may be interpreted as approval or support.

Member States should:

- monitor the situation and collect accurate data about its prevalence
- encourage political parties to adopt codes of conduct prohibiting hate speech
- provide training for elected representatives and staff on how to prevent, identify and react to hate speech
- ensure there are effective sanctions and an accessible complaints procedure

⁶³ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/27615/html>

⁶⁴ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/27614/html>

⁶⁵ <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/27636/html>

European Code of Conduct for all persons in local and regional government⁶⁶

Article 6 – Respect and Non-Discrimination All actors shall respect each other. They shall actively work towards a non-discriminatory culture of fairness and tolerance that appreciates diversity.

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Res 459 (2020) Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level⁶⁷

- introduce codes of conduct for elected representatives and staff prohibiting sexist hate speech and sexual harassment;
- introduce an effective complains system with sanctions;
- be vigilant during election periods regarding sexist language and hate speech and monitor candidate nomination procedures for inequalities, considering that violence commonly intensifies around elections carrying elevated risks for women candidates, and that candidate nomination periods provide an important focus for discerning inequalities and intimidation against female candidates.

Political Parties

Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1898 (2021) Political Parties and women’s political representation⁶⁸

Recognises the key role political parties play in increasing the number of women elected.

Proposes the suggested good practices be adopted by political parties:

- introducing a formal commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming in their statute; organising campaigns and activities to attract women’s membership;
- setting up women-only structures and allocating them with adequate funding, and giving them control over how to spend it;
- ensuring that party structures which select candidates to stand for election are fully representative of society, and therefore include a proportional presence of women;
- ensuring maximum transparency in the procedure for the selection of candidates to stand for election;
- introducing a minimum quota of 40% of the under-represented sex in their executive decision-making bodies at all levels;
- in the case of proportional electoral systems, introducing a minimum quota of 40% of the under-represented sex in the electoral lists, accompanied by special gender safeguards as regards the ranking order and the positions at the top of the list, preferably through a zipper-system;
- in the case of majoritarian electoral systems, encouraging the shortlisting of candidates of the under- represented gender, if appropriate through “all-women shortlists” or priority lists with an equal number of people of either sex;

⁶⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/1680718fbf>

⁶⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a0c056>

⁶⁸ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19134&lang=en>

- setting up mentoring and training programmes to enhance the capacity of talented women to take up positions of political responsibility;
- setting up training programmes to strengthen women’s media skills and ensure that women members are given a fair chance to speak on behalf of the party on a broad range of issues;
- ensuring that, during electoral campaigns, the broadcasting time allocated to the party is proportionally shared by women and men candidates;
- setting up measures to enable members to reconcile political engagement and family commitments, for instance by providing free childcare during important party events or during electoral campaigns, and avoiding in so far as possible that party meetings take place at unsociable hours;
- setting up systems to regularly assess and discuss gender distribution in political party structures and party mandates, for instance by foreseeing that the party leader reports on this matter on an annual basis;
- trying to reach cross-party agreement on the need and ways to enhance women’s participation and representation in politics.

Parliamentary Assembly Res 2222 (2018) Promoting diversity and equality in politics⁶⁹

Need to challenge the idea that “*politics is reserved for a select group, composed mostly of white, heterosexual men over 50.* “

“Promoting greater representativeness of elected institutions would strengthen their democratic character, enhance the quality and legitimacy of their decision making and increase people’s trust in the political system. It would also contribute to preventing and combating discrimination, sending out a powerful message in favour of equality and inclusion.”

Suggestions include:

- introduce, where they do not exist, codes of conduct for members of parliament comprising effective disciplinary sanctions against hate speech, violence and incitement to violence;
- organise training for new members of parliament to provide guidance in their new responsibilities;
- encourage political parties to support and promote a diverse range of candidates and office holders within their ranks and to take action to address any hate speech or discriminatory behaviour.

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Resolution 303 (2010) Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life⁷⁰

Congress invites local and regional authorities to give support to:

⁶⁹ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=24812>

⁷⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680719848>

1. encouraging women to stand for elections and fulfil their mandates in order to make councils and assemblies more representative of populations (diversity of generations, origins and experiences encountered in the community) by:
 - I. ensuring the renewal of persons having political mandates
 - II. inducing elected representatives to encourage and attract women to stand for election
 - III. ensuring that no one has to use their own private funds because they have to campaign for or hold office.

Encourage political parties to:

- in selecting candidates, prioritise an ability to represent the concerns and experiences of the communities rather than long experience as elected representatives;
- have a gender balance in the selection of executive roles rather than relying on seniority alone;
- encourage the setting up of women's networks;
- develop and implement specific actions with a view to enhancing women's political participation, such as capacity-building programmes, candidate training, recruitment programmes, systems for mentoring new members or training in public speaking;
- support the establishment of gender equality committees, networks among women's groups and other NGOs that advocate women's political participation and women candidates.

Political Institutions

Parliamentary Assembly Res 2111(2016) Assessing the impact of measures to improve women's political representation⁷¹

Suggested measures include:

- ensure effective sanctions exist for non-compliance with agreed positive measures (quotas) etc.;
- encourage parliaments and other elected bodies to adopt measures to reconcile their activities with the private life of members, such as compatible session and voting times, and childcare services;
- promote training and awareness-raising activities on gender equality targeting politicians irrespective of their gender; encourage political parties and other organisations to provide training for women politicians.

Electoral management and observation:

- ensure that electoral commissions apply provisions on gender equality in the electoral process and involve them in the legislative process when reviewing electoral legislation;

⁷¹ <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=22745>

- strengthen co-operation with international election observation missions as regards the participation of women in the electoral process and provide them with comprehensive information and gender-disaggregated data;
- promote the collection of gender-disaggregated statistical data by electoral management bodies and relevant administrations.