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Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level

Current Affairs Committee

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Summary

The report builds on previous Congress and Council of Europe texts on both women’s political participation and violence against women, in order to look at the specific case of sexist violence perpetrated against women in politics at the local and regional level, when they are candidates or holding elected posts. It takes stock of the increase of incivility, insults and attacks notably via social media from both peers and citizens against women who become visible in the political arena. It also underlines how the attitudes which underline sexist violence undermine women’s right to fully and equally participate in political and public life, also compromising the foundations of democracy and the exercise of democratic institutions.

The report calls on local and regional authorities to take a strong stand as political leaders against sexist attacks targeting women, introduce or revise codes of conduct explicitly prohibiting sexist behaviour and speech in their assemblies. It also invites them to be vigilant during election periods with regard to sexist attacks against women and to monitor candidate nomination procedures for inequalities. It invites the governments of the member States to provide support and resources to local and regional level authorities, in line with the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 of the Council of Europe which recognises local and regional authorities as natural partners.

¹ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People’s Party Group in the Congress
SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

RESOLUTION 459 (2020)²

1. Women are increasingly present in political life at all levels of governance, due in part to the adoption of electoral gender quotas or parity systems. But despite considerable progress made on this path, women remain under-represented in political decision-making bodies. A key obstacle for women to achieve higher representation in political bodies is sexist attitudes and violence against women.

2. The UN report on violence against women in politics defines the phenomenon as “any act of gender-based violence, or threat of such acts, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering and is directed against a woman in politics because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately.” The Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on “Preventing and Combating Sexism” links sexism to violence against women and girls, whereby acts of “everyday” sexism are part of a continuum of violence creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion and insecurity which limits opportunities and freedom.

3. The perception of women’s role in society, sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in all its forms, including violence against women are repeated challenges that women face when they aspire to exercise their right to political participation. Local and regional authorities are, in many countries, the levels of governance where many women begin their political careers. Therefore, they are particularly concerned because policies and measures at these levels can be determinant in changing the prevailing political culture.

4. The proliferation of communication platforms and social media has given rise to an escalation of the number of reports concerning attacks and harassment against women politicians, both candidates for elections and elected representatives. Various testimonies of women politicians who joined the #MeToo movement in 2017 provided a worrisome picture of the issue and of its magnitude.

5. Sexist violence against women in politics violates women’s right to fully and equally participate in political and public life. By extension, the foundations of democracy and the exercise of democratic institutions are compromised as well. Thus, all efforts to fight it contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions).

6. In 2011, the Council of Europe adopted the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210), also known as the Istanbul Convention. Even though the Convention does not explicitly mention violence against women in politics, its legal framework is wide enough to cover it as gender-based violence. The Council of Europe also adopted its Gender Equality Strategy (2018-2023) which recognises local and regional authorities as natural partners and the Congress as a key actor in implementing the Strategy and contributing to its achievement.

7. In 2018, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union jointly conducted a study on “Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe”. Following its disconcerting results, in November 2018, PACE launched the initiative #NotInMyParliament in order to end sexist behaviours in national parliaments and adopted a report on “Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment” in 2019. The report acknowledges that despite its far-reaching consequences, violence against women in politics is often dismissed. In this regard, it recommended to raise awareness, strengthen measures, revise codes of conduct, and monitor progress by collecting data regularly.

8. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (hereinafter “the Congress”) has several texts concerning women in the political arena and violence exercised against women, most notably Resolution 404 and Recommendation 390(2016) on women’s political participation and Resolution 303 and Recommendation 288(2010) on gender equality in politics.

² Debated and adopted by the Statutory Forum on 7 December 2020 (see Document [CG-FORUM\(2020\)02-04](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Jelena DRENJANIN, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE).

9. In light of the above, and with a view to preventing and combating sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional levels, the Congress invites local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe and their national associations to:

a. take a strong stand as political leaders against sexist attacks targeting women, and use all communication platforms including municipal and regional government websites and social media to defend these positions, sharing and disseminating good practices shown to be effective, and encourage political parties to do the same;

b. take appropriate action to fight sexism and prejudice on sexist gender roles, including their informal norms, practices and attitudes, and fight against the atmosphere of immunity among perpetrators as well as the normalisation of sexual harassment and violence against women, developing concrete tools and guidelines for political parties, candidates for elections and for elected councillors, including mentoring programmes for newcomers;

c. introduce or revise codes of conduct explicitly prohibiting sexist speech and sexual harassment in local and regional councils and assemblies, and organise compulsory civil training for elected representatives and local government staff, highlighting the power of by-stander interventions, and ensuring that women and men alike are involved in the efforts to fight gender-based violence;

d. introduce or revise complaint mechanisms that cover all the staff of local and regional authorities, which must be safe and confidential, and ensure that complaints are dealt with professionally;

e. establish effective sanction mechanisms, reviewing (when applicable) immunity rules that can afford council members immunity from prosecution for sexual harassment and violence against women;

f. introduce confidential counselling mechanisms for victims of sexism, sexual harassment and violence against women and misconduct;

g. introduce gender-sensitive security units that can protect women politicians from physical and psychological attacks, including those perpetrated in social media;

h. 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;

i. conduct periodical surveys and studies on the issue of violence against women in politics, including attacks perpetrated in the private sphere, with a view to achieving a better understanding of the phenomenon, monitor its development and adapt complaint and sanction mechanisms to the surveys and studies mentioned above;

j. strive for transparency regarding how gender bias is dealt with within political parties and assemblies in order to ensure accountability for sexist behaviour;

k. co-operate with civil society organisations, academia and the private sector, in order to come up with innovative solutions to prevent and combat violence against women in politics;

l. hold public debates regularly to raise awareness among elected representatives and local government staff and undertake educational outreach programmes aimed at citizens illustrating the negative impact of sexist descriptions, language and attacks against women politicians on the exercise of democratic rights;

m. co-operate with other levels of governance in the organisation of initiatives, from the planning phase to implementation and evaluation;

n. take note of the Congress guide “Preventing and combatting sexism at local level in Ukraine” as a practical tool to address sexism in local government and adapt the guide for use in their particular context.

10. The Congress asks its secretariat to further develop toolkits, guidelines and campaigns to raise awareness and support women local elected representatives and candidates to stand up against sexism and other forms of gender-based discrimination and violence, as well as to counteract sexist behaviour and violence from other politicians and the media. The development and use of toolkits, guidelines and campaigns, coupled with the measures suggested above, will provide a systematic approach to fighting sexism against women in politics at local and regional levels.

RECOMMENDATION 449 (2020)³

1. Women have made considerable progress in entering politics but remain under-represented in political decision-making bodies. Key obstacles for women to achieve higher representation in political bodies are sexist perceptions of women's role in society, sexual harassment, and violence. These repeated challenges create obstacles to women when they aspire to exercise their right to political participation.

2. Recently, sexist attacks against women politicians, both candidates in elections and elected representatives, have become more visible. From gendered slurs to sexual harassment and sexist character assassinations, violence against women in politics is a widespread phenomenon in every country. This was clearly reflected by the various testimonies of women politicians who joined the #MeToo movement in 2017, providing a worrisome picture of the issue and its magnitude.

3. Because of this violence, which obstructs their right to fully and equally participate in political and public life and by extension compromises the foundations of democracy and the exercise of democratic institutions, inequalities and bias are rooted in the pre-conditions for an equal representation between women and men in politics. In fact, it has relevant implications for public political discussion, democratic decision-making, and people's willingness to stand for office. Women have admitted to self-censoring and to exiting the political arena as a result of this type of violence.

4. In 2011, the Council of Europe adopted the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210), also known as the Istanbul Convention. Even though the Convention does not explicitly mention violence against women in politics, its legal framework is wide enough to cover it as gender-based violence. In March 2019 the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on "Preventing and Combating Sexism" which defines sexism as "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, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline" and links sexism to violence against women and girls, whereby acts of "everyday" sexism are part of a continuum of violence creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion and insecurity which limits opportunities and freedom.

5. In 2018, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union jointly conducted a study on "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe". Following its disconcerting results, PACE adopted a report on "Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment" in 2019. The report acknowledges that despite its far-reaching consequences, violence against women in politics is often dismissed. In this regard, it recommended to raise awareness, strengthen measures, revise codes of conduct, and monitor progress by collecting data regularly.

6. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities ("Congress") has several texts concerning women in the political arena and violence exercised against women, most notably its Resolution 404 and Recommendation 390(2016) on women's political participation and Resolution 303 and Recommendation 288(2010) on gender equality in politics.

7. In light of the above and with a view to contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), and also building upon the PACE recommendations to member States on "Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment", the Congress invites the member States of the Council of Europe, to:

a. provide support and resources to local and regional level authorities, in line with the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 of the Council of Europe which recognises local and regional authorities as natural partners and the Congress as a key actor in implementing the Strategy and contributing to its achievement, and encourage them to empower women candidates and elected officials, including

³ See footnote 2.

women from marginalised groups, making best use of the Congress in the institutional framework of the CoE and its intergovernmental bodies in promoting, implementing and evaluating the Strategy;

b. assist local and regional authorities in raising awareness among elected representatives, council staff and citizens on violence against women in politics and its negative impact on the exercise of democratic rights;

c. introduce or revise codes of conduct in national assemblies, governmental bodies and institutions, explicitly prohibiting sexist speech and sexual harassment, introducing effective complaint and sanctions mechanisms and assist local and regional governments with the implementation of measures regarding sexist violence against women in politics;

d. support research, action, policy development and projects at national, regional and local levels of government with a view to achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon, monitor its development and adapt complaint and sanction mechanisms to the surveys and studies mentioned above;

e. encourage political parties and assemblies to aim for transparency regarding how they deal with gender bias in order to ensure accountability for sexist violence and behaviour;

f. conduct periodical surveys and studies and establish official statistics, at all levels of government, on the issue of violence against women in politics, including attacks perpetrated in the private sphere;

g. take appropriate action to fight prejudice on sexist gender roles, including informal norms, practices and attitudes, and fight against the atmosphere of immunity among perpetrators as well as the normalisation of sexual harassment and violence against women, developing concrete tools and guidelines both for candidates for elections and for those holding elected posts.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM⁴

1. INTRODUCTION

1. Women's participation in politics is on the increase at all levels, from international bodies to local authorities. The gender composition of local and regional governments and party representatives is changing across the world. This can be seen in the proportion of women in municipal councils, which has risen from 23.4% to 29% over the last ten years in Europe (2008-2018/19).⁵

2. The increased presence of women as candidates and elected representatives is mainly due to a widespread adoption of electoral gender quotas.⁶ By 2016, 76.6% of member States to the Council of Europe (CoE) had implemented some type of quota or parity system. Such mechanisms have been instrumental in building a more solid framework to promote women's presence in political decision-making bodies, although women still make up a third or more of local assemblies in only five out of 28 European Union (EU) countries.⁷

3. A key barrier to achieving higher representation levels for women is how women's roles are perceived in our societies. Sexism, harassment and violence perpetuated against women in their everyday lives find an echo in political life where women face severe obstacles if they wish to exercise their most basic right of having a say in how society is organised and who should govern.

4. Over the past few years, we have seen increasing reports of attacks on politicians, and reports of widespread sexist elements in attacks on female politicians. Gendered slurs used against female candidates, sexist character assassinations launched on women in politics and sexual harassment of female elected representatives have become well-known features of politics in any country. These phenomena create inequalities in the pre-conditions for women's and men's political representation.

5. The issue of violence against politicians, and gender differences in how and how much politicians are targeted, is highly important because of its implications for public political discussion, democratic decision-making, and people's willingness to stand for office.

6. In 2017, women politicians worldwide joined the #MeToo movement, sharing their stories on social media to denounce the sexist attacks and harassment they endure. These testimonies revealed that such experiences obstructed women's efforts to enter the political arena. Sexist violence against women in politics is a violation of fundamental rights, as it constitutes an obstacle to fully and equally participate in political and public life. By extension, it compromises the foundations of democracy and the exercise of democratic institutions.

7. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS. 210, also known as the Istanbul Convention, 2011) constitutes the leading legally binding instrument to tackle violence against women in Europe. Whereas the Convention does not specifically mention violence against women in politics, the President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence has pointed out Convention articles relevant for the issue, and the group has concluded that "there was sufficient scope within international normative frameworks to cover violence against women in politics as a form of gender-based violence, although more could be done to issue specific provisions, protocols, guidelines or recommendations to guide States and survivors."⁸

8. The Council of Europe adopted a Gender Equality Strategy for 2018-2023 which recognises local and regional authorities as natural partners and the Congress as a key actor in implementing the Strategy and contributing to its achievement. In March 2019 its Committee of Ministers adopted

⁴ This explanatory memorandum is based on the document prepared by the Council of Europe consultant Sandra Håkansson, researcher at Uppsala University, Sweden. The written contribution is available from the Secretariat upon request.

⁵ https://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_Women_in_politics_study_EN.pdf

⁶ Hughes, Melanie M., Pamela Paxton, and Mona Lena Krook. 2017. 'Gender Quotas for Legislatures and Corporate Boards'. *Annual Review of Sociology* 43(1): 331–52.

⁷ European Commission. 2019. *2019 Report on equality between women and men in the EU*. ISSN 2443-5228.

⁸ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics; "Violence against women in politics"; UN-Women/OHCHR Special Procedures, Expert group meeting report, session 3

Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on “Preventing and Combating Sexism”⁹ which defines sexism as “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, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline” and links sexism to violence against women and girls, whereby acts of “everyday” sexism are part of a continuum of violence creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion and insecurity which limits opportunities and freedom.

9. In 2018, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union jointly conducted a study on “Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe”. Its disconcerting results provide evidence of the unceasing sexism that women in politics endure. In November 2018, PACE launched the initiative #NotInMyParliament in order to end sexist behaviors in national parliaments and adopted a report on “Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment” in 2019. The report acknowledges that despite its far-reaching consequences, violence against women in politics is often dismissed. In this regard, it recommended to raise awareness, strengthen measures, revise codes of conduct, and monitor progress by collecting data regularly.

10. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (“Congress”) has several texts concerning women in the political arena and violence exercised against women, most notably its Resolution 68(1999) on women’s participation in political life in the regions of Europe, Resolution 279 and Recommendation 260(2009) on violence against women at the domestic level, Resolution 404 and Recommendation 390(2016) on women’s political participation and Resolution 303 and Recommendation 288(2010) on gender equality in politics.

11. In 2020, a guide on “Preventing and Combatting Sexism at local level in Ukraine”¹⁰, was produced within the project ‘Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine’. The guide aims to equip local decision-makers with the knowledge necessary to address sexism in their institution, thereby enhancing women’s political participation and representation at local and regional levels. It presents concrete measures and is intended for use by local authorities and their national associations as well as possible targets of sexist violence and gender-based discrimination such as female candidates and local office holders. The guide will serve as an effective tool in the context of the 2020 local elections in Ukraine, and can be adapted for local and regional authorities in other countries.

12. Aligned with the above, the present report will focus on sexist violence against women in politics and what local and regional authorities can do and are doing in order to overcome the negative impact of this kind of violence on democratic representation in the member States of the Council of Europe. Awareness of the issue and action at the local level is essential for the promotion of women’s participation in politics, as many women start their political careers at the local level. The report is also part of the Congress’ contribution to the fulfilment of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular to the Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), and to the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 of the Council of Europe mentioned above.

1.1 Concepts and definitions

13. The issue of how gender impacts on violence targeting political actors is starting to receive more and more attention among policymakers and in academia. Different actors use different concepts and definitions. Researchers and practitioners, for example, use the concept of violence against women in elections (VAWIE) or violence against women in politics (VAWIP) to centre on women’s experiences of violence related to their political activities.

14. Research stemming from this perspective has highlighted how perpetrators use gendered derogatory comments to denigrate women politicians, motivate their attacks on women with gendered ideologies, and deter women’s political participation at large by fomenting politics as a male sphere

⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-055519-gbr-2573-cmrec-2019-1-web-a5/168093e08c>

¹⁰ Available in English at <https://rm.coe.int/16809ee57f> and in Ukrainian at: <https://rm.coe.int/16809ee580>, the guide was produced within the project ‘Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine’, implemented by the Congress as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2022.

where women are unwelcome.¹¹ Research that integrates gender into the study of political violence instead compares women's exposure to violence to men's in order to shed light on gender differences and similarities in political violence and election violence.¹² Focus on how gender matters for the forms, prevalence and impact of violence come from both lines of research.

15. The 2019 Council of Europe recommendation on preventing and combating sexism mentioned above in para. 8 defines sexism as:

“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, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons, or resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm, or suffering to a person or a group of persons, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, or constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or a group of persons, or maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes.”

16. The recommendation also links sexism to violence against women and girls, whereby acts of “everyday” sexism are part of a continuum of violence creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion and insecurity which limits opportunities and freedom.

1.2 International framework and actors

1.2.1. The UN Framework

17. In a resolution on women and political participation, the General Assembly has urged all States to take action to ensure women's equal participation, among other things, by investigating allegations of violence against women elected officials and candidates.¹³ The UN Secretary General's report on women and political participation noted that “the comprehensive investigation of allegations of violence, assault, or harassment of women elected officials and candidates for political office is an important step in creating an environment conducive to women's political participation.”¹⁴ Furthermore, the Secretary General notes that this form of violence has started to be recognised not long ago, and as a consequence “few states report systematically about such incidences.”

18. The UN report mentioned above urges both state and non-state actors to take actions to prevent and combat gender-based violence against women in politics and elections. Recommendations include collecting data on the problem, building state capacity to ensure women's security in parliaments, and strengthening mechanisms for reporting gender-based political violence.

19. In 2017, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWomen) and the United National Development Programme (UNDP) published a programming guide on preventing Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE).¹⁵ The report outlines action points

¹¹ Biroli, Flávia. 2018. ‘Violence against Women and Reactions to Gender Equality in Politics’. *Politics & Gender* 14(4): 681–85; Krook, Mona Lena, and Juliana Restrepo Sanín. 2016. ‘Gender and Political Violence in Latin America. Concepts, Debates and Solutions’. *Política y gobierno* 23(1): 127–62.

¹² Bardall, Gabrielle 2018. ‘Violence, Politics, and Gender’. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*; Bardall, Gabrielle. 2017. ‘The Role of information and communication technologies in facilitating and resisting gendered forms of political violence’. In Marie Segrave and Laura Vitis *Gender, Technology and Violence*. Routledge; Bardall, Gabrielle, Elin Bjarnegård, and Jennifer Piscopo. Forthcoming. ‘Gender, Political Participation, and Political Violence: Disentangling Motives, Form, and Impact’. *Political Studies*; Bjarnegård 2018 ‘Making Gender Visible in Election Violence: Strategies for Data Collection’. *Politics & Gender* 14(4): 690–95; Bjarnegård, Elin, Sandra Håkansson, and Pär Zetterberg. 2019. ‘Gender and Violence against Political Candidates: Lessons from Sri Lanka’. *European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions*; Mons, Belgium; Piscopo, Jennifer M. 2016. ‘State Capacity, Criminal Justice, and Political Rights. Rethinking Violence against Women in Politics’. *Política y gobierno* 23(2): 437–58

¹³ Resolution 66/130

¹⁴ United Nations (UN). 2013. “Measures Taken and Progress Achieved in the Promotion of Women and Political Participation: Report of the Secretary General.” Report A/68/ 184, July 24. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/755820?ln=en> (accessed September 12, 2019).

¹⁵ UN Women and UNDP, 2017, “ Preventing violence against women in elections: A Programming Guide”, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/preventing-vaw-in-elections-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3742> (Accessed 12 September 2019)

for mapping and measuring VAWE, how VAWE can be integrated into election monitoring, legal and policy reforms, and how to work together with parties to prevent VAWE.

1.2.2. Action by other international and non-governmental actors fighting political violence against women

20. The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) has drawn up the European Charter for equality of women and men in local life.¹⁶ This charter addresses local and regional governments of Europe and signatories commit to the principle of equality of women and men, and to implementing the commitments set out in the charter within its territory. Among other things, it outlines the responsibilities of local governments as employers to ensure gender equal working conditions, combat sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and to ensure the security and safety of women and men in their territories.

21. The Asian organisation SAP International was early to document incidents and raise awareness about political attacks on women.¹⁷ Likewise, The Association of Local Councilwomen of Bolivia (Acobol) documented around 4 000 cases of political violence and harassment targeting elected women in the early 2000s.¹⁸ Their efforts became pivotal for the process towards the country becoming the first in the world to specifically criminalise Political Harassment and Violence against Women.¹⁹

22. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) wrote a ground-breaking report in 2011 where it mapped women's and men's exposure to election violence in six countries.²⁰ Their framework for assessing, monitoring, and responding to violence against women in elections ("Violence against Women in Elections Framework") suggests methods for observing and responding to VAWIE in all phases of the electoral cycle.²¹

23. A series of trainings called "People Against Violence in Elections" (PAVE) are designed to help participants identify root causes of electoral violence, develop skills to foster dialogue and cooperation on nonpartisan projects between opposing groups and diffuse tension where possible, promote social harmony and a nonviolent political culture, become "peace ambassadors" who prevent, detect, deter and/or mitigate electoral violence.

24. An off-shoot programme, PAVE Youth, targets youth as voters, civic/voter educators, and peace ambassadors. Similarly, the Council of Europe publication *Bookmarks*, a manual for combating hate speech through human rights education, created to support the No Hate Speech Movement, presents activities designed for young people aged 13 to 18, but which are adaptable to other age groups.²²

25. The National Democratic Institute (NDI), headquartered in the USA, has carried out several studies on the topic of violence against women in politics and has published the "Votes without Violence" toolkit. It provides citizen observer groups with gender-sensitive assessment tools and training on how to identify and record incidents of violence against women in elections.²³ The toolkit has already been piloted in several countries.

¹⁶ See: https://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf

¹⁷ SAP International. 2008. Combating VAWIP: Revisiting Policies, Politics and Participation. 2nd South Asian Regional Conference: Kathmandu: SAP International.

¹⁸ Acobol, (Asociación de Concejalas de Bolivia). 2012. 'Acoso y Violencia Política En Razón de Género Afectan El Trabajo Político y Gestión Pública de Las Mujeres'. available at: <http://acobol.org.bo>.

¹⁹ Ley N°243 Contra el Acoso y Violencia Política hacia las Mujeres. See full text here: <https://www.comunicacion.gob.bo/?q=20130725/ley-n%C2%BA243-contra-el-acoso-y-violencia-politica-hacia-las-mujeres> (Accessed 12 September 2019).

²⁰ Bardall, Gabrielle. 2011. Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence. Washington D.C.: IFES.

²¹ Huber, Jessica and Lisa Kammerud. 2017. Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring, and Response. Washington D.C.: IFES.

²² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign/bookmarks-connexions>

²³ National Democratic Institute(NDI), 2016, "Votes without Violence: A Citizen Observer's Guide to Addressing Violence against Women in Elections." <https://www.ndi.org/votes-without-violence-guide> (Accessed 12 September, 2019).

2. THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND: DATA ON SEXIST VIOLENCE

26. So far, there have been few systematic studies on the topic of gendered aspects of violence against politicians. Little is known about how much politicians are targeted with violence or harassment, and whether certain groups of politicians are attacked more than others. Furthermore, no data exists that makes cross-country comparisons possible yet. What is clear is that reports of attacks on politicians, and gendered forms of attacks especially on female politicians, come from all parts of Europe and all parts of the world.

2.1 Prevalence of sexist violence against politicians

27. There is some statistical data and information that allows us to have a picture of the situation as it is today. For example, cross-national research from the UK, Norway, New Zealand and Australia found that between 80 and 95 % of parliamentarians had experienced some form of violence from citizens at some point of their political careers.²⁴ Herrick *et al* find similar rates for US mayors, and the highest rates for female mayors.²⁵ A Norwegian study found no overall gender difference in exposure to violence among politicians, but that female politicians are significantly more exposed to sexual harassment.²⁶

28. The French Senate's Legal Committee launched a consultation survey in August 2019 on violence against mayors with the aim to reinforce their authority and improve their protection.²⁷ 3812 elected representatives replied and 92% stated to have been victim of some sort of violence ranging from uncivil behaviour to aggression. 3135 mentioned incivilities, 1775 insults, 1826 threats, 543 aggressions and 308 people had nothing to declare. Most stated not to have complained to the police. Among those who did complain, nearly 40% declared that their complaint did not lead to criminal proceedings.

29. Unfortunately, although 21.4 % of the replies came from women, the survey was not designed for and does not provide detailed gender-disaggregated data except for noting that women were victims of insults equally as men. Of the 1439 cases concerning women, some were of a sexist nature but less so regarding physical assault (84 cases).

30. A study conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), a public body in the United Kingdom in Bosnia-Herzegovina, shows that a majority of female politicians who participated in a study viewed violence against women in politics as a normal characteristic of politics.²⁸ These women seem to view gendered violence as something they have to adapt to and handle as female politicians, partly fomented by sexist portrayals of female politicians in the media. Another study by WFD conducted in Ukraine found that 62% of women politicians and activists had been humiliated through social network and mass media, 59% had been victims of psychological violence and verbal abuses, and 47% had been sexually harassed.²⁹

31. In general, lack of over-time data makes it difficult to assess whether the problem of violence, harassment and intimidation of politicians has increased or decreased over time. What has been established, however, is that threats and harassment against candidates and elected officials on social media is increasing.³⁰

²⁴ Bjelland, Heidi Fischer, and Tore Bjørgo. 2014. *Trusler Og Trusselhendelser Mot Politikere: En Spørreundersøkelse Blant Norske Stortingsrepresentanter Og Regjeringsmedlemmer*. PHS Forskning, 2014: 4; Every-Palmer, Susanna, Justin Barry-Walsh, and Michele Pathé. 2015. 'Harassment, Stalking, Threats and Attacks Targeting New Zealand Politicians: A Mental Health Issue'. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 49(7): 634–41; James, David V. et al. 2016. 'Harassment and Stalking of Members of the United Kingdom Parliament: Associations and Consequences'. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology* 27(3): 309–30; Pathé, Michele, Jane Phillips, Elke Perdacher, and Ed Heffernan. 2014. 'The Harassment of Queensland Members of Parliament: A Mental Health Concern'. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 21(4): 577–84.

²⁵ Herrick, Rebekah et al. 2019. 'Physical Violence and Psychological Abuse against Female and Male Mayors in the United States'. *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (In print)

²⁶ Bjelland & Bjørgo, 2014.

²⁷ http://www.senat.fr/fileadmin/Fichiers/Images/redaction_multimedia/2019/2019-Documents_pdf/20191002_4_Dossier_de_presse_Plan_de_securite_des_maires.pdf

²⁸ Miftari, Edita (2019) Violence Against Women in Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Violence-Against-Women-in-Politics-BiH-WFD2019.pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.wfd.org/2018/08/06/violence-against-women-in-politics-case-study-ukraine/>

³⁰ Bjørgo, Tore & Silkoset, Emilie. (2017). *Trusler og trusselhendelser mot politikere: En spørreundersøkelse blant norske stortingsrepresentanter og regjeringsmedlemmer*. PHS Forskning, 2017:5; Erikson, Josefina, Sandra Håkansson, and Cecilia Josefsson. 2019. 'The Downside of Social Media: Swedish MPs' Experiences of Gendered Online Abuse'. *European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions*: Mons, Belgium; Gorrell, G. et al. 2018. "Twits, Twats and Twaddle: Trends in

32. Similarly, it is difficult to make cross-country comparisons due to the lack of data. The few studies on violence against candidates and elected officials that do exist often use different definitions impeding comparisons. The lack of standard indicators for measuring the incidence of violence against women in politics and during elections has also been highlighted by the UN Special Rapporteur on all forms of violence against women.³¹

2.2 Escalated risks during election periods

33. Violence commonly intensifies around elections in contexts marked by political violence³² as well as in peaceful contexts (such as Italy³³ and Sweden³⁴). Research on election violence has concluded that such violence either can escalate before elections in order to affect the outcome,³⁵ or directly following an election – from those who do not accept the results³⁶ and those who want to condition the activities of the newly elected administration.³⁷

34. Researchers taking on a gender perspective further point out the nomination period as an important focus for discerning inequalities and intimidation against female candidates, traditionally overlooked in research on election violence.³⁸ Female candidates often challenge male incumbents and may face gendered harassment while striving to get placed on parties' ballots.

35. One example of physical violence perpetrated publicly against women politicians took place in Greece during a TV debate just ten days before elections in 2012, when Ilias Kasidiaris, a high-profile member of Golden Dawn party, attacked two women members of parliament who were part of a seven-strong TV discussion panel.³⁹

2.3. Gendered forms of attacks

36. The often sexualised and gendered forms of attacks on political women communicate to the targeted women as well as to witnesses of the attacks, that women do not belong in politics.

37. Women are portrayed in their traditional roles as mothers and wives, and focus is brought to women's bodies, to undermine their roles as competent politicians.⁴⁰ The current mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, was told by a male local councillor that she was brainless and should be cleaning floors.⁴¹ The prestigious charity event of Germany Eiswette (Ice Bet) club refused to invite Karoline Linnert, Mayor of Bremen, because she is a woman.⁴² These acts denigrate female politicians and foment negative attitudes to women in politics as a group.⁴³

Online Abuse towards UK Politicians." *Twelfth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*. 25-28 Jun 2018, California, USA. AAAI Press, pp. 600-603.

³¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics; "Violence against women in politics".

³² Höglund, Kristine. 2009. 'Electoral Violence in Conflict-Ridden Societies: Concepts, Causes, and Consequences'. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21(3): 412–27.

³³ Alesina, Alberto, Salvatore Piccolo, and Paolo Pinotti. 2016. 'Organized Crime, Violence, and Politics'. NBER Working Papers 22093; Daniele, Gianmarco, and Gemma Dipoppa. 2017. 'Mafia, Elections and Violence against Politicians'. *Journal of Public Economics* (154): 10–33

³⁴ Wallin, Sanna, and Carl Command. 2015. Politikernas Trygghetsundersökning 2015: Förtroendevaldas Utsatthet under Valåret 2014. Stockholm: Brottsförebyggande rådet. NBN:SE:BRA-627.

³⁵ Collier, Paul. 2009. *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*. New York: Harper Perennial; Dal Bó, Ernesto, Pedro Dal Bó, and Rafael Di Tella. 2006. "Plata o Plomo?" Bribe and Punishment in a Theory of Political Influence'. *American Political Science Review* 100(1): 41–53.

³⁶ Mueller, Susanne D. 2011. 'Dying to Win: Elections, Political Violence, and Institutional Decay in Kenya'. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29(1): 99–117.

³⁷ Daniele and Dipoppa, 2017.

³⁸ Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg, 2019.

³⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/07/golden-dawn-tv-assault-greece>

⁴⁰ Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016.

⁴¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/08/world/europe/spain-women-sexism.html>

⁴² <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/germany-charity-event-sexism-all-male-bremen-karoline-linnert-women-controversy-a8740216.html>

⁴³ Biroli, Flávia. 2016. 'Political violence against women in Brazil: expressions and definitions'. *Revista Direito e Práxis* 7(15); Krook, Mona Lena. 2017. 'Violence Against Women in Politics'. *Journal of Democracy* 28(1): 74–88.

38. Researchers comparing women's and men's exposure to various forms of political violence and election violence has found that physical force is more often used against male targets (such as property damage or bodily violence), and that psychological and sexual violence is more often used against women.⁴⁴

39. Women in politics are often targeted with sexist forms of attacks, including remarks about their appearance and personal lives, physical sexual assault, and incessant threats of sexual violence. Several European parliamentarians have had pornographic images sent to them or comments that they themselves would be suited to pornography.⁴⁵ In Germany, Katharina Schulze, regional leader of the Greens in Bavaria, estimates that 20% of the messages that she receives daily are abusive.⁴⁶

40. In 2016, in Spain, the newspaper ABC -partly funded by public money-, published an article in which a male journalist repeatedly uses derogatory language and insults against left-nationalist female politicians from the Basque Country and Catalunya. He calls them "ugly, very ugly" and "rat-haired", and concludes that "it's not that they want to separate from Spain: they want us to throw them out. For being horrible and unsightly".⁴⁷

41. An example of physical sexual violence used to silence female politicians was when two Armenian city councillors were attacked during a sitting of the Yerevan city council. As these women were speaking up about a sewage leak, male opponents from the governing party surrounded and sexually assaulted them in front of the audience present at the city hall as well as live-streaming cameras.⁴⁸ Sexual violence has also been used against male politicians,⁴⁹ but seems to be far more commonly used against women targets.⁵⁰

42. Rumours and commentary on female politicians are often gendered in a way that degrades women as a group. In Croatia, for example, alleged sex tapes of female politicians have figured online⁵¹ and rumours about female politicians being sexually immoral figure in a wide range of countries.⁵² Rumours about marital problems, infidelity, or bad parenting carry more weight when spread about women than men, since these rumours draw on the different moral standards for women and men.⁵³

2.4. Sexual harassment against politicians

43. A gendered form of attack on politicians that deserves special attention is sexual harassment. During the #MeToo movement in 2017, many women spoke up about their personal experiences of sexual harassment. Female politicians in several countries created hashtags where they shared their stories and spread awareness on abuse that takes place in political contexts.

44. Sexual harassment functions to diminish women's roles as competent politicians and enforce their roles as sexual objects. It draws attention to and reinforces the unequal power relations between women and men in society and limits women's effective participation in society and politics. In France, Senator Stéphane Ravier insulted Lydia Frentzel, a local elected representative, during a meeting of the Marseille City Council. He offered to meet her "at the same hotel, on the same day, at the same time",

⁴⁴ Bardall, 2011.; Bjarnegård, Elin. 2016. 'Gender and Election Violence - the Case of the Maldives'. *Conference Paper IPSA*, Poznan, Poland; Håkansson, Sandra. 2019. 'Do Women Pay a Higher Price for Power? Gender Bias in Political Violence in Sweden'. *Journal of Politics* Conditionally accepted.

⁴⁵ Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2016. *Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians*. Geneva. Issues Brief.

⁴⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-48871400>

⁴⁷ https://sevilla.abc.es/opinion/sevp-flequis-201601060929_noticia.html

⁴⁸ Nikoghosyan, Anna, 2018, Armenia's female councillors were abused for challenging the patriarchal political system, <https://oc-media.org/opinion-armenias-female-councillors-were-abused-for-challenging-the-patriarchal-political-system/#more-10759> [last accessed 16 September 2019]

⁴⁹ See e.g. the attack on Swedish local politician Patrik Liljeglöd who was raped by political opponents: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sweden-politician-patrik-liljegl-d-raped-knifepoint-falun-left-party-democracy-a7949991.html>

⁵⁰ Bardall, 2011; Bjarnegård, 2016; Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg, 2019.

⁵¹ Krook, Mona Lena, and Juliana Restrepo Sanín. 2019. 'The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians'. *Perspectives on Politics*: 1–16.

⁵² See for example Miftari 2019, Bardall 2013, Bjarnegård 2016, Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2016, Bjarnegård, Håkansson and Zetterberg 2019, IPU 2016, WFD 2018.

⁵³ Bardall, Gabrielle. 2013. 'Gender-Specific Election Violence: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies'. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 2(3).

implying that she is a prostitute and has usual sexual relations with him. As a consequence, she decided to file a complaint for “sexist public insult” against him.⁵⁴

45. Based on research on sexual harassment in workplaces, it is not unexpected that such harassment takes place in political institutions. In an overview of academic research, Fitzgerald and Cortina conclude that the most severe problems of sexual harassment typically are found in organisations with a skewed gender ratio (i.e., mostly inhabited by men), roles and tasks that are historically masculine in nature, and where there is an organisational tolerance of offensive behaviour.⁵⁵ This finding is one more argument in support of measures to implement quotas for women, as they are underrepresented in many elected assemblies, governments or political parties.

46. Furthermore, the fact that relationships are currency in politics makes it a context where sexual harassment can proliferate.⁵⁶ Leaders of legislatures, or parties, may be incentivised to ignore or even retaliate against accusers in attempting to protect political allies or preserve organisational reputation.⁵⁷

47. Sexual harassment is usually understood to encompass gender harassment (e.g. expressions of degrading attitudes to women, “woman-bashing” jokes, referring to women by degraded names for female body parts), unwanted sexual attention (including sexually suggestive comments and compliments and unwanted body contact), and sexual coercion (unwanted sexual attention is combined with bribes and/or threats).⁵⁸

48. Examples of each form of sexual harassment from the realm of politics abound. An EU parliamentarian recounts that a minister said to her during a debate: ‘You are so beautiful that I cannot listen to you’,⁵⁹ hence drawing attention away from her role as a policymaker by sexualising her. Women report being sexually blackmailed by party colleagues and having to deal with persistent unwanted sexual advances and obscene comments.⁶⁰

49. A Bosniak female politician recounts that fellow politicians from her council insisted on calling her “Iuv” instead of her name, and repeatedly subjected her to sexual harassment: “They would eyeball the length of my skirt, make comments about the way I dressed, and other such macho remarks. The most unpleasant incident happened the day after the elections, a group of them were sitting with a few politicians in the garden in front of a café, and they shouted, “whore” as I walked past.”⁶¹

50. In a recent study on physical and psychological violence targeting Swedish local politicians, based on statistical analyses of survey data on 8 000 municipal politicians in three waves, Håkansson⁶² finds that both female and male politicians experience far more psychological than physical violence in the Swedish context. This holds for both election years and years in-between elections. The most common form of attack in 2016 against both female and male politicians is on social media, followed by verbal threats in person, threatening emails and threats communicated on the phone.

51. According to Håkansson’s study, female politicians are targeted more than male. This is especially the case for officials highest in the political hierarchy. Among female mayors, 69% are targeted on average per year with some form of political violence, compared to 56% of male mayors.

⁵⁴ https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/une-elue-porte-plainte-contre-stephane-ravier-pour-sexisme_2060917.html

⁵⁵ Fitzgerald, Louise F. and Lilia M. Cortina. 2018. “Sexual harassment in work organizations: A view from the 21st century.” In C. B Travis, J. W. White, A. Rutherford, W. S. Williams, S. L. Cook, & K. F. Wyche (Eds.), *APA handbooks in psychology series. APA handbook of the psychology of women: Perspectives on women’s private and public lives* (pp. 215-234). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association

⁵⁶ Mahoney, Anna, Meghan Kearney, and Carly Shaffer. 2019. ‘#MeToo in the State House’. Unpublished manuscript under review.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Fitzgerald and Cortina, 2018.

⁵⁹ Examples from IPU 2018

⁶⁰ Chrisafis, Angélique. 2016. ‘We can no longer stay silent’: fury erupts over sexism in French politics. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/13/we-can-no-longer-stay-silent-fury-erupts-over-sexism-in-french-politics> [Accessed 17 September 2019], IPU 2018

⁶¹ Miftari, 2019.

⁶² The case study summarises findings from Håkansson, Sandra. 2019. ‘Do Women Pay a Higher Price for Power? Gender Bias in Political Violence in Sweden’. *Journal of Politics* Conditionally accepted.

52. Election periods tend to entail increased political violence in peaceful contexts as well as in contexts marked by violence, and in consolidated democracies as well as in transitional contexts. This is also the case in Sweden: the highest incidence of attacks on politicians during the years measured was the election year in 2014. 27% of politicians were attacked at least once during this election year. Among mayors, 65% were targeted during the election year, compared to an average of 58% in non-election years.

53. There are some differences in the forms of violence used against women and men. Whereas men are more exposed to property damage, women are more exposed to threats of different sorts. This corresponds to studies from other countries that similarly find that physical force is more commonly used against men and/or their property, whereas psychological violence is more commonly used against women. In relation to the prevalence of violence against politicians, the study concludes that women in politics are significantly more exposed than their male counterparts. A higher share of women than men are targeted, especially among mayors and chairs of committees, and they are also targeted more times than the male counterparts.

2.5 Social media as an arena for harassment and abuse

54. Social media platforms have been shown to pose specific challenges to equality in democratic discourse. Testimonies of sexist online abuse targeting politicians come from all parts of the world at all levels of government. First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, has said that she probably speaks for every woman in politics when she says that women in politics have seen sexually violent commentary about themselves on social media.⁶³ Norwegian prime minister Erna Solberg has discussed the online abuse towards her as a female politician.⁶⁴

55. Analysing 70 000 tweets sent to UK MPs on Twitter, Ward and Mclaughlin find that male MPs receive more abusive tweets, but that female MPs receive more hate speech.⁶⁵ Out of all tweets that contained hate speech, 86% was directed at women. The authors conclude that women MPs may not receive more abuse on Twitter than male, but that “the abuse women receive is gendered in its content.” Similarly, Erikson et al find that Swedish female parliamentarians experience more gendered and sexist abuse on social media than male counterparts, suggesting that the main gender difference may not be the extent but the character of online abuse against MPs.⁶⁶

56. In Bavaria, Germany, an anonymous right-wing channel discussed the “dumbness” of the Bavarian politician Katharina Schulze. The first comment of the video reads “OK guys, hand on your hearts and be honest: Katharina Schulze, would bang? Yes or no?”, and one of the replies follows: “Nooo. Rather burn her”.⁶⁷

57. The Inter-Parliamentary Union marks that “social media has become the number one place in which psychological violence – particularly in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing, intimidation and threats – is perpetrated against women parliamentarians.”⁶⁸

58. The attacks against transgender women in politics have been in the news many times. One example thereof is Sue Pascoe from the United Kingdom, a trans person who is member of the Conservative Party and who ran for election in the European Parliament. She has been victim of harassment and attacks ranging from targeted harassment online to attacks on her property and death threats so that she had to be flagged as a vulnerable person by the local police.⁶⁹

59. Anonymity indubitably makes abusers’ lives easier. There have been calls for anonymity to be banned in order to discourage defamation, but some may argue that denying Internet users the ability

⁶³ Amnesty International, 2018, Nicola Sturgeon: A Case Study in Violence Against Women Online. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/nicola-sturgeon-online-violence-against-women/>

⁶⁴ The Local (2015), “Norway pm Opens Up about Online Abuse”, available at: <http://www.thelocal.no/20151201/norway-pm-opens-up-about-onlineabuse> [Accessed on: December 2, 2015].

⁶⁵ Ward, Stephen J., and Liam Mcloughlin. 2017. “Turds, Traitors and Tossers : The Abuse of UK MPs via Twitter.” In *ECPR Joint Sessions 2017*, University of Nottingham: European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR)

⁶⁶ Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson, 2019.

⁶⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/may/18/when-the-far-right-crack-rape-jokes-part-of-a-systemic-bid-to-demean>

⁶⁸ IPU, 2016.

⁶⁹ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/transgender-hate-crimes-up-81-per-cent-police-data-reveals-a4177016.html>

to post anonymously is not only a breach of their privacy and freedom of expression but also would reduce online participation in general. Nonetheless, raising barriers to posting abusive comments - for example through controls by site moderators – might still be a first step in stemming the tide of anonymous online abuse, though in many cases abusers have no fear of attacking openly as noted below.

60. Various types of actors have been reported as perpetrators of violence against politicians, including state- and non-state actors, members of political parties including one's own party, interest groups, constituents, voters, family members, religious leaders, and so on. Voters and constituents seem to be common perpetrators of violence against both male and female politicians in many European contexts.⁷⁰ However, threats against Spanish mayor Manuela Carmena containing sexist slurs were made by participants of a group chat of local police officers.⁷¹

61. Fellow party and parliamentary colleagues have been pointed out as important aggressors behind the violence and harassment faced by female politicians.⁷² Around one fifth of women in politics in Bosnia-Herzegovina report both parliamentary contexts and parties as sites where violence against women in politics is perpetrated.⁷³ While opposing parties are believed to be the most common perpetrators of VAWIP in this context by the study participants, almost half of them state that members of one's own party are common perpetrators.⁷⁴

62. Family members have exercised violence and intimidation against women to prevent them from standing for office or participating in politics more broadly.⁷⁵ There are also cases when family members have collaborated with female politicians' political opponents to exercise violence against them.⁷⁶ Due to patriarchal gender relations, male relatives can effectively make the lives of female candidates and officials very difficult by withholding the family's financial resources as a punishment, or by being complicit in the spreading of degrading rumours.⁷⁷

3. IMPACT OF PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE ON POLITICIANS

63. Political violence affects the immediate targets in various ways, and it also has implications for the political system and democracy of society in which it occurs.

3.1 Emotional and professional consequences of sexual harassment

64. Workplace sexual harassment has been consistently connected to myriad psychological consequences including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and PTSD.⁷⁸ Research on the topic has also identified a set of somatic consequences related to sexual harassment, such as exhaustion, sleep problems, gastric problems, and musculoskeletal pain.⁷⁹ Furthermore, work-related consequences of sexual harassment include work withdrawal and disengagement, and lowered productivity not just of directly affected individuals but of entire teams.⁸⁰ Importantly, all forms of sexual harassment, including gender harassment as well as physical sexual violence, are associated with these types of health and occupational outcomes.⁸¹

⁷⁰ E.g. Bjelland and Silokset, 2017; Every-Palmer, Barry-Walsh, and Pathé, 2015.; James et al., 2016.; Pathé, Phillips, Perdacher, and Heffernan, 2014.; Wallin and Command, 2015.

⁷¹ See <https://www.efe.com/efe/english/portada/court-to-investigate-insults-threats-madrid-mayor-in-local-police-chat/50000260-3443942> [accessed 9 September 2019]

⁷² Bardall, 2011; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016.

⁷³ Miftari, 2019.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ E.g. Bardall, 2011.

⁷⁶ Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg, 2019; Vásquez García, Verónica. 2011. *Usos y Costumbres y Cuidadanía Femenina. Hablan Las Presidentas Municipales de Oaxaca, 1996-2010*. Mexico: Cámara de Diputados, LXI Legislatura, Colegio de Postrados / Miguel Ángel Porrúa

⁷⁷ Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg, 2019; Vásquez García, 2011.

⁷⁸ For an overview, see Fitzgerald and Cortina, 2018.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

3.2 Political selection: drop-outs and opt outs

65. A potentially important implication of violence against politicians is that candidates and elected officials opt-out of re-running in future elections or drop out prematurely, and that potential candidates refrain from entering politics.

66. Evidence from Italy suggests that potential candidates refrain from running for mayor in municipalities affected by political violence: higher-ability individuals opt out, resulting in lower human capital among mayoral candidates in affected municipalities.⁸²

67. Swedish studies have found a low frequency of actual drop-outs, but 9% of female and 6% of male politicians report that they have considered leaving politics entirely due to own exposure to or worries about political violence.⁸³ 9% of female and 7% of male politicians report that they have considered leaving a specific assignment for the same reason.⁸⁴

68. In Norway, 11% of MPs (male and female) exposed to violence in the course of their political office report that they consider leaving politics.⁸⁵ 13 and 16% respectively worry about the safety of their families, and have increased security at home, as a consequence of facing violence as politicians.

69. Both women and men in local politics across Europe report opting out of standing for office or leaving elected office prematurely due to harassment and threats directed at them.⁸⁶ Each case of undue influence of this sort challenges the democratic functioning of politics. If women candidates or officials are targeted more frequently or exposed to attacks of a qualitatively more severe character, women may be more affected by the possibility of opt-outs and drop-outs from politics. Scottish politician Nicola Sturgeon comments on this: "What makes me angry when I read abuse about me is that I worry that it puts the next generation of young women off politics."⁸⁷

70. It is important for candidates and elected officials to be perceived as competent and capable in order to gain the confidence of voters and constituents. Publicly revealing that one is targeted with sexist attacks and harassment might put one at the risk of being portrayed as weak. Moreover, if the harasser is from the same party, there is a risk of being perceived as disloyal and unreliable. Victim blaming is a common feature of all forms of violence against women, and in the political context this can have severe consequences for political careers.⁸⁸ There are high risks that victims refrain from reporting incidents of harassment and that perpetrators remain unpunished. This contributes to a hostile working environment for politicians, which may be particularly detrimental for women's willingness to enter and remain in politics.

71. If women face gendered harassment as politicians at local and regional levels, this can impact on the selection of politicians into national level politics. Local politics constitute a common stepping stone to higher-level offices in many countries. Women are less likely to run for office than men in many contexts,⁸⁹ which can be exacerbated by gendered violence against women in politics.

⁸² Daniele, Gianmarco. 2017. 'Strike One to Educate One Hundred: Organized Crime, Political Selection and Politicians' Ability'. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*; Pinotti, Paolo. 2012. *Organized Crime, Violence and the Quality of Politicians: Evidence from Southern Italy*. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. SSRN Scholarly Paper.w

⁸³ Frenzel, Anna. 2017. *Politikernas Trygghetsundersökning 2017. Förtroendevaldas Utsatthet Och Oro För Trakasserier, Hot Och Våld 2016*. Stockholm: Bråttförebyggande rådet.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Bjørge, Tore & Silkoset, Emilie. (2017). *Trusler og trusselhendelser mot politikere: En spørreundersøkelse blant norske stortingsrepresentanter og regjeringsmedlemmer*. PHS Forskning, 2017:5.

⁸⁶ See e.g. <https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/bath-councillor-quits-post-claiming-2636794>; <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=161&artikel=6746402>

⁸⁷ Amnesty International, 2018, Nicola Sturgeon: A Case Study in Violence Against Women Online. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/nicola-sturgeon-online-violence-against-women/>

⁸⁸ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics; "Violence against women in politics"

⁸⁹ Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard L. Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3.3 Decision making

72. An implication that deserves substantial consideration is how decisions taken by politicians may be affected by political violence, and whether (groups of) women or politicians advocating certain issues are more affected than others. Research on the topic is scarce. Only one of the Norwegian parliamentarians surveyed reports that being exposed to violence has affected a decision on their behalf.⁹⁰ Among Swedish local politicians, around 2% report being affected in this way.⁹¹ It is possible that this type of consequence is more common in contexts affected by other forms of violence against politicians or by violence coming from other types of actors, but more studies are needed to assess the impact of violence, gender-based and otherwise, on political decision making.

3.4 Democratic debate and public discussions

73. Decreased freedom of expression and limits on what politicians discuss in public debates has been reported as a consequence of political violence from several European countries. Around 8% of Norwegian parliamentarians report self-censorship in what they discuss publicly or what they express on certain topics as a consequence of exposure to violence.⁹² Severe attacks on women who publicly engage in debates on politically salient topics are continuously reported from many countries.⁹³ Evidence from the UK suggests that women in politics are severely abused on Twitter.⁹⁴ Being such a commonly used forum for public debate, this could have implications for women's opportunities to participate in the democratic conversation on equal terms as men. In Swedish local politics, women in politics report avoiding making public statements on certain topics as a consequence of political violence to a higher extent than male counterparts.⁹⁵

3.5 Groups of women and intersectional identities

74. It is vital to recognise that the risks differ for different groups of office holders and candidates, including different groups of women. Politicians' intersectional identities may affect how and how much they are targeted, as well as the impact for both direct targets and on-lookers. They can also affect how violence exposure is framed and managed.

75. Italy's first black minister has been repeatedly exposed to racist and sexist attacks, such as being likened to an orangutan by a former government minister, having bananas thrown at her while on a podium, mannequins with fake blood being dumped by political opponents outside a townhall where she was due to give a speech, and a local councillor of an opposing party calling for her to be raped.⁹⁶ Similarly, a billboard, paid for by far right groups, demanded that a female European politician of African origin be "whitened with bleach and burned alive".⁹⁷ Sylvana Simons, Councillor of Amsterdam, has received several death-threats on the social media, and has been victim of misogynist and racist abuse. In 2016, the violence escalated into the circulation of racist and deeply violent video of her portrayed as a lynching victim.⁹⁸

76. A recent study points out that the forms of violence politicians are targeted with is linked to the impact they have.⁹⁹ Witnessing women of colour being exposed to sexist and racialised intimidation reverberates among marginalised communities.¹⁰⁰ It creates a heightened sense of vulnerability in the communities they represent symbolically,¹⁰¹ impacts on attitudes to racialised female politicians as a

⁹⁰ Bjørge, Tore & Silkoset, Emilie. (2017). *Trusler og trusselhendelser mot politikere: En spørreundersøkelse blant norske stortingsrepresentanter og regjeringsmedlemmer*. PHS Forskning, 2017:5.

⁹¹ Frenzel, 2017.

⁹² Bjørge and Silkoset, 2017.

⁹³ See e.g. a Swiss case: <https://www.euronews.com/2018/09/20/swiss-politicians-online-abuse>

⁹⁴ Amnesty International. 2018. *Toxic Twitter - A Toxic Place for Women*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-1/>.

⁹⁵ Frenzel, 2017.

⁹⁶ The Guardian, 2013, Italy's first black minister: I had bananas thrown at me but I'm here to stay, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/08/cecile-kyenge-quest-for-tolerance> [Accessed 16 September 2019]

⁹⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016.

⁹⁸ Holligan, Anna, 2016, Dutch race hate row engulfs presenter Sylvana Simons, BBC News, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38089469> [last viewed September 16, 2019]

⁹⁹ Kuperberg, Rebecca. 2019. 'Evidence from the Twitter "Cesspit": Antisemitic and Islamophobic VAWIP in the United Kingdom'. *European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions: Mons, Belgium*.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016.

group, and risks decreasing the supply of willing candidates among already politically marginalised groups.¹⁰²

4. ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST POLITICIANS IN A GENDER-SENSITIVE WAY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

4.1 Responsibilities of national, regional, and local authorities

77. Different electoral systems stipulate different rules and responsibilities. Many European countries have party-centred systems which entails some form of shared responsibility between government bodies and parties for the conditions of political offices. Furthermore, the division of responsibilities between national, regional, and local authorities differs across countries. The issue of clarifying the division of responsibilities, including budgetary responsibilities, is paramount. The UK Local Government Association has pointed out that the costs for councillors' security is sometimes born by local police forces, sometimes by political parties, and sometimes by local councils.¹⁰³ As a result, councillors' effective access to security measures may vary depending on how responsibility is assigned and resources available across localities and actors within the same country.

4.2 The national level

78. National public authorities can carry out projects to capacitate local government bodies and parties in how to handle physical, psychological and sexual violence against politicians. Nationwide surveys and studies on the prevalence of the problem can enable a good fact-based assessment of the situation. Furthermore, national level institutions can collect good practices from around the country and create fora for exchanging knowledge and experiences.

79. The UK Local Government Association notes that the local police force takes the issue of intimidation seriously in some parts of the country but less so in others.¹⁰⁴ National authorities can assist local police forces as well as other actors managing politicians' security in the implementation of adequate measures to protect politicians' integrity both physically and mentally. Gender awareness is vital in this work.

4.3 The local and regional levels

80. Local and regional authorities are closest to candidates and elected officials operating in their territories, and hence well-placed to conduct studies into their needs of support in relation to attacks on them as politicians. Policies on how to prevent and manage attacks from constituents and other external actors need to be in place, as well as internal zero-tolerance policies on harassment between politicians in the local organisation.

81. Under the European Charter for equality of women and men in local life, local and regional authorities are responsible as employers, under Article 11, to protect the right to dignity and security in the workplace as essential for gender equality. Signatories are committed to opposing sexual harassment by stating clearly that such behaviour is unacceptable, supporting victims, introducing and implementing transparent policies to deal with perpetrators, and raising awareness on the issue. Under Article 21, signatories are committed to analysing statistics on incidents affecting women and men from a gender perspective and implement adequate measures as a response. Under Article 22, signatories are committed to combating gender-based violence.

4.4 Need for understanding the needs of local and regional office holders and candidates

82. Local politicians have particular vulnerabilities in terms of the risk of being targeted with harassment coming from constituents and political adversaries. One crucial aspect is their geographical proximity to constituents and voters. Whereas national parliamentarians and candidates may largely be located

¹⁰² Kuperberg, 2019.

¹⁰³ Local Government Association. 2019. Intimidation in public life: House of Commons Briefing. <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA%20briefing%20-%20Intimidation%20in%20public%20life%20-%20HoC%20210519%20-FOR%20WEB.pdf> [Accessed 17 September 2019]

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

in capitals and enjoy some extent of anonymity in their home communities, local and regional candidates and officeholders often live next-door to their perpetrators. Their home addresses may be well-known and accessible to perpetrators of political violence and harassment, putting them and their families at different risks than politicians at other levels.

83. It is more common for office holders at lower levels of government to carry out their political functions on their spare time or as a part-time employment.¹⁰⁵ Politicians who do not work full time as such might have a lower familiarity with e.g. who to turn to when in need of support or security measures; the responsibilities of parties and government bodies respectively; routines for handling harassment and violence; existing policies and procedures on sexual harassment; and so on. They may have smaller networks of other politicians to ask for advice and spend less time in political institutions than full-time politicians.

84. Parties and assemblies at the local and regional levels may not have the same resources as the national level to assist politicians with issues to do with security, safety and equality. This may especially apply to smaller, local parties.¹⁰⁶

85. All of these aspects create specific vulnerabilities for local level candidates and officeholders, pointing to the need to clarify the division of responsibilities for their safety and wellbeing between national and local levels of government authorities and parties.

5. LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES' AREAS FOR ACTION

5.1 Building knowledge, developing concrete tools

86. As noted in a UN report, solutions to gendered violence against politicians need to start with fact-based assessments, "such as vulnerability mapping or violence monitoring, which can contribute to establishing the necessary evidence base in order to promote prevention and hold perpetrators accountable."¹⁰⁷ Mapping the situation is necessary in order to understand the scope of the problem, e.g. which politicians are affected and by what forms of violence, which can then facilitate adequate programming to tackle the issue. The UN's Special Rapporteur on "violence against women, its causes and consequences" notes that election observation programmes offer key opportunities to collect information on the issue of violence against women in elections.¹⁰⁸

87. Building knowledge on the issue requires accurate measurements of the forms of violence politicians are exposed to in elections and as office-holders. Commonly used measurements of political violence focus on visible acts of violence, over-emphasising physical violence, and the private sphere is seldom considered.¹⁰⁹

88. They are therefore likely to fail to capture some of the types of violence women may be more likely to face. For example, these measurements overlook experiences of family members' sometimes violent opposition towards women's political participation. Likewise, these measurements are unlikely to capture incidents of sexual harassment between politicians. Furthermore, the over-emphasis on physical manifestations of violence risks downplaying the detrimental effects that psychological violence can have.

¹⁰⁵ Verhelst, Tom, Herwig Reynaert and Kristof Steyvers (2013) Political recruitment and career development of local councillors in Europe. In: Egner, Björn, David Sweeting D and Pieter-Jan Klok (eds) Local Councillors in Europe. Urban and Regional Research International, vol 14. Springer VS, Wiesbaden. Pp 27-49

¹⁰⁶ For an overview of diminishing role of national parties in local elections, see Razin, Eran (2013) Councillors and their parties. In: Egner, Björn, David Sweeting D and Pieter-Jan Klok (eds) Local Councillors in Europe. Urban and Regional Research International, vol 14. Springer VS, Wiesbaden pp 51-62

¹⁰⁷ United Nations (UN). 2013. "Measures Taken and Progress Achieved in the Promotion of Women and Political Participation: Report of the Secretary General." Report A/68/ 184, July 24. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/755820?ln=en> (accessed September 12, 2019).

¹⁰⁸ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics; "Violence against women in politics".

¹⁰⁹ Bjarnegård, Elin. 2017. 'Gender and Election Violence: Advancing the Comparative Agenda'. Comparative Politics Newsletter 27(1): 11–15.

89. Based on information collected, a systematic approach that involves guidance, training, support, monitoring, and development, involving the development and use of toolkits and guidelines is an effective measure. In order to systematise work on the security of elected officials, the Uppsala municipality in Sweden has adopted a toolkit. It consists of guidance, training, support, monitoring, and development. The guideline for support and security measures for elected officials, adopted by the municipal board in 2017, stipulates that the municipality is responsible for the safety and security of all elected officials, not just those employed by the municipality, and clarifies the municipality's responsibility to prevent and handle threats, violence, and harassment against them. By adopting the guideline, all elected officials in the municipality have the same possibility to receive support and protection as the non-political employees of the municipality.¹¹⁰

90. The municipality has surveyed the municipal politicians in order to assess their needs. Politicians receive documents outlining relevant information about personal security, how the procedures for handling threats work, security issues related to public meetings, etc. The municipality acknowledges the importance of security measures as well as psychosocial support for all politicians and stresses that the size of the party's funds should not determine whether a politician can receive security or psychosocial support.¹¹¹ Specific guidelines exist for various forms of physical and psychological violence, detailing how to act and who to contact.¹¹²

91. In France, following the consultation on violence against mayors (see para. 24), the French Senate's Legal Committee made 12 proposals (of which 7 are legislative). A draft law on "engagement and proximity" was presented to the French Council of Ministers in July 2019 and to the Senate for a first reading in October 2019. Among almost 800 amendments proposed, at least 10 to 15 concern the issue of handling the violence against mayors and local councillors.

5.2 Adopting institutional provisions

92. National, regional, and local political institutions need effective policies and procedures in place to address violence and harassment targeting politicians, and these need to be sensitive to gender dimensions. This includes preventing and responding to the problem, as well as monitoring and building capacity.

93. Reforms may be necessary to ensure that legal action can be taken on violence, harassment, and intimidation directed at politicians, both elected and non-elected. This can entail stipulating that existing workplace legislation on anti-discrimination applies to all politicians regardless of employment arrangements, or providing specific legislation addressing violence and harassment against politicians. Difficulties of prosecuting sexual harassment due to parliamentary immunity have been raised, for example in Costa Rica, where parliamentarians introduced a bill to ensure that elected officials would not be immune to prosecution in cases of harassment.¹¹³

5.3 Taking measures against sexual harassment in local parliamentary institutions and political parties

94. Research on sexual harassment unanimously finds that addressing the organizational culture is vital in order to combat sexual harassment.¹¹⁴ Though the propensity to harass differs between individuals, organisational factors are most critical: organisational tolerance "is the single most powerful factor in determining whether sexual harassment will occur and will be damaging when it does."¹¹⁵ This is good news for political organisations, since it is within their power to address and change such factors.

¹¹⁰ Uppsala Municipality, <https://www.uppsala.se/organisation-och-styrning/nyheter-och-pressmeddelanden/uppsala-kommun-far-pris-for-sakerhetsarbete/> [accessed 9 September 2019]

¹¹¹ Uppsala Municipality, <https://skl.se/download/18.294971d715e84cab8c784275/1505981931067/Verktogs-lada-trygg-saker-fortroendevald-Uppsala-kommun.pdf> [Accessed 9 September 2019]

¹¹² Uppsala Municipality, <https://skl.se/download/18.294971d715e84cab8c783b8a/1505981107731/Rutin-hantering-hot-vald-uppsala-kommun.pdf> [Accessed 9 September 2019]

¹¹³ Palmieri, Sonia. 2011. *Gender-Sensitive Parliaments. A Global Review of Good Practice*. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

¹¹⁴ Fitzgerald and Cortina, 2018; Willness, Chelsea. R., Piers Steel & Kibeom Lee. 2007. *A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of workplace sexual harassment*. *Personnel Psychology*, 60(1), 127-162.

¹¹⁵ Hulin, Charles L., Louise F. Fitzgerald, and Fritz Drasgow. 1996. "Organizational Influences on Sexual Harassment." In *Women and Work: A Research and Policy Series, Vol. 5. Sexual Harassment in the Workplace: Perspectives, Frontiers, and Response Strategies*, ed. Margaret S. Stockdale. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

95. Hulin et al.'s research has identified the following aspects of organisational culture as crucial to address: ¹¹⁶

- Perceived risk for targets of sexual harassment who report harassing incidents. A person who reports an incident of sexual harassment needs to be sure that they will not lose their job or suffer any other reprisals for reporting. Social retaliation has been found to be highly prevalent, such as ostracism, blame, and being treated as a "trouble-maker", and to have equivalent professional and psychological harms as professional retaliation.¹¹⁷ Leaders of political institutions should be responsible for making sure that reporters of sexual harassment do not get punished, professionally or socially, for reporting.
- Chances that they will be taken seriously by management. Those who report incidents of sexual harassment need to be sure that the leaders of the organization will not brush it off as trivial, that they will not be met with disbelief, and that reporting the incident will lead to a proper investigation. Low chances that incidents will be taken seriously by management make it easy for perpetrators to perpetrate, decreases the likelihood that victims will report, and amplifies the negative health and professional consequences for the victim.
- Likelihood that something will be done to the harasser. Measures need to be taken against harassers, and everyone in the organization needs to be aware that acts of sexual harassment will have consequences for the harasser. If the perceived costs to harass are too low, the organization shows tolerance towards sexual harassment.

96. The above aspects of organisational culture should be operationalised into policies on sexual harassment in parties and institutions of local government. Institutionalising a zero-tolerance of sexual harassment makes it less likely to occur, and communicates to members and potential future candidates that the organisation is committed to being an equally safe and unhostile environment for all.

97. Mandatory training sessions on sexual harassment have been shown to have varying results, and sometimes even be counter-productive.¹¹⁸ Workplace civility training, where focus is non respectful behaviour in general rather than specific focus on sex-based and sexually offensive behaviour, may be more geared towards successful outcomes.¹¹⁹

98. By-stander interventions have demonstrated promise: where a third party confronts harassers and supports victims. If nothing more, these interventions displace some of the responsibility commonly placed on victims themselves to handle the situation.¹²⁰

5.4 Containing harassment and intimidation from constituents and voters

99. In relation to constituents' and voters' attacks on politicians, physical as well as psychological intimidation need to be taken seriously. Security units may be more used to protecting politicians' physical than psychological integrity and may need assistance in expanding their toolbox for dealing with harassment and threats. Even threats that are unlikely to "escalate" into physical attacks can be damaging on the target's psyche and ability to continue carrying out political functions normally. Harassment that might not constitute a criminal offense can still disturb politicians in their roles as such and create inequalities in the conditions for political representation. Social media needs to be understood as the important arena for psychological violence against politicians that it is.

100. It is recommended that municipalities, regions, and all local government organisations have a security division or similar, and that these are aware of physical and psychological attacks facing office holders as well as gender dimensions to attacks. Actors responsible for politicians' security, be it party or government commissioned actors, need developed routines for handling problematic constituent contacts that go beyond assessing which individuals might contribute to physical risks.

¹¹⁶ Hulin, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow, 1996.

¹¹⁷ Fitzgerald and Cortina, 2018.

¹¹⁸ Bisom-Rapp, Susan. "Sex Harassment Training Must Change: The Case for Legal Incentives for Transformative Education and Prevention." *Stan. L. Rev. Online* 71 (2018): 60; Dobbin, Frank and Alexandra Kalev. 2017. "Training Programs and Reporting Systems Won't End Sexual Harassment. Promoting More Women Will." *Harvard Business Review* November 15.

¹¹⁹ Fitzgerald and Cortina, 2018.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

5.5 Aiming for gender-sensitive assemblies and administrations at local and regional level

101. A gender-sensitive parliament is a parliament that responds to the needs and interests of both men and women in its composition, structures, operations, methods and work. Gender-sensitive parliaments remove the barriers to women's full participation and offer a positive example or model to society at large.¹²¹ This Inter-Parliamentary Union definition is valid for assemblies of all levels of governance.

102. Recruiting more women to political positions and promoting women to leadership in politics is an important ingredient in how to alter organisational culture and make parties and parliaments more gender-sensitive. Women's numeric representation at the local and regional level differs across European countries.¹²² The formal and informal design of political institutions is a key area to work on in order to remedy women's underrepresentation in politics.

103. In a report to the UK House of Commons, Childs makes detailed recommendations on how to make parliaments inclusive, most of which are relevant to any level of government. The report is based on the notion that an "inclusive, effective and representative Parliament is about more than simply increasing the diversity of Members elected to the House; it also requires their equal and effective participation therein."¹²³ In order to make political institutions inclusive of women and minorities, written-down rules are not the sole object to be addressed. Informal norms, practices, and culture, i.e. the normal way of doing things", need an equal amount of consideration.¹²⁴

104. Building on IPU's framework, Palmieri outlines four key elements for gender-sensitive parliaments:

- a. Accepting that the responsibility to achieve gender equality, both in terms of policy outcome and process, is shared between parliaments and parties, and between women and men.
- b. Policies and laws allow parliaments to monitor, follow-up and review its gender equality achievements.
- c. Institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming in representational, legislative, and oversight work to ensure that any potential gender-based discrimination is considered and counteracted.
- d. Striving towards a gender-sensitive parliamentary culture and work environment that does not sanction discriminatory, prejudicial norms and attitudes.¹²⁵

105. One practical organisational aspect that can either facilitate or impede representation of different social groups is the timing of meetings. Mothers are underrepresented in politics and social norms make it particularly difficult for women to combine caring responsibilities with political functions.¹²⁶ Taking into account that politicians may have caring responsibilities, scheduling meetings within business hours is advisable.¹²⁷

106. In order to normalise women's inclusion in political bodies, it is important to consider how gender-specific language affects perceptions of women politicians. Gendered language reproduces ideas of politics as a male sphere and women as outsiders. Hence, using terms such as "chair", rather than e.g. "chairman" is recommended.¹²⁸ Similarly, making sure not only men are featured in art work in political buildings serves the same purpose. Experiments have demonstrated that women who see pictures of female leaders give better speeches both according to external observers and the women themselves.¹²⁹ Education is a key component of the arsenal for implementing a non-sexist language policy in local and regional governments just as it is for developing and improving the self-esteem of girls in schools.

¹²¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2012. Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments. Geneva.

¹²² See e.g. Alibegović, Dubravka Jurlina, Sunčana Slijepčević and Josip Šipić (2013) 'The gender gap among local representatives: A potential for local development?' In: Egner, Björn, David Sweeting D and Pieter-Jan Klok (eds) *Local Councillors in Europe. Urban and Regional Research International*, vol 14. Springer VS, Wiesbaden. Pp 181-202

¹²³ Childs, Sarah. 2016. *The Good Parliament*. University of Bristol.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Palmieri, Sonia. 2018. 'Gender-Sensitive Parliaments'. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

¹²⁶ Campbell, Rosie, and Sarah Childs. 2014. 'Parents in Parliament: "Where's Mum?"' *The Political Quarterly* 85(4): 487-92.

¹²⁷ Childs, 2016.

¹²⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2012.

¹²⁹ For an overview, see Bohnet, Iris. 2016. *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*. Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

107. Developing codes of conduct is an effective measure to shape norms. Laws and regulations demonstrate what behaviour is acceptable and what is not, and there are myriad examples of people adapting their behaviour to and internalising regulated norms. Rankings and comparisons can serve towards the same goal of establishing norms.¹³⁰

108. Emphasising the importance of the role men can play in stepping up the fight against casual sexism or everyday sexist aggressions that feed into power imbalances between men and women is crucial as they make public spaces a hostile environment for women. It cannot be repeated enough that fighting sexism is not only women's affair.

109. Transparency on gender-sensitivity goals of political organisations and bodies, and transparency on the extent to which those goals are reached, is key for accountability. Actors that are aware that they will be held accountable for their actions towards diversity exert less bias.¹³¹ Long-term and short-term, achievable goals should be combined.

¹³⁰ Bohnet, Iris. 2016. *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*. Cambridge/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*