



Report
Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission Annual
Conference 2025

Verdala Palace, Siggiewi, Malta | 17–18 September 2025

***Tackling Sexism and Violence Against Women -
An Essential Step Towards Equal Participation***

Executive Summary

Violence against women in politics continues to undermine women and men's equal participation and the integrity of democratic institutions. Although women's representation has grown, many still face harassment, intimidation, violence, and online abuse aimed at silencing their voices and their rightful place in politics. Such acts are not private or isolated incidents, but manifestations of deep structural inequalities and male-dominated institutions that threaten both human rights and democracy.

The 2025 Annual Conference of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission, organised in co-operation with the Maltese Presidency, convened policymakers, parliamentarians, international experts, and civil society representatives to examine how to counter these threats and advance equality in political life. The discussions reaffirmed the central role of the Istanbul Convention, as a core instrument to effectively prevent and combat violence against women, and of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2029, as a policy framework for action, and highlighted the need to close the gap between formal commitments and lived realities, between *de jure* and *de facto* equality.

Speakers stressed that combating harassment and violence against women in politics requires both institutional and cultural change. Political parties, parliaments, and public bodies were urged to strengthen internal accountability through binding codes of conduct, independent complaint mechanisms, and regular gender audits. Participants underlined that freedom of expression cannot be invoked to justify abuse and emphasised the importance of balancing fundamental rights. They called for clear sanctions, transparent reporting, and visible political leadership against sexism and harassment in politics.

Technology-facilitated violence was identified as a growing threat that silences women and undermines their participation in public life. Participants called for stronger accountability of digital platforms, survivor-centred prevention and response mechanisms, and greater investment in digital literacy and online safety. Civil society organisations were recognised as indispensable partners in prevention, support, and monitoring, but their effectiveness depends on sustained funding and the protection of civic space.

The conference concluded that addressing sexism and violence against women in politics is essential to democratic legitimacy. The resulting thematic recommendations call for comprehensive legal, institutional, and cultural reforms to eliminate all forms of violence and gender-based discrimination in political and public life, ensure accountability of political institutions and digital actors, protect survivors, engage men as allies, and promote an intersectional perspective across all levels of governance. Ultimately, tackling sexism and violence against women in politics is not only about protecting women and achieving gender equality in public life — it is about safeguarding democracy itself.

Introduction

The 2025 Annual Conference of the Council of Europe’s Gender Equality Commission (GEC), co-organised with the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, took place on 17–18 September at Verdala Palace in Siġġiewi, Malta. Its theme—Tackling Sexism and Violence Against Women: An Essential Step Towards Equal Participation—highlighted the urgent need to address violence against women in politics as both a violation of human rights and a threat to democracy and inclusive governance.

The conference came at a pivotal moment, with the launch of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2029, the Council of Europe’s ongoing process towards the New Democratic Pact for Europe, and as after-math of the 2025 Beijing+30 global review. The Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2029 addresses violence against women in politics by urging binding party codes of conduct, victim-centred complaint mechanisms, criminalisation of technology-facilitated abuse, and measures to tackle sexism, discrimination, and sexist hate speech within political life. By embedding the fight against sexism and violence against women in politics within its vision of democratic renewal, the process towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe underscores that inclusive, safe, and representative institutions are the cornerstone of democracy.

The conference provided a critical space to share experiences, debate strategies, and commit to concrete actions to dismantle the barriers hindering women's full and equal participation in political life, concentrated on two areas of discussion:

- Breaking down the barriers to equal and meaningful participation: ending sexism and violence in political life, including technology-facilitated violence;
- The future of women in politics: confronting the anti-feminist backlash and advancing gender equality.

Day 1: Tackling Sexism and Violence in Political Spaces

Opening and Keynote Speeches

The opening of the conference framed violence against women in politics as a systemic crisis that undermines human rights and the credibility of democracy. Speakers highlighted the scale of the challenge, with evidence showing that four out of five women parliamentarians have faced psychological violence, and that women mayors are three times more likely to be attacked than men. Online abuse and disinformation were singled out as tools designed to intimidate women and deter them from leadership, with impunity remaining the norm. It was underlined that democracies cannot function when half the population is effectively excluded, and that full implementation of the Istanbul Convention, along with the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029 and the future New Democratic Pact for Europe, are essential to bridging the gap between commitments and lived realities.

The speakers stressed that sexism and violence are not isolated incidents but symptoms of entrenched inequalities rooted in male-dominated political culture and institutions. Intersectionality was emphasised as crucial, recognising that barriers linked to ethnicity, disability, or age compound gender-based discrimination and must be explicitly addressed. The conclusion was clear: progress requires coordinated action across governments, parties, and civil society, with women recognised not merely as beneficiaries of democracy but as its leaders and decision-makers.

Malta was highlighted as an example of both progress and remaining challenges. The adoption of its first national gender equality strategy and the introduction of a corrective mechanism for parliamentary representation were welcomed as concrete reforms that reflect political will to increase women's participation. At the same time, it was recognised that legislation and mechanisms cannot, on their own, dismantle entrenched gender biases and deep-rooted inequalities or ensure cultural change. The Maltese example underscored the importance of complementing institutional reforms with broader societal shifts, including efforts to strengthen support for women leaders, and build inclusive political cultures.

- **Rebecca Buttigieg (Parliamentary Secretary for Reforms & Equality, Malta):** *“Strategies and laws matter, but without the political courage to implement them, they remain words on paper.”*
- **Bjørn Berge (Deputy Secretary General, Council of Europe):** *“We cannot say that we have true democracy where half the population is effectively silenced.”*
- **Dr Helena Dalli (Former EU Commissioner for Equality):** *“Stepping into the public arena is like walking into a minefield. Persistent threats undermine women's participation, particularly online, where anonymity fuels cowardice.”*

Panel: Sexism and violence in political spaces: online and offline barriers to women's equal participation

The panel examined how sexism, harassment and violence, both online and offline, are deliberately deployed to exclude women from political life. Beyond statistics, the discussion highlighted the mechanisms of intimidation: from coordinated smear campaigns to image-based abuse and the normalisation of misogynistic language in political discourse. Studies show that four out of five women parliamentarians have faced psychological violence. It was noted that comparative evidence underscores the gendered nature of such attacks: one Italian study found that women mayors are three times more likely to be physically or verbally assaulted than their male counterparts. Online abuse, often sexualised in nature, was described as a systematic tactic to silence women and weaken democratic institutions.

Personal testimony from younger activists reminded participants that statistics are lived realities. One account described how persistent online harassment left young women paralysed with fear,

driving some to withdraw from leadership pathways altogether. This highlighted how digital violence not only harms individuals but deprives public life of a generation of potential leaders. Civil society voices added that while freedom of expression is fundamental, it must never be confused with freedom to abuse. Experiences in Malta showed that community-level awareness-raising and education are essential to ensure that girls and young women recognise and resist harassment, preventing violence from being normalised in everyday life.

The political dimension was strongly emphasised. Violence against women in politics was described as an attack on democracy itself, demanding binding legislation, structural reforms, and robust enforcement. Participants stressed that political parties and parliaments must confront sexist cultures within their own institutions and hold perpetrators accountable. The panel noted with concern that although online violence is widespread, only 3–6% of reported cases ever result in prosecution — a striking illustration of the culture of impunity. Without political will and institutional responsibility, the cycle of violence will persist.

The technological and economic aspects of online platforms were also scrutinised. Platforms were described as profit-driven ecosystems where misogynistic and harmful content is rewarded with visibility and revenue. Innovative initiatives such as StopNCII.org were highlighted as promising tools to counter image-based abuse, but speakers underlined that such measures cannot substitute for comprehensive regulation and accountability frameworks.

The discussion also situated these challenges within a broader international framework. The Istanbul Convention was recalled as a binding treaty obliging states to prevent violence, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators across all spheres of life, including political and public participation. The 2024 UN General Assembly Resolution on eliminating violence against women and girls in digital environments was highlighted for its call to action through the “four Ps” — prevention, protection, prosecution, and accountability — and for its recognition of the importance of closing the gender digital divide.

Attention was also drawn to new and emerging instruments. The draft UN Convention on countering Information and Communication Technology (ICT) misuse was noted for including Article 16, which would require states to criminalise the intentional sale or distribution of intimate images and establish specific protections for minors. The Council of Europe’s Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law was welcomed as the first binding treaty in the field of artificial intelligence requiring states to embed safeguards such as equality, non-discrimination, remedies, and procedural rights. Finally, the draft Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls was underlined a key standard to ensure that violence against women and girls online is neither facilitated, condoned, nor ignored. It aims to strengthen state accountability, guide criminal, civil, and administrative responses, provide effective remedies to victims, and reinforce legal frameworks to hold perpetrators accountable. Together, these instruments were seen as critical steps to ensure that women’s safety and equal participation are guaranteed in both offline and online spaces.

- **Boris Radanović (Head of Engagement and Partnerships at the time of the conference and currently Head of International Development, South West Grid for Learning Trust Limited (SWGfL)):** *“Technology has to be part of the solution. Tools like StopNCII.org show that we can fight technology-facilitated gender-based violence with technology itself.”*
- **Karen Buttigieg (Former President, Malta Girl Guides):** *“Political participation with a small ‘p’ matters—women leaders in communities face the same sexism and barriers as women in big politics.”*
- **Shanley Clemot McLaren, Feminist Activist and Expert on Gender Digital Rights, United Nations Young Activist Laureate:** *“If we claim to stand for democracy, we must change how digital spaces work and make them truly accessible and safe, also for young women. This task is not a burden for women to carry alone; it is a collective responsibility for our societies.”*
- **Zita Gurmai, Member of the Hungarian National Assembly, Deputy Leader of the Socialist Group of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe:** *“Violence against women in politics is about power and control. If we want democracy, men must be part of the solution.”*

Examples of Good Practice:

[StopNCII.org – Tackling Non-Consensual Intimate Image Abuse](#)

StopNCII.org (“Stop Non-Consensual Intimate Image Abuse”) offers a global, technology-based solution to combat image-based sexual abuse. The platform enables individuals to create a unique digital fingerprint (hash) of intimate images without uploading them, allowing participating social media companies — including Meta, TikTok, Bumble, and Reddit — to detect and prevent their circulation online. In a context where online sexualised abuse is widespread and prosecutions are rare, StopNCII.org empowers survivors to regain control over their digital safety and exemplifies how cross-sector cooperation and privacy-preserving technology can strengthen prevention and accountability in the digital space.

Panel - Addressing sexism and violence in politics: the role of political parties and institutions

The second panel examined the responsibility of political parties and public institutions as the main gatekeepers of democracy — and therefore the primary arenas where equality and safety must be secured. While legislative and internal party quotas have opened doors for women, when they exist, many are still pushed out of political life by harassment, intimidation, and violence. Participants stressed that progress cannot be measured by the number of women elected alone, but by whether they can participate safely, lead freely, and remain in politics without fear of violence.

Sexism and violence were described as structural, not incidental. They are rooted in opaque party cultures, informal hierarchies, and tolerated misconduct that reinforce the dominance of men in

power. It was noted that harassment is often perpetrated by fellow party colleagues, with incidents peaking as women gain influence or address sensitive topics. In turn, it was argued that women's underrepresentation does not stem from a shortage of women candidates, but from institutional and cultural barriers that constrain participation, discourage leadership, and silence dissent.

Speakers discussed how much of political life remains a *"secret garden"* governed by unwritten rules of selection, funding, and discipline that determine who rises and who is excluded. Gender audits of political parties were described as a practical tool to expose these hidden dynamics and to provide the evidence base for reform. Political parties and parliaments were urged to adopt codes of conduct, create independent complaints systems, ensure proportionate sanctions, and conduct regular confidential surveys to track progress. It was underlined that zero tolerance must be a system, not a slogan — one built on clear definitions, scope covering all political actors, independence of investigation, victim-centred procedures, sanctions, mandatory training, and transparent reporting.

Several models of good practice were highlighted to demonstrate how accountability can work in practice. In some countries, political parties require candidates to sign conduct contracts, offer online-safety training, designate *"safe contacts"* at events, and maintain direct liaison with law enforcement to address threats swiftly. Parliaments were cited where harassment prevention is integrated into human-resource management — through confidential complaints routes, mandatory anti-harassment training, and annual evidence reviews. In others, public reporting on complaints and outcomes ensures transparency and reinforces that *"what gets counted gets changed."*

The panel concluded that tackling sexism and violence in politics requires an integrated approach combining legal and procedural safeguards with cultural and institutional change. Political parties and parliaments must not only prevent and sanction violence but also model equality, transparency, and accountability within their own operations. Democracy cannot thrive in institutions that tolerate silence, secrecy, and impunity.

- **Yulia Netesova, Chief of Democratic Governance and Gender Unit, ODIHR:** *"Gender audits are like holding up a mirror to political parties. They show how exclusion happens in the 'Secret Garden of Politics' — the opaque rules on selection, placement, funding, discipline, and party culture — which should be clear and fair."*
- **Carmen Sammut, Professor & Pro-Rector, University of Malta:** *"Sexism and violence are not isolated incidents; they are symptoms of entrenched inequalities that determine who can lead and whose voices are heard."*
- **Georgios Stamatis, Member, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe:** *"It is not enough to elect women; political institutions and parties must create conditions for them to stay, contribute fully, and thrive."*
- **Cecilia Dalman Eek, President of the Chamber of the Regions & Vice-President of the CoE Congress of Local and Regional Authorities:** *"We must move beyond the 'old boys' club' culture in parties. Internal structures must be inclusive, with courage, collaboration, and*

clear complaint mechanisms. There should also be follow through, with consequences to harassment and other complaints.”

Examples of Good Practice:

ODIHR Gender Audits of Political Parties

ODIHR (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) has developed a comprehensive Gender Audit of Political Parties methodology, accessible via its online platform. These audits examine candidate selection, leadership structures, decision-making, resource allocation, and party culture to identify barriers to women’s equal participation. The process is both diagnostic and transformative: political parties receive evidence-based recommendations, benchmarks, and follow-up actions that help institutionalise equality. When effectively implemented, gender audits increase transparency, strengthen accountability, and support the development of more inclusive and representative political institutions.

Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions – Gender Mainstreaming

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR, *Sveriges kommuner och regioner*, SKR) has introduced gender mainstreaming across municipalities and regions to promote equality in governance and service delivery. These processes help local authorities review internal practices, decision-making, and budgeting to identify and address systemic gender biases. SALAR’s experience demonstrates how structured auditing, combined with leadership commitment and data-driven planning, can drive institutional reform “from the ground up” and strengthen local democracy through more inclusive and equitable decision-making.

Stella Network (North Macedonia) – Women’s Mentorship and Support

The Stella Network connects women politicians in North Macedonia through mentoring, peer learning, and solidarity initiatives. It provides a safe space for women leaders to share experiences, build alliances, and develop leadership skills while supporting one another in navigating political life. In a context where women in politics often face hostility and exclusion, Stella serves as both an empowerment platform and a resilience network, helping women to remain active in politics and inspiring a new generation of leaders.

Closing remarks:

The closing reflections of the day stressed that ending sexism and violence against women in politics is essential to safeguarding democratic legitimacy. Progress depends on implementation — translating existing standards and commitments into consistent institutional action. Laws and mechanisms must be applied with accountability, supported by strong leadership and cross-sectoral cooperation. Ensuring women’s equal participation in a political life free of violence was emphasised as vital to maintaining public trust and protecting the pluralism and inclusion on which democracy depends. It was also highlighted that strategies must embrace an intersectional approach: women’s experiences are shaped not only by gender but by multiple, overlapping

factors — including ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and age — which can produce compounded disadvantage. Embedding this perspective ensures that policies and responses are inclusive, leaving no one behind.

- **Hallvard Gorseth (Director of Equal Rights and Dignity, Council of Europe):** *“Without women’s equal participation, democratic institutions cannot be truly representative or legitimate. Ensuring participation on equal terms safeguards democratic values — pluralism, inclusion, and civic engagement — and strengthens cohesion in society in the face of polarising forces.”*

Day 2: Addressing Backlash and Structural Barriers

Opening Remarks

The second day opened with a call to move from commitments to implementation. It is underlined that while much progress has been made in recognising the challenges women face in politics, it now has to be translated into real change on the ground through concrete policies. Tackling sexism and violence in politics requires policies that are responsive to women’s lived experiences and grounded in intersectionality. These policies must be actively enforced, with clear accountability mechanisms that hold perpetrators accountable and provide meaningful support to victims. Governments, parliaments, and civil society were urged to work together to close the gap between legal standards and everyday practice, strengthen accountability, and create environments where women can lead without fear. While laws and regulations are essential, they must be applied consistently and supported by strong political will, leadership, and cross-sectoral cooperation. It was underscored that creating environments where women can participate fully and lead without fear or intimidation is not just a matter of fairness but essential to safeguarding the integrity of democratic institutions. Only by addressing these issues at all levels, and with the involvement of all relevant actors, can we create the spaces necessary for women to thrive in politics and leadership.

- **Sara Slana, Chair, Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe:** *“It is time to turn commitments into measurable progress — equality must be visible in how institutions function every day.”*

Fireside Chat: Navigating the backlash: women’s leadership and the fight for equal participation in politics

The fireside chat highlighted how gendered hierarchies persist within political institutions, even where formal equality frameworks are in place. Women are frequently channelled into committees dealing with social or family issues, while men continue to dominate those responsible for finance, defence, and strategic policy. This unequal distribution of influence perpetuates power imbalances and limits women’s capacity to shape political and economic priorities. The speakers noted that such patterns are reinforced by resistance to women’s

authority and by a lack of institutional incentives to challenge established norms within parties and legislatures.

Discussions underscored that advancing gender equality cannot rest solely on women's activism. Male politicians and leaders must act as visible allies — calling out sexism, sharing responsibility for creating safe working environments, and ensuring that gender equality measures are integrated into party policies and governance. Participants stressed that men's engagement should move beyond symbolic endorsement toward active participation in mentoring, advocacy, and institutional reform. Civil society was recognised as a critical partner in ensuring accountability and transparency, with sustained funding necessary to support independent monitoring and advocacy.

- **Naomi Cachia, MP, Government Whip¹ and Head of Maltese PACE Delegation:** *“We have to stop waiting for our institutions to get better — we must demand they become better.”*
- **Deborah Frances-White, Writer & Comedian, Host of the “Guilty Feminist” Podcast:** *“Drawing men to the feminist movement is important. We need to be in coalition with men who understand our struggle is linked and that outdated gender norms don't serve anyone. We all need to upskill in persuasion. You can't scold people into wanting change.”*

Panel - Addressing structural barriers to women's equal participation in the face of sexist backlash

The final panel examined the long-term structural reforms needed to achieve true parity and respond to the growing backlash against women's rights. Speakers warned that despite the existence of gender equality frameworks, persistent gender norms and expectations continue to limit women's access to decision-making spaces. Women in positions of authority are still perceived by some as transgressing traditional gender roles, exposing them to hostility and heightened scrutiny. Such biases are particularly harsh on younger women, who must repeatedly prove their competence in environments where their male peers' authority is taken for granted. Moreover, disinformation was identified as a major tool used to undermine women in politics. Misinformation campaigns, often aimed at discrediting women or diminishing their achievements, create a toxic environment that limits their participation. This manipulation of public opinion threatens both gender equality and democratic processes.

Discussions highlighted that the recent backlash against women's rights is often framed as a defence of “traditional values” or “national identity,” with the effect of reasserting male-dominated power structures. This ideological regression, coupled with increasing polarisation between young men and women on equality issues, poses a serious challenge to democracy and social cohesion. Participants stressed that democracy cannot be resilient if women's voices are sidelined or if attacks on equality go unchallenged.

¹ Whips are MPs and peers affiliated to a political party appointed to ensure their party colleagues vote according to the leader's agenda

Speakers agreed that legal and policy tools remain indispensable but must be backed by enforcement and cultural change. Legislative quotas, internal party measures, and parity laws were cited as effective when adapted to the electoral system and accompanied by credible sanctions for non-compliance. Equally important are measures to make political spaces safe — through codes of conduct, complaint mechanisms, sanctions, and support services for victims. Structural reforms must also include investments in care systems and work-life balance policies that remove barriers to women’s full participation. The Council of Europe’s Recommendation on Preventing and Combating Sexism and the Istanbul Convention were both identified as key instruments for addressing these systemic barriers.

Civil society was recognised as an essential partner in sustaining progress. Feminist and women’s organisations continue to play a critical role in advocacy, awareness-raising, training, and support for women in public life. Yet, shrinking civic space and funding cuts threaten their survival and undermine accountability. Participants called on governments and international organisations to guarantee sustainable financing for these groups, involve them in policymaking, and protect their right to operate freely. International organisations were urged to keep gender equality and parity at the heart of democratic renewal, ensuring that commitments translate into measurable outcomes.

In the face of backlash, women continue to lead with courage and conviction. Their collective resilience is not simply endurance — it is a form of leadership that keeps democracy alive when institutions falter. As one participant observed, resilience should not be the cost of participation but the proof of women’s indispensable place in shaping political life.

- **Lucina Di Meco, Co-Founder, #ShePersisted:** *“Online abuse is monetising misogyny. We need to disrupt the profit model that rewards hate.”*
- **Cherise Sultana, President, National Youth Council Malta:** *“Young women entering politics face both sexism and cynicism. We must create systems that support them, not test their endurance.”*
- **Susana Pavlou, Director, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies:** *“We cannot talk about equality if civic space continues to shrink. Feminist organisations are the safety net of democracy.”*
- **Sandra Lengwiler, Vice-Chair of the Gender Equality Commission:** *“Women have shown extraordinary persistence in the face of hostility, but we must not make resilience a requirement for political participation. Institutions must take responsibility for ensuring that women can lead without fear.”*

Example of Good Practice:

[#ShePersisted – Countering Online Violence Against Women in Politics](#)

#ShePersisted is a global initiative that documents and combats online violence and disinformation targeting women in public life. Through large-scale data analysis and case studies across multiple countries, the platform exposes how digital abuse is used as a political weapon to silence women leaders and activists. It also provides evidence-based recommendations for

governments, tech companies, and political institutions to strengthen protection, transparency, and accountability. #ShePersisted demonstrates how research and advocacy can turn online monitoring into policy influence, offering a model for addressing technology-facilitated violence through collaboration between civil society, academia, and international organisations.

Closing Remarks

The conference concluded with reflections on the importance of translating the shared insights into coordinated action at national and regional levels. Gender equality must remain a cross-cutting responsibility within all institutions, supported by systematic gender mainstreaming and adequate resources. Building on the exchange of good practices and commitments presented during the two days, participants were encouraged to maintain cooperation across governments, parliaments, civil society, and international partners. Sustaining this dialogue and embedding equality in the daily work of institutions is the most effective way to address sexism and violence against women in politics and ensure that progress achieved becomes irreversible.

- **Maria Ellul, Assistant Director (Gender Mainstreaming Unit), Human Rights Directorate, Malta:** *"Sexism and violence in politics are not some inevitable feature of the landscape. They are barriers. And barriers can be torn down."*

Recommendations

The discussions throughout the conference underscored that combating sexism and violence against women in politics requires sustained, coordinated, and adequately resourced action at all levels. The following recommendations summarise the key priorities identified across sessions, combining legislative, institutional, cultural, and societal measures.

1. Legal and Policy Reform

- ✓ Member States should ensure that national legislation comprehensively criminalises all forms of violence against women in politics, including psychological, sexual, physical, and economic, both online and offline, in full alignment with the Istanbul Convention and relevant international standards. Legal frameworks should establish clear obligations for law enforcement and judicial authorities to investigate and prosecute such cases with urgency and sensitivity.
- ✓ Governments are encouraged to incorporate gender-sensitive provisions into electoral laws, political party statutes, and public administration frameworks to ensure that violence, harassment, or discrimination result in tangible sanctions, including loss of mandates or public funding.
- ✓ The *New Democratic Pact for Europe* should explicitly recognise gender equality as a cornerstone of democracy and the fight against sexism and violence against women in

politics as a condition for democratic renewal and resilience. Embedding gender equality and accountability standards in the Pact future actions would ensure that democratic institutions remain representative, inclusive, and violence-free.

2. Institutional Accountability

- ✓ Political parties and parliaments should adopt binding codes of conduct prohibiting sexist language, harassment, and abuse, with independent complaints mechanisms and disciplinary procedures accessible to all members. These mechanisms must guarantee confidentiality, protection from retaliation, and transparent reporting on sanctions and outcomes.
- ✓ Regular gender audits of political parties and institutions should be institutionalised as a tool to assess internal power structures, decision-making, and representation, producing data-driven action plans and measurable reforms. Institutional change also requires strong political will and visible leadership.
- ✓ National action plans on combating sexism and violence against women in politics should be institutionalised, integrating the 4Ps into broader gender equality and democratic governance strategies.
- ✓ Political parties should allocate resources to gender equality efforts, mandatory training for all members, with modules on preventing harassment and online abuse, and mentoring programmes connecting experienced politicians with aspiring or young women leaders.

3. Digital and Technology-Facilitated Violence

- ✓ Governments and regulators should hold technology companies accountable for moderating misogynistic content, disinformation campaigns, and online threats targeting women in politics. Platforms should be required to remove abusive material promptly, ensure transparency on moderation policies, and cooperate with law enforcement.
- ✓ Member states should encourage media and tech platform accountability through voluntary charters or professional codes that prohibit sexist content, disinformation, and targeted harassment.

Member States are encouraged to adopt survivor-centred digital prevention and protection measures that safeguard privacy, prevent the circulation of non-consensual intimate material and ensure that institutional protection extends to online spaces. These measures should use secure technologies, uphold data protection standards, and be embedded in comprehensive national frameworks for addressing technology-facilitated violence against women. Mechanisms

should be put in place to help those experiencing digital abuse remove harmful content, protect data privacy, and prevent re-victimisation.

- ✓ All actors, including political parties and civil society, should invest in digital literacy, cyber-safety training, and awareness campaigns that equip women politicians and activists with tools to prevent, document, and report online abuse.

4. Civil Society, Solidarity, and Funding

- ✓ Sustained partnerships with civil society organisations are vital for prevention, response, and monitoring of violence against women in politics. Governments should ensure predictable, multi-year funding for women’s rights organisations working to combat harassment and violence against women in politics, recognising their watchdog role in democratic systems and upholding their right and opportunities to operate freely and independently. They should further strengthen cooperation with women’s rights organisations that offer first-response services, training, and monitoring, recognising them as essential partners in prevention and victim support.
- ✓ Donors and international institutions should prioritise flexible funding that allows organisations to adapt to emerging threats and provide direct support services, including legal aid, psychological counselling, and digital protection for targeted women.

5. Leadership and Male Engagement

- ✓ Cultural transformation within political life requires men to act as visible allies in promoting equality and condemning harassment and violence. Male politicians, party leaders, and parliamentarians should share responsibility for enforcing zero-tolerance standards, mentoring young women, and speaking out against sexist behaviour within their own ranks.
- ✓ Institutions should mainstream gender equality into leadership development programmes, induction training, and performance frameworks, ensuring that accountability for equality is integrated into the professional advancement of both men and women.
- ✓ Public campaigns should normalise gender-balanced leadership as a democratic norm, emphasising that gender equality strengthens governance, legitimacy, and social trust. They should also promote positive visibility of women in leadership and encourage equal representation in debates, committees, and decision-making bodies — including traditionally “male-dominated” sectors such as finance, defence, and security.

6. Intersectionality, Monitoring, and Knowledge-Sharing

- ✓ Efforts to eliminate sexism and violence against women in politics must adopt an intersectional lens that recognises the compounded discrimination faced by women from diverse backgrounds, including women belonging to minority groups, women with disabilities, young women, LBQ women and women facing structural exclusion.
- ✓ Member States should collect and disaggregate data on all forms of harassment and violence against women in politics, including online abuse, using common indicators and methodologies. Periodic reporting can feed into regional monitoring frameworks, such as the one on the implementation of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy (2024–2029).
- ✓ The Council of Europe, the OSCE, United Nations, European Union and partner organisations should strengthen mechanisms for peer learning, data exchange, and dissemination of good practices, ensuring that successful models—such as gender audits, digital safety initiatives, and mentoring networks—are adapted and replicated across member states.

Ways Forward

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission will integrate the outcomes of the Malta conference into its ongoing work. Key messages will be incorporated into the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2029 and linked to the New Democratic Pact for Europe. The outcomes of the conference will be disseminated widely and shared the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to inform their debates, The Gender Equality Commission will continue to highlight and promote good practices across Member States and with relevant stakeholders, reinforcing the message that women’s political participation, free of sexism and violence, is essential for strong, resilient and inclusive democracies.