



Violence Against Women in European Politics

A Comprehensive Toolbox for Political Parties

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Before entering politics, besides a career in journalism and in the defence and security sectors, I extensively studied the (lack of) representation of women in leadership positions. Women in politics were also the subject of my academic research and articles on numerous occasions. This year's European election campaign resulted in my first term as a Member of the European Parliament. Since the early stages of my mandate, I have been getting a taste of the bitter reality of gendered unequal treatment, attacks, and violence that female politicians have been enduring for decades.

The collection of comprehensive and comparable data on this topic is still lacking, so the full extent of the problem is not entirely known. However, the occasional surveys that are carried out hint that the extent of the issue is much wider than previously thought. Nevertheless, what we know with certainty is that female politicians are subjected to many forms of violence, ranging from abominable comments, insults, and

threats on social media, to verbal abuse and disinformation campaigns, to stalking and physical and sexual violence. The good news is that there is a single answer to all of them: to respond courageously – together.

Political parties, as the stewards of public policy and representation, are the perfect battleground as they play a crucial role in shaping the frameworks that can either perpetuate or challenge these injustices. This timely European Liberal Forum publication offers a much-needed guide for these parties, outlining strategies and practical tools to effectively combat violence against women within the political arena. The stakes are high since gendered violence in politics impacts not only individuals but also the very fabric of our democratic societies and institutions by dissuading women from participating in politics at all levels, thus undermining the core democratic principles of equality and justice. I saw this first-hand in my home country, Slovakia, when our first-ever female president, Zuzana Čaputová, decided not to run for a second term. In the 21st century, violence cannot be a factor when women consider taking up or staying in public office. We cannot afford to see more women leaving politics or public life. We need to step up our game – together.

By engaging with this comprehensive toolbox, political parties can lead the way in creating safer, more inclusive political spaces, for women and with them, and contribute to a broader societal shift towards equality and respect. I know that Jasmina Mrso and her team gave their all in writing this book, and as a young female politician myself, I am proud to be a member of a platform that embodies these values, which are the cornerstones for achieving equal representation, so close to its heart. I truly hope that this publication will inspire action, drive change, and ultimately help eradicate the scourge of violence against women from our political institutions and beyond.

The journey towards a more just and equitable society begins with informed, proactive steps. This publication stands as a testament to the commitment and responsibility we all share in this endeavour.

How to use this book

This publication is a continuation of the previous work of the European Liberal Forum (ELF) on the topic of violence against women in politics (VAWP). It aims to provide actors – in particular political parties and political foundations – who are interested in enhancing internal policies and efforts on tackling VAWP with a ‘one-stop shop’ that gives them an overview of the status quo, as well as an extensive list of potential tools that can be used to review and improve their existing mechanisms.

The first part of the book presents an overview of the ELF’s past work, relevant data on the topic, legal frameworks, important definitions of the different forms of violence, and the general impact of VAWP on democracy and political representation. There is also a section that examines online VAWP with a focus on social media platforms.

The second part contains 30 different tools that political parties can choose to implement according to their resources. These tools are divided into four thematic sections: awareness-raising, legal and statutory frameworks, online violence and mitigation, and the role of political marketing and communications in addressing VAWP. Thus, those who are already familiar with the status quo can skip directly to the toolbox.

Introduction

Violence against women in politics (VAWP) represents a significant and pervasive challenge that transcends borders, cultures, and political systems. This phenomenon encompasses various forms of aggression, including physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and online violence, all aimed at deterring women's participation in political life and undermining their effectiveness as leaders. Historically, women have faced numerous barriers to political participation, but VAWP adds a layer of intimidation and hostility that can discourage even the most determined individuals from pursuing or continuing a career in politics.

The roots of VAWP can be traced back to deeply entrenched gender norms and power imbalances that have historically marginalised women in public life. Throughout history, women have struggled to secure their right to vote, to stand for election, and to be treated as equals in the political arena. Despite significant advancements in gender equality over the past century, VAWP remains a critical barrier to achieving true democratic representation. Women in politics often encounter resistance and hostility not only from political opponents but also from within their own parties and from the public, which can manifest in various forms of violence and discrimination.

In recent decades, the rise of digital platforms has created new arenas for VAWP. Social media, while providing a space for political engagement and mobilisation, has also become a breeding ground for online harassment and abuse. Women politicians frequently face gendered hate speech, threats, and defamatory campaigns designed to silence and discredit them. The anonymity and reach of the internet exacerbate the impact of this violence, making it a global issue that requires comprehensive strategies and solutions.

The implications of VAWP are profound, not only for the individuals

directly affected but also for the health of democratic systems as a whole. When women are deterred from participating in politics due to violence or the threat of violence, it skews representation and policy-making processes. Democracies thrive on the principle of inclusive participation, where diverse voices contribute to the shaping of policies that reflect the interests and needs of the entire population. VAWP undermines this principle by creating a hostile environment that discourages women from engaging in public life, thus perpetuating gender imbalances in political representation and leadership.

Addressing VAWP requires a multifaceted approach that includes legal reforms, support systems, and cultural change. International frameworks, such as the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations, 1979), provide a basis for legal protections against gender-based violence, including VAWP. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks depends on their implementation and enforcement at the national level. Political parties, governments, and civil society organisations must collaborate to ensure that laws are not only in place but also actively enforced to protect women in politics.

Support systems within political parties and institutions are also crucial. These include psychological support, legal assistance, and clear reporting mechanisms for victims of VAWP. Political parties must establish protocols for handling allegations of violence and harassment, ensuring that victims are supported and perpetrators are held accountable. Training and awareness programmes can help foster a culture of respect and equality, reducing the incidence of VAWP and promoting a safer environment for women in politics.

Moreover, addressing VAWP necessitates a cultural shift that challenges the underlying gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate violence and discrimination. Public awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and the promotion of positive representations of women in leadership roles can contribute to changing societal attitudes and reducing the acceptance of violence against women in politics.

This publication aims to provide a concise analysis of VAWP, highlighting the role political parties and political foundations have in addressing its

root cause. By understanding the nature and impact of VAWP, and by implementing targeted measures to combat it, we can move towards a more inclusive and equitable political landscape. The subsequent sections will cover the specifics of VAWP, including its various forms; the role of digital platforms; and the steps that political parties and institutions can take to create a safer and more supportive environment for women in politics, in the form of 30 tools they can implement depending on the resources they have at their disposal.



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Section 1

Understanding violence against women in politics

Understanding violence against women in politics

The ELF study *Violence Against Women in European Politics* (Mrso, 2022), published in 2021, aimed to gain direct insights into the problem of violence and other forms of discrimination against women in politics across Europe. It was based on a Europe-wide survey and in-depth interviews with female political activists. The survey received 77 responses from political activists across 25 European countries, with the majority of respondents identifying as women from liberal and progressive political organisations. While the survey results were used to set the context, the interviews provided detailed personal accounts of experiences with VAWP, revealing significant gaps in institutional support and awareness.

The publication was accompanied by a raising awareness campaign, which included two high-level events in Sarajevo and Brussels, gathering over 200 female political practitioners. The project highlighted the lack of protective mechanisms within political parties and stressed the need for more research and policy reforms to address VAWP. With its focus on the personal experiences of the interviewed and surveyed women, the publication explored the different types of violence women experienced in politics.

Overview of different types of gender-based violence

Physical violence

Assaults during public events, physical threats in the workplace, being pushed or shoved during rallies, having objects thrown at them, personal attacks while campaigning door-to-door, physical intimidation by colleagues or opponents, being grabbed or restrained against their will, vandalism of personal property, spitting or other forms of direct physical confrontation, forced entry into their homes or offices.

Physical violence was reported by 14.3 per cent of the ELF survey respondents. This includes acts such as hitting, kicking, pushing, and other forms of physical assault. Many respondents noted that physical threats were sometimes used as a means of intimidation, even if actual physical violence was not carried out.

And although many attacks on women in politics have moved to the online space, the most recent reports and briefings by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2024) and the European Parliament (2024) show that the problem of physical violence against women in politics persists. Still, the most comprehensive overview of the prevalence of physical (and other types of) violence against politicians is provided in the 2016 global survey by the IPU (2016), which found that 25.5 per cent of women parliamentarians had experienced physical violence in parliament. Their 2018 joint study with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on women in European parliaments found that 14.8 per cent had suffered physical violence (IPU, 2018); and in African parliaments, this number is around 23 per cent (IPU, 2021). At the same time, in South Asia, as much as 60 per cent of women do not participate in politics due to fear of violence (UN women, 2014).

The murder of British Member of Parliament Jo Cox in 2016 (Wikipedia, n.d.) sent shockwaves through Europe and the rest of the world, exposing significant flaws in the existing prevention mechanisms and highlighting

a lack of awareness regarding VAWP and the level of its escalation. In the intervening years, however, we do not seem to have made much progress. In 2024, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen was physically assaulted in a square in central Copenhagen. She described the experience of someone crossing that last physical boundary as 'intimidating' (CBS News, 2024).

One has to wonder, if we see such things happening on the highest levels, what challenges are women facing on the local level that never hit the news cycle? While comprehensive data on VAWP on the local level is still lacking, a project by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) tracked violence targeting local officials in EU countries (ACLED, 2023). While ACLED's 2023 report does not offer a gendered perspective of the issue, a safe assumption can be made that women in local politics in Italy's southern regions have a higher chance of falling victim to violent attacks.

Although less frequently reported than other forms of violence, physical violence not only endangers the physical safety of women, but the fear of physical harm can discourage women from attending public events, engaging with constituents, or even running for office.



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Emotional and psychological violence

Verbal abuse and insults, threats of harm or death, public humiliation, spreading false rumours, cyberbullying, intimidation tactics, harassment through phone calls or messages, gaslighting, exclusion from decision-making processes, constant criticism or belittling, stalking, emotional manipulation, blackmail, sending offensive or threatening emails.

Emotional violence was reported by 79.2 per cent of respondents in the ELF survey (Mršo, 2022). This includes verbal abuse, belittling, constant criticism, and efforts to undermine their self-esteem. It was often reported in conjunction with other forms of violence, in particular psychological violence, amplifying its effects: 64.9 per cent of respondents experienced psychological violence, including threats, intimidation, and manipulation.

Emotional and psychological violence is insidious and pervasive, affecting a significant majority of women in politics. This form of violence often manifests as derogatory remarks, public shaming, and persistent efforts to undermine women's confidence and credibility. It can occur in various

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settings, including within political parties, during public engagements, and through media channels. Respondents recounted numerous instances of emotional abuse, ranging from being dismissed and belittled during meetings to being the subject of relentless verbal attacks in public and online forums. The survey revealed that many women politicians faced psychological violence from multiple sources, including political opponents, colleagues, and the public. Such abuse affects not only their mental well-being but also their professional reputation and career progression.

Other surveys confirm that this is the most prominent form of violence experienced by women politicians. According to the IPU, around 82 per cent of women parliamentarians globally have experienced psychological violence, and the number is even higher (85.2 per cent) in European parliaments. Since this type of violence is among the hardest to identify, a higher level of awareness usually coincides with a higher level of reporting.

Sexual violence

Unwanted sexual advances, groping, sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment in the workplace, lewd comments or gestures, inappropriate touching, coercion into sexual activities, being sent explicit images or messages, being filmed or photographed without consent, stalking with a sexual intent, being forced to watch pornography, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, verbal sexual harassment, quid pro quo sexual harassment (demanding sexual favours in exchange for professional advancement), indecent exposure.

In the ELF survey, 32.5 per cent of respondents reported experiencing sexual violence, including sexual harassment and assault. Sexual violence was less frequently reported than emotional and psychological violence but remains a critical and severe issue. Furthermore, the 2018 IPU-PACE survey found that 24.7 per cent of women parliamentarians across Europe had experienced sexual violence.

Sexual violence against women in politics encompasses a range of behaviours, from unwanted sexual advances and harassment to outright sexual assault (UN Women, 2021). Respondents shared distressing accounts of sexual harassment and assault perpetrated by colleagues, political opponents, or members of the public. This type of violence not only affects the physical safety of women but also has profound psychological impacts, causing trauma, fear, and a sense of vulnerability that can deter women from active political engagement (International IDEA, 2021).

What is most problematic about sexual violence is that it tends to be underreported for several reasons. Firstly, the stigma associated with being a victim of sexual violence can discourage women from coming forward. There is a fear of not being believed or being blamed for the incident (Murphy-Oikonen et al., 2022). Additionally, the political environment often lacks the necessary confidential reporting mechanisms and psychological support systems to handle such sensitive issues effectively. The lack of discretion and the potential for public exposure make it even more challenging for women to report these incidents.

The psychological impact of sexual violence necessitates comprehensive support services, including counselling and mental healthcare. Such support is often lacking in political settings, where the focus may be more on public image and damage control rather than the well-being of the victims. Confidentiality is crucial in handling cases of sexual violence to protect the privacy and dignity of the victims. Without assurances of discretion, many women may choose to remain silent to avoid public scrutiny and further victimisation (Sigurdardottir & Halldorsdottir, 2021).

Economic violence

Economic violence can include threats to income, job security, and access to financial resources necessary for political campaigns. This form of violence is particularly insidious as it directly affects women's financial independence and their ability to sustain their political careers. By withholding financial resources or leveraging job-related threats, perpetrators can coerce women into compliance or punish them for their political activities.

Economic violence is often used to control and manipulate women, limiting their independence and political engagement. In the ELF survey, 22.1 per cent of respondents experienced economic violence, which includes financial restrictions, withholding resources, and job-related threats. Similarly, the 2018 IPU-PACE survey found that approximately 14 per cent of the surveyed women parliamentarians reported experiencing economic violence.

There is a specific level of vulnerability in economically challenged regions. Women in countries with higher unemployment rates or in poorer regions are particularly vulnerable to economic violence. In these areas, job security and financial resources are already scarce, and the threat of economic repercussions can be more intimidating. Women who are economically disadvantaged may lack the financial stability needed to withstand job-related threats or the withholding of resources (EIGE, n.d.).



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Younger women and those at the beginning of their political careers are also especially vulnerable to economic violence. These women

often lack established careers outside of politics and significant financial savings to fall back on. The precarious nature of their financial situation makes them more dependent on the financial stability provided by their political roles (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2018). Economic threats can thus be particularly effective in deterring these women from political engagement or coercing them into undesirable actions.

Examples of economic violence reported by women include threats of losing their jobs if they do not comply with certain demands, being denied access to necessary campaign funds, or having their financial resources cut off as a form of punishment for their political activities.

Online violence

Cyberbullying, threats of violence or death, doxing (publishing personal information online), hacking of personal accounts, spreading false rumours or defamatory content online, online harassment through social media, sending explicit images or messages, trolling, impersonation, coordinated smear campaigns, hate speech, misogynistic comments, cyberstalking, virtual mobbing, distribution of manipulated or fake images or videos.

Online violence is a growing concern that significantly impacts women in politics. In the ELF survey, 71.4 per cent of respondents reported experiencing online and digital violence, including cyberbullying, doxing, and digital harassment. The 2018 IPU-PACE survey also highlighted the prevalence of online violence, with 58 per cent of women MPs reporting being the target of online sexist attacks on social networks. Additionally, women are more often the targets of sexist remarks and insults (NDI, 2019).

Online violence includes a range of abusive behaviours, such as cyberbullying, doxing (publishing private information), deepfake pornography, and other forms of digital harassment. This type of violence is particularly insidious due to the anonymity and reach of online platforms, which can amplify its effects and make it more challenging to address. Women politicians often receive threatening messages,

defamatory posts, and coordinated attacks aimed at discrediting and intimidating them. Research also shows that online harassment can have severe psychological effects (Iroegbu et al., 2024) and deter women from public participation (Felle, 2023).

In today's digital age, it is essential for politicians to maintain an online presence to engage with constituents, share their views, and campaign effectively. However, this necessity also makes them vulnerable to online violence. Women who lack adequate support staff to filter out threats and manage their online presence are even more susceptible to digital harassment. This constant exposure can lead to significant psychological stress and deter women from fully participating in political life.

Online violence often intersects with other forms of violence. For instance, psychological and emotional abuse can be exacerbated by online harassment, as perpetrators use digital platforms to extend their reach and intensify their attacks. This intersectionality highlights the need for comprehensive strategies that address all forms of violence against women in politics. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has introduced new challenges in combating online violence, as AI tools can be used to create more sophisticated forms of harassment, such as deepfake videos and automated bots that amplify abuse and disinformation, making it harder to track and address the perpetrators.

At the same time, regulating online content is a complex issue, similar to the challenges faced in combating hate speech. A significant portion of the responsibility falls on social media platforms, whose policies and enforcement mechanisms play a crucial role in mitigating online violence. However, the effectiveness of these measures varies widely, and there is often a lack of consistency in how platforms handle abusive content. This inconsistency can leave women vulnerable to ongoing harassment.

Withdrawal from political participation

Gender-based violence significantly impacts women's career progression in politics, often leading to their withdrawal from political life. The continuous threat or experience of violence makes the political violence

environment untenable for many women, leading them to exit the political arena. And there are many prominent examples of this.

In 2023, Jacinda Ardern announced her resignation as prime minister of New Zealand, stating that she no longer had 'enough in the tank' to do the job justice (Jett & Stelloh, 2023). The combination of burnout, a hostile political environment, declining poll numbers, and personal/family considerations all appear to have factored into her resignation.

Later that year, Zuzana Čaputová, the president of Slovakia, announced that she would not seek re-election primarily due to personal and family reasons. She cited exhaustion and the significant toll the role has taken on her well-being as key factors in her decision (Németh, 2024). Despite her popularity and high support in the polls, Čaputová said she could not perform her duties at the required level for another term. Additionally, she has faced ongoing political pressures and challenges, including a lack of political support from the Slovak parliament and continuous attacks from her political opponents.

While Sanna Marin did not withdraw from politics in the same manner as Jacinda Ardern or Zuzana Čaputová, her exit from the Finnish premiership was similarly shaped by personal pressures and intense public scrutiny (Euronews, 2023). In 2022, Marin faced a media storm after videos of her dancing at a private party went viral, shifting the focus from her political achievements to her personal life (Kwan, 2022).

Despite leading Finland through the COVID-19 pandemic and navigating the country's NATO application, the undue focus on her private activities raised questions about her professionalism, which some argue disproportionately targeted her as a young, female leader. After losing her re-election bid in 2023, Marin stepped down as leader of the Social Democratic Party, citing a need to focus on her personal life. Though she did not fully withdraw from the public sphere, she transitioned to a new role as a strategic counsellor for the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (Chiappa & Dawson, 2023), where she continues to contribute to global leadership and policy initiatives.

Given that women tend to prioritise their mental well-being (Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek, 2007), those women who face violence in politics are more likely to abandon their political careers due to the direct impact of violence on their mental and physical health or the broader hostile environment it creates. This withdrawal diminishes the pool of experienced and capable female politicians and sends a discouraging message to other women

considering a career in politics. And it has long-term implications for the diversity of political leadership.

When women exit politics, the leadership remains predominantly male, perpetuating a cycle of gender imbalance in political representation. This lack of diversity hinders the development of policies that are inclusive and representative of the entire population. Without sufficient female representation in leadership positions, a number of critical issues may not receive the attention they deserve, resulting in policies that do not fully address the needs of all citizens.

Mental health and public health considerations

Gender-based violence in politics, whether online or offline, has severe psychological impacts on women (Krook & Sanín, 2016). Victims of such violence often experience anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Yun, Shim, & Jeong, 2019), which can severely affect their ability to perform their political duties and participate fully in public life. The constant threat of violence creates a climate of fear and intimidation, leading to a deterioration in mental health. This psychological toll can discourage individuals from continuing their political careers or pursuing higher office and ultimately limit the pool of individuals ready to enter politics.

Online violence, including cyberbullying, harassment, and doxing, is a pervasive issue that affects not only the targeted individuals but also the broader public and global health (WHO, 2021). The anonymity and reach of online platforms allow perpetrators to attack politicians relentlessly, leading to widespread psychological distress. This form of violence can also have a ripple effect, creating a toxic online environment that discourages civic engagement and open political discourse.

Mental health problems are not confined to the victims alone but can also affect their families and close associates (Fekadu et al., 2019). And it can spread across a society, ultimately leading to the normalisation of abusive online behaviour (Gillett, 2018). Moreover, the stress and mental health issues resulting from online violence impact global health by increasing the burden on healthcare systems (Ranney et al., 2016). Victims of severe online harassment may require extensive mental health support, including therapy and medication, adding to the already significant mental healthcare needs globally.

Section 2

The nature of online VAWP

The nature of online VAWP

In today's digital era, the internet and social media have become essential tools for political engagement and discourse. However, these platforms also serve as arenas for online violence, particularly targeting women politicians. Below we show how online violence undermines democracy, focusing on its impact on politicians, with special attention to women, and whether online trolls are harmless or play a significant role in eroding political participation and free discourse.

Online violence encompasses a variety of abusive behaviours, including cyberbullying, doxing, threats, and harassment. Women politicians are particularly vulnerable to gendered attacks targeting their appearance, sexuality, and competence. These attacks are often more personal and vicious than those faced by their male counterparts (Krook, 2020). The anonymity provided by the internet enables perpetrators to act with impunity, creating a pervasive and insidious threat environment.

Online trolls: Harmless pranksters or democratic underminers?

The role of online trolls in political discourse is contentious. While some argue that trolls are harmless pranksters exercising free speech, evidence suggests otherwise. Online trolls often engage in coordinated attacks aimed at silencing and intimidating political figures, particularly women. This behaviour undermines democratic principles by fostering a climate of fear and exclusion.

Beyond the individual trolls acting independently, there is a growing phenomenon of professionalised troll networks, sometimes referred to as cyber troops or troll farms, which are employed by political campaigns and parties to manipulate public discourse. Unlike random online agitators, these professional trolls operate as part of organised and well-coordinated efforts to promote specific political agendas, discredit opponents, and shape public opinion. This strategic use of trolls is often referred to as 'playing the game' in the digital age of politics, where success can hinge on dominating social media narratives.

Political campaigns increasingly resort to hiring troll farms to amplify their messages, using bots and fake accounts to create the illusion of widespread support or dissent. According to research by the Oxford Internet Institute (Bradshaw, Bailey & Howard, 2020), over 80 countries have deployed cyber troops as part of their political strategies, with parties spending millions on firms that provide disinformation-for-hire services. This professionalisation of trolling makes it more difficult to combat, as these actors are adept at circumventing platform regulations and generating content that can evade automated detection systems.

For women in politics, the impact of these professional trolls is particularly severe, as they are often targeted with misogynistic and sexist attacks aimed at undermining their credibility and discouraging their participation in politics.

Trolls contribute to a toxic online environment that discourages women from participating in politics. A study by the IPU found that 58 per cent of women parliamentarians had experienced online sexist attacks on social networks (IPU, 2018). These attacks are not only psychologically damaging but also deter women from engaging fully in political life. The constant barrage of abuse can lead to self-censorship, withdrawal from social media, and even resignation from political positions.

Impact on political participation

Online violence has a chilling effect on political participation for both men and women, although women face gender-specific challenges.

When politicians are targeted with online abuse, it discourages them from running for office or engaging in public debate. This reduction in political participation is detrimental to democracy, as it limits the diversity of voices and perspectives in political discourse.

Online violence affects all politicians, though the nature and impact can vary. The psychological effects of sustained harassment can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and burnout. Politicians under constant threat may feel more and more compelled to withdraw from social media or public life altogether, which diminishes public engagement and the robustness of democratic debate.

The broader implications of online violence for democracy are profound. By silencing and intimidating politicians, particularly women, online violence perpetuates gender inequality in political representation. This inequality has ripple effects on policy-making and governance. Research has shown that female politicians are more likely to advocate for policies addressing social welfare, gender equality, and anti-corruption measures (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018). When these voices are silenced, it results in a legislative agenda that may overlook these critical issues.

Moreover, the deterrence of both men and women from political participation due to online violence undermines the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Democracy thrives on the principle of equal representation and participation, and when certain groups experience an issue differently, it can lead to exclusion and marginalisation, ultimately eroding public trust in democratic institutions and processes.

Women politicians

Women who experience online harassment are more likely to self-censor and avoid contentious issues (Chadha et al., 2020). This self-censorship undermines the democratic process by limiting the range of ideas and viewpoints presented to the public. It can also reduce women's visibility or cause them to avoid engaging in critical discourse to protect themselves, leading to a less inclusive and representative political environment (Kowalski et al., 2014), and it can interfere with their political campaigns, lowering their chances of being re-elected.

Men politicians

Men also face online violence, but their experiences often differ in nature and impact. For example, male politicians facing threats and abuse may adopt a more aggressive stance, reinforcing toxic political environments. While women face gendered abuse, men are more likely to receive threats related to their policies or political stances. Men politicians often report threats of violence or attacks on their competency (Pedersen, Petersen, & Thau, 2023). However, societal expectations and norms about masculinity may lead men to underreport these experiences or dismiss them as part of the political game. This can perpetuate a culture where online abuse is normalised and not adequately addressed.

Undermining free political discourse and broader implications for democracy

Free political discourse is a cornerstone of democracy. It allows for the exchange of ideas, debate, and the development of policies that reflect the will of the people. However, online violence undermines this principle by silencing voices through intimidation and harassment.

When politicians, particularly women, are subjected to online abuse, it skews political discourse by drowning out diverse perspectives. The harassment often focuses on personal attacks rather than substantive political debate, shifting the focus from policy issues to personal attributes. This diversion undermines the quality of political discourse and prevents the electorate from making informed decisions.

The normalisation of abusive behaviour in political discourse further entrenches the hostile environment, making it even more challenging for marginalised voices to participate (Henry, Flynn, & Powell, 2015). When online platforms fail to adequately address and mitigate online violence, it sends a message that such behaviour is acceptable.

As political parties continue to 'play the game' by employing tactics such as using trolls to attack politically active women online, it becomes harder to foster a democratic environment where all voices can be heard without fear of harassment or intimidation.

Addressing online violence: Challenges and strategies

Addressing online violence presents significant challenges.

The anonymous and borderless nature of the internet makes it difficult to hold perpetrators accountable. Additionally, the policies of social media platforms play a crucial role in either mitigating or exacerbating online violence.

Many social media platforms have been criticised for their inadequate response to online abuse. Despite having policies in place to address harassment, enforcement is often inconsistent and lacks transparency. The reliance on automated systems to detect and remove abusive content can also be problematic, as these systems may fail to recognise the nuanced nature of gendered attacks (IREX, 2023).

However, there are strategies that can be implemented to address online violence more effectively. Firstly, social media platforms need to improve their enforcement mechanisms and provide greater transparency on how they handle reports of abuse. This includes investing in human moderators who can better understand and respond to gender-specific harassment.

Secondly, stronger legal frameworks are needed to hold perpetrators accountable (ICJ, 2021). Governments can enact legislation that specifically addresses online violence and provides avenues for victims to seek justice. For example, laws against cyber harassment and stalking can be strengthened and better enforced to protect all politicians from online abuse.

Thirdly, providing support and resources for victims of online violence is crucial. This includes mental health support, legal assistance, and training on digital safety. Empowering politicians with the tools and knowledge to protect themselves online can help mitigate the impact of online violence.

Examples from different countries and political systems in regulating online violence

Online violence is a pervasive issue affecting politicians globally, with women often bearing the brunt of gendered attacks. Different countries have implemented various strategies and regulations to address this problem, reflecting their unique political systems and cultural contexts. Below are examples from several countries that highlight their approaches to regulating online violence and their effectiveness. These can generally be divided into two categories – those that regulate online platforms and those that hold individual perpetrators accountable, mostly in the domain of non-consensual intimate imagery and revenge pornography.

European Union

The European Union has adopted a holistic approach to combating online violence through the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (GDPR-info.eu, 2016) and the proposed Digital Services Act (DSA) (European Commission, 2024). These regulations aim to protect users' rights and ensure that digital platforms are held accountable for harmful content.

Key provisions

- The GDPR provides stringent data protection measures, including the right to be forgotten, which can help victims of online abuse.
- The DSA proposes to enhance the transparency and accountability of online platforms, requiring them to remove illegal content swiftly and report on their content moderation practices.

Effectiveness and challenges

The EU's approach balances user protection with the need for free expression. The GDPR has been instrumental in empowering individuals to control their personal data. However, the implementation of the DSA is still underway, and its effectiveness will depend on the cooperation of social media platforms and enforcement by Member States.

Germany

Germany's approach to regulating online violence is encapsulated in the Network Enforcement Act (NetzDG) (Bundesministerium der Justiz

und für Verbraucherschutz, 2017), enacted in 2017. This law targets hate speech, fake news, and illegal content on social media platforms, requiring companies to remove 'manifestly unlawful' content within 24 hours of notification and other illegal content within seven days.

Key provisions

- Social media platforms must provide a transparent and effective procedure for user complaints.
- Platforms face fines of up to €50 million for non-compliance.
- The law mandates bi-annual transparency reports from social media companies detailing their handling of complaints.

Effectiveness and challenges

The NetzDG has been effective in increasing the removal of illegal content, but it has also faced criticism for potential overreach and stifling free speech. Critics argue that the threat of hefty fines may lead platforms to remove content too aggressively, impacting legitimate expression.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has made significant strides in regulating online violence through the introduction of the Online Safety Bill (UK Parliament, 2022). This legislation aims to hold social media companies accountable for the content on their platforms, enforcing a duty of care to protect users from harmful and illegal content. The bill mandates that platforms must remove illegal content, such as hate crimes, harassment, and threats of violence, and ensure that harmful content is less accessible to users.

Key provisions

- Social media companies must rapidly remove illegal content and prevent its appearance.
- Platforms are required to implement robust systems for age verification to protect children from harmful content.
- Ofcom, the communications regulator, has the authority to enforce compliance, with fines of up to £18 million or 10 per cent of global turnover for violations.

Effectiveness and challenges

The Online Safety Bill represents a comprehensive approach to making the internet safer, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children and

women. However, it has faced criticism from both safety advocates, who argue it does not go far enough, and free speech advocates, who fear it might lead to over-censorship.

Australia

Australia has implemented several laws to combat online violence, including the Enhancing Online Safety Act and the Criminal Code Amendment (Sharing of Intimate Images) Act (Australian Parliament, 2023). These laws focus on protecting individuals from cyberbullying, harassment, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

Key provisions

- The eSafety Commissioner has broad powers to enforce takedown notices for harmful online content.
- The law criminalises the sharing of intimate images without consent, with penalties including imprisonment and fines.
- The eSafety Commissioner also provides resources and support for victims of online abuse.

Effectiveness and challenges

Australia's comprehensive approach has been praised for providing victims with quick recourse and holding perpetrators accountable. However, there are ongoing challenges in enforcing these laws across international borders and ensuring that social media companies comply with local regulations.

Canada

Canada has taken steps to address online violence through amendments to the Criminal Code and the introduction of the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act (Canada, 2014). These measures criminalise cyberbullying, non-consensual distribution of intimate images, and other forms of online harassment.

Key provisions

- It is illegal to share intimate images without consent, with penalties including imprisonment.
- The law provides for the swift removal of such images from the internet.

- Victims can seek protection orders to prevent further harassment and abuse.

Effectiveness and challenges

Canada's legal framework has been effective in prosecuting offenders and providing relief for victims. However, enforcement remains a challenge, particularly with anonymous perpetrators and content hosted on international platforms.

United States

The United States has a patchwork approach to regulating online violence, largely relying on existing laws against harassment and threats, combined with self-regulation by social media platforms. Key legislative efforts include the Communications Decency Act (CDA) Section 230 (US Congress, n.d.), which provides online platforms with immunity from liability for user-generated content, while encouraging them to remove harmful content.

Key provisions

- Section 230 of the CDA protects social media platforms from being held liable for content posted by users but allows them to remove content deemed harmful or offensive.
- Various states have enacted laws to address cyber harassment, cyberstalking, and revenge porn, with penalties including fines and imprisonment.

Effectiveness and challenges

While Section 230 has been instrumental in allowing the internet to flourish, it has also faced criticism for enabling platforms to avoid accountability for harmful content. Efforts to reform Section 230 are ongoing, with proposals to require platforms to adhere to certain standards in content moderation. Critics argue that the current framework does not do enough to protect victims of online violence, particularly women and marginalised groups.

Detailed strategies and tools for combating online violence

Addressing online violence, particularly against women, requires a multifaceted approach that includes prevention, protection, and prosecution. Here are some detailed strategies and tools to combat online violence.

Enhancing digital literacy and security

Digital self-care and security training: Providing comprehensive training on digital security and self-care can empower women to protect themselves online. For example, resources such as 'A Woman's Guide to Digital Security' (Safe Spaces, 2017) and tools such as 'Security in a Box' (n.d.) offer practical tips for safeguarding personal information and maintaining online safety.

Online safety toolkits: Organisations such as the eSafety Commissioner in Australia offer extensive toolkits and resources to help individuals manage their online presence and respond to online abuse effectively.

Legal and policy measures

Strong legal frameworks: Countries have enacted laws such as the NetzDG in Germany to compel social media platforms to swiftly remove illegal content, including hate speech and harassment. Similarly, Australia's Enhancing Online Safety Act empowers the eSafety Commissioner to issue takedown notices for harmful content.

Legislation on cyber harassment: Many countries have introduced specific laws targeting cyber harassment and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. Canada's Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act criminalises these behaviours and provides mechanisms for victims to seek justice.

Reporting and support mechanisms

Helplines and support services: Establishing dedicated helplines and support services, such as the Crash Override Network (n.d.) and the Safety Net Project (Tech Safety, n.d.), provides immediate assistance and resources to victims of online violence.

Online reporting tools: Social media platforms should offer accessible and user-friendly reporting tools. For instance, Meta (n.d.), TikTok (n.d.), YouTube (n.d.), LinkedIn (n.d.), and X (n.d.) have safety centres that guide users on how to report abuse and protect their accounts.

Technological solutions

AI and automated moderation: Utilising artificial intelligence to detect and remove abusive content can be an effective strategy. Companies such as the SafeToNet Foundation (n.d.) use AI to prevent children from accessing or creating harmful content, by detecting and blocking it in real time.

Enhanced platform accountability: The UK's Online Safety Bill aims to hold social media companies accountable for the content on their platforms, imposing significant fines for non-compliance and requiring transparency in content moderation practices.

Role of technology companies with case studies and policy recommendations

Technology companies play a crucial role in combating online violence. Their policies and practices can significantly impact the prevalence and severity of online abuse. Here are some examples and recommendations.

(1) Case study: Meta's community standards

Approach: Meta has developed detailed community standards and guidelines on their platforms to guide the removal of harmful content. These standards cover hate speech, harassment, and threats of violence, among other issues.

Implementation: Meta employs a combination of human reviewers, AI, and an independent Oversight Board to monitor and adjudicate content

issues. While human reviewers and AI are responsible for enforcing standards on a daily basis, the Oversight Board addresses complex and disputed cases, especially those with significant social or ethical implications. Users are also provided with tools to report violations easily, promoting community involvement in monitoring content.

Challenges: While human reviewers and AI face limitations in real-time, high-volume enforcement, the Oversight Board provides an additional layer of oversight, helping address policy-related concerns and issuing binding decisions on controversial cases. However, this broader focus means the Oversight Board cannot handle individual violations at scale, leaving immediate enforcement challenges largely to AI and human reviewers.

(2) Case study: Hateful Conduct Policy of X (formerly known as Twitter)

Approach: X's Hateful Conduct Policy prohibits abuse and harassment based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other protected categories.

Implementation: X uses automated systems to identify potentially harmful tweets and relies on user reports to flag abusive content.

Challenges: X seems to be facing the most backlash recently. It has been criticised for not doing enough to protect users, especially women, from coordinated harassment campaigns. The platform's reliance on user reports can also place a burden on victims to report abuse. Since 2023, European Commissioner Thierry Breton has had multiple exchanges with Elon Musk regarding X's failure to comply with the Digital Services Act, which mandates the removal of hate speech and disinformation. However, there still seems to be disagreement around his approach in the EU (Financial Times, 2024). Brazil's Supreme Court ordered the temporary suspension of X for failing to remove disinformation and politically harmful content. This ban underscored X's difficulties in complying with national regulations, as the platform struggled to manage misinformation in politically sensitive contexts.

(3) Case study: YouTube's harassment and cyberbullying policy

Approach: YouTube's policy against harassment and cyberbullying aims to

protect creators and users from abusive content. The platform removes content that violates these policies and may issue strikes against repeat offenders.

Implementation: YouTube uses machine learning to detect potentially harmful content and relies on user flagging to review and remove videos.

Challenges: The vast amount of content uploaded to YouTube every minute makes comprehensive monitoring difficult. Additionally, the platform has faced backlash for not being transparent enough about its content removal processes.

Policy recommendations on addressing online violence

(1) Strengthen legal frameworks

- Governments should enact comprehensive laws that specifically address online violence, including cyber harassment, cyberstalking, and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images.
- These laws should provide clear definitions and severe penalties for violations.
- Public discussions on these laws should involve all stakeholders, including social media platforms, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), victims' advocacy groups, law enforcement, academia, and civil society, to ensure that legal solutions are inclusive, balanced, and effectively address the concerns of those most affected by online violence.

(2) Enhance platform accountability and cooperation

- Social media companies must adopt transparent and consistent content moderation policies. They should regularly publish transparency reports detailing their efforts to combat online violence.
- Platforms should invest in advanced technologies such as AI to detect and remove harmful content proactively. However, these technologies should complement, not replace, human moderators, who can understand context and nuances.

(3) Support victims

- Establish dedicated support services for victims of online violence, including helplines, counselling, and legal assistance. Organisations such as the Crash Override Network and Safety Net Project provide valuable resources for those affected by online abuse.
- Governments and NGOs should collaborate to raise awareness about available resources and encourage victims to seek help.

(4) Promote digital literacy

- Implement educational programmes to improve digital literacy and teach individuals how to protect themselves online. This includes understanding privacy settings, recognising phishing attempts, and knowing how to report abuse.
- Schools and universities should incorporate digital literacy into their curricula to equip young people with the skills needed to navigate the online world safely.

(5) Foster international cooperation

- Online violence often transcends national borders, requiring international cooperation to address it effectively. Countries should work together to develop standardised regulations and share best practices.
- International organisations, as well as intergovernmental and supranational organisations and unions, such as the EU, can play a crucial role in coordinating efforts and ensuring that member states implement robust measures against online violence.

(6) Reward and promote platforms that demonstrate good practices

- Platforms that actively cooperate with regulatory bodies, civil society, and victims' advocacy groups, and consistently show progress in

- combating online violence, should be recognised.
- This could include incentives such as public recognition and certifications of best practices for platforms that maintain high standards of transparency and effective moderation.
 - Such positive reinforcement can motivate other platforms to follow suit and improve their own policies.

Section 3

Notes from the Industry

Microsoft's approach and policies towards digital safety

Over 2 billion people will have the opportunity to vote in elections across the world in 2024. In June, European citizens voted in elections that will shape the next five years of how the European Union tackles issues such as online violence in the age of AI. Rapid developments and the adoption of emerging AI technologies create exciting opportunities for all of us.

However, the widespread availability of these tools is likely to exacerbate existing challenges for women in politics, particularly in the online space.

Technology companies play a crucial role in combating online violence.

```

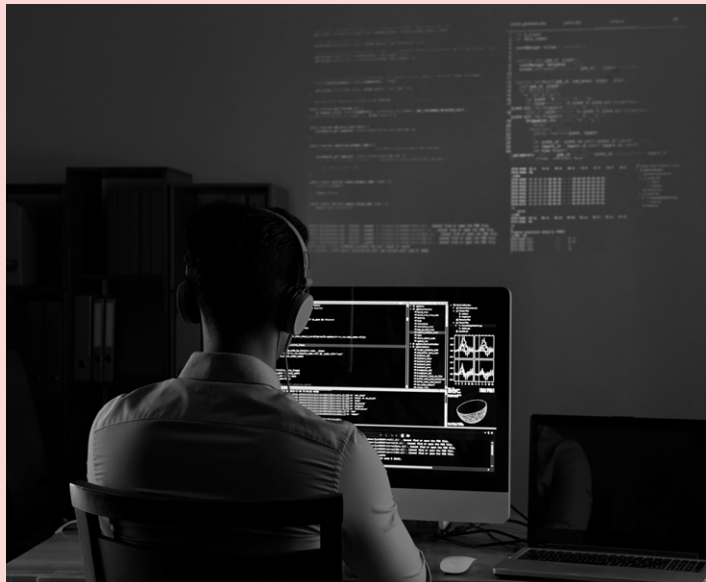
each: function(e, t, n) {
  var r, i = 0,
      o = e.length,
      a = N(e);
  if (n) {
    if (a) {
      for (; o > i; i++)
        if (r = t.apply(e[i], n), r === !1) break;
    } else
      for (i in e)
        if (r = t.apply(e[i], n), r === !1) break;
  } else if (a) {
    for (; o > i; i++)
      if (r = t.call(e[i], i, e[i]), r === !1) break;
  } else
    for (i in e)
      if (r = t.call(e[i], i, e[i]), r === !1) break;
  return e;
},
trim: b && !b.call("\u000a\u0000") ? function(e) {
  return null == e ? "" : b.call(e)
} : function(e) {
  return null == e ? "" : (e + "").replace(C, "")
},
makeArray: function(e, t) {
  var n = t || [];
  return null != e && (N(Object(e)) ? x.merge(n, "string" == typeof e ? [e] : e) : b.cal
},
isArray: function(e, t, n) {
  var r;
  if (t) {
    if (!n) return b.call(t, e, n);
    for (r = e.length, n = n ? 0 > n ? Math.max(0, r + n) : n : 0; r > n; n++)
      if (n in t && t[n] === e) return n;
  }
}

```

Women and girls are already disproportionately targeted by violence and abuse online, and increases in the abuse of synthetic media, as well as the rise in online gender-based violence, has already demonstrated a sharp increase in the creation and distribution of harms against women. We have already seen that this digitised harm landscape can have a profoundly detrimental impact on women’s political participation.

In 2019, even before the advent of generative AI, a report by [Sensity AI](#) found that 96 per cent of so-called deepfakes were pornographic, and of those, 99 per cent were made of women. Such images have long been used to shame, harass, and extort the person depicted, affecting not only individuals with a public profile, but also private individuals, including teens. Research from [Graphika](#) (Lakatos, 2023) suggests that in September 2023 alone, there were 24 million unique visitors to synthetic non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII) websites. The same report found that the number of links advertising synthetic NCII services increased more than 2,400 per cent on social media from 2022 to 2023, and many of the [services](#) target women (Murphy, 2023). In other words, this harm is on the rise, it is deeply gendered, and the consequences are significant and long-lasting.

Technology companies offer a number of tools to help people control their experience online.



The global community is actively responding to the intersection of AI and online safety.

Amid these challenges, the global community is actively responding to the intersection of AI and online safety. On 30 July 2024, Microsoft published [**White Paper on Protecting the Public from Abusive AI-Generated Content**](#), outlining Microsoft's approach to combating abusive AI-generated content and providing recommendations for policy-makers in the United States to modernise legislation to protect the

public. Many of the same policy issues arise in Europe and beyond. Microsoft's own work to combat abusive AI-generated content also continues through our commitments under the [**AI Elections Accord**](#): A Tech Accord to Combat the Deceptive Use of AI in 2024 Elections, launched at the Munich Security Conference on 17 February 2024.

As part of Microsoft's commitments in the Tech Accord, we have been developing training materials and public campaigns to drive awareness of the issue of deepfakes in elections and increase understanding of the tools available to protect against deceptive AI-generated content. For example, in advance of the European Parliament elections in June 2024, Microsoft organised briefings in Brussels and across the 27 EU Member States with political parties and candidates, providing them with information on the risks of deepfakes and ways to protect themselves and react effectively. Candidates can report deceptive [**AI election deepfakes to our dedicated reporting portal**](#).

In addition to the trainings, Microsoft also ran a broad public awareness campaign across the EU. This campaign drove voters to trusted sources of election information as well as media and information literacy resources to help combat any attempts to use deceptive AI to impact the election. Since before the 2024 global election year, Microsoft's [**Democracy Forward**](#) initiative has been working to leverage technology, data, and strategic partnerships to help strengthen democratic institutions globally. The Democracy Forward Team leads and coordinates Microsoft's efforts to partner with governments, NGOs, academics, political campaigns, and industry to protect democratic processes around the world, as well as political candidates and leaders.

Through this initiative Microsoft works towards ensuring the security of critical institutions, including those who participate in advancing civil society, whether in the political realm, or as non-profits, think tanks, journalists, and human rights organisations, which are consistently the target of nation-state cyberattacks. Microsoft's **AccountGuard** is a cybersecurity service that adds an extra layer of protection for high-risk, highly targeted organisations, including those in the political sector such as political parties. Throughout all these initiatives, Microsoft seeks to leverage and create new technologies, build awareness campaigns, and use our voice proactively to address this complex harm, including to support women in politics.

It is critical to take a whole-of-society approach to address gender-based online violence.

This requires collective action from companies, governments, and the public itself. Collectively, we must address the offline drivers of gender-based violence and provide support to victims. At Microsoft, we aim to protect our users from illegal and harmful online content while respecting human rights through a risk-proportionate approach – by tailoring our safety interventions to the nature of the service and to the risks.

Microsoft prohibits a wide range of potentially harmful content and conduct that may impact women and girls, including sharing inappropriate content or material; content that harasses, bullies, or threatens others; stalking; or activity that violates the privacy of others. Information about our **policies** is publicly available. Microsoft also prohibits the sharing or creation of NCII on our services, including a prohibition on creating and sharing synthetic NCII.

At Microsoft, we use a combination of automated technology and trained human reviewers to find and take action against any content or conduct that violates our terms and policies. User reporting is also critical to flag targeted abuse or previously unidentified harmful content. Many of our services provide in-product reporting capabilities (e.g., Bing, Xbox, Skype), and a central reporting portal exists on our **digital safety site**.

We welcome additional insights to help us understand the perspectives of vulnerable or affected groups or suggestions on ways in which tech companies can evolve their approach to address emerging risks, especially as technology evolves.

Women's safety at Meta

At Meta, we believe that women should have equal access to all the economic opportunities, education, and social connection that the internet provides. Our mission is to give people the power to share and to make the world more open and connected. But none of this is possible if people don't feel safe on our apps. That's why we're always working to build a safer and more supportive community.

We recognise that some online and offline behaviours can disproportionately impact women, so we take a comprehensive approach to making our technologies safe and inclusive places for all women, including engaging with experts, writing clear policies, and developing cutting-edge technology to help prevent abuse from happening in the first place.

Policies

The [Facebook Community Standards](#) and Instagram Community Guidelines clearly explain the content allowed on our platforms and cover a wide range of harmful content types. Some of our policies related to women's safety are Hate Speech, Sexual Exploitation of Adults, and Bullying and Harassment. We also have strict rules against content or behaviour that exploits people, including the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (NCII or 'revenge porn') or threats to share those images without permission ('sextortion').

Tools

We offer a number of tools to help people control their experience on Meta apps and protect themselves against unwanted content and contact. For example, members of our community can limit access to their Facebook profile or filter for potentially offensive direct messages

on Instagram. They can also **report violating behaviour** and we will remove anything that doesn't follow our policies.

On Instagram, we recently launched **a new feature** designed to help better protect our community from unwanted images and videos in direct messages (DMs). We think it will be particularly meaningful for women – and especially women in the public eye – who have historically been disproportionately affected by these kinds of unwanted messages. With this new feature, anyone looking to send DM requests to people who don't follow them can only send text. What this means in practice is that people will no longer receive unwanted images or videos from people they don't follow.

Partnerships

We regularly engage with over 850 safety partners globally who are experts in online safety. These partners help to inform our work and collaborate with us to deliver education programmes. In June 2021, we **announced** the formation of our Global Women's Safety Expert Advisors, a group of non-profit leaders, activists, and academic experts, to help us develop new policies, products, and programmes that better support the women who use our apps.

As mentioned, it has long been our policy to remove **NCII**, and we use

Good practices can significantly impact the prevalence and severity of online abuse.



photo- and video-matching technology to keep this content off Facebook and Instagram. In December 2021, we **partnered** with UK Revenge Porn Hotline and more than 50 global organisations to launch **StopNCII.org**, the first industry-wide platform to help stop the proliferation of NCII online.



Women should have equal access to all the economic opportunities, education, and social connection that the internet provides.

The initiative currently has 12 industry partners and over 100 NGO partners. Since its launch, the participating tech companies have helped over 300,000 people and blocked over 20,000 intimate images and videos.

Resources

Our **Safety Center** is full of valuable information, tools, and resources about staying safe online and what to do if you encounter harmful content. In 2021, we announced the launch of our **Women's Safety Hub** to centralise all the safety resources women may want when navigating our platforms. It includes specific resources for women leaders, journalists, and survivors of abuse. The hub also contains video-on-demand safety training in multiple languages.

Section 4

Preventing VAWP:
What can parties
do?

Preventing VAWP: What can parties do?

Tools for establishing a safe environment: Awareness-raising campaigns

Creating a safe environment within political parties is essential to combat VAWP. Having a high level of awareness within the party around the topic is fundamental to this effort. By adopting a comprehensive awareness-raising approach that includes educational materials, clear protocols, leadership training, and public awareness campaigns, political parties can create a safe environment that supports women and combats VAWP. These efforts not only protect individuals but also strengthen the party's commitment to equality and justice, fostering a more inclusive political space.

Tool 1: Digital and printed leaflets

Develop comprehensive materials to educate members, officials, and staff about the different forms of VAWP. These leaflets should be visually engaging and accessible both digitally and in print. They should include definitions, examples, and signs of various types of violence, such as psychological, physical, sexual, and economic violence, as well as online harassment.

Below are some examples and content suggestions for leaflets and printed materials. Make sure to add important contact information and protocols for reporting violence and advice on how to seek help if one falls victim to VAWP.

Leaflet examples and content suggestions

EXAMPLE 1: A leaflet that helps identify different forms of VAWP

An example would be a foldable leaflet or booklet that helps identify and recognise the different types of violence, containing a definition of each type of violence and a real-life example. Another option would be to have a small glossary leaflet that helps educate and raise awareness of the meaning of different terms used in relation to gender-based violence.

EXAMPLE 2: A leaflet that helps identify warning signs

This material would be developed with professionals and could provide descriptions of warning signs as well as checklists that can help identify changes in behaviours, withdrawal from activities, outcasting, or even injuries that may occur as a result of VAWP, in both you and your party colleagues.

EXAMPLES 3: A leaflet with real-life examples of VAWP

Usually used in targeted campaigns, such as reactionary campaigns when prominent cases of VAWP arise, or as part of advocacy campaigns for certain policy changes, these types of leaflets serve to humanise and give voices to victims. They can contain testimonials, case studies, or stories from survivors, highlighting the reality of VAWP and the importance of recognising it.

Tool 2: Protocol and guidelines for potential victims

A party that aims to have a high level of awareness on VAWP and its consequences should develop a detailed protocol for potential victims, outlining steps to take when experiencing VAWP. This protocol should be clear and provide immediate and long-term actions.

Guidelines for different scenarios:

- Immediate action: Specify steps to take if an incident occurs, such as seeking a safe place, if necessary, or going offline, as well as documenting the incident and contacting a trusted person or authority within the party.
- Reporting mechanisms: Describe how to report the incident within the party, including contact details of designated personnel or departments.
- Support services: Provide information on accessing legal, medical, and psychological support services, both within and outside the party.

So, what information should your protocol and guidelines for potential victims entail?

1. Instructions for immediate actions:
 - On how to find a safe location
 - On documenting the incident with notes and photos if possible
 - On contacting a trusted party official
2. Reporting mechanisms:
 - Whom to report to – name of the designated person/department
 - Contact information – phone and email address
 - Description of the correct steps in the reporting process
3. Other support services:
 - Where to find legal assistance – contact information of organisations or people that provide it
 - Medical support – information about local resources on where to seek medical attention
 - Psychological counselling – hotlines, websites, organisations, or other contacts that offer psychological support

Tool 3: Guidelines for leadership and party branches

Party leaders play a pivotal role in setting the tone and ensuring the safety of their members. They must be trained to recognise and address VAWP adequately and appropriately and to support the victims, while at the same time protecting the image of the party, especially in cases of in-party violence.

Leadership guidelines should include:

- Commitment statements: Publicly committing to zero tolerance for VAWP.
- Training programmes: Mandatory training on VAWP for all leaders.
- Response protocols: Clear protocols for handling reports of VAWP swiftly and confidentially.

Women's and youth wings are often the most vulnerable and should have tailored guidelines to support their unique needs. Both new and old members should receive an information package on VAWP that underlines the importance of addressing VAWP.

Resources should include workshops and trainings, trust-building activities, as well as specialised programmes and support networks.



Women's wings should empower women with knowledge, resources, and support systems to protect themselves and support others. These resources should include workshops and trainings, organising internal and external awareness-raising campaigns, trust-building activities, as well as specialised programmes and support networks.

Youth wings also bear a special responsibility to educate young members about VAWP and promote respectful behaviour from the outset, through their activities, workshops, and the promotion of respectful behaviour and guidelines for addressing VAWP. Such information should be included in the material received by all members of youth wings, preferably upon joining the organisation.



Tool 4: Self-check lists and quizzes

Behavioural self-checks: Develop self-check lists and quizzes that help members reflect on their own behaviour and recognise VAWP.

- Self-assessment checklists: Tools that prompt members to consider if their actions or words may constitute harassment or contribute to a hostile environment, or whether someone has been a victim of VAWP, when unsure about it.
- Awareness quizzes: Interactive quizzes to test knowledge about VAWP, reinforcing learning and awareness.

Template examples:

(1) Self-check your experiences: Have you experienced any of the following behaviours?

- A colleague or acquaintance or another person greeted me with a hug, and I felt his/her hand wander to other parts of my body and/or he/she pulled me closer to his/her own body.
- During a random conversation, a colleague or acquaintance or another person made a joke of a sexual nature that made me feel uncomfortable.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person asked me to go for drinks or dinner with him/her after I had previously expressed an unwillingness to do so.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person surprised me with comments about my appearance (e.g. called me 'sexy' or 'good looking', or told me that my outfit looks good on me, and this made me uncomfortable).
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person asked me questions about my private life, sexual preferences, and/or sexual partners, or asked me to comment on someone else's private life, sexual preferences, and/or sexual behaviour.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person told stories, spread rumours, or talked to other people about my sexual preferences and/or my sexual partners.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person made uninvited comments, sexual innuendos, or catcalling noises (howling, kissing sounds, smacking lips) to me and/or in my presence, which made me uncomfortable.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person referred to me as girl, honey, babe, beauty, sexy, and so forth.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person stared at me and/or looked me up and down, which made me feel uncomfortable.
- At least one time, someone followed me and/or blocked my path (even if it seemed like a joke).
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person made sexual

gestures with hands and/or other body parts, or made sexual facial expressions (winking, licking lips, throwing kisses).

- A colleague or acquaintance or another person gave me uninvited personal gifts that made me think they expected something in return.
- Another person surprised me by touching parts of my body, hair, or clothes.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person gave me uninvited hugs, kisses, strokes, massages, neck rubs, and/or pats.
- At least one time, a person stood very close to me during a gathering, then they rubbed themselves up against me, which made me uncomfortable.
- Someone uninvitedly touched themselves sexually in my presence.
- Another person made sexual and physical advances towards me after I said 'no' and/or 'don't' at least one time.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person pressured me (or tried to pressure me) to provide sexual favours.
- A colleague or acquaintance or another person made unwanted phone calls to me and/or sent me uninvited text messages and/or materials of a sexual nature, which made me feel uncomfortable.
- Someone attempted to rape or sexually assault me.

(2) Self-check your behaviour: Have you ever engaged in one of the following behaviours?

- Deviated from the usual way of greeting a person by adding uninvited physical contact (e.g. an uninvited hug or peck, caressing of any body part, a tighter hug, or a hug with additional contact between certain body parts).
- Turned a conversation about work and/or politics to sexual topics and jokes with sexual innuendos.
- Asked a person repetitively to engage in any type of behaviour or activity after she/he expressed an unwillingness to do so (e.g. go for drinks, engage in a dance with you, written correspondence, etc.).
- Made sexual comments about a person's body, clothes, or appearance in general.

- Asked uninvited questions about a person's sexual and/or private life, his/her sexual preferences, fantasies, and/or other intimate information.
- Told stories and rumours (true or false) about a person's sex life.
- Made uninvited comments, sexual innuendos, or catcalling noises (howling, kissing sounds, smacking lips).
- Referred to an adult woman as a girl, honey, babe, beauty, and so forth.
- Stared at a person or looked them up and down.
- Followed a person or blocked their path.
- Made sexual gestures with hands and/or other body parts, or made sexual facial expressions (winking, licking lips, throwing kisses).
- Gave uninvited personal gifts to someone that might create the sense that a favour is expected in return.
- Uninvitedly touched a person's body, hair, or clothes.
- Gave uninvited hugs, kisses, strokes, massages, neck rubs, and/or pats to a person.
- Intentionally stood very close, brushed up, or rubbed oneself up against a person.
- Uninvitedly touched oneself sexually around another person.
- Made uninvited sexual and/or physical advances towards a person.
- Pressured a person to provide sexual favours.
- Made uninvited phone calls or sent uninvited text messages and/or materials of a sexual nature.
- Attempted rape or sexual assault.

Tool 5: Understanding consent tool

Consent education: Develop tools to educate members on the importance of consent in all interactions.

- Definitions and scenarios: Clear definitions of consent and real-life scenarios to illustrate its application.
- Interactive modules: Engage members with interactive learning modules that reinforce the principles of consent.

Template examples:

Understanding consent

CONSENT IS:	CONSENT IS NOT:
Informed – always ask permission before engaging in a behaviour that deviates from your usual relationship with a person	Flirting, smiling, silence, or dressing sexy; accepting drinks, dinner, or a ride
Freely given – if you have to coerce a person or try really hard to convince them to say yes to engaging in any kind of interaction with you, then you do not have consent	Being dressed in a sexy way, in revealing clothes, or even undressed
Ongoing – just because a person is consenting to something does not mean they will consent to whatever comes next	Agreeing to something before, meaning that you have to agree to do it every other time
Sober – consent given under the influence of alcohol or drugs can be revoked afterwards	Something you do not remember giving because your judgement was clouded for whatever reason; it is not saying yes or not saying no, while under influence
Clear – anything but a clear ‘yes’ or other type of agreement is unclear	The mere absence of a ‘no’ or a rejection
Specific – make sure you are both consenting to the same behaviour	Being in a relationship or even a marriage
Based on equal power – consent becomes unclear if one person is in a position of power compared with the other person	Gender-based – persons of any gender have the right to reject any type of behaviour with another person; and it is not one gender’s role to initiate things and to convince the other to give consent

Tool 6: External awareness raising

Your spokespeople on VAWP: Find and appoint dedicated spokespeople on the issue of VAWP to ensure consistent and authoritative messaging.

EXAMPLES:

Public engagement:

Regularly engage with media and the public to raise awareness about VAWP and the party's commitment to combating it.

Partnerships with NGOs:

Collaborate with non-governmental organisations to leverage their expertise and amplify the message.

Advocacy and legislative work:

Advocate for legislative and policy changes by using spokespeople and elected and/or appointed officials, to make a greater societal impact.

Campaigns and events:

Host awareness campaigns, seminars, and workshops to educate the public and party members.

Visibility in media:

Ensure regular coverage in the media to highlight the party's efforts and successes in combating VAWP.

In this way, the party will develop a strong and proactive public image as an organisation committed to addressing VAWP.

Tool 7: Training and awareness programmes

A stance against VAWP and support for gender equality, human rights, and ethical behaviour should be at the forefront of a political party's training programmes and political academies. This training should not only target women and youth but encompass all branches, leadership, and staff.

Introductory training programmes

Objective: Implement training programmes similar to those in corporate environments to educate all party members on recognising VAWP, understanding protocols, and fostering an inclusive culture.

Template examples:

EXAMPLE 1: Training on recognising VAWP	
CONTENT:	Define different forms of VAWP, including psychological, physical, sexual, economic, and online violence
DELIVERY:	Interactive presentations, e-learning modules, and workshops
EXAMPLE MODULE OUTLINE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction: Overview of VAWP and its impact • Types of violence: Detailed explanations and real-life examples • Recognising signs: How to identify signs of VAWP among colleagues • Case studies: Analysis of documented cases to understand the manifestations and impacts of VAWP

EXAMPLE 1: Training on recognising VAWP	
DURATION:	1 hour
MAIN METHOD OF DELIVERY:	Interactive presentation with Q&A
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Slide deck, real-life case studies, handouts with definitions and signs of VAWP
AGENDA:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to VAWP (10 mins) 2. Types of violence (15 mins) 3. Recognising signs (15 mins) 4. Case study analysis (20 mins) 5. Q&A and discussion (15 mins)

EXAMPLE 2: Training on protocols and reporting mechanisms	
CONTENT:	Detailed guidelines on what to do when witnessing or experiencing VAWP
DELIVERY:	Printed materials, online resources, and in-person briefings
EXAMPLE MODULE OUTLINE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate actions: Steps to take when VAWP occurs • Reporting procedures: How to report incidents, including contact points within the party • Support services: Accessing legal, medical, and psychological support
DURATION:	1.5 hours
MAIN METHOD OF DELIVERY:	Workshop with breakout sessions

EXAMPLE 2: Training on protocols and reporting mechanisms

MATERIALS NEEDED:	Printed protocols, flowcharts, contact lists, sample reporting forms
AGENDA:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction to protocols (20 mins) 2. Support services overview (20 mins) 3. Immediate actions (15 mins) 4. Reporting procedures exercise (35 mins)

EXAMPLE 3: Training on fostering an inclusive culture

CONTENT:	Training on gender equality, human rights, and ethical behaviour
DELIVERY:	Workshops, seminars, and role-playing exercises
EXAMPLE MODULE OUTLINE:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding equality: Importance of gender equality and human rights • Ethical behaviour: Promoting respectful and inclusive behaviour • Interactive sessions: Role-playing and group discussions to internalise these concepts
DURATION:	1.5 hours
MAIN METHOD OF DELIVERY:	Interactive workshop and group discussions

EXAMPLE 3: Training on protocols	
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Handouts, ethical guidelines, case studies
AGENDA:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Importance of equality (20 mins) 2. Promoting ethical behaviour (20 mins) 3. Role-playing (scenarios of examples of ethical and unethical behaviour and how to address it) and group discussions (50 mins)

Simulation trainings and role play

Objective: Utilise simulation trainings and role play to put existing protocols into practice, assess their efficiency, and identify areas for improvement.

Scenario re-enactments are often used to recreate realistic situations based on past or potential future VAWP incidents. They are usually done as in-person role play, virtual simulations, and/or as part of interactive workshops. The simulation trainings should always start with scenario set-ups that describe the context of the simulated VAWP incident, followed by role assignments (which participants will play the victim, the perpetrator, bystanders, party officials, colleagues, etc.). After that the role play execution should start, and it should always be accompanied by group work that includes debriefing and group discussions on the effectiveness of the responses to the VAWP cases. Finally, the main question to ask is: what can be improved?

TRAINING OUTLINE EXAMPLE:	
TITLE:	Scenario-based training for VAWP incidents
DURATION:	2.5 hours
METHOD:	In-person role play with debriefing
MATERIALS NEEDED:	Scenario scripts, role descriptions, evaluation forms
AGENDA:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction and scenario set-up (30 mins) 2. Role assignment and preparation (30 mins) 3. Role play execution (45 minutes) 4. Debrief and feedback (45 minutes)
GOALS AND STEPS IN THE SIMULATION:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test the party's existing protocols through simulation • Review existing protocols • Enact scenarios where these protocols are applied • Assess the efficiency and identify gaps • Feedback session: Collect participant feedback and suggest protocol improvements

SCENARIO EXAMPLES:

Scenario 1: A female party member receives threatening messages after a public appearance.

Scenario 2: A female party member has experienced sexual harassment by a colleague.

Scenario 3: A party member holding a public office is being constantly harassed online and they are contemplating leaving politics because of it.

Scenario 4: A young woman in the youth wing who also works in an administrative role in the party/someone's cabinet is being blackmailed with being fired if they do not comply with all orders from a senior official, some of which cross the line into mobbing and unethical behaviour

Scenario 5: A female party member has complained about the behaviour of a male colleague to him, but he fails to understand he is doing anything wrong.

Divide roles: Participants role-play the victim, perpetrator, bystanders, and designated party officials, applying the party's protocols. In certain scenarios and mixed groups, gender roles can also be reversed.

Debrief questions: What actions were taken? Were the protocols followed effectively? What improvements can be made?

Legal and statutory frameworks and their enforcement

To effectively combat VAWP, it is crucial to understand the existing legal frameworks, identify gaps in protection, and advocate for necessary changes. Political parties have a role in this by informing their members, advocating for reforms, and leading by example through their own policies and procedures. By implementing these strategies, political parties can create a safer and more inclusive environment, demonstrate their commitment to combating VAWP, and set a positive example for society.

Tool 8: Overview of existing laws and gaps in legal protection

Several international and national laws address gender-based violence, including VAWP. Key international frameworks include the following.

The Istanbul Convention (2011): Officially known as the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, this treaty provides a comprehensive legal framework to protect women against all forms of violence, notably articles 3, 33, 34, 40, and 46.

The Budapest Convention on Cybercrime (2001): Addresses cybercrime and includes provisions relevant to online violence against women, notably articles 4, 5, and 9.

Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) General Recommendation No. 1 (2021): Focuses on the digital dimension of violence against women.

CEDAW (1979): Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is a UN treaty aimed at eliminating discrimination against women and promoting gender equality.

International Labour Organization: Violence and Harassment Convention,

2019 (No. 190) and Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206) – conventions of the International Labour Organization addressing workplace violence and harassment.

The EU's efforts on combating gender-based violence:

- EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence: Provides a legal framework to combat violence against women within the EU.
- EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online: Establishes guidelines for online platforms to tackle hate speech.
- The Digital Services Act Package: Aims to create safer digital spaces and hold online platforms accountable for removing illegal content.
- EU Artificial Intelligence Act: Includes provisions to prevent AI from being used to perpetrate or facilitate violence against women.
- European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles: Outlines rights and principles for a safe and inclusive digital environment.

In addition to these international frameworks, parties should also pay attention to local and national laws, such as gender equality laws and national penal codes, which provide specific protections and remedies for VAWP.

Gaps in legal protection: Despite these frameworks, significant gaps remain in the protection against VAWP.

- Inconsistent national implementation: Not all countries have ratified or fully implemented international treaties such as the Istanbul Convention, leading to varied levels of protection.
- Inconsistent national implementation: Not all countries have ratified or fully implemented international treaties such as the Istanbul Convention, leading to varied levels of protection.
- Enforcement issues: Even where laws exist, enforcement is often weak, with inadequate resources and training for law enforcement agencies.

Tool 9: Advocating for changes through elected and appointed officials

Political parties can leverage their influence to advocate for stronger legal protections against VAWP in several ways.

1. Policy proposals:
 - Develop and propose comprehensive policies that address all forms of VAWP, including physical, psychological, sexual, and online violence.
 - Advocate for the integration of gender-specific provisions in broader legislative reforms, ensuring that VAWP is explicitly addressed.
2. Legislative advocacy:
 - Encourage party members who hold elected or appointed positions to champion legislation that strengthens protections against VAWP.
 - Engage in lobbying efforts to persuade other policy-makers and stakeholders to support these initiatives.
3. Public campaigns:
 - Launch public awareness campaigns to highlight the need for stronger legal protections and the party's commitment to combating VAWP.
 - Collaborate with civil society organisations and other political entities to build a broad coalition for change.

Tool 10: Informing members of existing mechanisms and how to use them

Political parties should ensure their members are well informed about existing legal mechanisms and how to utilise them effectively by creating resources.

1. Educational workshops:
 - Conduct regular workshops and training sessions to educate members about existing laws and their rights under those laws.

- Provide practical guidance on how to report incidents of VAWP and navigate legal processes.
2. Resource materials:
 - Develop and distribute comprehensive guides that outline the steps to take when experiencing or witnessing VAWP.
 - Create easy-to-understand materials that explain the legal protections available and how to access support services.
 3. Support systems:
 - Establish internal support systems to assist members in dealing with incidents of VAWP, including legal advice and emotional support.
 - Partner with external organisations that specialise in supporting victims of gender-based violence to provide additional resources.

Tool 11: Creating recommendations for legislative reform and enforcement mechanisms

To effectively combat VAWP, political parties should advocate for the following legislative reforms and enforcement mechanisms.

1. Comprehensive legislation:
 - Call for laws that explicitly address all forms of VAWP, and which are reviewed and updated continuously to respond to new trends.
 - Ensure that legislation includes clear definitions, robust protections, and severe penalties for perpetrators.
2. Strengthening of enforcement:
 - Advocate for increased funding and resources for law enforcement agencies to effectively enforce laws against VAWP.
 - Insist that law enforcement officers receive specialised training on handling cases of VAWP sensitively and effectively.
3. Victim support services:
 - Advocate for mandatory provisions for comprehensive victim support services, including legal aid, counselling, and safe shelters.

- Ensure that all services are accessible to all women, regardless of their political affiliation or socio-economic status.
4. Monitoring and accountability:
 - Implement mechanisms to monitor the enforcement of laws and hold accountable those who fail to protect victims of VAWP.
 - Establish independent oversight bodies to review cases of VAWP and ensure justice is served.
 - This is especially crucial for parties that have adopted a strong advocacy and awareness-raising approach and have designated spokespeople on VAWP.

Tool 12: Leading by example: Updating party/statutory documents

Political parties should lead by example by updating their statutory documents to reflect a commitment to gender equality and ethical conduct.

1. Incorporation of gender equality on all levels:
 - Call for laws that explicitly address all forms of VAWP, and which are reviewed and updated continuously to respond to new trends.
 - Ensure that legislation includes clear definitions, robust protections, and severe penalties for perpetrators.
2. Designated articles on VAWP:
 - Create specific articles in the party's statutory documents that address VAWP, detailing procedures for reporting, investigating, and responding to incidents.
 - Outline the consequences for party members found guilty of perpetrating VAWP, including disciplinary actions and expulsion.
3. Ethical conduct policies:
 - Develop and enforce a code of conduct that promotes ethical behaviour and respect for all members.

- Include provisions for regular training on ethical behaviour, gender sensitivity, and anti-harassment.
4. Clear reporting mechanisms:
- Establish clear and accessible mechanisms for reporting incidents of VAWP within the party.
 - Ensure that these mechanisms are confidential and protect the privacy and safety of victims.

Support systems

Depending on their resources, political parties must dedicate significant effort to developing robust support systems if they wish to address VAWP effectively. These support systems are critical for providing the necessary assistance to victims and creating a safe and supportive environment within the party. If resources are lacking, collaborating with political foundations and think tanks, such as the European Liberal Forum, can actually enhance the effectiveness of these support systems.

Support systems are essential for addressing VAWP because they offer victims the necessary resources to cope with and recover from their experiences.

These systems not only provide immediate assistance but also foster a culture of safety and respect within political parties. Establishing comprehensive support structures helps ensure that victims are not isolated and that perpetrators are held accountable. By leveraging the expertise of NGOs and political foundations, parties can create tailored support mechanisms that address the unique challenges faced by women in politics.

Tool 13: Psychological support and counselling services

Purpose: Psychological support and counselling services are vital for helping victims of VAWP cope with the emotional and mental trauma caused by their experiences. These services provide a safe space for victims to express their feelings, process their experiences, and receive professional guidance on managing stress and trauma. Most parties lack any type of mental health support for their members, which is disappointing given the nature of political work.

Implementation:

- **In-house counsellors:** Employ or contract professional counsellors who are available to provide confidential support to members.
- **Partnerships with NGOs:** Collaborate with organisations that specialise in trauma and psychological support to offer additional resources and expertise.
- **Awareness campaigns:** Educate members about the availability of these services and encourage those in need to seek help.

Tool 14: Legal and career support

Purpose: Legal and career support services help victims navigate the complexities of the legal system and manage the impact of VAWP on their careers. These services ensure that victims receive proper legal representation and advice and help them maintain their professional standing and opportunities.

Implementation:

- Legal aid services: Provide access to legal professionals who can offer advice, representation, and support in pursuing legal action against perpetrators.
- Career counselling: Offer guidance on how to manage career disruptions caused by VAWP, including advice on navigating hostile work environments and finding new opportunities if necessary.
- Advocacy: Advocate for policies and legislation that protect the careers of women in politics and provide recourse for those affected by VAWP.

Tool 15: Formal and informal support groups

Purpose: Support groups provide a community of individuals who share similar experiences, offering emotional support, practical advice, and a sense of solidarity. These groups can be formal, organised by the party or affiliated organisations, or informal, arising naturally among members. It is important that women know they can turn to this group if they are experiencing any form of VAWP and that a culture of camaraderie is fostered within those groups. The support they offer can be emotional, but also online and physical protection, if necessary.

Implementation:

- In-party groups: Establish formal support groups within the party, facilitated by trained professionals or experienced members.
- Online communities: Create online platforms where members can share experiences, seek advice, and offer support to each other in a safe and moderated environment.
- International networks: Foster connections with support groups in other political parties and organisations at the international level to provide broader perspectives and resources.

Tool 16: Designated ombudspersons for VAWP

Purpose: Designated ombudspersons act as independent and impartial figures who investigate complaints of VAWP within the party. They ensure that allegations are taken seriously, investigated thoroughly, and resolved fairly.

Implementation:

- **Appointment:** Appoint experienced and respected individuals to serve as ombudspersons, ensuring they are independent from party leadership.
- **Training:** Provide ombudspersons with specialised training on handling VAWP cases sensitively and effectively.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure that all party members are aware of how to contact the ombudsperson and understand the process for filing complaints.

Tool 17: Self-care strategies for women in politics

Purpose: Self-care strategies empower women in politics to take proactive steps in maintaining their physical and mental well-being, helping them manage the stress and demands of their roles while mitigating the impact of VAWP. They can be included as part of existing or new women's academies.

Implementation:

- **Workshops and seminars:** Offer regular sessions on topics such as stress management, mindfulness, and work–life balance.
- **Resource materials:** Provide guides and toolkits that outline practical self-care techniques and strategies.

- Peer support: Encourage the formation of peer support networks where women can share self-care tips and support each other's well-being.

Tool 18: Events safety protocols

Purpose: Safety protocols for party events are essential to prevent incidents of VAWP and ensure that all attendees feel secure and respected. Creating safe spaces within the party ensures that all members can participate fully and confidently without fear of harassment or violence.

Implementation:

- Risk assessments: Conduct thorough risk assessments before all events to identify potential safety concerns and address them proactively.
- Security measures: Implement appropriate security measures, such as increased presence of trained security personnel and clear reporting procedures for incidents.
- Code of conduct: Establish and communicate a code of conduct for all event attendees, outlining expected behaviour and consequences for violations.
- Designated safe areas: Identify and mark safe areas within party premises and event venues where members can go if they feel threatened or uncomfortable.
- Clear policies: Develop and communicate clear policies on what constitutes a safe space and how to maintain it.
- Regular monitoring: Regularly monitor these spaces and solicit feedback from members to ensure they remain safe and welcoming.

Tool 19: Self-protection tools and tips

Purpose: Providing self-protection tools and tips equips women in politics

with practical knowledge and resources to protect themselves from VAWP both online and offline.

Implementation:

- Training sessions: Offer training on self-defence techniques, online security practices, and strategies for staying safe during public appearances.
- Digital security tools: Provide access to digital security tools, such as VPNs and secure communications platforms, to protect personal information.
- Resource guides: Distribute comprehensive guides that outline self-protection strategies and resources.

Tool 20: Sponsorship and mentorship programmes

Purpose: Sponsorship and mentorship programmes support the career development of women in politics by providing guidance, advice, and opportunities for professional growth, but also warn about the dangers and perils that come with being a woman in politics, including VAWP.

Implementation:

- Mentor matching: Pair experienced party members with women who are new to politics or looking to advance their careers.
- Sponsorship initiatives: Establish programmes where senior members actively sponsor and advocate for the career progression of women within the party.
- Regular check-ins: Schedule regular check-ins between mentors and mentees to ensure ongoing support and address any challenges.

Tool 21: Party resources rearrangement: HR and mental health professionals

Purpose: Rearranging party resources to include HR and mental health professionals ensures that the party has the necessary expertise to address VAWP effectively and support the well-being of its members. This, of course, depends highly on the party's resources, but some external help can be acceptable as well.

Implementation:

- **Dedicated HR department:** Establish a dedicated HR department focused on issues related to VAWP, including policy development, training, and support.
- **Mental health professionals:** Employ or contract mental health professionals to provide ongoing support to members and develop mental health initiatives.
- **Regular audits:** Conduct regular audits of party resources and policies to ensure they are aligned with best practices for preventing and addressing VAWP.

These support measures not only provide immediate assistance to victims but also foster a culture of respect and accountability within the party. By collaborating with NGOs, political foundations, and think tanks, parties can leverage additional expertise and resources to enhance their support systems.

Online violence mitigation

Online violence against women in politics is a rapidly growing issue, exacerbated by the increasing reliance on digital platforms for political

engagement and communication. This form of violence includes harassment, threats, and defamation, and it targets both men and women, albeit differently, aiming to silence their voices and discourage their participation in politics. The anonymity and reach of the internet make it a fertile ground for such attacks, leading to severe psychological distress, reputational damage, and even physical harm. As political parties strive to create safe environments for their members, ever-evolving strategies and tools are needed to monitor and respond to online harassment effectively.



Online violence against women in politics is a rapidly growing issue.

Tool 22: Digital safety kits

Purpose: A digital safety kit equips members with essential tools and knowledge to protect their online presence and respond effectively to harassment.

Contents of a digital safety kit:

1. Password management tools:
 - Password managers: Applications such as LastPass or 1Password help generate and store strong passwords securely.
 - Two-factor authentication (2FA): Instructions for enabling 2FA on all social media and email accounts to add an extra layer of security.
2. Privacy settings guides:
 - Social media privacy: Step-by-step guides for setting privacy controls on platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, and LinkedIn.
 - Browser security: Recommendations for secure browsing, including using incognito mode and privacy-focused browsers such as Brave.
3. Incident response plan:
 - Documentation tools: Templates for documenting incidents of harassment, including screenshots and logs of abusive messages.
 - Reporting procedures: Instructions for reporting harassment to social media platforms and law enforcement.
4. Digital hygiene tips:
 - Regular updates: Reminders to keep software and applications updated to protect against vulnerabilities.
 - Secure communication: Recommendations for using encrypted messaging apps such as Signal for sensitive communications.

Tool 23: Online support groups

Purpose: Online support groups provide a community where members can seek help, share experiences, and receive immediate support when faced with online harassment.

Functions of online support groups:

1. Immediate response teams:
 - Report and defend: Teams of volunteers who can quickly report abusive content and defend the victim by countering false narratives.

- Emotional support: Provide moral support and reassurance to victims through direct messages or group chats.
2. Resource sharing:
 - Guides and tips: Share resources on how to handle online harassment and protect personal information.
 - Best practices: Distribute best practices for maintaining digital security and dealing with online trolls.
 3. Networking:
 - Peer support: Foster connections among members who have experienced similar issues to build a support network.
 - Collaborative initiatives: Work together on initiatives to raise awareness and advocate for stronger protections against online violence.

Tool 24: Social media moderation

Purpose: Effective social media moderation tools help monitor and control the online discourse, ensuring that harmful content is identified and removed promptly.

Types of social media moderation tools:

1. Automated moderation:
 - AI algorithms: Use machine learning algorithms to detect and flag abusive content automatically.
 - Keyword filters: Implement keyword filters that block or flag harmful language in posts and comments.
2. Human moderation:
 - Dedicated moderators: Employ or designate party members to manually review flagged content and take appropriate action.
 - Training for moderators: Provide comprehensive training on recognising and dealing with various forms of online harassment.
3. Reporting mechanisms:
 - User reports: Encourage members to report abusive content directly to moderators or platform administrators.

- Feedback loops: Establish feedback loops to inform users about the actions taken in response to their reports.

Tool 25: Training from the communications department

Purpose: Training from the communications department equips members with the skills and knowledge to handle online harassment and communicate effectively under pressure.

Examples of training programmes:

1. Crisis management:
 - Scenario training: Simulate crisis situations involving online harassment and train members on appropriate responses.
 - Media training: Teach members how to handle media inquiries and public statements during a crisis.
2. Social media best practices:
 - Content creation: Guide members on creating positive and engaging content that minimises the risk of attracting trolls.
 - Interaction guidelines: Develop guidelines for interacting with followers and handling negative comments.
3. Legal awareness:
 - Legal rights: Educate members on their legal rights and protections against online harassment.
 - Reporting procedures: Train members on how to report harassment to social media platforms and law enforcement.
4. Digital literacy programmes:
 - Purpose: Educate members on the importance of digital literacy in protecting themselves from online harassment.
 - Content: Offer courses on recognising phishing attempts, securing personal information, and safe browsing practices.

Tool 26: Recognising when the line is crossed

Purpose: A checklist helps members identify when online harassment escalates to a level that requires intervention from authorities.

Checklist items:

1. Threat assessment:
 - Explicit threats: Identify explicit threats of violence, harm, or death.
 - Pattern of harassment: Recognise persistent and escalating patterns of harassment.
2. Personal information exposure:
 - Doxing: Detect instances where personal information is shared online without consent.
 - Stalking: Identify behaviours that indicate online stalking or tracking of movements.
3. Emotional and psychological impact:
 - Mental health indicators: Notice signs of severe emotional distress, anxiety, or depression due to online harassment.
 - Professional impact: Assess whether the harassment is affecting the victim's professional life and responsibilities.
4. Immediate action:
 - Report to authorities: Contact local law enforcement if there is an immediate threat to safety.
 - Secure evidence: Preserve all evidence of harassment for potential legal action.

Tool 27: Online violence emotions tracking diary

Purpose: This template helps individuals document their emotional responses to online harassment, providing a record that can be used for support and legal purposes.

TEMPLATE EXAMPLES

[Daily entries]

Date: _____

Time: _____

Platform (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, X): _____

Description of incident:

Emotional response (circle all that apply):

- Anger
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Sadness
- Other: _____

Action taken (e.g. reported to platform, contacted support group):

Follow-up needed:

[Weekly summary]

Week of: _____

Summary of incidents:

Overall emotional impact:

Additional support needed:

In addition to the tools, there should be a certain level of dedication to advocacy and policy development on the topic of online violence. Parties should advocate for ever-improving policies and regulations to protect against online harassment. They should also engage with policy-makers and social media platforms to jointly push for better enforcement of anti-harassment measures.

The intersection of VAWP and political marketing and communications

In political parties, the handling of VAWP is not only a matter of internal policy but also a significant public relations (PR) challenge. Internal incidents such as sexual harassment and online abuse can rapidly become public issues, impacting the party's reputation and electoral prospects. It is crucial for the communications department to manage these situations effectively, ensuring that the party responds swiftly and appropriately while maintaining public trust.

The role of the communications department in dealing with VAWP

The communications department plays a pivotal role in managing VAWP cases. Their responsibilities include crafting clear and consistent messages, ensuring transparency, and demonstrating the party's commitment to addressing and preventing VAWP.

Key responsibilities:

1. Crisis communications planning:
 - Develop a comprehensive crisis communications plan that includes protocols for handling VAWP allegations.
 - Ensure that all members are aware of the plan and understand their roles in executing it.
2. Message consistency:
 - Craft clear and consistent messages that reflect the party's zero-tolerance stance on VAWP.
 - Ensure that all public statements, social media posts, and internal communications align with these messages.
3. Transparency:
 - Communicate transparently about the steps the party is taking to address VAWP incidents.

- Avoid downplaying and/or dismissing allegations; instead, show a commitment to investigating and resolving them.

Common PR mistakes in dealing with VAWP cases

1. Minimising the issue:
 - Downplaying the severity of VAWP incidents can damage the party's credibility and alienate supporters.
 - Example: A party dismisses a high-profile harassment allegation as a 'personal matter', leading to public outrage and loss of trust.
2. Inconsistent messaging:
 - Inconsistent messages from different party members can create confusion and suggest a lack of a unified stance.
 - Example: One spokesperson expresses support for the victim, while another downplays the incident, sending mixed signals.
3. Delayed responses:
 - Failing to respond promptly to allegations can be perceived as indifference or incompetence.
 - Example: A party takes weeks to address a harassment claim publicly, resulting in media speculation and public dissatisfaction.
4. Lack of accountability:
 - Not holding perpetrators accountable can lead to perceptions of a cover-up and systemic issues within the party.
 - Example: A senior member accused of harassment faces no consequences, leading to accusations of favouritism and injustice.

Establishing a proactive communications strategy

1. Training and preparedness:
 - Provide training for all communications team members on how to handle VAWP cases.
 - Conduct regular simulations to ensure readiness for real incidents.
2. Clear reporting channels:

- Ensure that there are clear and accessible channels for reporting VAWP incidents within the party.
 - Publicise these channels to all members and supporters.
3. Empathy and support:
- Show empathy and support for victims in all communications.
 - Highlight the party's commitment to providing resources and support for those affected.

Your communications culture

Creating an ethical and respectful communications culture within a political party is essential for addressing VAWP effectively. This involves setting clear standards for behaviour, promoting gender equality, and ensuring that all members understand and adhere to these standards of ethical and respectful political marketing.

1. Developing a communications code of conduct: Establish a comprehensive code of conduct that outlines acceptable behaviour and communications standards. Include specific provisions addressing VAWP, ensuring that all forms of harassment and abuse are explicitly prohibited.
2. Training and education: Implement regular training sessions on gender sensitivity, ethical communications, and VAWP prevention for all members. Ensure that these training sessions are mandatory and provide practical guidance on maintaining respectful interactions.
3. Promoting inclusivity: Foster an inclusive environment where all members feel valued and respected. Highlight the contributions of women and other underrepresented groups in party communications and marketing materials.

Addressing gender biases and societal norms in communication

Understanding and addressing gender biases and societal norms is crucial for creating a communications culture that supports gender equality and combats VAWP.

1. Identifying biases:
 - Conduct internal reviews to identify and address any gender biases in party communications and policies.
 - Use tools such as gender audits and surveys to gather insights from members and supporters.
2. Challenging stereotypes:
 - Actively challenge and counter gender stereotypes in all party communications.
 - Promote diverse and positive representations of women in politics, highlighting their achievements and leadership.
3. Engaging men as allies:
 - Encourage male members to become allies in the fight against VAWP.
 - Provide training on recognising and addressing gender biases and promoting gender equality.
4. Community engagement:
 - Engage with communities and grassroots organisations to promote gender equality and combat VAWP.
 - Use community outreach programmes to educate the public about the party's stance on VAWP and its efforts to address the issue.

Tool 28: Guidelines for communications departments

Purpose: These guidelines ensure that the communications department handles VAWP incidents appropriately, maintaining the party's integrity and public trust.

Contents:

1. Crisis management protocols:
 - Develop step-by-step procedures for responding to VAWP incidents.
 - Ensure that all communications staff are trained in these protocols.
2. Consistent messaging:

- Establish templates and key messages for addressing VAWP cases.
 - Ensure that all statements are reviewed for consistency and appropriateness.
3. Transparency and accountability:
- Promote transparency in how the party addresses VAWP incidents.
 - Ensure that all communications reflect a commitment to accountability and support for victims.

Tool 29: External and internal communications guidelines for all members

Purpose: These guidelines help all party members understand how to communicate about VAWP issues, both within the party and to the public.

Contents:

1. Internal communications:
 - Encourage open and respectful dialogue about VAWP within the party.
 - Provide clear reporting channels and ensure confidentiality for those who report incidents.
2. External communications:
 - Guide members on how to speak about VAWP publicly, emphasising the party's commitment to addressing it.
 - Provide talking points and FAQs to ensure consistent messaging.
3. Social media use:
 - Offer guidelines on how to handle VAWP-related discussions on social media.
 - Encourage members to report any abusive content and support each other online.
4. Fighting gender stereotypes:
 - Ensure that all communications challenge and do not reinforce gender stereotypes.

- Highlight examples of women in leadership roles and their contributions to the party and society.
- Train members to recognise and counter gender biases in their interactions and communications.

Tool 30: Scenario examples

Examples of violence experienced by women in politics are provided below to raise awareness about the issue and to make clear what constitutes gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and hostile working environments. These scenarios can be used in preparing simulation workshops, for promotional material, for awareness-raising campaigns, for enhancing internal communications guidelines and protocols, and in other ways to enhance the tools listed above.

Scenario example 1: Sarah

Sarah is a young volunteer working at a local branch of a political party. Her role involves calling constituents to gather opinions on a key issue affecting their community. One evening, after a long day of work at the party office, Sarah stays late along with the branch leader. Seeing that she's tired and hungry, the leader offers to buy her dinner and drive her home. Grateful for the offer, she accepts.

During dinner, the leader begins flirting with her and suggests driving her to their place for drinks instead of taking her home, even offering to let her spend the night. Sarah politely declines, explaining that she's tired. She doesn't want to offend the leader, as they hold significant influence over her future in the party and she has aspirations of advancing in politics.

A few nights later, the same situation occurs. This time, Sarah rejects the leader's advances more firmly. While they back off for a few days, the behaviour resurfaces, and the leader tries again. Sarah makes it clear that she is not interested. Following her rejection, the leader informs her that

she will no longer be included in any party activities and that she won't be invited to future meetings. They also threaten her political ambitions, suggesting her career is over before it has begun. To add further pressure, the leader claims they will spread rumours that Sarah was the one making advances in an attempt to use sex to further her career within the party.

Scenario example 2: Johanna

Johanna has recently been elected to public office. She has always enjoyed fashion and takes pride in dressing well, wearing make-up, and following a skincare routine. For her, these choices make her feel confident and comfortable. In her workplace, a predominantly male parliament, she wears clothes that reflect her style.

However, whenever Johanna walks through the halls or speaks in parliament, some of her male colleagues make inappropriate comments about her appearance, looking her up and down and exchanging remarks that make her uncomfortable. Although she is used to this type of behaviour, it often leaves her feeling that her contributions are not taken seriously because of how she looks.

One day, to emphasise a serious issue she was presenting, Johanna wears a conservative black outfit, hoping her appearance will not distract from the topic at hand. As she begins speaking, one of her colleagues raises his hand – not to address the issue but to comment on her attire, saying he doesn't like her outfit that day. He adds that instead of 'playing with tough topics', she should 'stick to looking sexy', suggesting this is the key to her future success, while dismissing her views as unimportant.

Scenario example 3: Petra

Petra, an enthusiastic graduate with a master's degree in public policy, is thrilled to land an internship working with a prominent government minister. At first, she feels fortunate to be given such a great opportunity, with the minister involving her in important meetings and offering her responsibilities beyond what she had expected.

Over time, however, the minister's behaviour shifts. They begin asking personal questions, greeting her with hugs, and making comments about her appearance. These gestures escalate to casual touches and caresses. One day, while Petra is working, the minister approaches her from behind, places their hands on her shoulders, and begins massaging them while complimenting her on her work. Petra feels extremely uncomfortable, but she freezes, unsure of how to respond. Her colleagues, who witness the incident, say nothing.

Later, Petra learns that some of her colleagues have been gossiping about her, insinuating that she is enjoying special treatment and that she welcomes the minister's advances.

Scenario example 4: Alice

Alice, an active member of her political party, has built a strong reputation for her work with local citizens. As her popularity grows, party members encourage her to run in the next local election against the incumbent mayor, who has been accused of corruption multiple times. Though hesitant, Alice agrees because she cares deeply about her community.

Her campaign starts off well, with rising support and promising poll numbers. However, as her momentum grows, she becomes the target of personal attacks. While many people tell her that such hostility is normal in politics, one particular Facebook user starts harassing her more

frequently. This individual creates fake profiles, leaves numerous hateful comments on her posts, and bombards her with disturbing messages. Alice reports the situation to her team, but they dismiss him as just another 'crazy person' not worth worrying about.

Then, the harassment escalates. The user sends a direct message threatening to rape and murder Alice if she doesn't drop out of the race, even including her home address in the message.

Scenario example 5: Layla

Layla, a young political activist, has worked closely with her local party branch for years. After a successful election, she and several other members decide to organise a team-building event to celebrate their hard work. They raise money to rent rooms at a beachside resort where they can relax and enjoy themselves.

During the event, one of the newly elected councillors drinks too much and makes inappropriate advances towards Layla. Upset by the incident, she brings it up the next morning. However, the councillor and others excuse the behaviour, blaming it on the alcohol. Layla soon finds out that people are calling her a 'party breaker' for speaking up.

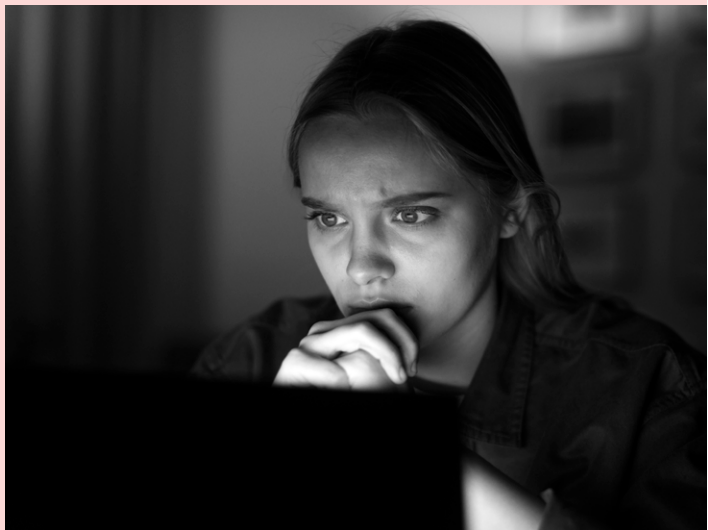
Despite the discomfort, Layla tries to maintain good relationships with her colleagues. However, the councillor begins sending her messages containing sexual innuendos, apologising the next day and blaming his behaviour on drunkenness. At first, Layla endures it, but when the messages continue, she firmly tells him to stop. The harassment pauses for a short time but soon resumes. Worse still, her parliamentary group begins to distance themselves from her, spending more time with the councillor and excluding her from informal gatherings and social events.

Scenario example 6: Maria

Maria, a rising politician known for her anti-corruption stance, becomes the target of online harassment as her influence grows. One day, a deepfake video of her in explicit content surfaces online, spreading rapidly. Though she immediately denounces it as fake, the damage is done – her political opponents fuel the rumours, and the video continues to circulate widely.

Despite her efforts to clear her name, and the urging of her team and her party to ignore the attacks, the deepfake overshadows her work, and even her supporters struggle to fend off the relentless attacks. After months of trying to fight back, Maria makes the difficult decision to step away from politics, as she feels the situation has taken a toll on her mental health.

The role of digital platforms in exacerbating VAWP cannot be overlooked.



Conclusion

Violence against women in politics is a critical issue that poses a significant threat to the integrity and inclusiveness of democratic systems. As we have explored throughout this publication, VAWP manifests in various forms – physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and online – all of which aim to undermine women’s participation and effectiveness in political life. Addressing this multifaceted issue requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach involving legal reforms, institutional support, and cultural change.

One of the primary conclusions drawn from our analysis is the urgent need for robust legal frameworks that explicitly address VAWP. International treaties such as the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW provide a foundation for these protections, but their implementation at the national level is crucial. Governments must enact and enforce laws that protect women in politics from all forms of violence and provide avenues for recourse and justice. This includes not only punitive measures against perpetrators but also preventive measures such as mandatory training on gender sensitivity and VAWP for all political actors.

Support systems within political parties and institutions are equally important. Parties must establish clear protocols for reporting and responding to incidents of VAWP, ensuring that victims receive the support they need and that perpetrators are held accountable. This includes providing psychological support, legal assistance, and career guidance to victims, helping them navigate the aftermath of violence and continue their political careers. Political parties should also foster a culture of respect and equality through regular training and awareness programmes, emphasising the importance of gender equality and the unacceptability of any form of violence.

The role of digital platforms in exacerbating VAWP cannot be overlooked.

Online harassment and abuse have become pervasive issues, with social media often serving as a battleground for gendered attacks on women politicians. Addressing this requires collaboration between governments, social media companies, and civil society to develop effective policies and tools for combating online violence. This includes enhancing digital literacy, improving content moderation, and providing support mechanisms for victims of online harassment.

The rise of AI and new technologies poses serious challenges in combating VAWP. Politicians and parties must be vigilant about AI-driven threats such as deepfakes, which can create falsified videos or images to damage reputations. Automated bots can also amplify online harassment, spreading false narratives at scale. Parties should focus on monitoring AI-generated content and training members to recognise digital manipulation. Additionally, developing policies to regulate the use of AI and working with social media and other digital platforms, to ensure they have strong content moderation systems, are crucial steps to protect women in politics from these evolving threats.

Cultural change is perhaps the most challenging yet most essential component of addressing VAWP. Deeply entrenched gender norms and stereotypes contribute to the persistence of violence and discrimination against women in politics. Public awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and the promotion of positive representations of women leaders are vital in challenging these norms and fostering a more inclusive and respectful political culture. By highlighting the achievements and contributions of women in politics, we can inspire future generations and reduce the stigma and hostility that often accompany their political engagement.

The implications of failing to address VAWP are profound. When women are deterred from participating in politics due to violence or the threat of violence, it undermines the principle of inclusive participation that is fundamental to democracy. This results in skewed representation and policy-making that does not fully reflect the interests and needs of the entire population. Ensuring that women can participate safely and equally in political life is not only a matter of justice but also a necessity for the health and sustainability of democratic systems.

In conclusion, tackling VAWP requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society. Legal reforms, institutional support, and cultural change must

work in tandem to create a safe and supportive environment for women in politics. By implementing the strategies and recommendations outlined in this publication, political parties, governments, and civil society can take meaningful steps towards eradicating VAWP and promoting gender equality in political representation. The journey towards a more inclusive and equitable political landscape is ongoing, but with commitment and action, we can make significant progress in ensuring that all voices are heard and valued in our democratic processes.

Glossary of terms

Acquaintance sexual assault

A form of sexual assault in which the survivor has an existing relationship with the assailant. The assailant may be someone the survivor hardly knows, such as a friend of a friend or a first date, or they may be someone the survivor knows well, such as a partner or a close friend.

Alcohol or drug facilitated sexual assault

The use of alcohol or other drugs to intentionally incapacitate or sedate another person for the purpose of sexual assault. This includes an assailant targeting someone who is already visibly intoxicated.

Coercion

A tactic used to intimidate, trick, or force someone to have sex without resorting to physical force. Examples include:

- Constantly pressuring someone and refusing to take 'no' for an answer.
- Implying sex is owed in return for favours, such as buying dinner, drinks, or gifts.
- Making someone feel guilty for not engaging in sex.
- Providing excessive alcohol to inebriate the person.

Consent

An agreement between participants to engage in sexual activity. Consent must be freely given and can be revoked at any time. It cannot be provided by someone who is under the influence of drugs or alcohol or by someone underage.

Corrective rape

Rape perpetrated against someone on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity, intended to force the victim to conform to heterosexuality or a normative gender identity.

Cyberbullying

A form of online violence that involves sending intimidating, threatening, or abusive messages or content over digital platforms.

Cyberstalking

The repeated use of electronic communications to harass, intimidate, or monitor another person. It can involve following someone's online activity, sending threatening messages, or tracking their physical location via technology.

Deepfake pornography

A form of online violence where a person's likeness, often a woman's, is digitally superimposed onto explicit or pornographic material without their consent, creating a false video that appears real. Deepfakes can be used to humiliate, blackmail, or discredit the victim.

Domestic violence

Also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic violence involves physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions used to gain or maintain control over an intimate partner.

Doxing

The public release of private or identifying information about someone without their consent, often with malicious intent, exposing them to further harassment or violence.

Economic violence

The use of economic resources to exert control over someone, such

as withholding money, restricting access to financial resources, or forbidding employment or education.

Emotional violence

Undermining a person's sense of self-worth through constant criticism, verbal abuse, or isolating them from friends and family.

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

Procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM is often motivated by beliefs about sexual purity and gender norms.

Femicide

The intentional killing of women or girls specifically because of their gender. Most cases are committed by partners or ex-partners and involve ongoing abuse, threats, or intimidation.

Gender-based violence (GBV)

Violence directed at an individual based on their gender, gender identity, or perceived gender, including emotional, physical, sexual, and psychological harm. Women, LGBTIQ+, and gender-non-conforming individuals are disproportionately affected by GBV.

Honour killing

The murder of a woman or girl by family members, typically for reasons related to preserving family honour. The woman is often accused of bringing shame to the family due to perceived sexual or social transgressions.

Human trafficking

The acquisition and exploitation of people through means such as force, fraud, coercion, or deception. This heinous crime ensnares millions of women and girls worldwide, many of whom are sexually exploited.

Image-based sexual abuse

A broad term that includes any non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos, whether the content is shared with malicious intent (e.g. for revenge, humiliation, or control) or even for financial gain. It also encompasses threats to share such images.

Interpersonal violence

Abuse that occurs within relationships, including physical, emotional, and psychological harm between partners, family members, or close friends.

Non-consensual sexting

Sending explicit messages or images without the recipient's consent, often as a form of harassment or control.

Online or digital violence

Any act of violence committed, assisted, or aggravated through digital platforms, including social media, text messaging, or email. This includes cyberbullying, doxing, deepfake pornography, and cyberstalking.

Physical violence

The use of physical force against someone, including hitting, kicking, burning, shoving, slapping, or restraining a person.

Psychological violence

Causing emotional or psychological harm through threats, intimidation, or isolation, including threats of harm to the victim's children, pets, or property.

Rape

Any non-consensual vaginal, anal, or oral penetration of another person with any bodily part or object. Rape can occur in all types of relationships, including marriage and armed conflict.

Rape culture

The social environment that allows sexual violence to be normalised and justified. It is rooted in patriarchy and fuelled by persistent gender inequalities and biases about gender and sexuality.

Revenge porn

The non-consensual distribution of intimate images or videos, often shared by an ex-partner as an act of revenge following the end of a relationship.

Sexual assault

Any act of a sexual nature carried out against someone without their consent, ranging from unwanted touching to forced intercourse.

Sexual harassment

Unwanted physical or verbal behaviour of a sexual nature, including groping, catcalling, or making sexually explicit comments.

Sexual violence

Any sexual act committed against the will of another person, either when this person does not give consent or when consent cannot be given because the person is a child, has a mental disability, or is severely intoxicated or unconscious as a result of alcohol or drugs.

Slut-shaming

The act of criticising a woman for her real or presumed sexual activity, or for behaving in ways that one thinks are associated with her real or presumed sexual activity.

Stalking

Repeated, unwanted behaviour directed at an individual, including following them, monitoring their activities, or sending them unwanted messages. Stalking can escalate to threats or physical violence.

Stealthing

The non-consensual removal of a condom during sex, when the other party has only consented to protected sex.

Survivor/victim

Both terms are used to refer to a person who has been sexually assaulted (see RAINN, 2021). 'Victim' is commonly used in the judicial system (by the police and in court) and is the most common term in the media. It is equally possible for a person to be a survivor and a victim depending on their experience. Personal, cultural, and socio-political reasons may influence a person in self-identifying with either term.

Survivor-centred approach

A form of response to sexual violence that prioritises the rights and needs of survivors, supporting them in defining their own experience and recovery.

Victim blaming

The act of shifting responsibility for sexual assault or violence from the perpetrator to the survivor, often by suggesting that the survivor's behaviour or appearance provoked the attack.

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About ELF

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 56 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard. ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen. ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks, and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.

About the author

Jasmina Mršo is an expert in working with political parties and political foundations. Currently the international officer of Naša Stranka, a social-liberal party in Bosnia and Herzegovina, she also serves as the Secretary-General for the Liberal Southeast European Network (LIBSEEN). Adding to her credentials, she has served as an elected local councillor in Sarajevo. A skilled capacity-building trainer, moderator, and experienced author and editor, Jasmina has collaborated with numerous local and international organisations and political networks. Her expertise particularly shines in training politically engaged women to realise their aspirations, evident in projects such as the Initiative 50% and the Balkan Women's Academy, where she works as a trainer. She is also a member of the Alliance of Her Advisory Board. Jasmina describes herself as a 'political nerd' with a special interest in gender equality and women's political participation, development cooperation, European geopolitical awakening, and EU enlargement.

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