11/08/23

We accept the invitation of the Task Force for Safer Participation in Public Life to submit relevant findings from the research *Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland.* In this research we collaborated with the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) and AkiDwA (the National Network of African and Migrant Women living in Ireland) to offer this first account of how Traveller, Roma and other ethnic minority and migrant women understand, assess, and experience local politics in Ireland. The research was jointly funded by the Irish Research Council under grant number [NF/2019/15800797], and by the Traveller and Roma Policy in the Equality Unit of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (through the Dormant Accounts Fund in the Department of Rural and Community Development – granted to the NTWF).

Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland has informed a range of policy and advocacy inputs on the issue of improving minoritised women's access to public life. These include the Unfinished Democracy: The Final report and recommendations of the Oireachtas Committee on Gender Equality; Ireland's 5th Report to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and research and programmes developed by the National Women's Council and Women for Election to improve diversity in politics in Ireland.

Our submission is of relevance to the Task Force as a central issue identified by participants was their experiences of sexist and racist abuse and harassment both on and offline. The findings are qualitative and derived from our interview data with minoritised women aspirants, candidates, and political representatives as well as party political officials, advocacy organisations and training programmes for women seeking a role in politics. The analysis in this submission is contextualised in global research on violence against women in politics (VAWIP) that supports our central findings regarding the experiences of VAWIP by ethnic racial minority and migrant women in pursuing a role in public life, their interpretations of and responses to such experiences. We also highlight the barriers that the participants identified to reporting VAWIP and the impacts of such violence on their ambition and capacity to enter and maintain a role in public life. Please consider our submission and recommendations generated by the participants and from our analysis of international research and organisational inputs on the global incidence of VAWIP. We provide consent to publish this submission.

Sincerely,

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Submission to the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life:

Pauline Cullen and Shane Gough (Maynooth University)

Pauline Cullen is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and an academic with a record of scholarship on gender equality including policy related research for the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI) and the European Institute for Gender Equality on women in decision making and in public life. She acted as research expert for the Irish Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality. Her work was been published in the *Journal of Civil Society, Social Movement Studies, Gender Work & Organization, Politics & Gender; Policy and Society; Media, Culture & Society, Politique Europeenne & European Politics and Societ*y.

She is co-editor of *Producing Knowledge, Reproducing Gender* (University College Dublin Press/University of Chicago Press). Pauline brings a sociological perspective that aligns to qualitative and ethnographic approaches now more common in feminist political scientific work on gender and politics (EUGENDEM project).

Shane Gough (BCL, Maynooth University; LLM, University College Dublin; PhD candidate, Maynooth University) is a researcher with a background in political activism and human rights law. He has been at the forefront of social justice campaigns for over a decade including LGBT+ rights (marriage equality campaign) and women's reproductive rights (Repeal campaign to repeal the constitutional ban on abortion in Ireland). He was a political advisor to a female Government Minister from 2016 to 2020. In addition to his research on minoritised women in politics and ethnic quotas, he is a member of the National Women's Council Coalition for Local Quotas which is lobbying for the introduction of gender candidate quotas at the local level.

Safe Participation of *Minoritised Women* in Political Life

In 2016, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched the #NotTheCost campaign, a global call to action to stop violence against women in politics. In its report to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, at the request of the United Kingdom for a "Review into the Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates and the Broader Implications for Other Candidates and Public Office Holders" it articulated a framework and provided evidence establishing the scale and impact of violence in politics against women. It argued that although violence in politics can be experienced by anyone, regardless of their gender, traditional definitions of 'political violence' had not captured the additional acts and threats perpetrated against politically-active women because of their gender and in some contexts their racial and ethnic status. Importantly it underlined how gender norms shape how and why women are subject to violence in politics, as well as what types of acts are used against them and that this kind of violence was not a new phenomenon but had for decades gone unreported and unrecorded (NDI 2017, pp 3-5).

The UN defines violence against women in politics as "any act of gender-based violence, or threat of such acts, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering and is directed against a woman in politics because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately." (UN 2018, p.5) The Council of Europe states that "acts of "everyday" sexism are part of a continuum of violence creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion and insecurity which limits opportunities and freedom" (Council of Europe 2020, p.2).

NDI's (2017) analysis argued that violence against women in politics has three distinct characteristics: it targets women because of their gender; can be gendered in its very form (as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence); and its impact is to discourage women from being or becoming politically active. Additionally, it noted that when compared to the experience of men in politics, women are more likely to experience familial or social intimidation in the private sphere. Drawing from academic assessments (Krook 2016) the NDI underlined "that acts of violence against women in politics — whether directed at women as voters, civic leaders, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials — have an intent beyond their specific target: to frighten women who are already politically active, to deter women who might consider engaging in politics, and to communicate to society that women should not participate in public life in any capacity. Therefore, the motive behind the violence is as important as the intended target". (NDI 2017, p 6). The lack of awareness and concerted response to violence against women in politics has been linked to attitudes more broadly which underline sexist violence that in turn undermine women's right to fully and equally participate in political and public life, also compromising the foundations of democracy and the exercise of democratic institutions (Council of Europe 2020). The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) has drawn up the European Charter for equality of women and men in local life. This charter addresses local and regional governments of Europe and signatories commit to the principle of equality of women and men, and to implementing the commitments set out in the charter within its territory. Among other things, it outlines the responsibilities of local governments as employers to ensure gender equal working conditions, combat sexual harassment and gender-based violence, and to ensure the security and safety of women and men in their territories. To date, Ireland has no local authority signatories to the Charter, nor are any local government representative organisations listed as members of the CEMR.

Evidence suggests that women in politics around the world have experienced violence and that their experiences have implications for their ability and willingness to participate actively in public life (UN 2018; IPU 2016; IPU 2019). The chilling effect that violence has on the ambitions of young women, new entrants to politics, and minoritised women is of particular concern. Analysis of the global experience of political violence affirms that often, women who experience abuse, harassment and even assault have been dismissed and told that these acts are merely "the cost of doing politics". But in fact, the costs of violence include a threat to the benefits of the sustainable and democratic governance that an inclusive political space can create. Research indicates that as women step forward to claim their right to participate in politics, they are met by a backlash in terms of violence that encompasses a range of harms including persistent harassment and discrimination, psychological abuse - in person and increasingly online - and physical or sexual assault (NDI 2017; Cullen and Gough 2022). An increase in violence against women in politics may be a function of the increase in female candidates (including those from minority groups) at local and national level (specifically in the context of the gender quota requirements). Notably, being a member of a minority group

is an aggravating factor which "exposes women parliamentarians to more sexist remarks and violence, often compounded by racism" (IPU 2019)

This submission is based on the first, and most comprehensive, account of the experiences of minoritised women in, or aspiring to be in, public life at the local level in Ireland (Cullen and Gough 2022). We use the term "minoritised women" to refer to Traveller, Roma, other ethnic minority and migrant women – all categories represented in the sample interviews. The research consisted of 45 in depth interviews with: minoritised women who have run for local election in Ireland; political parties; civil society advocacy organisations; training programmes; and relevant government departments. Arising from these interviews, the authors of this submission would like to underline the importance of applying an **intersectional lens** to any policy or legal commitments entered into to ensure the safe participation in public life, in particular of minoritised women. This requires consideration of the multiple and intersecting, often unique, forms of discrimination that women, and men, from minoritised communities face.

Old problems new challenges

Increasing polarisation in political movements and the predominance of social media and artificial intelligence as tools to spread disinformation and incite hatred have increased risks associated with public life. (Ging 2019; Demos 2020; Saresma and Tulonen 2022). The NDI (2017) affirmed that this should be understood as an area where an old problem has been given new and more toxic life. The anti-democratic impact of psychological abuse and other forms of violence through digital technology and digital media outlets, including social media can all significantly change the nature, scale and effect of the intimidation of women in politics. Attacks against politically-active women are often channelled online, where harassment is anonymized, —sometimes transnationally disseminated in an immediate and expansive manner while undermining a woman's sense of personal security in ways not experienced by men (IPU 2019, p. 6). In this way, online abuse, intimidation and harassment leads to women's self-censorship and withdrawal from public discourse and correspondence, and represents a direct barrier to women's free speech, undermining democracy in all its key elements: reducing participation, and constraining representation (NDI 2017, p,5)

Barriers to acknowledging the problem

The NDI and Interparliamentary Union (IPU) both affirm that acknowledgment of the problem of violence against women in politics has been hampered by three factors : first, the conventional wisdom that, unless there is a physical manifestation, it is not violence; the perception that there are no specific gender dimensions to violence in politics (all politicians must face a certain degree of abuse as part of their political role) ; and the fact that the vast majority of women who have experienced attacks are likely to remain silent about them.

The IPU-PACE (2018) study focussed on violence in Parliamentary contexts and shows how rarely such acts are reported in Europe. This analysis found that barriers to recognising and reporting violence in politics included a sense that the institutional environment tolerated such conduct; that at present no service or mechanism in parliament was available to report such offences and or doubts over the effectiveness or fairness of existing mechanisms. Other findings included fears that colleagues might find them at fault, question their veracity or insinuate they had provoked the harassment or violence inhibited politicians and political staff from reporting abuse and harassment. Furthermore, for women MPs in particular barriers to reporting included worries about how their public profile and parliamentary career might be affected as well as their commitment to party loyalty.

Polarisation of politics: a gendered and racialised phenomena

A large body of work has established how the erosion of women's rights are part of the racist and xenophobic playbook of far-right organisations that include support for democratic backsliding (Lombardo et al 2021; ISD 2021). The status of gender equality is then a litmus test for the quality of democracy in a society (Cullen 2021; Graff and Korolczuk 2021). Strong commitments to gender equality and intersectional equality democratises the public sphere by promoting inclusionary and participatory processes (CCINDLE)

Intersectional inclusion of marginalized groups' claims in policy making is in turn best served when politics is diverse (Siow 2023).

Minoritised women's participation in public life holds the potential to strengthen democracy (Tatari and Mencutek 2015; Funk and Molina 2021; Clayton, O'Brien, and Piscopo 2019). Attempts to limit their participation and or exclude them should be met with a robust political, institutional and societal defense of the value of diverse representation.

It is imperative that we understand that **gender** is a central organising framework used to foment political division and violence and that women and especially minoritised women are at particular risk. Ideas about women and men and their supposed roles in society are coded in racialised ways that that are used to support far right political and social movements (Verloo and Paternotte 2018). This has been long acknowledged by those researching organised opposition to democracy or de-democratisation (Lombardo et al. 2021). What also needs to be underlined is that mainstream political institutions and parties have a specific role in opposing these forms of democratic backsliding and have unfortunately in other jurisdictions become complicit in such agendas (Graff and Korolczuk 2021; Korolczuk 2023) . We know that this has specific implications for reinforcing the exclusion of minoritised women from public life and the roll back more generally on gender equality. It is important to also underline how abuse and harassment and violence in politics is not just a problem 'out there' in society to be viewed as exceptional and or the outcome of far-right commentators and organised groups. Research on parliaments as workplaces has already revealed them as products of masculinised organisational culture where harassment and abuse has long occurred at the same time as opportunities and supports to report same are limited (IPU 2016; IPU 2019; Erikson et al 2021; Raney and Collier 2021; Berthet and Kantola 2021; Berthet 2021). Parliaments have responded to gendered harassment (IPU 2019) although in some contexts in ways that confine the problem to the realm of social media rather than as a broader policy issue that requires political change (Phillps 2023). Evidence suggests that political institutions respond to racism by illustrating 'positive examples' of 'diversity' or statements and statutes that support inclusion (Ahrens at al 2022).[1] However, they may disregard the broader implications, practices and cultures that sustain structural racism. In such an environment, racialised people carry the burden of calling out racist acts, *a burden shouldered disproportionately by minoritised women* (Emejulu and Bassel 2021; Joseph 2020). The linking of racism to external actors can also work as a form of *deflection that can distance* political actors from the realities of *already existing* racist (including anti-Traveller racist) attitudes, which combine with sexism and misogyny to limit minoritised women's' access to public life (Kantola et al 2023). If mainstream institutions including media engage in practices that stereotype minoritised women this can soften the ground for forms of political violence and harassment. Analysis of mainstream media coverage of women and men from minoritised backgrounds that enter politics indicate that they are held to a different standard and defined as out of place in public life (Van der Pas and Aaldering 2020; Runderkamp et al 2022). Criticism of clothing, earrings, hair and other aspects of their physical appearance can supress minoritised women's political ambition (Lemi and Brown 2019).

These dynamics are also evident in the Irish context, where surveys and individual testimony revealed pervasive social media abuse of female politicians including threats of violence, sexual assault and rape (Cullen and McGing 2019; McGing 2021; NWC 2021; Cullen and Gough 2022). The Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) surveyed local councillors in 2021 and found almost three quarters of those who responded had experienced threats, harassment and intimidation. More than half of the respondents were female, and sexual and racist abuse feature in councillors' accounts of a range of online and offline threats and incidents (AILG-CMG 2021). Richardson's (2022) analysis found female local councillors received 8 times as many abusive tweets per followers compared to their male counterparts, while female senators received 3 times as many abusive tweets per followers than their male counterparts. The conditions for good democracy require that everyone can freely express their views, unconstrained by hate speech, sexual harassment or stereotypes that challenge expertise (Galligan 2015).

Different Paths: Shared Experiences

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[1] Ahrens, P, Berthet, V, Elomäki, A, Gaweda, B, Kantola, J, and Miller, C (Tampere University, Finland) (2021), 'Racism in the European Parliament', EUGenDem virtual workshop: Racism, anti-racism, and the EU Institutions.

Our research revealed the experiences of minoritised women of *violence and racist and sexist abuse and harassment*. As noted above the gendered dimensions of violence and harassment directed against politicians are increasingly evident and include physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence (Krook 2020; Krook and Sanín 2020). This violence targets minoritised women in ways that increase their marginalisation from politics (Krook and Sanín 2020) and is considered a deliberate attempt to place a barrier to more diverse political representation (Erikson et al 2021; Dhrodia 2018). The scale of this research is the local level where minoritised women are more likely to engage in public life. This is a context in which safety risks are more prevalent given the nature of campaigning and canvassing at the local level in Ireland, and sexist and racist abuse has a bigger impact as it becomes more personalised and proximate. Local politicians have particular vulnerabilities in terms of the risk of being targeted with harassment coming from constituents and political adversaries. Local and regional authorities are, in many countries, the levels of governance where many women begin their political careers. Therefore, organisations such as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe are particularly concerned because policies and measures at these levels can be determinant in changing the prevailing political culture (Council of Europe 2020). Our analysis (Cullen and Gough 2022) builds on findings in the UK that reveal that, in both its motives and outcomes, gendered and racialised harassment and violence has forced women to modify their campaign activities in ways that diminish their chances of winning, and that Black and minority ethnic women are disproportionately targeted compared with white women (Collignon et al 2022, IPU 2019). The experiences of the diverse sample of women in the research mirrored such findings in contexts with a longer tradition of minoritised people in political life. We underline the importance of working from a nuanced account of how harassment and abuse is experienced and navigated in different ways by minoritised women. An important finding in our work is that while minoritised women with different levels of resources and power have responded in different ways to harassment and abuse all women shared experiences of harassment and abuse that reveal the limits of how the current political system responds.

Consider the nature, prevalence and <u>impact of abuse</u>, including on-line abuse, and harassment of those who participate in political life within the Irish context.

In what follows we include some excerpted data and analysis from our research (Cullen and Gough 2022).

All representatives we interviewed acknowledged sexism and racism as a dimension of their experiences in politics. However, some were more explicit than others about the nature of this abuse, naming it as such and its effect on them as politicians. When considering the invitation by a party to run for local office, one representative was approached by another would-be candidate with the comment "do you think you are intelligent enough to run." Another representative that had run in a Seanad (Senate) race recounted a remark from another politician "You did well in the Seanad race because of your ethnicity." Comments of this nature can have the effect of undermining the legitimacy of minoritised women aspirants, candidates and elected representatives and ultimately deter minoritised candidates from participating in public life.

One female representative of colour resented the discussion about her race and ethnicity as she indicated that it always ended in someone defining her as a token. Some offered rationalisations that included that "women have to develop a thick skin" and wondered if the abuse was not personal to her but more to the political party affiliation. There were also comments that suggested an effort to resist being understood as a victim or unable to cope with such abuse as well as generalising the experience with the remark that race was an issue for both male and female politicians.

One woman of colour interviewee, while acknowledging racism, asserted that "I tend not to take it to heart." She adopted a benign interpretation stating, "People prefer to hear what is familiar, they can adapt and change." Reflecting research that confirms party loyalty often influences women's interpretations of their experiences of violence in politics: another participant contended that for her party "It would have been easier to support an Irish candidate than to support me."

Experiences of abuse and harassment:

All participants cited experiences of abuse and harassment on social media, while some also provided examples that occurred in public space and in the process of canvassing.

One participant recalled receiving "unpleasant emails which were a source of upset". For white migrant women commentary on accent, and questions about citizenship status including "where are you really from?" were encountered on doorsteps. One participant recounted being questioned as to why migrants or ethnic minorities were "allowed into local politics."

White migrant women did receive questioning about their nationality but suggested that they were less likely than visible migrant or ethnic minority women to experience explicit racism. In effect white migrant women candidates experienced abuse most often in the form of sexist remarks with implicit racialised elements whereas for non-EU migrants of colour, abuse and harassment was both sexist and explicitly racist.

For Traveller, Roma and Black women racialised identities carry specific penalties although all migrant women experience forms of sexualised and racist abuse. Concerns were also raised by these women about the links between such abuse and stereotypical representations of minorities in traditional media. One non-EU migrant woman when interviewed by local media described how she was interrogated, not about the local issues she wanted to speak to, but about her background and ethnicity. Other non-EU migrant candidates referred to ghost accounts on twitter that engaged in consistent abuse.

Some women of colour experienced sustained and extreme forms of abuse both on and offline. One interviewee relayed her experience which included being sent unsolicited pictures of a sexual nature by text message, late night phone calls to her home and being propositioned while canvassing. Other experiences included receiving dog excrement in her letterbox, the 'egging' of the exterior of one's home, racist graffiti in the housing estate where a candidate resided and threats against a candidates' children. Another non-EU migrant candidate recounted the taunts of "why don't you go back and change your own country" while canvassing and while in public spaces.

Anti-Traveller racism also creates unique challenges for Traveller women interested in a public role. Female Traveller candidates faced notable and enduring instances of anti-Traveller racism and sexism. One interviewee summed it up in this way: "we stay invisible to stay safe so if we are made visible it has to be in a way that we control." Notwithstanding the obstacles against them, many Travellers have run for office. However, with this decision often came an internal dialogue about whether or not to identify themselves as a Traveller, with the additional burden of assessing how running for a public role would subject them and their families to abuse. All Traveller interviewees ultimately self-identified as Travellers and in turn experienced significant forms of abuse and discrimination. These incidents encompassed the destruction or removal of posters, defacement with graffiti across their images, and a prevailing anti-Traveller racism that manifested specifically on social media. Furthermore, such distressing encounters extended to public spaces, evident immediately upon the campaign's initiation. Candidates recounted experiences where doors were purposefully shut, hands were retracted as if cleaning them, and campaign materials were torn up, creating an atmosphere where their presence was seen as an intrusion. Media interviews with Traveller candidates tended to focus on anti-social behaviour which was a source of frustration and upset for Travellers who wanted to speak about wider issues affecting Travellers and their local, settled, constituency.

Responses to experiencing violence in politics:

A common strategy was to 'block' or ignore social media abuse, or, if possible, to delegate its management to a colleague or friend. Those with personal and party support, including financial support outsourced communications in particular social feeds to be curated. This worked to insulate some women from the scale and intensity of abuse. This also underlined the reality that access to resources and human capital support especially during campaigning were an important determinant of the effect of online abuse. One representative of colour relayed that the party she belonged to had provided her with some resilience training, and she also relied on a basic strategy of blocking and ignoring racist and sexist abuse. Others indicated that training programmes they had participated in gave some advice especially on navigating social media which proved useful in dealing with this form of harassment. Of course, these strategies did not always work as harassment also took place face-to-face or at private residences.

Implications of violence in politics:

For white migrant women, social media abuse was cited as a reason to limit its use and/or have someone else curate it to insulate them from worry. This worked to supress their inclination to rely on social media as a form of communication. This had specific consequences for their candidacy given the pivotal role social media plays in modern political campaigns and its significant capacity to amplify a candidate's profile especially when working within limited media budgets. Managing communications was especially difficult for women of colour candidates where there were tensions between establishing a personal brand, and the use of personal images on posters such as braided hair, as one candidate commented "you cannot make any mistakes as a Black Woman." Some Traveller women also experienced similar difficulties in managing communication materials, where their Traveller identity was an immediate source of abuse.

However, aside from constraining voice and or strategic engagement online with constituents and the broader public, other implications included retreat from the public domain. One interviewee explained that experiences of sustained harassment and intimidation where she lived and worked resulted in her feeling "petrified of what will happen." This in real life abuse was in her view, coming from far-right organisations and individuals on social media, where a fake account was made in her name. She did report these incidences to the police; however, the abuse and harassment made her fearful to canvass. She summed up her experiences with the statement that "after that happened, I was afraid to go out" and that over time "it can break you." She reflected that in hindsight she was placed in a vulnerable position in a 'very white context' and that, although the party she campaigned with was supportive, they should have anticipated what she might face. All participants registered the emotional and psychological 'toll' or 'cost' of contemplating or competing for a political role as a woman, and as a minority. In line with previous research (Cullen and McGing 2019; Lima 2020), despite these experiences and events, most participants remained interested in pursuing a local political role.

Reporting abuse and harassment:

Some interviewees expressed reluctance to report incidences of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination due to the negative effect such reports might have for future campaigns for office. This suggests that there is an underreporting of incidences. While all women participants acknowledged they had experienced racism and sexism, some downplayed these experiences and their effects. There is apprehension about raising issues of sexism and racism because of the political costs of doing so. There is also a lack of clarity about where to report such issues. Acknowledgment of the problem of violence against women in politics has been hampered by the fact that victims may not even recognize what has happened to them as a form of violence or may deny the problem altogether in an effort to deflect charges that they are "hysterical" or "not coping" with the demands of the job. Many are afraid of being viewed as victims or accused of "playing the victim" for fear of justifying claims that women do not belong in political life (NDI 2017, 2)

Political Parties response to abuse in Public Life:

Our research confirms that political parties are aware of violence in politics and the experiences of female candidates and representatives. We also found that parties have devoted resources to protect female politicians and to support them when they have experienced abuse and harassment. At the time of our data collection these responses were predominantly reactive and based on incidents that were reported to party political officials and colleagues. Specific incidents that gained media coverage and involved street harassment had elicited a review of security arrangements for at least one public representative.

 Interviewees including political party staff and spokespersons noted social media and the rise of the far-right activity on and offline as an obstacle to participation, particularly for minoritised women. However, party officials also acknowledged the more pervasive and everyday toxicity confronting women in politics in which "negative comments are frequently made about women's clothing and weight which turns women off." Another stated that "there is an element in Ireland that do not want minorities elected." Restricting levels of abuse while protecting free speech was an important balance to achieve with social media platforms viewed as carrying responsibility in this regard. All parties mentioned the role of legislation (including hate

crime legislation) to tackle this type of abuse against politicians. Recent research (McGing and Lima for the NWC 2022) surveyed political parties on their policies and practices regarding social media abuse. They found that most constitutions and internal party codes still do not cover the various types of abuse that women in politics face online. They also found there was no specific reporting mechanisms for online abuse and there were protean efforts to move beyond diversity and equality officers to develop more comprehensive approaches to the problem of violence against women in politics.

2. Consider measures to address the problem of abuse and harassment within political life ;

Participants in the research recommended access to emotional and psychological supports particularly after a campaign and especially if they had been unsuccessful; training on how to deal with sexism and racism on and offline; hate crime legislation and a code of practice with sanctions for racist comments by politicians was considered important, as were legislative frameworks to ensure parties diversify candidates.

Other recommendations from our research (Cullen and Gough 2022) that are relevant include:

- Fund equality, diversity and inclusion training including intercultural training for elected members and staff of political parties, local authorities, councils and the Oireachtas.
- Require compulsory Codes of Practice with zero tolerance for sexism and racism with sanctions for breaches and clear channels to report incidents of sexism and racism both within political parties and political institutions (Oireachtas and Local Authorities).
- Strengthen and provide legislation for Media Codes of Practice on anti-racist and anti-sexist reporting (including a media fund to support positive representations of Traveller, Roma, and other ethnic minority cultures in public life).
- Implement hate crime/speech legislation (on and offline) and create specific offences of:
  - hate speech (including racist and sexist abuse) against politicians;
  - hate speech against any group while holding elected office; and
  - include a definition of gender-based political violence.
- Political parties to develop and implement a Gender and Diversity Action Plan including a dedicated equality, diversity and inclusion officer with relevant expertise.
- Provide comprehensive training for minoritised women candidates and elected representatives including how to deal with social media abuse, sexism, racism (including anti-Traveller racism).

3.. The response of the Houses of the Oireachtas and Political Parties in demonstrating leadership in promoting civil discourse in public life.

Globally, data on violence against women in politics is not systematically collected or recorded, due in part to "largely gender-blind election monitoring standards and the lack of political will to address violence against women in elections" (UNGA 2018, [35]). This function of monitoring could be performed by the newly established Electoral Commission.

Local party organisations and local authorities may not have the same resources as the national level to assist politicians with issues to do with security, safety and equality. National authorities could capacitate local government bodies and parties in how to handle physical, psychological and sexual violence against politicians. Nationwide surveys and studies on the prevalence of the problem can enable a fact-based assessment of the situation. Furthermore, national level institutions can collect good practices from around the country and create fora for exchanging knowledge and experiences (COE 2020).

- Provide resources at the local level to assist with issues related to security, safety and equality.
- Ensure effective data collection on violence against women in politics, particularly during critical electoral contests (Electoral Commission).

In terms of the parliamentary response, the 2019 *Houses of the Oireachtas Commission Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles and Policy* is a welcome first step. We recommend exploring where this policy can include stipulating that existing workplace legislation on anti-discrimination applies to all politicians regardless of employment arrangements or providing specific legislation addressing violence and harassment against politicians. While this policy states that parliamentarians will "Prevent bullying, harassment and sexual harassment in the Parliamentary Workplace", it does not similarly address racism, including anti-Traveller racism, by members of the Houses of the Oireachtas (although it does state that parliamentarians will "Be advocates for diversity and inclusion and take steps required to prevent discrimination and harassment on equality grounds"). The inclusion of sanctions against anti-racist comments in the Policy should be a priority, as should ensuring the policy is known to members and there are appropriate reporting mechanisms for victims of sexist and/or racist abuse in parliament. As well as reinforcing the importance of data collection, UN Women (2018) suggest a number of initiatives that legislatures can take to address Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP).

- Adoption of laws and policies which define and protect against VAWIP.
- Adapt existing violence against women legislation to explicitly provide measures on protecting against VAWIP.
- Protocols and regulations adopted by the Electoral Commission to prevent VAWIP in the electoral process.
- Provide gender-sensitivity training to the police, adjudicators, judges, lawyers, who may handle reported cases of VAWIP.
- Establish methods to report cases of VAWIP safely/confidentially.

We encourage the State, Oireachtas and political parties to cooperate to institutionalise a comprehensive social media harassment policy with appropriate sanctions for those who commit violence against women in politics.