

PREVENTING AND COMBATTING SEXISM AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

A Guide for Women and Men in Local Politics



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe

The Congress



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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Preventing and combatting sexism at local level in the Republic of Moldova: A guide for women and men in local politics
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The guide was drafted by gender equality experts Gabrielle Bardall Ph.D. and Tatiana Chebac. The overall co-ordination was ensured by the Secretariat of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The guide is part of a series of country-specific guides on preventing and combatting sexism in local politics that aim to equip elected and appointed local representatives and candidates with the knowledge and skills necessary for recognising and addressing sexist behaviour, and for revising and putting in place mechanisms to prevent and combat sexism.

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Foreword

Equal participation for women and men in politics and at all levels of decision-making has been widely acknowledged as essential to more prosperous and stable societies but is far from being reached globally or in Europe. Gender equality is a priority of the Council of Europe, with vast legal and policy *acquis*. The pioneering work in the field of gender equality has resulted in a set of standards which aim to bring member states closer to equality between women and men. Moreover, gender equality remains at the heart of human rights and sustainable development policies, with the United Nations 2030 Agenda acknowledging it for building stronger institutions as two of the 17 goals.

A sphere where equal participation must be actively pursued is local government. It is often an entry point for women into politics, allowing them to contribute to policy-making and administrative decisions in areas which are most of concern for their daily lives and where visible impact can be achieved. However, many obstacles hinder the active involvement of women in local politics. Sexist discourse, attitudes and violence against female candidates and local elected representatives is an important barrier to the participation of women and the advancement of their political careers. Yet, women's involvement is not only a democratic and human rights necessity, but also a pragmatic one: no society can do without half of its potential and knowledge.

In light of the evidence that sexism is a hindering factor in achieving equality between women and men, the Council of Europe has made preventing and combatting gender stereotypes and sexism the first strategic objective in its current Gender Equality Strategy. Likewise, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has placed a particular focus on ensuring gender equality in pursuing its political priorities. It has taken concrete steps in working towards balanced representation of women and men, including through its *Recommendation on Fighting sexist violence against women in politics at local and regional level*² that encourages local and regional authorities to take appropriate measures in their institutions and administrations.

Local and regional authorities are responsible for upholding human rights, preventing various forms of discrimination and ensuring gender equality within their territories and institutions. Preventing and combatting sexism requires a concerted effort by local and regional elected representatives and public administration, supported by law enforcement institutions and civil society organisations. Effective policies, structures and mechanisms, including complaint mechanisms need to be put in place to promote equality at the local level.

In the spirit of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the right of all citizens to participate in the affairs of a local authority, the guide aims to equip local decision-makers and candidates in the Republic of Moldova with the knowledge needed to recognise and address sexism in their institutions, thereby enhancing women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels.



Mathieu Mori

Secretary General

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe

Introduction

Women who seek and hold local elected office are pioneers in advancing human rights in an area still heavily dominated by men. Among the many barriers they face, sexism plays a major role in limiting their ability to fully and freely exercise their civic duties.

This guide provides practical advice to both local authorities and national associations of local and regional authorities, and to possible targets of sexist violence (including sexist speech and sexual harassment) and gender-based discrimination such as female candidates and local office holders. It offers guidance on how to recognise, prevent and combat sexism through practical measures before, during and after elections. The guide includes examples of good practices on awareness raising, codes of conduct and regulations to be adopted by municipalities *inter alia*, as well as some examples of sanctions against perpetrators and remedies for those targeted by sexist behaviour. It also provides a general overview of the concrete measures intended to address the underlying causes of sexism by enhancing gender equality in local government.



The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the Recommendation on preventing and combatting sexism in 2019.³ The recommendation provided the first international definition of sexism.

Sexism is defined 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”.⁴ Widespread and prevalent in all sectors and all societies, sexism is rooted in historically unequal power relations between men and women which lead to discrimination and prevent the full advancement of women in society.⁵

Sexist attacks targeting representatives of local and regional authorities and civil servants and sexist behaviour within and among these authorities is a major barrier to elected women’s effective participation in local government (note: this guide does not address sexist policy or behaviours that local bodies may enact towards their citizens). Local government is a particularly important area where this problem should be addressed because of the impact local decision-makers have on the daily lives of citizens in key areas such as housing, security, transport, and the economy.

Local government is often an arena for policy innovation and problem-solving, where policymakers identify and pilot test solutions before they are introduced at a national scale. Local politics is also often a gateway for women to enter politics. Barriers such as sexism against female candidates and local office holders can deter women from entering or advancing in their political careers. Women's equal participation and representation at this level of public decision-making is vital to ensure that the needs and issues of the entire population are adequately addressed as well as to localise the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶



This practical Guide aimed at combatting sexism and promoting gender equality in local government has five concrete objectives:



To advance political and human rights and achieve SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls);



To enable local authorities and associations of local and regional authorities to address a key problem, create tolerant and supportive workspaces and advance gender equality in society;



To empower local elected women to be effective in their roles by eliminating a major obstacle;



To contribute to creating a secure and empowering environment for aspiring women to compete for local elected office; and



To advance popular perceptions of legitimacy, representativity and effectiveness of local government

Women in Local Government: Laws, Policy and Current Statistics

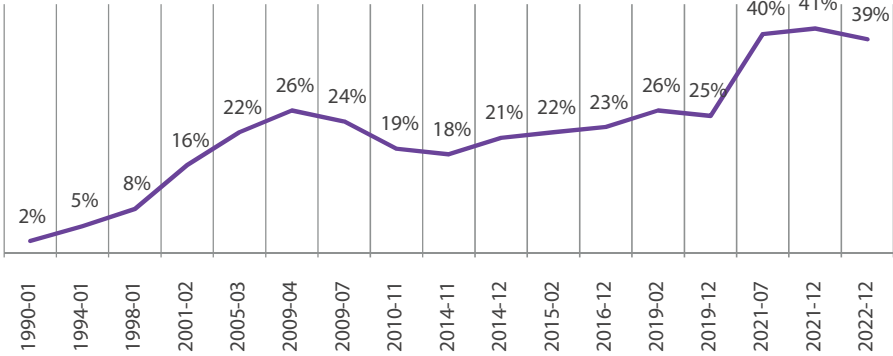


While women's political empowerment in the Republic of Moldova is relatively strong for the region, it continues to fall short of the Moldova's international commitments. Women's political empowerment is one of the most important challenges for achieving gender equality in Moldova. This is one of the commitments undertaken by the country in the context of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 5 - Gender equality, Target 5.5: Ensure equal opportunities for representation at all levels of decision-making in political and public life). To meet its goals, Moldova can assess challenges in different sub-areas of women's political participation, such as sexism in local government, and tackle them through targeted efforts.

Despite being one of the poorest countries in Europe,⁷ significant progress has been made towards gender equality. Moldova has long been one of the highest-ranking countries in the Eastern European region. In 2023, Moldova ranked 19th out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index, which measures the current state and evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment).⁸ According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in July 2023 Moldova ranked 32nd out of 188+ countries, with women constituting 38.6% of members in the unicameral Parliament.⁹ In both cases, Moldova leads the Central and Eastern European region for women's equality.

Women's representation in leadership and decision-making roles has increased in recent years including women from vulnerable and marginalised groups (Roma women,¹⁰ women with disabilities,¹¹ rural women). In 2020, the country elected its first female President, Maia Sandu. In 2021, it achieved the highest number of women Members of Parliament in its history (40.6%), nearly doubling previous levels.

Women in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 1990 -2022



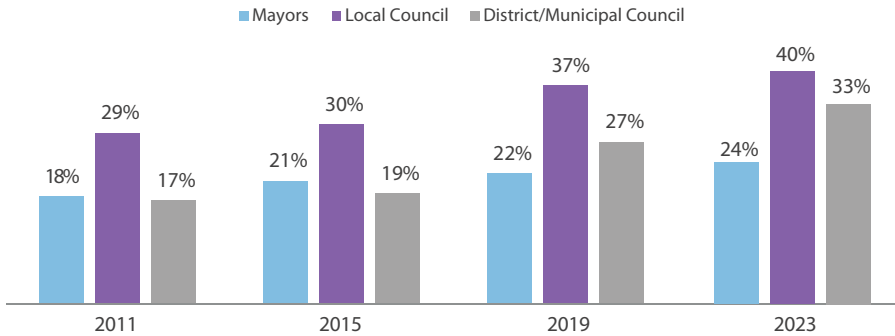
source: InterParliamentary Union

Women's representation in local level positions has not grown at the same swift pace. Women elected to mayoral roles only saw a minimal increase of 2% following the 2023 local elections, compared to the 2019 elections. The share of mayor roles going to female candidates was 24.1%, meaning 216 women mayors out of a total of 898 mayors.¹² In larger constituencies, only 14,8% of mayors are women (representing a 1,8% decrease from 2019), while in smaller constituencies, the figure is 24,7%.¹³ Women were elected to 40,3% of seats in local councils and 33,3% of seats in district/municipal councils, both figures representing a slight increase compared to 2019.¹⁴

The application of quotas contributed to these positive changes, albeit with different impact at the national and local levels. The Electoral Code requires that candidate lists for both parliamentary and local elections contain a minimum of 40% of either sex. The rule is further strengthened by list placement requirements (at least one in four candidates for every ten places) and strong enforcement measures (e.g., refusal of non-compliant lists).¹⁵

In the 2021 parliamentary elections, the highest share of women candidates in Moldova's history was recorded at 46.7%. At the local level, women constituted 30,4% of candidates for Mayor, which was 3% higher than in 2019, 47,2% of candidates for the local council and 45,3% of candidates for the district/municipal council.¹⁶

Women in Local Government in the Republic of Moldova 2011-2023



Source: UNDP¹⁷

While progress has been made in the Republic of Moldova to advance gender equality, significant challenges persist. Women's representation in leadership roles has improved, but gender norms and stereotypes continue to fuel discrimination and violence against women in politics and the workforce. The prevalence of gender-based violence remains a concerning issue, worsened by underreporting and lack of trust in support systems. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises has further heightened these inequalities, especially for vulnerable groups like refugee women. Achieving true gender equality requires a collective and sustained effort from all sectors of society to challenge norms, eliminate stereotypes, and build an inclusive and equal country for everyone.

MOLDOVA'S LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER EQUALITY



International & Regional Commitments

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015-2030
SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (BPfA) of the 4th World Conference for Women (1995)

- Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making
- Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership
- Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies
- Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects
- Generate and disseminate gender disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1980) & CEDAW Optional Protocol

Eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promotes women's and girls' equal rights.

EU Integration Instruments: the Amsterdam Treaty (1999)

Recognised the importance of eliminating inequalities between women and men and made a commitment to mainstreaming gender issues. Article 3(2) of the Treaty states that the EU must aim to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women in all its activities.

The EU-Moldova Partnership Agreement (2014)

A significant element of this agreement is the emphasis on gender equality. It encourages Moldova to align its legal framework with European standards, which includes the promotion of gender equality and protection against gender-based discrimination. The agreement also facilitates cooperation on social issues and the exchange of best practices. Furthermore, it provides development aid that can be allocated for gender equality initiatives, such as empowering women and combatting domestic violence. Through dialogue and civil society engagement, the agreement aims to bring gender issues to the forefront of policy-making in Moldova.

Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (2011)

Aims at preventing violence against women, including domestic violence, protecting victims, and prosecuting offenders. The Convention is comprehensive and sets legally binding standards for governments to meet. It addresses various forms of violence including physical, sexual, and psychological, and takes measures to combat gender stereotypes and discrimination. Moreover, it calls for the establishment of support services for victims, legal reforms, and public awareness campaigns. Moldova ratified the convention in 2021.

EEAS Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025

The EU reaffirms the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment throughout EU external action at all levels and in all sectors.



National Law and Policy

Constitution of the Republic of Moldova

Enshrines the principle of equality of all citizens before the law and public authorities, without any discrimination as to race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, political choice, personal property or social origin.

Electoral Code

New provisions of the Electoral Code give advantageous conditions to women regarding the mandatory number of signatures they need to collect to be registered as candidates to the position of MP for single-member constituencies, placement provisions, sanctions for non-compliance with the minimum quota of 40 per cent and financial support for parties to promote women, amongst others.

Law No. 5 on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2006)

Guiding policy on gender equality: it includes definitions concerning gender equality, sexual harassment, victimisation, and gender-based violence within the national machinery.

Law No. 121 on Ensuring Equality (2012)

Includes definitions of different types of discrimination; to this end, the Equality Council was created.

Law No. 45-XVI on preventing and combating violence within family

The law provides a definition of violence within the family and types of violence, as well as institutional mechanisms and protection measures for victims of domestic violence (protection orders and emergency restriction orders), state obligations to offer services, and state guaranteed legal aid and financial compensation to domestic violence victims.

Law No. 113 on amendment of some normative acts (2020)

Aims to align provisions applicable in civil legislation with the Istanbul Convention (and in line with CEDAW recommendations), specifically defines (for the first time) violence against women, covers all forms of violence, introduces the obligation of specialists to assess the risks of committing/repeating acts of violence, and provides state-guaranteed legal assistance from the moment the complaint is filed by the survivor. The new provisions included in the Law No. 113 respond partly to CEDAW Recommendation No. 23 and are aligned with the SDGs. By a special provision in the Criminal Code, violence within the family was criminalised (Article 201).

The Program for Promoting and Ensuring Gender Equality between Women and Men in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2023-2027

Focuses on five general objectives aimed at reducing gender-based wage gaps for equal work or work of equal value, increasing social protection for individuals involved in long-term care activities for family members through the creation of new support services, and promoting women in leadership positions and in the decision-making process. Additionally, it aims to increase the number of men who promote gender equality.

The Third Human Rights National Action Plan for the years 2018–2022 (PNADO)

Covers 16 areas of intervention, including gender equality and gender-based violence. Based on the same Parliament Decision, No. 89, the National Human Rights Council (NHRC) was established to ensure, better coordinate, and monitor the implementation of PNADO III. At the moment, the NHRC has replaced specialised commissions, including on gender equality, but does not have the capacity to cover these areas. A new action plan is in the process of elaboration at the time of press.

Program and Action Plan for the implementation in the Republic of Moldova of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, 2023-2027

The Program is planned for a 5-year period and focuses on collaboration among stakeholders in security and defence to reduce stereotypes and barriers, improve women's representation, and increase the effectiveness of violence prevention and reporting mechanisms. It also aims to increase women's involvement in international peacekeeping, enhance regulatory, institutional, and operational frameworks, and train specialists. The program seeks to ensure equal participation of women and men in conflict resolution and to foster gender equality both at central and local levels. Additionally, it emphasizes effective communication with associations and civil society to strengthen peace nationally, regionally, and internationally.

Recognising sexism in local government



Sexist behaviour¹⁸ in local government can be direct or indirect, including written, verbal, physical, electronic or via other forms of expression. Sexist behaviour and sexual harassment may be physical and/or psychological and can involve obvious and active actions, such as physical assault or openly discriminatory comments, or passive and subtle actions, such as persistent teasing or regularly “forgetting” to include female councillors in meetings and decision-making processes. These actions may be single incidents or repeated behaviours over a period of time. Sexual harassment is defined by the person targeted by the behaviour, not the person engaging in that behaviour – claiming “it was a joke” or “I didn’t mean to offend” do not excuse the behaviour. Sexist comments do not need to be targeted at an individual to be harmful. For example, a male council member who makes a derogatory statement about women’s inferiority could be recognised as committing an act of harassment against female council members because it contributes to a hostile work environment for women in the council.

In the context of local government, the perpetrators of sexist speech and sexual harassment can include fellow council members, members of council staff and administrative staff, other elected officials and staff from other levels of government. It can also include constituents and community members. Perpetrators may include both men and women and may be known to the target or not. Social media can be a vector for encouraging sexism aimed at women in local government, when users express derogatory comments, ridicule, etc. in these spaces.

Sexism against women in politics is common in the Republic of Moldova. According to a series of recent studies, violence, particularly during elections, has emerged as a significant

obstacle to women's political participation.¹⁹ Sexism is present in discriminatory and derogatory language used against women politicians throughout the electoral cycle, often spread through online platforms. The unequal representation of women in leadership and the absence of gender-sensitive discourse in political parties and relevant state institutions reflect deep-rooted sexism in these spaces. Women who run as independents and women from underrepresented groups face especially steep challenges.

Toxic masculinity was pervasive during the last general elections in 2019, with aggressive behaviour, including physical aggression, displayed by both male candidates and former female candidates, commentators, and representatives of civil society. Discriminatory and harassing language intensified as the local election date approached two years later, in 2021, often targeting political women from minority and vulnerable groups.

During the 2021 early parliamentary elections, a study identified that sexist language and derogatory labels were commonly used, particularly among male candidates, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing gender norms.²⁰ Women were often excluded from political discourse, and party postings and debates consistently used masculine forms of address. Journalists also utilised masculine plurals (specific to Romanian language), except for a few cases, when discussing women candidates. Moreover, political leaders and presenters frequently referred to women in stereotypical and condescending terms, contributing to the marginalisation of women in politics.

Unfortunately, during the 2023 local elections, sexist discourse was still part of the electoral rhetoric, with 37 cases identified by the Promo-LEX Association.²¹ According to the NGO, gender roles, civil status and physical appearance formed the basis of the sexist discourse that targeted women in the elections. Another NGO, "Egalitatea de gen" (in English "Gender equality"), identified 195 cases of sexist language, with 146 generated by men and 49 by women, and 21 cases of sexist behaviour.²²

Globally, women who are active in political life regularly face sexist bias, ridicule, humiliation and gender-based discrimination. According to UNDP research,

"Rather than focusing on women's professionalism and competence, their colleagues, the media and the general public often instead fixate on their personal attributes, superficialities such as clothing and hairstyles and their roles as mothers and wives".²³

There are many reported examples at all levels of governance.

According to civil society hate speech monitoring reports, Presidential candidate Maia Sandu faced an overwhelming amount of hate speech and sexist remarks that aimed to undermine her candidacy in 2020.²⁴ Gender-based critiques were frequent and included criticism of her decision not to have a family or children, sexual insinuation (i.e. implying she controlled other male politicians through sexual favours), and prejudiced attacks related to her support for LGBTI rights. By linking Ms Sandu to societal prejudices and stereotypes, her opponents aimed to discredit her qualifications, capabilities, and suitability for the presidency.

Reports on violence against women in elections further highlight the systemic discrimination faced by female candidates at other levels of politics. Instances of public sexual harassment, derogatory content, and toxic masculinity were documented during the 2019 local elections. For example, a female candidate for mayor, faced a hostile defamation campaign when printed materials containing incitement to hate and sexual violence were posted throughout the city centre. Women candidates faced a discriminatory media environment where gender-related topics were poorly covered and discriminatory language was frequently used during debates, with little or no intervention from male moderators. According to one source:

“there were shortcomings and inaccuracies in moderating electoral debates, especially the lack of a gender dimension in the topics addressed, insufficiently addressing the deviations and discriminatory speeches of disdain and hatred”.²⁵

These incidents underscore the urgent need to address and confront sexism and discrimination within political contexts. They emphasize the importance of fostering an inclusive and respectful environment that values the competence and contributions of all candidates, regardless of gender.

Examples of sexist and harassing behaviour

Spreading malicious rumours, gossip or innuendo.

Persistently criticising, demeaning or ridiculing a person.

Undermining or deliberately impeding a person's work.

Excluding or isolating someone.

Physical threats or assault.

Calling someone derogatory names.

Teasing or joking about a person.

Making aggressive or threatening gestures.

Displaying offensive posters, cartoons, images or other visuals.

Verbal threats or abuse.

Playing pranks, vandalising or hiding personal belongings or work equipment.

Unwelcome invitations or requests.

Unwelcome physical contact.

Publicly ridiculing or disciplining.

Blocking applications for leaves, training or promotion.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Sexism

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

Affirmative actions

Temporary special actions to accelerate the achievement of real equality between women and men, with the intention of eliminating and preventing discrimination or disadvantages resulting from existing attitudes, behaviors and structures.

Discrimination based on sex

Any difference, exception, limitation or preference having as its purpose or consequence the limitation or intimidation of the recognition, exercise and implementation on the basis of equality between women and men of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Direct discrimination based on sex

Any action that, in similar situations, discriminates against a person compared to another person of a different sex, including because of pregnancy, maternity or paternity;

Indirect discrimination based on sex

Any action, rule, criterion or practice that is identical for women and men, but with an unequal effect or result for one of the sexes, with the exception of affirmative actions.

Harassment

Any unwanted behaviour that leads to the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, with the aim or effect of harming a person's dignity based on the criteria stipulated by this law; incitement to discrimination – any behaviour by which a person applies pressure or displays intentional conduct for the purpose of discriminating against a third person based on the criteria stipulated by this law.

Sexual harassment

Manifestation of physical, verbal, non-verbal behaviour or other actions of a sexual nature that lead to the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, with the aim or effect of harming a person's dignity.

Violence against women

Expressions and addresses that present women and men in a humiliating, degrading and violent manner, offending their dignity.

Sexist language

Acts of gender-based violence that cause or may cause physical, sexual or psychological suffering to women, including the threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, committed in the public or private sphere.

The definition of sexism is taken from Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 27 March 2019

[https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894;](https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894)

all other definitions are taken from the legislation of the Republic of Moldova, specifically:

LAW No. 5 of 09-02-2006 regarding ensuring equal opportunities between women and men

https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=136677&lang=ro

LAW No. 45 of 01-03-2007 regarding the prevention and combating of family violence

https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=138530&lang=ro

LAW No. 121 of 25-05-2012 regarding ensuring equality

https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=106454&lang=ro

Combatting Sexism through Practical Measures



Solutions for ending sexism require engaging diverse groups of people, as well as leveraging processes and institutions. This section presents the main areas of action where practical measures can actively contribute to combatting sexism in local government. It begins by looking at how different stakeholders can take appropriate action. This includes discussions of how local government authorities can make better-informed decisions through data and research and how they can improve co-operation with civil society. This section also looks at methods for enhancing capacity of candidates and aspirants as well as how working with men (including young men) can strengthen outcomes. It discusses standards and transparency measures that help local governments enhance their responsiveness to issues of sexism and offers ideas on how networking and engaging new technology facilitates solutions.

Next, Section IV considers ways in which state processes and institutions can be adapted to improve their ability to respond to and prevent sexism and discrimination at the local level. The section begins with codes of conduct and ethical guidelines for local authorities and progressively examines possible institutional solutions from local to regional to national levels. It closes with an overview of possible sanctions and remedies, and a note on resource planning.

All interventions discussed here can be targeted at different phases of the electoral cycle (pre-, during and post-election) or can be overarching across the electoral cycle as a whole.

Entry Points for a Multi-Stakeholder Strategy to Combat Sexism

Ending sexism in local government requires the involvement of many different actors working in multiple areas. This section presents how core actors (local government authorities) can improve the quality and impact of their actions in combatting sexism. It reviews how local government can work with other key groups, including civil society, to enhance responses. Other target groups, such as male counterparts in local bodies and female candidates and aspirants, can also be supported to better contribute to a constructive environment.

Improving informed decision-making

Evidence-based approaches help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, events and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups from participation.²⁶ Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) and other documentation and research (surveys, data collection, etc.) are essential tools for local and regional councils to identify the nature of the issue in their institutions and set a baseline to measure improvement. Local government authorities can introduce these measures at multiple levels, generally for their institutions and more specifically around significant policies and procedures. Data collection should be consistent and ongoing for local authorities and should always be gender disaggregated. Some data such as reporting on sexism during campaigning and polling would be specific to electoral periods. All data, documentation and assessments should be conducted in a timely fashion to ensure that their results can meaningfully feed into decision-making processes. These findings may guide local authorities in improving internal processes and structures as well as being useful for reducing sexist practices among external actors, such as political parties. EIA are commonly used to assess new or proposed changes to policy. Evidence-based approaches have the added value of creating a written record of equality considerations taken into account and enhancing institutional transparency.

EXAMPLES

Equality impact assessments (EIA) and disaggregated statistics



The Republic of Moldova

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) - Gender Statistics: The precision and dependability of the state's gender-related data is guided by the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, endorsed by the UN Economic Commission for Europe in 1992 and the UN/Statistics Commission in 1994, and by complying with the Law on Official Statistics. Within the Statistical Data Bank of the NBS, there exists a dedicated section for the dissemination of gender-specific statistics. These statistics constitute a fundamental subset of gender-oriented indicators developed

under the aegis of the United Nations Statistics Commission. It is an important tool that allows monitoring the characteristics of women and men as a specific socio-demographic group, for decision-making policies, respecting the equality principle of rights and opportunities for women and men. Gender statistics are targeted to both the central and local public administration authorities involved in decision-making, as well as non-governmental organisations, academia, mass-media which monitors and analyses the situation of equal opportunities.²⁷

Nonetheless, certain limitations persist. According to an EU analysis:

“several gender-sensitive indicators have remained inaccessible since 2016 and even earlier periods. The scope of indicators disaggregated by sex remains rather confined, and the official statistical information concerning gender is neither standardized across all areas nor comprehensive in its coverage.”

Gender Pulse was launched in 2017 by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, in partnership with the UN. It is an interactive visualization tool for gender-sensitive statistics. It includes five thematic areas relevant for analysing gender issues: demography, participation in the decision-making process, education, health, and economic empowerment. GenderPulse promotes gender equality by making data accessible and understandable for decision-makers and the public. www.GenderPulse.md.



United Kingdom

For over a decade, dozens of local authorities across the UK have used EIA to meet their responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).²⁸ This Act requires all public authorities to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation related to sex and gender as well as other protected characteristics. While each locality adopts its own procedures, in general EIA in the UK involve a screening evaluation to come to a decision about whether and why further analysis is – or is not – required. If further analysis is required, a full assessment questionnaire is completed, and the report is made public.

EIA questions may include gender analysis of the proposed policy, referral to relevant public data, consultation with community actors, data collection and evidence. Resulting recommendations are based on whether the proposed policy will meet the council's responsibilities in relation to equality and human rights. Examples of EIA forms, guidance and reports can be viewed at:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/equalities-hub/equality-framework-local-government>
https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/5885/our_approach_to_equality/6

Setting targets and tracking progress through co-operation with civil society organisations

Accurate data and documentation allow local authorities to set targets for improvement over time. Setting ambitious yet realistic targets for decreasing the prevalence of sexism and increasing gender equality within local elected bodies establishes a tangible roadmap for improvement. Targets should be based on solid data and developed collaboratively in consultation with multiple stakeholders, both state and non-state depending on the context. To ensure compliance, unmet targets can be set to automatic policy changes, for example failure to meet a target could automatically trigger budget increases on spending for equality measures. Collaboration between local bodies and civil society organisations (CSOs) can be especially helpful in this. CSOs may contribute with testimony, research and documentation to track progress against targets. They may also enhance awareness raising about local authority targets and progress, which promotes confidence and perceived legitimacy by the population.

EXAMPLES

Collaboration to set targets and track progress on combatting sexism



The Republic of Moldova

There are several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that perform gender-specific monitoring in different areas.

The Platform for Gender Equality developed an online platform enabling citizens to publicly report and notify authorities of instances of gender discrimination, sexism, and incitement to discrimination around the 2019 elections. The Platform (www.gender.monitor.md) invited the public to report alleged cases of gender discrimination, sexist messaging, and violence against women. Besides statistical data that can be monitored via the reported cases on the Platform and in monitoring reports, select cases were brought for litigation by the Platform activists; each case was reported to the Equality Council and the litigation goes further to Court in some cases (see separate section on the Equality Council).

The Promo-LEX Association monitored the public space and the media during 2017-2019, offering disaggregated data on different aspects of hate speech, including sexism for the first time. They recorded not only the number of cases but also categories of sources distributing the hate speech, public resonance, sex and average age of hate speech authors and victims, protected criteria and affected groups, politicians and media most often using these forms of expression. Their two reports (2018 and 2019) recorded nearly 600 cases and gained significant public attention, with millions of views and thousands of shares. The media played a key role in spreading hate speech, contributing to at least half of the cases in the public space.



France

In 2023, the French High Council on Equality (HCE) released an emergency plan to fight “an alarming level” of sexism in France.²⁹ The plan spans a broad range of areas, from youth education to political violence. Its recommendations include increasing resources for tackling GBV, enhancing sex education in schools, regulating online content, recommending mandatory anti-sexism training in the workplace, making public funding contingent on gender equality efforts, encouraging media organisations to improve women’s representation, addressing under-representation in school texts, banning gendered adverts for toys, and raising societal awareness. A notable innovation of the action plan is the recommendation to introduce a public, independent authority to root out sexist behaviour in politics. If adopted, such a body would make MPs accused of GBV ineligible for government positions. Wide-ranging recommendations such as these can help set targets and benchmarks across multiple areas of government.

Equipping candidates and aspirants to navigate local politics

Sexism is a deterrent for many women that are considering entering local politics. To overcome this, aspirants and candidates must understand the recourse available to them and trust that officials will protect them by sanctioning harmful behaviours both online and offline. This may include offering targeted information sessions, public service announcements and briefings during campaign periods. Strategic communications by official actors involved is also helpful, including statements of policy and intent by electoral bodies, police and security actors, local authorities and political parties.

Mentoring programmes facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experience, perspectives and skills within local government by providing an opportunity for elected women at all levels to learn from each other to progress in their own careers. Similar to networking strategies, mentoring and sponsorship programmes pair emerging women leaders with both men and women with longer experience in their field. This strategy helps to combat sexism by equipping newly elected women with the tools and resources needed to exercise their duties free of harassment.

EXAMPLES

Capacity building for candidates and aspirants



The Republic of Moldova

There are several active leadership schools for women in politics that focus on empowering women leaders from different areas and sectors through new knowledge and skills to pursue career development, increase women’s leadership

roles in political parties, government agencies and NGOs, and improve women's participation in community decision making. Notable examples are: the National Academy of Women's Leadership under the Platform for Gender Equality Moldova (2020-2023) funded by the EU Delegation in Moldova, "Women 4 leadership" under the NGO Institutum Virtutes Civilis, as well as programs supported by UN Women and the Embassy of Sweden. Others, such as the CONTACT Center's Academy for Community Leadership, offer support for both male and female candidates from underrepresented groups ahead of the gender local elections in November 2023.

In 2019, the Political Club 50/50 re-launched a new edition of its *Guide for Female Candidates in the Electoral Campaign*, originally published in 2015.

<https://moldova.unwomen.org/ro/biblioteca-digitala/publicatii/2016/01/ghidul-femeilor-candidate>.



Portugal

The "From Women to Women" programme in Portugal aimed to increase young women's participation in politics. Older women active in politics provided twelve months of mentoring to 30 young women aged 16-30, who also took part in training activities on gender equality, democracy, political systems, and other topics, and visits to political institutions. Young women belonging to minority ethnic and cultural groups were particularly encouraged to apply.³⁰

Working with men to combat sexism and promote gender equality

Sexism is reinforced by gender stereotypes and also affects men and boys. Expectations towards men can lead to sexist behaviour. Constructive engagement with men (including young men) must be a part of any solution to combat sexism. Male counterparts in local government can learn to better understand what constitutes harmful sexist behaviours, avoid engaging in them and promote gender equality instead. Capacity building activities can promote collaborative design and implementation of policies to sanction sexist behaviour and sexual harassment.

Practical measures to engage with men to cease contributing to cultures of sexism in local government include training, dialogue initiatives and mentoring programmes designed to raise awareness of personal bias and sexist behaviour and identify strategies to overcome them. These may be organised by specialised third-party actors (CSOs, etc.) or directly by the local bodies themselves. Similarly, local elected representatives (women and men) who want to contribute to improved policy responses may benefit from targeted training or comparative studies of responses in other regions or countries.

Beyond training and education, strategies to promote men's engagement against sexism and for equality may include party pacts and personal commitments, incentive programmes, recognition and training in skills to intervene and respond in harmful situations. Mentoring programmes can also be used in different ways, for example by mentoring incoming male representatives on how to actively contribute to gender equal and sexism-free local government. "Reverse mentoring" is another strategy whereby women active in local politics provide gender sensitivity training to regional or national level officials.

EXAMPLES

Working with men to combat sexism and promote equality



The Republic of Moldova

The NGO Casa Marioarei created the initiative "Father School: Step by Step" aimed at preventing domestic violence by encouraging men to actively participate in childcare and sharing household responsibilities. Throughout the pandemic, the project utilised social media platforms, training guides, workshops, and a resource group of exemplary fathers to engage over 150 individuals, culminating in certificates for trainers who conducted sessions with parents. This effort represents a valuable step towards combating domestic violence through education and community engagement. Learn more at : <https://antiviolenta.md/en/events/>. In 2020, UNFPA Moldova announced a pilot program of eight "Fathers Clubs" to be established in Straseni and Falesti, and the associated Father's School Guide.³¹ The clubs are intended to be a place where current and future fathers can find support and resources enabling them to participate actively in child-rearing and in activities traditionally regarded as female-dominated. Previously, in 2015, UNFPA launched the study "Men and gender equality in the Republic of Moldova" analysing shifts in behaviours and attitudes among men and women. The study provided national-level data to monitor changes resulting from gender equality policies and programs, in order to guide subsequent development in this area.³²



Global – Barbershop Initiative (HeForShe)

Barbershop events encourage men and boys to become actively engaged in promoting gender equality by better understanding how gender inequality limits the ability of individuals, businesses, and communities to reach their full human, economic and social potential. Barbershop events provide men with tools to address this inequality and become agents of change. The Barbershop Initiatives offer a range of tools in three areas: 1) Leadership sessions, 2) Workshops, and 3) Increasing engagement. These resources are targeted at audiences of men across a range of levels, starting with the highest levels of leadership. Toolkits and resources are available free online at <https://www.heforshe.org/en/barbershop>.



Sweden

The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) represents and advocates for local government in Sweden. All of Sweden's municipalities and regions are members of SALAR. The Government of Sweden has an agreement with SALAR since 2017 to strengthen the focus of gender equality work on men, boys and questions of masculinity.³³



Caribbean states

Parliamentarians have identified the following good practices:



In legislative and oversight functions

- Assessing legislation and budgets through an intersectional gender lens to consider the potential impacts on diverse groups
- Advocating for laws and initiatives that will positively impact women and help build the political will to pass them
- Consulting with women's groups to seek feedback on proposed legislative initiatives (not just those explicitly related to gender equality) and integrating the results into decision-making



In meetings (including committees, plenary, and in the constituency)

- Chairing meetings in a way that encourages equitable participation by all members (e.g. inviting those who have not spoken to contribute)
- Listening respectfully when each member of the group is speaking



In the media and online

- Leveraging social media as a tool to keep informed about the work of gender equality advocates and joining discussions on pertinent topics
- Challenging gender stereotypes and bias when they emerge on online platforms or through interview questions



In everyday life

- Learning about key gender equality issues and sharing knowledge with others
- Encouraging other men to become allies
- Using gender-sensitive language (i.e. communication that demonstrates respect for women and does not make them invisible) and draw attention to harmful uses of language in day-to-day conversations.

<https://www.parlAmericas.org/en/gender-equality.aspx>

Setting standards and introducing transparency measures

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe identified transparency and open government as priorities in preventing corruption and promoting public ethics.³⁴ The principles of open government are directly connected to the government's willingness to address sexism and promote gender equality. Specifically, open government increases the availability of information about governmental activities, supports civic participation, promotes government integrity and leverages new technologies for transparency and accountability. These actions contribute to closing gender gaps on information, access and participation and allow women and gender advocates to have a greater say in how government services are provided and to hold officials accountable.³⁵

These are equally important measures for preventing and combatting sexism in local and regional bodies. Local and regional bodies should publish key documents and information, promote public consultation processes, and support the monitoring and implementation of transparency measures around issues related to sexism and sexual harassment within the institutions and surrounding women's political participation. Standards of behaviour may be agreed upon and formally established to prevent harmful sexist incidents from occurring within the institutions. Training may be offered to promote widespread understanding and awareness of new standards of behaviour.

EXAMPLES

Standard setting



Global – The Open Government Partnership

Seventy-five countries (including the Republic of Moldova) and over one hundred local governments—representing more than two billion people—along with thousands of civil society organisations are members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP). In April 2020, the OGP launched a new phase focused on local government, called “OGP Local”. At all levels of government OGP recommends the following actions to promote gender equality and end sexism:

- Proactively invite and positively encourage women's organisations, gender networks, and leaders to participate in government multi-stakeholder forum;
- Work with gender advocates to conduct an analysis of government action plans to identify where people of different genders have disproportionate levels of access or potential benefit, and then use that analysis to mainstream gender considerations into specific OGP commitments; and
- Consider a new commitment that uses open government to address a specific gap in women and girl's services or policy needs.

Many more examples of open government recommendations for promoting gender equality can be found at <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/actions-for-a-more-inclusive-open-government-partnership/>

Also see: <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-local/>



Canada

Canada explicitly integrates gender in its open government action plan. Canada uses its gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) assessment to assess its open government plan in order to examine how various intersecting identity factors might impact the effectiveness of Canada's open government work. Based on this review and feedback from a multi-stakeholder process and feminist and inclusive peer review, the Government of Canada produced its 10 National Action Plan Commitments for 2018-2020 and multiple other resources. Available at: https://open.canada.ca/data/dataset?portal_type=info&subject=society_and_culture&q=&sort=title_string+asc&res_type=guide

Leveraging regional and national gender equality networks

Gender equality networks are powerful tools for women in local government to gain fresh ideas and perspectives both about overcoming shared problems (such as sexism) as well as improving policy solutions for their constituencies. Such networks provide fora for advice and career support, build confidence and help people gain different perspectives. There are many examples of networks for local elected women worldwide, ranging from national associations that bring together women at specific levels of government (for example, national networks of women mayors) to networks spanning global regions or groupings (for example, the Forum of Women Mayors in South East Europe,³⁶ the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network,³⁷ the Federation of Canadian Municipalities³⁸ and the Network for Locally Elected Women of Africa – REFELA, in its French acronym).³⁹

EXAMPLES

Gender equality networks



The Republic of Moldova

In addition to the Women's Network in the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM), described elsewhere, several networks exist in Moldova:

The Women Deputies Platform of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is a new cooperative framework enabling female deputies from both the majority and opposition parties to collaborate on strengthening women's rights. It focuses on promoting gender equality, combatting violence against women, and supporting women's economic empowerment and family-friendly policies through legislative efforts.

www.parlament.md

The Platform for Gender Equality: launched in 2015, it focuses on several key objectives including promoting women's balanced participation in

politics, preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, fostering gender equality in the labour market, encouraging female entrepreneurship, and developing an institutional framework to ensure gender equality. The Platform undertakes various activities including lobbying, public awareness campaigns, and interactions with parliamentary committees and relevant ministries. The Platform played a significant role in propelling legislative changes to ensure de facto gender equality, which led to the passing of Law No. 71. It currently has 44 members.

www.egalitadedegen.md

The National Coalition “Life without Violence”, established in April 2014, is a forum of 27 members including service providers, NGOs, and public institutions focused on addressing domestic violence. Its mission is to work towards a life free from violence for women and children by providing legal assistance, psychological and social support, rehabilitation services, and programs for offenders. It also engages in advocacy initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and supports the development and improvement of legislation and policies related to domestic violence.

www.stopviolenta.md

The Network of Roma Women and Girls of the Republic of Moldova, created to defend the interests of Roma women in the Republic of Moldova. The organisation currently operates throughout the country, providing support to the target group both at home, through cooperation with local public authorities, and through the creation of public policies at the national level in collaboration with government officials. Currently, the network has 230 members.

The Association of Women Entrepreneurs in Moldova (AFAM), founded in 2013 aims to empower women in entrepreneurship and management. It encourages women to start businesses, supports their growth, increases female representation in leadership, and contributes to a favourable business ecosystem for women. In its 10-year span, AFAM has conducted over 250 events and projects in collaboration with various partners and currently boasts more than 70 members from over 20 business sectors.

www.afam.md

Integrating new technologies

Although social media and other new technologies can transmit and amplify harmful sexist messages, they are equally potent as tools for educating and awareness-raising. Webinars, online rallies and Q&A sessions can offer women in local politics the opportunity to both share experiences on a peer-to-peer basis as well as to reach out to the public and raise awareness of the harmful effects of sexism against women in politics. Podcasting is another useful tool. Podcasts can be used to offer more in-depth information on challenges and opportunities. Podcasts can also be used to focus on more targeted audiences such as local women councillors/aspirants and male politicians.



The Republic of Moldova

The gender.monitor.md platform is an online crowdsourcing tool designed for collecting, storing, and geographically illustrating cases of violence (verbal, physical, psychological) against women in elections, as well as instances of gender discrimination and sexism. Using the widely known Ushahidi software,⁴⁰ the strength of this platform lies in offering all community members the opportunity to get involved and report these cases of violence and violations of women's fundamental rights to participate in public and political life.



Europe

The Council of Europe's online Human Rights Channel presents a range of helpful information on how to end sexism. Accessible in multiple languages, the resources available include information on understanding sexism, videos, statistics, examples and recommendations. It also includes an interactive quiz to test users' knowledge and personal perceptions around sexism.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-channel/stop-sexism>



Global

Many podcasting examples to promote women's political participation and reduce sexism exist in other parts of the world, for example the Canadian "No Second Chances"⁴¹ podcast follows the political journeys of 12 female ministers, and helps listeners understand how gender played a role in both low and high points of their careers. "The 23%: Conversations with Women in Government" is a podcast that talks to women leaders about what motivated them to run for office, lessons they've learned along the way and the policy battles they're facing ahead.⁴²

Institutional channels for combatting sexism within local government

In the Republic of Moldova, the legal framework concerning gender equality is based on the Constitution (1994), which upholds the principle of equality for all individuals before the law and public institutions. It explicitly prohibits discrimination based on various factors, including race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, political affiliation, wealth, or social background. The

Law No. 5 (2006) focuses on Providing Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. This law encompasses definitions related to gender equality, sexual harassment, victimisation, and gender-based discrimination, establishing a national framework for promoting equal opportunities. The Law No. 121 on Ensuring Equality (2012) provides further definitions of different forms of discrimination and led to the establishment of the Equality Council. This council plays a crucial role in ensuring compliance with non-discrimination standards, monitoring the implementation of laws, addressing complaints, restoring the rights of victims of discrimination, and raising awareness in society to eliminate all forms of discrimination. It serves as a key entity in combatting gender inequality and sexism in the Republic of Moldova. This legal framework provides a basic framework for combatting sexism in local government.

Codes of conduct and ethical guidelines

Local government codes of conduct establish consistent standards of behaviour for members of local councils in how they conduct themselves with their elected colleagues, with staff and with the public. Written codes of conduct help ensure that members of local government share a common basis for acceptable conduct. They enhance public confidence in institutions and elected officials.

Local council codes typically represent an additional set of rules to supplement existing regional or national legislation or policy. Some global jurisdictions (such as the Province of Ontario, Canada⁴³) require local governments to establish codes of conduct for local elected officials and certain boards. They may also mandate these codes to include specific matters, including sexism and discrimination. Local government codes of conduct may also be introduced because the issues related to responsible conduct of individual elected officials fall outside the mandates of existing offices responsible for government oversight. Alternately, they may be adopted as a first line of action in a broader hierarchy of government oversight.

Codes of conduct should include clauses to ensure women and men's equal participation by specifying guiding principles and specific practices that constitute prohibited sexist and discriminatory behaviour. These should include non-criminal sexual harassment, intimidation, bullying (including cyber bullying and social bullying), hate speech and disrespectful behaviours. Including these behaviours in codes of conduct is essential because they provide a basis to sanction perpetrators, and they boost public awareness and multiparty unity on the topic.

Codes of conduct may also contain rules following a finding of misconduct. Codes may include rules regarding enforcement, or they may reference other governing policy. In some cases, codes of conduct may be supplemented by by-laws that establish local-level accountability officer positions to handle complaints and enforcement. Complaints of violation of codes of conduct may be made by members of the public, staff as well as other members of the local council. Codes of conduct may accommodate both formal and informal complaints.



The Republic of Moldova

Although no codes of conduct exist to specifically address sexism or gender equality, in 2015 the Central Electoral Commission issued the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and the Media promoting mutual respect among competitors.⁴⁴

Since then, before each election campaign, the Central Electoral Commission has been inviting candidates and media representatives to sign annually updated versions of the code.



Europe

The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life establishes a formal commitment by local and regional governments to use their powers and partnerships to achieve greater equality. To assist in the implementation of these commitments, each signatory authority undertakes to draw up an Equality Action Plan, which sets out its priorities, actions and resources and undertakes to engage with all of the institutions and organisations in its territory, in order to promote the achievement of real equality in practice.



Canada

Provincial governments provide various resources to assist local governments to develop their codes of conduct. These include template documents and companion guides, reports on best practices across the province or between other provinces and links to other helpful material.

Model Code of Conduct:

https://www.gov.nl.ca/mpa/files/Municipal_Official_Code_of_Conduct_Template-2.docx

Local government ethics and inclusion resources:

<https://bit.ly/2FrU3e1><https://fcm.ca/en/resources/wilg/women-in-local-government-resource-library>



Georgia

In 2017 the Government of Georgia approved the General Rules of Ethics and Conduct in a Public Institution, according to which a public servant shall avoid committing any form of discrimination, as well as refrain from using hate speech in public and/or making discriminatory comments. Moreover, the rules provide for the prohibition of sexual harassment and ensuring equality, through creation of equal opportunities and refraining from stereotypes.⁴⁵ One of the platforms where a person can report violation of ethical norms is the online portal Mkhileba.gov.ge run by the Bureau of Civil Service of Georgia. A number of Georgian municipalities, such as Baghdati and Vani, have adopted codes of conduct for civil servants which echo the abovementioned rules, incorporating equality and non-discrimination and the prohibition of sexual harassment.⁴⁶



Serbia

The Republic Electoral Commission has adopted a Code of Conduct for Political Entities during election campaigns. The code includes provisions promoting gender equality and prohibiting sexist language and behaviour. It encourages political parties and candidates to respect the principles of gender equality and to avoid discrimination or offensive language based on gender during electoral campaigns.⁴⁷

Accountability Officers and Ethics Standards Boards

Enforcement of codes of conduct may be overseen by accountability officers or ethics standards boards. These officials must ensure that all parts of codes of conduct are equally protected, which may require supplemental training regarding gender provisions in cases where these are newly introduced.

Globally, there are various types of accountability officer roles that may enforce gender provisions at the local level. These are usually established under local by-law and may include:⁴⁸

- *a municipal Ombudsperson*. The municipal Ombudsperson's function is to investigate, in an independent manner, decisions and recommendations made and acts of the administration of a municipality, local boards and certain municipal corporations. The municipal Ombudsperson is a separate office from the central or regional Ombudsperson, who also may also have a role with respect to local government;
- *a closed meeting investigator*. A local government (municipality or other) may appoint an investigator to investigate, in an independent manner, complaints about closed meetings (i.e. meetings where the public is not invited to attend). Should the local government not appoint an investigator, the Ombudsperson at the next jurisdiction level would be expected to serve in that role;

- *an Integrity Commissioner.* Integrity Commissioners report to local councils. Their role is to independently apply the code of conduct and associated procedures, rules and policies governing ethical behaviour of local government members. They may issue periodic watchdog reports or investigate specific complaints. If a Commissioner's inquiry into an ethics complaint finds a violation of the code of conduct, the local council may impose a penalty at their discretion.

In contrast to creating an individual role to oversee ethics, many countries establish Local Government Standards Panels or Boards to administer justice and resolve complaints relatively quickly and to provide the local government sector with guidance and benchmarks about acceptable standards of behaviour.⁴⁹ Under this model, local councils choose to elect an independent standards board on a periodic basis (annual or other) that is representative of political representation as well as of local diversity (sex, race, religion, etc.). Standards Boards have the authority to make binding decisions to resolve allegations of minor misconduct and to deal with complaints about council members having allegedly committed a breach of one or more of the provisions of their code of conduct. To be effective, they must establish clear procedures for filing complaints, both for internal and external actors. Standards boards may have the authority to apply sanctions and temporarily or permanently suspend council members who are found guilty of non-criminal sexual harassment and other prohibited behaviours. Appeals to local standards boards may be made to higher authorities, such as the Ombudsperson.

EXAMPLES

Accountability officers and ethics boards



The Republic of Moldova

Although there are currently no accountability officers to deal with issues of sexism and discrimination within local government, there are several avenues for seeking recourse for harms committed by outside actors, including in media and advertising:

1) Complainants may submit an application to the Equality Council. The Council is a state body aimed at fostering an inclusive society by ensuring non-discrimination and equality. The Council undertakes legislative reviews, monitors the enforcement of relevant laws, investigates discrimination complaints, and engages in public awareness campaigns. The Council is composed of human rights experts. It reviews applications concerning discrimination allegations on various grounds, including sexism and gender-based discrimination. Based on the examination of the case, the Council delivers a decision with recommendations, and a case may be transferred to the court.

<http://egalitate.md/>

2) The Ombudsperson Office receives and investigates complaints on human rights violations, including gender-based discrimination. This office offers recommendations to State actors and proposes legislative initiatives. The Ombudsperson Office can address the Constitutional Court on human rights issues, including gender.

www.obudsman.md.



Austria

In 2011 an advisory board on anti-sexism to the Austrian Advertising Council was installed including qualified gender experts to counteract gender-discriminatory advertising and raise awareness of the advertising industry for a non-discriminatory portrayal of the sexes.

Out of 278 complaints received in 2012, more than half dealt with “gender discriminatory advertising” (53.41%). The anti-sexism Advisory Board reviewed these complaints and provided its opinion to the Council. In 13 cases (7.39%), the Council called for immediately stopping the campaign. Similar models can be applied for local government.



Canada

The Integrity Commissioner for the city of Vaughn, Ontario filed a Code of Conduct Complaint Investigation Report to the city council following receipt of a complaint with allegations of sexual assault, harassment and reprisal by a deputy mayor and a councillor in 2017. Referencing the provisions of the municipal code of conduct that protect against sexual harassment, the report documented the investigation and recommended sanctions (reprimand and suspension of remuneration for 90 days), corrective actions (apology to the complainant and the city) and the suspension or removal of some procedural powers. Ultimately, the deputy mayor and councillor resigned.⁵⁰

Role of associations of local and regional authorities to respond

Associations of local and regional authorities give voice to the needs of local government at a national or regional level and promote local needs. These associations can play important roles in responding to sexism and harassment in local government in several ways. They can collect appropriate data, monitor progress, raise awareness, advocate for improvements, educate local councils about solutions at the council level and set standards for their members. Associations of local and regional authorities may require capacity building support directly to achieve some of these goals.



The Republic of Moldova

The Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM, 2010) is an independent organisation that represents the authorities and municipalities throughout the country. It serves as a forum for local leaders to discuss common challenges, exchange best practices, and advocate for the autonomy and empowerment of local governments.

Established in 2011, the CALM Women's Network is a platform for women in local government – mayors, district heads, counselors, secretaries, employees of local public authorities (APL) – dedicated to developing women's leadership and enhancing the role of women in decision-making at local and national levels. CALM undertakes various capacity-building actions for local public authorities to empower communities, support women leaders, and integrate the gender dimension into public policies.

CALM's goals include enhancing the role and strengthening the capacities of women in local public administration, encouraging active participation of women in local decision-making processes, and generally improving the status of women at the local level. CALM unites over 200 women mayors from all over the country. Designed as a networking opportunity and capacity-building initiative, the network advocates for human rights-based approaches and the integration of the gender dimension in the decentralization and local governance process. CALM provides its members with the necessary tools and resources to ensure quality administration, to enhance women's visibility and to promote gender mainstreaming in local governance.

<https://www.calm.md>



Australia

Local Government Managers Australia, Queensland (LGMA Queensland, founded in 1957) supports local government advocacy, collaborative learning and professional development. The LGMA offers an in-depth Framework for Action to Promote Gender Balance in Senior Management in Local Government. The Framework is an internal guidance document outlining the vision, strategic priorities and mechanisms to assist in integrating gender awareness through local government organisational cultures and management, as well as within the LGMA itself. It includes guidelines on implementation, monitoring, reporting and review.

https://www.lgprofessionalswa.org.au/Documents/Gender%20Balance%20Framework/LGMA%20Gender%20Balance%20Framework_Nov2015_B.pdf

Responses through the National Office of the Ombudsperson

Like the Equality Council, the Ombudsperson of Moldova (the People's Advocate) is an independent institution that reports to the Parliament. It is crucial in safeguarding human rights, including fostering gender equality. The role involves protecting against gender-based discrimination by scrutinizing societal norms, laws, and the conduct of governmental and non-governmental entities, and handling cases of discrimination or violence. They provide a platform for victims to raise their concerns, investigate complaints, and propose remedial actions, including legal proceedings or policy changes. Additionally, the Ombudsperson actively fosters a culture of gender equality through educational initiatives and awareness campaigns. They collaborate with civil society organizations and international agencies to advocate for legislative reforms, develop gender-sensitive policies, and share best practices. It is essential for the government and relevant stakeholders to consider and act upon the Ombudsperson's recommendations for their efforts to be effective in advancing gender equality.

EXAMPLES

Ombudsperson actions to stop sexism and sexual harassment



The Republic of Moldova

The Ombudsperson office joins the campaigns against hate speech that are usually organised before the elections to raise awareness on the negative impact of hate speech. The Ombudsperson's office in the Republic of Moldova also supports the civil society efforts in promoting gender equality by submitting alternative reports to the UN treaty bodies and other international mechanisms. However, the Ombudsperson does not have a clear mandate on combatting gender inequality.



Ukraine

In 2019, prior to the onset of conflict in 2021, the Ombudsperson considered 385 appeals of citizens reporting over 420 cases of discrimination (including 44 cases of gender-based discrimination) and launched 61 legal proceedings. The Ombudsperson considered reports on cases of gender-based discrimination and documented multiple cases of public sexist insults towards women-politicians from men-politicians, violation of their human dignity, and mistrust of their professionalism.⁵¹



Croatia

Croatia has a dedicated Ombudsperson for Gender Equality who acts in an independent manner, monitors the enforcement of the Gender Equality Law and other regulations on gender equality and reports to the Croatian Parliament at least once a year. First created in 2003, the Gender Equality Ombudsperson handles between 400-500 or more cases each year, including referring several cases for litigation.⁵² One initiative of this office was working with the Croatian radio and television (HRT). The HRT training centre, in co-operation with the Office of the Gender Equality Ombudsperson, introduced training programmes for editors and journalists on the elimination of stereotypes and of content that presents men and women in a sexist, offensive or degrading manner in the media.



Slovenia

Slovenia has a Human Rights Ombudsperson (*Varuh človekovih pravic*) who monitors and safeguards human rights, including gender-based rights. The Ombudsperson investigates complaints related to discrimination and promotes gender equality through awareness-raising and advocacy.



Estonia

Estonia has a Chancellor of Justice (*Õiguskantsler*) responsible for overseeing the legality and justness of public administration. The Chancellor of Justice investigates complaints regarding potential discrimination, including gender-based discrimination, and works to ensure compliance with human rights standards.



Lithuania

Lithuania has a Seimas Ombudsperson's Office (*Seimo ombudsmeno tarnyba*) responsible for promoting and protecting human rights, including gender equality. The Ombudsperson's Office investigates complaints related to discrimination and takes measures to address gender-based discrimination.



North Macedonia

North Macedonia has an Ombudsperson (*Заштитник на граѓаните*) tasked with protecting and promoting human rights, including gender equality. The Ombudsperson investigates complaints of discrimination, including those related to gender-based discrimination, and advocates for gender equality in society.

Sanctions, Enforcement & Remedies

The legal framework in the Republic of Moldova provides a foundation for addressing discrimination, human trafficking, and domestic violence. The Constitution of 1994 establishes the principle of equality and prohibits discrimination on various grounds. Law No. 121 (2012) led to the formation of the Equality Council to address discrimination issues. In Moldova, the framework for recourse in cases of sexism and discrimination includes the following:

Article 10 of the Law “On ensuring equality” nominates the entities responsible for the prevention and combating of discrimination and ensuring equality, the Equality Council, public authorities and courts of law. Any person who thinks that they are a victim of sexual discrimination or became an object of sexual harassment shall have the right to appeal to the state authorities.

According to the same Law, the Equality Council initiates the procedure to investigate alleged acts of discrimination either on its own or upon the request of the victim, including requests from unions, civic associations, and individuals representing a person, group, or community affected by the alleged discriminatory act. Acts of discrimination are subject to disciplinary, civil, administrative, and criminal liability according to the current legislation.

In addition to the legal provisions guaranteeing women’s protection against gender-based discrimination to be applied in case of sexual harassment, there are special regulations ensuring protection from sexual harassment.

If a person seeking legal assistance reports sexual harassment committed against them, it is necessary to identify the specific type of actions and whether they constitute an offense as stipulated by Article 173 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova:

Sexual harassment, defined as the solicitation of a sexual act or other actions of a sexual nature through physical, verbal, or non-verbal behaviour, creating an unpleasant, hostile, degrading, humiliating, discriminatory, or insulting atmosphere for the victim, committed by taking advantage of the victim’s dependent state or through threats, provided that the act does not meet the elements of rape or non-consensual sexual acts.

If the actions involved coercion to engage in acts of a sexual nature, it is necessary to analyse if the actions constitute a crime as stipulated by Article 171 and Article 172 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Moldova. In this case the most efficient mechanism is recourse to the court to claim compensation for damage, caused by sexual harassment – material or moral (for example, unlawful dismissal).

Remedies for individuals targeted by sexist behaviour vary from simple corrective measures, a civil claim to court for compensation for damage (material or moral) or to criminal justice, depending on the severity of the problem. This guide does not discuss criminal violations.

Globally speaking, several principles should be taken into consideration when developing appropriate sanctions and appeals processes. Sanctions for engaging in prohibited behaviours should be commensurate with the severity of the violation, up to and including suspension of the offending elected official. More minor violations may be sanctioned with measures, such as public apologies, public censure, fines or required training or service. For sanctions to be effective, there must be a clear set of guidelines on appropriate behaviour and identification of specific behaviours defined as sexist. These may be set in local government regulations or internal code of conduct. Sanctions must be mutually agreed upon by the signatories of the code of conduct. Appropriate institutions should also be involved in ensuring enforcement, including the office of the Ombudsperson and/or local ethics boards or accountability officers where they exist.

In addition to any sanctions levied against the perpetrator, in any given country the local or national accountability infrastructure (e.g. office of the Ombudsperson or a local ethics board) may provide a remedy or compensation to the person targeted. Recourse may be in the form of financial compensation, such as general damages for the loss of the right to be free from discrimination and violations to personal dignity. It can also include special damages to compensate the target of the sexist behaviour for money, opportunities or other losses that took place because of the discriminatory or harassing behaviour.

Non-financial remedies are also options for victims of sexist discrimination. These could benefit the individual person through actions, such as protection against further actions by the perpetrator and public apologies. It can also involve public interest remedies, which are designed to have an impact on the broader community, including other people who could have been affected by the discrimination. These remedies can raise awareness or educate about the issue in order to promote a better understanding of the problem of sexism and discrimination and prevent it from happening in the future. Examples of public interest remedies for sexist behaviour in local government include changing internal policy to afford better protections, developing/improving internal human rights complaint procedures, introducing educational programmes or posting ethics codes publicly in the local government offices.

EXAMPLES

Transparent procedures for enforcing codes of conduct



Canada

Transparent and accessible complaints procedures aid in effective enforcement of codes of conduct. The City of Barrie set forward clear procedures on filing complaints about violations of codes of conduct and publishes them on their website, summarised as follows:

Informal Complaints

Any individual who has identified or witnessed behaviour or activity by a member that appears to be in contravention of the Code may address their concerns in the following manner:

- Advise the member that their behaviour or activity contravenes the Code;
- Encourage the member to stop the prohibited behaviour or activity;
- If applicable, confirm to the member your satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his or her response to the concern identified;
- Keep a written record of the incidents including dates, times, locations, other persons present, and any other relevant information, including steps taken to resolve the matter;
- If not satisfied with the response received through the informal process, an individual may proceed with a formal complaint through the Integrity Commissioner.

Formal Complaints

Any individual who has identified or witnessed behaviour or activity by a member that appears to be in contravention of the Code may address their concerns through the formal complaint process:

- All formal complaints must be made using the City's Complaints Form / Affidavit.
- The complaint must include an explanation as to why the issue raised may be a contravention of the Code and any evidence in support of the allegation must be included with the Complaints Form/Affidavit; Complaints must include information on witnesses, as well as the specific details of the case and be filed with the Integrity Commissioner.

The Integrity Commissioner will determine whether the matter is a complaint with respect to non-compliance with the Code and/or a violation of other codes including a Criminal Matter or a violation of codes on Discrimination or Harassment.

See: <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/accountability-officers/integrity-commissioner/about-the-integrity-commissioner/>

Ensuring adequate resources

In order to offer effective remedies as well as to advance the other measures suggested in this guide, local governments should ensure adequate funding to support the measures described above. Strong institutional responses to sexism within local government require dedicated funds and human resources. For example, staffing of accountability positions, training and awareness-raising, processes to develop and adopt codes of conduct and investigation and reporting

cannot be adequately implemented unless sufficient and consistent resources are allocated to them.

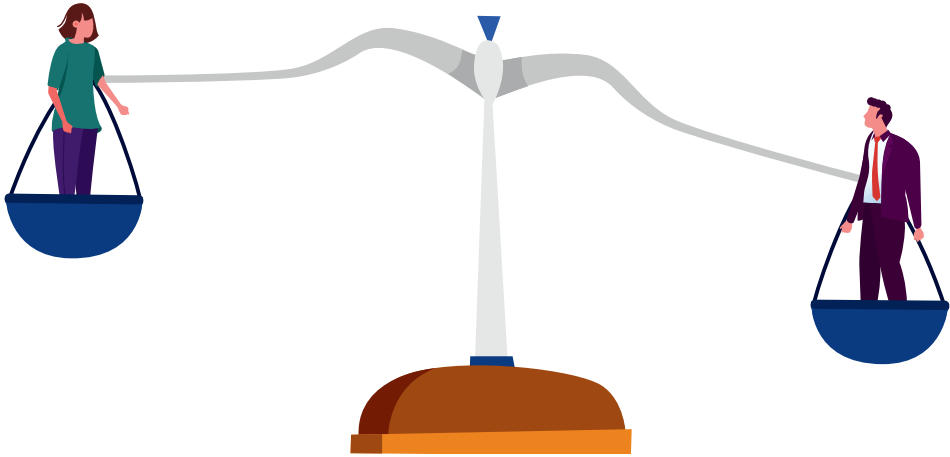
According to UN Women:

In the Republic of Moldova, there is currently no system in place to track and make public allocations for gender equality and the empowerment of women, although the Government has reported some data in this field. However, the 2020 Voluntary National Review (VNR) does not contain data on this indicator.⁵³

In Moldova allocation of resources for national machinery of gender equality is low, particularly the frameworks outlined in the Law No. 5-XVI of February 9, 2006 on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. As a result of limited resources to implement the law, the functionality of the local gender focal points is deemed to be low.⁵⁴

The Republic of Moldova has international legal commitments supporting Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB). Although GRB is not explicitly mentioned in the national legislation, the legal framework, including Law No.181 of 2014., on public finance and budgetary-fiscal responsibility, aligns with GRB principles of resource allocation equity and budget transparency. However, challenges persist, such as the absence of gender-oriented analysis in budget drafts and the lack of a legislative framework for integrating GRB into the budget planning process, as highlighted in Government Decisions No. 933 and No. 259. Efforts to promote GRB have been made but further progress is needed. Civil society, together with development partners, built initiatives at the local level that aimed to push the gender equality agenda through GRB. Despite capacity building of local authorities and supporting tools that have been created by civil society and developing partners, GRB still remains a challenge for local authorities.

Promoting gender equality in local level government through concrete measures



The specific strategies for combatting sexism in local government that have been suggested above will only succeed if they are accompanied by efforts to address the root causes of sexism by promoting greater gender equality in local government. This final section provides a brief overview of some key measures for promoting gender equality in local government.

Adopting Temporary Special Measures (TSM) for local government

Temporary Special Measures (TSM) are “aimed at accelerating the improvement of the position of women with a view to achieving substantive equality with men, and to effect the structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms and effects of discrimination against women, as well as to provide them with compensation for inequalities and harm suffered.”⁵⁵

Gender quotas (the most well-known form of TSM) have been proven effective at increasing women’s representation in elected bodies, worldwide. Gender quotas can be either legislated or voluntary. There are two forms of legislated quotas: candidate quotas and reserved seats. As the name implies, candidate quotas guarantee more equitable gender balance among candidates but do not ensure that the target will be met. Reserved seat quotas set aside a designated proportion of seats for the under-represented sex, thereby guaranteeing a minimum level of representation.


In Moldova, through the efforts of civil society, legal provisions have been established that require political parties to adhere to a minimum gender quota of 40 percent in both their managerial positions and candidate lists. These provisions were introduced in the Law No. 5-XVI on Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2006), the Electoral Code (1997), and Law No. 294 on Political Parties (2007). Additionally, the Electoral Code has been amended to favour women in certain aspects, such as reducing the number of signatures needed for women to register as MP candidates in single-member constituencies, optimizing placement provisions, and offering financial support to parties that promote women candidates, among other measures. This mandatory 40% quota, introduced in 2016 and applied formally in the previous parliamentary elections, with women predominantly placed in non-electable positions at the bottom of candidate lists, has been discouraged through an additional filter introduced in 2019. Parties are now required to allocate the 40% quota at every 10 positions on the list, ensuring the inclusion of at least four women or men.


Quotas are only one kind of TSM that can be adopted to enhance women's representation. Other approaches include:


- special media and advocacy campaigning;
- capacity development programmes for women candidates and elected officials;
- campaign financing support for women running for office;
- voluntary party quotas
- gender sensitive budgeting at the local level⁵⁶


Other structural reforms and policies

In addition to legislative changes to electoral laws and systems, there are many initiatives that can be taken at the local level to enhance gender equality and accordingly, combat sexism. These include measures taken directly by local governments, as well as measures by national or regional bodies to govern local authorities. Briefly, these include:

 **Introduce term limits.** Term limits for councillors promote turnover and open new space for women to compete. Term limit proposals can be implemented with significant lead time, to allow sitting members to achieve their policy goals.

 **Promote gender equal workspaces for local councillors.** This may include instituting parental leave programmes, providing childcare or covering the costs of childcare for local councillors, allowing remote attendance of meetings and enhancing the use of technology in workplace accommodation and reviewing meeting times (avoiding evening, weekend meetings and events) in order to allow members with family care duties to attend.

 **Adopt policies on gender equality in leadership roles.** Local councils may adapt policies to promote gender equality through council activities, including ensuring balance on any committees and equal representation in leadership roles.

 **Proactive recruitment.** Local authorities should publicly promote gender balanced recruitment ahead of election periods, to encourage equal representation. This may include targeted awareness raising and information sessions.



Gender focal point. Identifying a gender focus point or diversity committee within local government can be a mechanism to advance monitoring and new initiatives.

In Moldova, Gender focal points have existed within all ministries and departments since 1999, however their capacity and budget allocations are low.



Training. Regular training activities for local councillors, online and in-person, can help improve the ability to recognise and combat sexism as well as to become better equipped to develop responsive local policy that advances equality in the community as well as in the institution.



Use Gender-Inclusive Language in public documents and statements (both oral and written). The European Union defines gender-inclusive language as “a generic term covering the use of non-sexist language, inclusive language or gender-fair language. The purpose of gender-neutral language is to avoid word choices which may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm. Using gender-fair and inclusive language also helps reduce gender stereotyping, promotes social change and contributes to achieving gender equality.”⁵⁷ The principle of gender-inclusive language should be applied to public documents as well as internal policy and communication at all levels of government. An example of a way to achieve this is Greece, where the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) developed a Guide on gender-inclusive language in public documents. Similarly, following a survey carried by an NGO, Cyprus produced a booklet/guide aimed at overcoming sexism language in public service documents. The information was subsequently shared in workshops organised by the Office of the Commissioner for Gender Equality and the national mechanism for women’s rights.⁵⁸

For further examples, refer to:

Gender in Local Government: A Sourcebook for Trainers (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2008)

https://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/pdf/Source_BK_9-May.pdf

Manual for Gender Equality at The Local Level. (OSCE 2015).

<https://www.osce.org/bih/216636>

Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Resource page for Women in Local Government.

<https://fcm.ca/en/programs/women-in-local-government>

P. Sheilds and M. Elias. *Handbook on Gender and Public Administration*
Elgar Handbooks in Public Administration and Management. Feb 2022.

<https://www.elgaronline.com/display/edcoll/9781789904727/9781789904727.xml>

National Democratic Institute. Local Government Gender Assessment and Action Planning Implementation Guide (LGGAAP). 2023.

<https://www.ndi.org/publications/local-government-gender-assessment-and-action-planning-implementation-guide>

Conclusion

Ending sexism in local government requires a concerted effort on the part of local elected representatives in partnership with civil society, law enforcement and regional and national authorities. Starting with reliable data, clear targets and shared understanding of the scope and nature of the problem, local authorities can adopt a range of strategies to address the existence of sexism and promote gender equality in local politics.

Local and regional authorities can demonstrate their commitment to ending sexism by developing adequate structures and policies to combat sexism and promote equality within their institutions. Allocating sufficient resources and staffing structures of accountability ensures that these commitments are applied and enforced. By dedicating themselves to transparent practices and creating gender-inclusive institutional cultures, local governments build public trust and are more able to successfully fulfil their roles.

Notes

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- ³ Council of Europe, Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on preventing and combating sexism. <https://rm.coe.int/168093b26a>
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- ¹⁰ UNDP Moldova (2020), *The Rocky Road Towards Gender Equality In Moldovan Politics. Roma Women Achieve Historic Victories*. <https://undpmoldova.exposure.co/drumul-anevoios-catre-egalitatea-de-gen-in-politica-din-moldova?source=share-undpmoldova&fbclid=IwAR14aDmrH4Cde5I0ArGtqpqDUuetkmL3wW6c1GO-8A1n9pWXSh6nTX9N7qAM>
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- ¹⁵ Electoral Code of the Republic of Moldova, article 46 (3) & 137 (2-3).
- ¹⁶ Partnership for Development Centre, 2023.
- ¹⁷ See UNDP reports: "Infographics *Gender Equality in Elections in the Republic of Moldova*", June 2016, available at <https://www.undp.org/moldova/publications/infographics-gender-equality-elections-republic-moldova>; "Gender profile of the 2019 Local General Elections", January 2020, available at <https://www.undp.org/moldova/publications/gender-profile-2019-local-general-elections>.
- ¹⁸ The following is adapted from the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), *Stop Harassment: A Guide for CUPE Locals*, 14 August 2018. <https://cupe.ca/stop-harassment-guide-cupe-locals-1>.
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- ²⁵ Egalitatea de Gen (2021), *Preliminary Report On Violence Against Women In The 2019 Local General Elections*. <https://egalitatedegen.md/biblioteca/participarea-femeilor-in-politica/>.

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- ²⁸ Equality Act 2010, 11:1. On 19 November 2012 the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, spoke at the Confederation of British Industry's annual conference and announced that government departments would no longer be required to carry out EIAs. They are still used voluntarily in many regions.
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Preventing and combatting sexism in local politics is essential for guaranteeing equal participation for women and men and ensuring that their perspectives are represented in local policies.

This guide presents concrete measures for combatting sexism at local level and ensuring that women play an active and meaningful role in the decision-making process. It 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.

Combatting sexism in local government requires a concerted effort from all levels of governance in partnership with law enforcement bodies and civil society. Practical steps such as collecting reliable data, raising awareness, and building capacities can create a shared understanding of the scope and nature of the problem. Altogether, clear targets and commitment on the part of public authorities, accompanied by sufficient resources for ensuring accountability will lead to transparent structures, a gender-inclusive institutional culture and greater equality.

ENG

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the institution of the Council of Europe, Responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees it brings together 612 elected officials, representing more than 130,000 local and regional authorities.

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