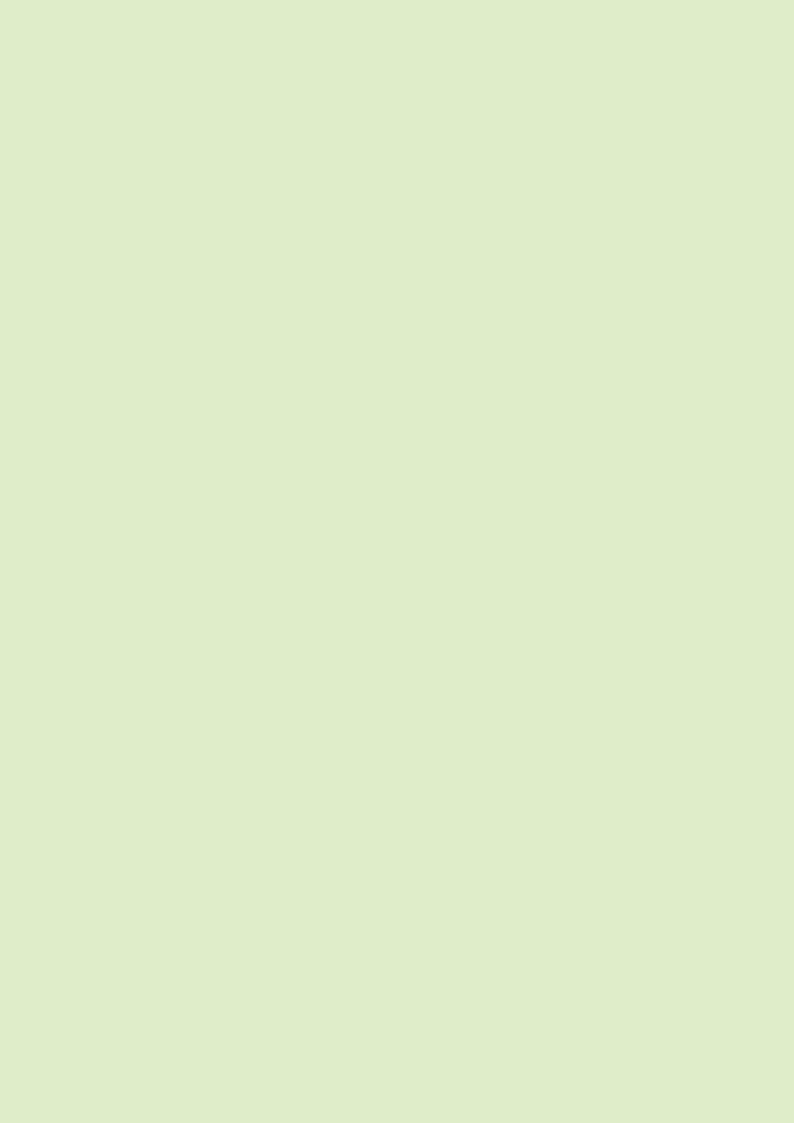Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas

Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life

Report as presented to the
Ceann Comhairle and the Cathaoirleach

May 2024

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- Caitríona Gleeson – CEO, Women for Election

- Deputy Cathal Berry (Independent)

- Ciara Phelan – Journalist, *Irish Examiner* –
  member of the group between 25th May 2023 and 11th April 2024

- Senator Fiona O'Loughlin (Fianna Fáil)

- Gabrielle McFadden – Former Senator (Fine Gael)

- Deputy Ivana Bacik (Labour Party)

- Deputy Jennifer Carroll MacNeill – Minister of State (Fine Gael)

- Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor (Fianna Fáil)

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- Senator Lisa Chambers (Fianna Fáil)

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- Nicola Kelly – Development worker, Inner City Organisations Network (ICON)

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Foreword

Abuse of those in political life is escalating and corrosive, threatening our democratic and political systems and acting as a barrier to participation in public life.

In May 2023, I was asked by the Ceann Comhairle, Deputy Séan Ó Fearghaíl, and the Cathaoirleach, Senator Jerry Buttimer, to chair the **Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life** to examine the issue of abuse, including online abuse, in political life. In accepting their invitation, I was driven by my experiences as former Garda Commissioner and United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Safety and Security, which provided insight into the threat posed by these issues, and the importance of coordinated and effective action to protect the values of our democracy and promote a safe and inclusive society. As a citizen, I share the deep concerns of many ordinary people at the prevalence and impact of abuse on those involved in public life and I am especially concerned that this will dissuade many well-intentioned and well-qualified people from entering political life in the future.

The membership of the Task Force included members from the Houses of the Oireachtas, local councillors, representatives from civic society, media and other experts. All of them gave their time willingly, and I wish to thank my colleagues on the Task Force and the secretariat provided by the Houses of the Oireachtas for their commitment and contribution to the work.

I also express my appreciation to all the participants for their valuable contributions including written and oral submissions from a wide range of stakeholders nationally and internationally. The Task Force was concerned to hear repeated and harrowing testimonies of the nature, extent and impact of abuse directed at politicians, their families and their staff which were often driven by misogyny, sexism, racism and homophobia. I am particularly grateful to those who shared their personal experiences of abuse and harassment, in some cases reliving the trauma that had been visited on them.

The establishment of the Task Force demonstrates the commitment of the Houses of the Oireachtas to addressing the serious issue of abuse in political life. In this regard, I acknowledge the work of UCD in conducting research of Members of the Houses and their staff to assess their experience of abuse and its impact. I hope that this work prompts further research in this area to better understand and address the root causes of the problem.

Beyond the important learnings for Ireland, it is hoped that our findings can also provide insights and experience to share and inform other parliaments' consideration of this global challenge. This research and other studies, nationally and internationally, demonstrate that the causes and negative consequences of abuse within political life for safety, well-being and freedom to participate in political life are far-reaching, for individuals and their families. What is clear from the research is that those in political life in Ireland are experiencing the same high levels of abuse as their counterparts internationally.

The degrading of political discourse over the last years suggests that action is needed to facilitate political discussions and debate in a dignified and constructive manner, even on matters on which we fundamentally disagree. Politicians have a special responsibility to demonstrate leadership. While robust political debate is important and necessary, it must be civil and respectful at all times. It is critical that Irish politics becomes inclusive with more diverse range of life backgrounds, experience, and perspective, where participants and those aspiring to participate feel accepted, safe, respected and supported. Our diverse and modern Irish community should be reflected in our politics at all levels and our differences celebrated.

The Task Force agreed this Report on 11th April 2024. Its recommendations are supported by an overarching action plan. I am confident that the plan, when implemented, will not only make participation in Irish political life safer but could and should be a major step in future proofing our democracy.

Glossary of Terms

Abuse – the use of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological violence or threats to control the thoughts, opinions, behaviours or emotions of someone else; It should be noted that the term 'abuse' is used in the Report to include abuse, harassment and intimidation, including online

AGS – An Garda Síochána. The national police and security service of the Republic of Ireland

AILG – Association of Irish Local Government

An Coimisiún Toghcháin – The Electoral Commission, an independent statutory body that oversees elections in Ireland, established in February 2023

Cathaoirleach – The Chair of Seanad Éireann, the Upper House of Parliament in the Republic of Ireland

Ceann Comhairle – The Chair of Dáil Éireann, the Lower House of Parliament in the Republic of Ireland

CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Coimisiún na Meán – The commission for regulating broadcasters and online media, in the Republic of Ireland, established in March 2023

CPO – Crime Prevention Officer

CSPE – Civil, Social and Political Education

Cyberviolence – Online behaviours that criminally or non-criminally assault, or can lead to assault of, a person's physical, psychological or emotional well-being

Dáil Éireann – the Lower House of Parliament in the Republic of Ireland; commonly referred to as "the Dáil"

DCEDIY – Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

DEIS – Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools – a Department of Education programme to provide pathways to better opportunities for those in communities at risk of disadvantage and social exclusion

Doxing – searching for and publishing private or identifying information about (a particular individual) on the internet, typically with malicious intent

DSA – Digital Services Act, an EU Regulation which came into force in November 2022

ECPRD – European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation, an international network for cooperation between parliamentarians on research, documentation and information

GREVIO – Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence; the independent expert body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)

Harassment – any form of unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person

Intimidation – the use of threats or other behaviour designed to cause someone to act or to refrain from acting in a manner in which that person is entitled to act, to the detriment of that person or of another person

Houses of the Oireachtas – the two Houses of Parliament in the Republic of Ireland: Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann

ICCL – Irish Council of Civil Liberties

IHREC – Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

IPU – Inter-Parliamentary Union

Judiciary – The judicial authorities of a country; judges collectively

LGBTQI+ – An umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people

Local Councillor – An elected member of a local authority directly elected in local elections

MEP – Member of the European Parliament

Meta – Meta Platforms, Inc., – an American multinational technology conglomerate which owns and operates Facebook, Instagram, Threads and WhatsApp

NAPAR – National Action Plan Against Racism

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NWCI – National Women's Council of Ireland

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

OSMR Act – Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022

PACE – The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The parliamentary arm of the Council of Europe, dedicated to upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law

Pew – The Pew Research Centre; A nonpartisan think tank based in Washington D.C. that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world

PSNI – Police Service of Northern Ireland

Seanad Éireann – the Upper House of Parliament in the Republic of Ireland; commonly referred to as "the Seanad"

Senator – A member of the Seanad or Upper House of Parliament in the Republic of Ireland

SIPO – Standards in Public Office Commission

STEM – a common abbreviation for four closely connected areas of study: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

T.D. – A member of the Dáil or Lower House of Parliament in the Republic of Ireland; A Dáil member's official Irish title is "Teachta Dála" which in English means "Deputy to the Dáil"

TFGBV – Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

VAWP – Violence against Women in Politics

Summary

The Ceann Comhairle, Deputy Séan Ó Fearghaíl, and the Cathaoirleach, Senator Jerry Buttimer, established a **Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life** in response to reports that an increasing level of abuse, including online abuse, harassment and intimidation (shortened to 'abuse' throughout the Report) is being experienced by those who participate in political life. The consequences of abuse, as reflected in national and international studies, are far-reaching for the individuals who experience it and can act as a potential barrier to participation in political life and undermine the democratic process.

The Task Force approached the work on a thematic basis, guided by its Terms of Reference, in considering the prevalence and impact of abuse, measures to safeguard participation in political life and the collective response of Government, its agencies and other stakeholders to address the issue. The Task Force met with a wide range of stakeholders and considered written submissions to inform its work, draw conclusions and arrive at the tangible recommendations contained in this Report.

From the evidence, the Task Force concludes that abuse in political life is prevalent, problematic and targeted disproportionately at women and minority groups. Online abuse is intensifying and becoming normalised, fuelled by the anonymity provided by digital platforms, and often driven by misogyny, sexism, racism and intolerance.

The Task Force concludes that given the potentially serious impact on democracy, and on diverse and inclusive representation, a strategic and coordinated approach is needed to address the issue. The Task Force recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas lead in coordinating a comprehensive and sustained response, in partnership with Government Departments and other relevant stakeholders, through the establishment and resourcing of a Senior Officials Oversight and Implementation Group to action the recommendations in this Report.

To safeguard Members, the wider parliamentary community and the Leinster House environs, it is recommended that the Houses of the Oireachtas review and strengthen security arrangements and ensure mechanisms are put in place for enhanced cooperation and information sharing with An Garda Síochána (AGS). Guided by international best practice, the Task Force recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas establish and resource an opt-in social media monitoring service for Members, to monitor and report online threats and harassment against them.

Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas have, individually and collectively, a unique responsibility in upholding values and principles that facilitate robust but respectful debate through their interactions in Dáil and Seanad Éireann and in wider political debate. This responsibility should be reflected in the codes of conduct for Dáil and Seanad Éireann and the Task Force recommends that the existing Codes of Conduct under the Standards in Public Office Act 2001 for TDs and Senators be reviewed and updated to include provisions to address abuse, including online abuse, and discriminatory behaviours.

An Garda Síochána (AGS) has a key role in upholding the rule of law, protecting citizens' rights and safeguarding those in political life. The Task Force makes recommendations regarding the need for a structured and coordinated intelligence-led approach by AGS in discharging its responsibilities, providing crime prevention advice and responding appropriately to reported incidents. Reporting should become the 'norm', with clear mechanisms established for this purpose and a 'zero tolerance' approach applied across the criminal justice system, political life and civil society.

To prevent abuse, the Task Force sees the need to promote a greater awareness across political life, the criminal justice system and civil society of both the causes and the impact of abuse on those in political life, including on the person, their family and the potential to undermine the democratic process.

The Task Force views political parties as central in creating a culture of respect, equality and diversity among their membership that supports the Irish political system. It is recommended that political parties have codes of conduct in place with clear principles and expected standards of behaviour, including internal pathways for reporting abuse in a confidential manner.

The Task Force concludes that social media platforms and the regulator, Coimisiún na Meán, have critical roles to play in proactively addressing online abuse against politicians and political candidates. All social media platforms have a responsibility to take proactive measures to safeguard all users, including those in political life, and to ensure a safe space for civil political discourse. Furthermore, Coimisiún na Meán must fully utilise its powers to regulate social media platforms and to address inaction by social media platforms in responding to the problem of online abuse.

Recommendations of the Task Force are presented below.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that An Coimisiún Toghcháin, as part of its research programme, undertake comprehensive research of the prevalence of abuse of politicians, at national and local level, and of political candidates, and establish a baseline assessment of the issue. This should include the targeted abuse of women and minority groups during election cycles and identify barriers to participation and inform the policy response to address them.

2. It is recommended that local authorities provide psychological support services to local representatives, similar to the model of services provided through the Houses of the Oireachtas Workplace Support Programme.

3. It is recommended that consideration should be given to the greater development, through government funding of support networks for women and minority groups involved in political life, including the women's caucuses.

4. It is recommended that it should no longer be a requirement for the home addresses of election candidates to be published and this should be optional.

5. It is recommended that Government adopt a long-term strategic approach to increasing political participation by under-represented groups, to achieve greater diverse and inclusive representation, as a matter of priority. This objective should be supported by current and coordinated equality, integration and inclusion strategies. The strategies should include specific, measurable and timebound actions and be adequately resourced to achieve stated outcomes.

6. Funding streams available to NGOs and community groups under all inclusion strategies should be widely publicised to support initiatives.

7. That the full implementation of Recommendations 26 and 27 of the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality which relate to school resourcing and curriculum redevelopment be prioritised to address sexism and gender inequality from a young age, as these are identified as drivers of abuse of women in politics.

8. It is recommended that An Coimisiún Toghcháin, as part of its awareness and education programme, undertake a campaign to raise awareness of the impact of abuse in political life, including on the participation of women and minority groups.

9. It is recommended that formalised structures are put in place within AGS to provide cohesion and consistency in safeguarding those in political life, including:

i. that AGS, in conjunction with the Houses of the Oireachtas authorities, strengthen arrangements to exchange information, assess the prevailing security situation and agree appropriate security measures.

ii. that comprehensive security reviews be conducted on a periodic basis to ensure appropriate and proportionate measures are in place to maintain safe access and egress to the Leinster House complex, while balancing the rights of individuals and citizens to engage with the democratic process.

iii. that AGS assign a dedicated, appropriately resourced team of personnel, with sufficient knowledge of the workings of the Houses and their environs, to liaise with Leinster House authorities and to ensure the required day to day security and liaison arrangements are in place.

iv. that AGS appoint dedicated points of contact at national, regional and local level to proactively provide tailored security advices to elected representatives and establish reporting mechanisms to receive and coordinate responses to incidents of abuse.

v. that information regarding reports of threats and investigations, including the outcome of enquiries and investigations, be collated at national level to inform the overall threat assessment and the design and implementation of appropriate security measures.

vi. that AGS engage with An Coimisiún Toghcháin and Local Authorities in providing general crime prevention and security advice to prospective candidates and arranging crime prevention briefings, as appropriate, through the Divisional Crime Prevention Officers. Details of designated contact points for electoral candidates should be published online by AGS to report incidences of abuse.

vii. that AGS proactively engage and build strong working relationships with the proposed Oireachtas social media monitoring unit [see Recommendation 13(ii)], and Oireachtas engagement forum [see Recommendation 13(iii)] to monitor, assess and action as appropriate infractions of the code or breaches of the criminal law.

viii. that An Garda Commissioner designate the Assistant Commissioner, Garda National Crime and Security Intelligence Service (GNCSIS), specific responsibility for the overarching implementation of the above recommendations in view of the urgency and seriousness of the issue.

10. It is recommended that social media companies take proactive measures to address abuse against those in political life by:

    i. active participation in the engagement forum with the Houses of the Oireachtas [see Recommendation 13 (iii)] and other stakeholders on the collective response to online abuse.

    ii. increasing engagement with political representatives and their staff, including through the provision of continued training and information seminars.

    iii. dedicating adequate resources to moderate harmful content against politicians.

    iv. reviewing Content Policies to provide those engaging in political life with the same protections as private individuals.

    v. adhering to the forthcoming Online Safety Code.

    vi. cooperating and building strong working relationships with Coimisiún na Meán, AGS and designated trusted flaggers in pre-emptively countering and removing harmful content.

11. It is recommended that Coimisiún na Meán:

    i. fully utilise its powers to ensure appropriate protections for elected representatives and candidates online, given the potential impact and harm of online abuse to individual politicians and to the democratic process.

    ii. accredit the Houses of the Oireachtas, local authorities and political parties as trusted flaggers so that platforms are obliged to give priority to reports received from them.

    iii. consider applications from NGOs for accreditation as trusted flaggers so that platforms are obliged to give priority to reports received from them.

    iv. consider the benefits and make recommendations on joining the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse.

    v. build strong working relationships with relevant entities across the system to fulfil their mandate.

12. It is recommended that Dáil and Seanad Standing Orders provide that, at the first sitting of each Dáil and Seanad, the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach make a statement seeking Members' collective commitment to civil and respectful discourse in political debate in the Houses.

13. It is recommended that the Houses of the Oireachtas:

    i. establish and resource a Senior Officials Implementation and Oversight Group comprising representatives from the Houses of the Oireachtas, relevant Government Departments and other relevant stakeholders to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force. The Group should report annually to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

    ii. establish and resource a comprehensive social media support service for Members, to include:

        a. an opt-in social media monitoring service to monitor and report abusive, intimidating and harmful content directly to social media platforms as trusted flaggers for action and to report online abuse to AGS; and

        b. training on safe engagement online for Members and their staff, including technical assistance in using tools available to deter and report malicious content.

iii. establish a forum for engagement with representatives from social media companies, Coimisiún na Meán and AGS on the collective response to online abuse of Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

iv. facilitate information sessions for Members and their staff on workplace security measures.

v. establish a dedicated single point of contact in the Superintendent's Section to whom security related incidences can be reported, including an escalation process to AGS as appropriate.

vi. in conjunction with AGS, create strong working relationships to facilitate the exchange of information, conduct periodic security reviews and agree and implement appropriate security measures.

vii. undertake a review of the Security Requirements Allowance scheme to assess that it sufficiently meets the requirements of Members and identify the reasons for the low uptake to date.

viii. implement the relevant recommendations of the Family Friendly Forum Report (FFF Report) including:

- to review existing codes of conduct on appropriate behaviour for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and set out clear sanctions for breaches of these codes (Recommendation 25 of the FFF Report); and

- to undertake an audit of the Houses of the Oireachtas using the gender sensitive toolkit provided by the IPU (Recommendation 31 of the FFF Report).

ix. review and update the existing Codes of Conduct under the Standards in Public Office Act for TDs and Senators to include provisions to address abuse, including online abuse, and discriminatory behaviours.

14. It is recommended that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Local Authorities:

i. review the security allowance scheme to ensure that it sufficiently meets the requirements of elected members of local authorities.

ii. provide information sessions on security matters to local councillors and directly elected mayors, in conjunction with AGS on workplace security measures.

iii. explore the feasibility of establishing comprehensive social media support services for local councillors and directly elected mayors, to include:

a. an opt-in social media monitoring service to monitor and report abusive, intimidating and harmful content directly to social media platforms as trusted flaggers for action and report online abuse to AGS; and

b. training on safe engagement online, including technical assistance in using tools available to deter and report malicious content.

15. It is recommended that political parties:

i. put in place measures to support women and minority members and candidates, noting the particular challenges these groups may encounter in participating in political life.

ii. promote and implement the Anti-Racism Election Protocol.

iii. have in place internal codes of conduct for members of their party that prohibit abuse, both for elected members and for ordinary members, with sanctions for those who do not comply.

iv. have complaints processes and trained points of contact within the political parties for members of the party who experience abuse.

v. have systems in place to collate data on reported incidences and outcomes of abuse to facilitate the monitoring and assessment of the prevalence and impact of abuse.

vi. equip election candidates with campaign training that incorporates measures to protect against abuse.

vii. undertake a benchmarking exercise of their policies and procedures against the NWCI Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties and the OSCE toolkit for political parties to tackle violence against women.

viii. work collectively to develop an all-party code of conduct or civility code for parties and their membership to adopt.

16. In view of the need to protect the integrity and sustainability of our democracy and the leadership required in that regard, it is recommended that political party leaders and group leaders convene annually under the leadership of the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach to share progress on actions taken by the political parties on foot of the recommendations in this Report.

CHAPTER 1: Prevalence and Impact of Abuse and Harassment in Political Life

Introduction

This Chapter considers the prevalence and impact of abuse experienced to inform an understanding of what abuse is, how it is experienced, by whom, the forms it takes, and whether it is targeted at particular groups in political life. The Task Force met with An Coimisiún Toghcháin, academics, international agencies and representative associations, and considered written submissions received. The findings of an academic survey by UCD of Members and their staff, commissioned by the Task Force, assisted in assessing the prevalence and impact of abuse.

Evidence Presented to the Task Force

1.1 UCD Survey Results on Abuse of Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and Political Staff

UCD distributed a quantitative survey to all 220 members of Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann and to 580 political staff in February 2024. In total, 61 Members and 200 political staff completed the survey, representing a completion rate of around 28% and 34% respectively. A copy of the full research report is available on the Task Force webpage (https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members/office-holders/ceann-comhairle/task-force-on-safe-participation-in-political-life/). Some key findings from the research are summarised below.

Figure 1: Survey findings on abuse of members and political staff of the Houses of the Oireachtas

| 94% of Members & 72% of political staff who responded experienced abuse | Female Members experienced more sexual and sexist abuse | Abuse had negative impacts for victims, their families, and political participation | Issues of immigration and women's rights elicited the most abuse |

Prevalence and experiences of abuse

i. The UCD survey found that abuse of Members and political staff is highly prevalent; **94% of Oireachtas Members and 72% of political staff who responded to the survey reported that they experienced some form of abuse**. In this respect, the findings reflect international study findings (below) on the pervasiveness of abuse in political life.

ii. Social media was found to be the most common location of abuse of Members, with **73% of Members** responding reporting **frequent online abuse**. In respect of political staff, **14% of political staff** responding reported **frequent online abuse** and **13%** reported encountering **frequent abuse at constituency offices**.

iii. The five most prevalent experiences of abuse for Members and political staff are listed in Table 1 below. More than half of Members (52%) and a third of political staff (34%) reported frequent experience of abusive language. More than one third of Members also reported frequent experience of prejudicial slurs (38%), unwelcome comments on their physical appearance (35%), and having false information published about them (34%).

Table 1: Most frequent experiences of abuse reported

Members	Political staff
Experience of abuse (prevalence %)	**Experience of abuse (prevalence %)**
Use of abusive language (52%)	Use of abusive language (34%)
Use of prejudicial slurs (38%)	Comments on appearance (13%)
Comments on appearance (35%)	Persistent unwanted calls/messages (12%)
Publication of false information (34%)	Prejudicial slurs (10%)
Spread malicious/false rumours (28%)	Spread malicious/false rumours (5%)
Persistent unwanted telephone calls/messages (21%)	Unwanted approaches/attempts to contact (5%)

iv. The research found that **female Members experienced significantly more sexual harassment (including online), threats of a sexual nature, unwanted sexual approaches, sexually explicit messages, prejudicial slurs, and comments on their physical experience than male members**. International and Irish studies have both found similar findings on the gendered and sexual nature of abuse of female politicians.

v. Younger politicians were more likely than older politicians to report experiencing any form of abuse.

Impact of abuse

vi.   The survey findings reinforce international evidence on the **serious negative consequences of abuse in political life for victims, their families, political participation, and the health of democracy**. The survey found that:

    a.   The vast majority, 89% of Oireachtas Members and 75% of political staff who responded, reported feeling some level of **anxiety or fear as a result of abuse**.

    b.   Almost half (49%) of members and 16% of political staff reported **concerns for the safety of their families**.

    c.   Almost one-quarter (24%) of members reported suffering from serious **physical and mental health issues**, such as anxiety disorders or stress-related illness, because of abuse.

    d.   Safety of political staff is highlighted with 60% reported requesting increased security at constituency offices and 24% reported being afraid of physical attack. Possibly in response to this, 23% of political staff reported changing their daily activities, 19% worried about being out in public, and 19% had increased security at their homes.

    e.   **Abuse had a strong impact on Members engagement on certain (mainly controversial) policy issues**. Specifically, 51% of members reported that they were hesitant to come forward with a particular opinion, 45% that they avoided engaging on a particular policy issue/field, and 33% that they restricted their freedom of speech on a particular issue all as a result of abuse.

    f.   The survey found that issues of **immigration, women's rights, LGBT+, housing and the environment elicited the most instances of abuse**. This raises the question of whether these policy areas are the areas that members limit their freedom of expression and engagement on due to abuse.

    g.   Statistical analysis of survey results further found that **issues of immigration and housing were linked to physical attacks**, threats to harm and calling for Members and political staff to come to serious harm. **Women's Rights and LGBTQ issues were linked to threats of sexual violence.**

    h.   Despite the high level of abuse reported, **most Members (54%) and political staff (68%) reported that they still intended to continue in their respective roles**. However, a large minority of both (46% of Members and 32% of political staff) reported that abuse had made it less likely that they would continue.

Reporting and support for abuse

vii.   **Most Members and political staff surveyed were aware of the supports** available to them, with 89% of Members and 90% of political staff aware of at least one avenue for support.

viii.   Reporting of abuse was higher for Members (75%) than for political staff (40%). The **main avenue for reporting was An Garda Síochána (AGS)** and the level of satisfaction with the response of AGS was generally high.

ix. Considering the 25% of Members and 60% of political staff who did not report abuse, the most prevalent reasons for this were a view that abuse was not sufficiently serious to warrant reporting and/or that reporting would not lead to a solution for abuse.

1.2 Further Evidence of Abuse

i. The Task Force heard that politicians are increasingly willing to speak openly about their experiences of abuse and the impact of these experiences[1]. Evidence provided stressed the importance of reporting of abuse by politicians to gather accurate data on its prevalence.

ii. The findings of an Oireachtas Library and Research Service (L&RS) analysis of international studies on abuse of politicians and political staff[2] indicate that:

■ Abuse of politicians is highly prevalent. It is observed in each jurisdiction where it has been studied.

> **Forms of abuse in political life**
>
> **Psychological abuse:** Verbal threats, harassment, stalking.
>
> **Sexual abuse:** Sexual assault or harassment, sexualised images, sexualised threats.
>
> **Physical abuse:** Violent assault, threatening with weapon.
>
> **Economic abuse:** Property damage, denial of salary or funding.

■ Political staff experience high prevalence rates of abuse.

■ Women participating in political life often experience higher levels of abuse than men. Women politicians often experience abuse in gender-specific ways (such as more sexual abuse).

■ There is a shortage of research on abuse of other under-represented groups in parliament (including politicians who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse, minority ethnic and LGBTQ+). However, the studies that have been conducted indicate that members of these groups also experience particularly high levels of abuse.

■ Social media is a major purveyor of abuse, but abuse is experienced both online and offline.

iii. Survey research undertaken by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service with 27 European Parliaments[3] confirms that members in most European parliaments had raised concerns about abuse (see Chapter 5.1 and ECPRD responses: 'Safe Participation in Political Life' (https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2024/2024-05-02_l-rs-note-ecprd-responses-safe-participation-in-political-life_en.pdf) (oireachtas.ie) for more details).

iv. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) provided statistics from its pan-European survey on abuse of female parliamentarians[4] (see Figure 2) which found that most female politicians surveyed experienced at least one form of abuse, and psychological abuse was the most prevalent form of abuse reported (by 85% of female parliamentarians surveyed).

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1 Dr Lisa Keenan, Trinity College Dublin, written submission to the Task Force, 16 August 2023.

2 Oireachtas Library & Research Service (2024). L&RS Briefing Paper: ECPRD responses 'Safe Participation in Political Life. ECPRD responses: 'Safe Participation in Political Life' (https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/libraryResearch/2024/2024-05-02_l-rs-note-ecprd-responses-safe-participation-in-political-life_en.pdf) (oireachtas.ie).

3 Research via the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD).

4 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe". Available online at: https://www.ipu.org/resources.

Figure 2: IPU European survey findings on prevalence of abuse experienced by female parliamentarians

v.   The Task Force was informed that abuse appears to be becoming more extreme in nature and more prevalent, with the impact becoming more of a burden on those who choose to enter and engage with politics at every level.

vi. An Coimisiún Toghcháin stated that "The evidence where it exists is compelling about the scale of the problem we face."[5] The Task Force notes the research remit of An Coimisiún Toghcháin and calls on it to undertake research in this area to address the knowledge gaps.

vii. There is a shortage of studies on abuse of politicians in Ireland. However, the studies that do exist point to high levels of abuse experienced by politicians and political candidates in Ireland, and this was reinforced in anecdotal evidence[6]. AILG published the findings of surveys of local councillors in 2021 and in 2023[7]. The survey results confirm that threats, intimidation and harassment are commonplace, and respondents continue to experience threats of violence towards them and members of their families. It is noted that the number of respondents who indicated that they had experienced threats, intimidation or harassment has decreased since the last survey – 72% in 2021 and 64% in 2023.

1.3 Experiences of Women and Minority Groups

i.   The Task Force heard that abuse of female politicians can be considered gendered where:

   ■   it is directed towards women based on their gender.

   ■   the contents of the abuse experienced are gendered in nature (e.g., sexual harassment, sexist/sexual threats).

   ■   the impact of the abuse is to communicate to women that they do not belong in politics, thus deterring them from participating fully in political life.

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5   An Coimisiún Toghcháin evidence to Task Force on 14th December 2023.

6   Fiona Buckley and Lisa Keenan, "More Women: Changing the face of politics" (2021). Available online at: WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics (https://www.womenforelection.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics-small.pdf); Lisa Keenan and Fiona Buckley, "Exploring political ambition in the Republic of Ireland: a survey of politically interested women" (2023). Available online at: Exploring political ambition in the Republic of Ireland (https://www.womenforelection.ie/pdfs/Exploring-political-ambition-in-the-Republic-of-Ireland-a-survey-of-politically-interested-women.pdf).

7   Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) & Crime Management Group (CMG), "Report following councillor survey on threats, harassment, and intimidation in public office", 2021. Available online at: http://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/AILG-CMGsurveyreport.pdf; Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) & Crime Management Group (CMG), "Threats, Harassment, and Intimidation in Public Office", 2023. Available online at: AILG-CMG Report – Threats, Harassment and Intimidation in Public Office (https://ailg.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AILG-CMG-Report-Threats-Harassment-and-Intimidation-in-Public-Office-1-compressed.pdf).

ii.   United Nations (UN) Women defines violence against women in politics (VAWP) 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."[8] It considers VAWP as a human rights violation that impacts on the whole of society and aims to silence women's voice, agency and power in the public sphere[9].

> An IPU survey (https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe) found that female politicians under the age of 40 reported receiving more sexist and sexual remarks (+9%), sexual harassment (+12%), and degrading online/media abuse (+18%) compared to all female MPs.

iii. International study findings indicate that women in politics experience higher levels of abuse than men. However, this was qualified by information that not all studies find a substantial difference between the *amount* of abuse experienced by women versus men.[10] An important point stressed here was that the *content* of abuse is different, with female politicians experiencing substantially higher levels of abuse that is sexual, sexist and/or degrading in nature.[11]

iv.   Irish studies have not generally compared levels of abuse for male and female politicians. However, several Irish studies with female politicians note the high level of sexual harassment and/or abuse they encounter[12].

v.   International research on the influence of other demographics is at an early stage, but it indicates that race, ethnicity, sexuality, ability and age all influence the prevalence and content of abuse[13].

vi.   The Task Force was informed that politicians, political candidates and political staff from these demographic groups often experience abuse which is particularly vicious and distressing.

> A UK-based study (https://pure.strath.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/129841025/Collignon_etal_PQ_2022_The_gendered_harassment_of_parliamentary_candidates_in_the_UK.pdf) found that 63% of ethnic minority women candidates reported experiencing abuse, compared to 38% of ethnic minority men, 34% of white men, and 45% of white women.

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8   Based on definition in UN Women and UNDP's "Preventing violence against women in elections: A Programming Guide" (2017). Available online at: Preventing-VAW-in-elections-en.PDF (https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/Preventing-VAW-in-elections-en.PDF) (unwomen.org).

9   Rachel Weston, UN Women, evidence to the Task Force on 26th October 2023; Also EGM-report-Violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf (https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/EGM-report-Violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf) (unwomen.org).

10 Bertie Vidgen et al, "Challenges and frontiers in abusive content detection" (2019). Available online at: https://aclanthology.org/W19-3509.pdf; Emily A. Vogels, Pew Research Center, "The State of Online Harassment" (2021). Available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org.

11 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), "Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians" (2016). Available online at: https://www.ipu.org/resources.

12 Lisa Keenan and Fiona Buckley, "Exploring political ambition in the Republic of Ireland: a survey of politically interested women" (2023). Available online at: Exploring political ambition in the Republic of Ireland (https://www.womenforelection.ie/pdfs/Exploring-political-ambition-in-the-Republic-of-Ireland-a-survey-of-politically-interested-women.pdf); Buckley and Keenan, "More Women: Changing the face of politics" (2021). WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics (https://www.womenforelection.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics-small.pdf); Dr Tom Felle evidence to Task Force on 7th September 2023.

13 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe" (2018). Sourced from https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe; Sofía Collignon, Rosie Campbell and Wolfgang Rüdig. "The gendered Harassment of Parliamentary Candidates in the UK" (https://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/78167/1/Collignon_etal_PQ_2022_The_gendered_harassment_of_parliamentary_candidates_in_the_UK.pdf).

vii.   The first account of Traveller, Roma, other ethnic minority, and migrant women's experiences in politics in Ireland acknowledges the intersection of sexism and racism as a dimension. The study is based on interview findings with 43 minority women in politics. It details targeted instances of abuse, including destruction or removal of posters, defacement with graffiti across candidates' images and, for Traveller women in particular, a prevailing anti-Traveller racism[14].

1.4 Social Media and the Prevalence of Abuse

i.   The Task Force heard from academics and organisations on the impact of social media on the prevalence of abuse in political life. Collectively the evidence indicates that online abuse is intensifying and becoming normalised, fuelled by the anonymity provided by digital platforms. Findings from research studies also indicate that women and minority groups experience more online abuse, including sexualised abuse, and this extends to women and minorities in political life.

ii.   Online abuse comprises a range of different behaviours/actions, including offensive name-calling, purposeful embarrassment, online stalking, threats of a physical nature, repeated harassment and sexual harassment. Online abuse can have both online and real-world components, such as 'doxing', where private information about individuals is published on the internet, typically for malicious purposes[15] [16].

iii.   The Task Force was informed that the internet, and social media in particular, are leading purveyors of abuse of politicians, and that most politicians/political candidates experience some form of online abuse, often on a regular basis[17]. The Task Force heard that social media is a major facilitator of sexist and racist remarks/threats, and that female politicians are particularly exposed to image-based abuse, such as the sharing of fake images with a sexual or derogatory connotation[18] [19]. Serious concern was expressed by contributors that online abuse can be perpetrated with anonymity and impunity.

> A University of Galway-led study of 69 members/former members of Oireachtas and local councillors found that **96%** had received abusive messages, hate mail or inappropriate comments online.
>
> **73%** had received threats of physical violence and **38%** received threats of sexual violence (including rape).

iv.   International evidence suggests that the severity of online abuse has increased over time[20] [21] and that online abuse increases where politicians address contentious issues that are the focus of political debate. Concerns were raised that this may serve to temper political debate.

14   Pauline Cullen and Shane Gough. "Different paths, shared experiences: Ethnic minority women and local politics in Ireland (https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/filefield_paths/Different_Paths_Shared_Experiences_Report.pdf)".

15   Prof. Maura Conway evidence to Task Force on 7th September 2023.

16   Vogels. "The State of Online Harassment". (2021) https://www.pewresearch.org.

17   Dr Tom Felle evidence to Task Force on 7th September 2023.

18   Dr Brigitte Filion, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), evidence to the Task Force on 21st September 2023.

19   IPU and PACE, "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe". Available online at: https://www.ipu.org/resources.

20   Prof. Maura Conway evidence to Task Force on 7th September 2023.

21   Vogels, "The State of Online Harassment" (2021), p.6. https://www.pewresearch.org

v.   Evidence from an Irish study of abuse[22] of politicians in Ireland on Twitter (now X) found that social media abuse increases in response to:

■   Politicians mention of politically contentious issues.

■   Significant political events or controversies.

■   Gender. The study found that, when accounting for follower numbers, female local councillors received eight times as many abusive tweets as male local councillors, while female Senators received three times the amount as male Senators. Interestingly, there was no significant gender difference observed for TDs.

1.5 The Impact of Abuse

i.   Presentations, submissions and personal testimony highlighted the consequences of abuse for politicians/political staff, their families, and political life.

ii.   An Coimisiún Toghcháin commented that "Being a public representative is a career like no other, where even applying for the job places you immediately in the public spotlight, places you under media and public scrutiny, and places you into a potentially vulnerable position."[23]

Excerpts from personal testimonies

I don't upset easily … but I would often be crying at work.

Election canvassing is very public so my personal safety and my own supporters will be of concern to me.

I have really bad anxiety.

I wouldn't go on public transport because of my experience.

He intimidated me, getting close up to me, threatening that he would kill me.

You're constantly looking over your shoulder.

iii. The Task Force heard powerful personal testimony from national and local politicians of their lived experiences of abuse and its impact. The following key issues were raised repeatedly during this testimony:

■   Concerns for safety and well-being of family members and particularly children in the household.

■   Fears of safety from abuse limiting not only political activities (e.g. public meetings) but also daily lives (e.g. going to the supermarket).

■   Being female, a person with a disability, or from a culturally or linguistically diverse or minority group compounds abuse.

■   Abuse is seen as part of the job of politicians and politicians are seen as "fair game" for abuse. A view that this leads to abuse not being taken seriously.

■   Increase in online abuse over last number of years.

■   A view that social media companies do not act on reports of abuse.

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22   Ian Richardson, "The dynamics of political incivility on Twitter towards Irish representatives" (2021). Available online at: **https://rpubs.com/ Ian_W_Richardson**.

23   An Coimisiún Toghcháin evidence to Task Force on 14th December 2023.

- Abuse was not only online but also within political debate and between political parties, including sexist and racist comments.

- Abuse was not usually reported to authorities or reports that were made were dropped.

- Abuse was a concerted effort to get the individual and, for minorities, the group they are seen to represent, to exit political life.

- High and sustained levels of abuse cause politicians to limit certain political activities (including canvassing), reduce their online presence, and avoid contentious topics (e.g. immigration).

- Many had considered (even briefly) leaving politics in response to abuse.

The Task Force is respectful of the privacy of those individuals and is very appreciative of their input. It is also keen to avoid the risk of identifying presenters.

iv.   Submissions received outlined the consequences of sustained abuse for mental health and called for psychological supports to be made available to politicians and their families experiencing abuse. Safety concerns for politicians, in particular pointing to the current requirement to include home addresses on ballot papers, were highlighted as problematic.

v.   Beyond direct personal impact, the Task Force heard evidence of the negative impacts of abuse for political participation and democracy. These include potential candidates being discouraged due to fear of abuse, existing politicians deciding not to run again, politicians avoiding contentious topics, politicians avoiding community-facing activities and/or candidates avoiding in-person canvassing, which decreases chances of election. Concerns were raised about how this shapes politics and in particular the political participation of already under-represented groups and prominence of gender and/or minority-sensitive policy.

> **Excerpts from personal testimonies**
>
> *It was obvious that this was a concerted effort to get me to leave politics.*
> *I don't know if I'd go again.*
> *I don't want to be afraid doing my job.*

vi.   At the same time, the Task Force heard of the resilience of politicians/candidates, with many continuing to participate despite the extraordinary levels of abuse they receive. Here evidence highlighted the value, not of formal support, but of individual politicians' coping strategies and informal support networks[24]. This was reflected in the evidence heard by the Task Force that there are a greater number of female candidates registered for the upcoming local elections[25].

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24   Catherine Turner and Aisling Swaine, "At the Nexus of Participation and Protection: Protection-Related Barriers to Women's Participation in Northern Ireland" (2021). Available online at: At the Nexus of Participation and Protection (**https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Womens-Participation-Northern-Ireland-2-Final.pdf**); Publication received by the Task Force on 30th July 2023.

25   Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) evidence to the Task Force on 21st September 2023.

1.6 Drivers of Abuse

i. Consistent with international evidence[26], the Task Force was informed of multiple, often connected, causes and risk factors of abuse of those in political life. These include:

    a. Lack of prosecution/punishment for those who perpetrate abuse.

    b. Existing societal inequalities/discrimination which fuels gender and/or racist abuse.

    c. A culture of politics where male dominance is seen as normal, and female politicians challenging that encounter hostility.

    d. An undermining of the value of politics, with politicians increasing seen as 'fair game' for abuse.

    e. An increase in far-right activity online and associated coordinated targeted attacks against politicians.

ii. It is contended that these drivers are compounded by the anonymity provided by the internet, and that politicians who are vocal on issues such as sexism, racism or the rights of the LGBTQ+ community are particularly targeted.

Excerpt from personal testimony

Go back to where you came from.

Conclusions

i. The Task Force concludes that abuse in political life, both internationally and in the Irish context, is escalating, problematic and frequently targeted at women and minority groups.

ii. The Task Force concludes that abuse is experienced increasingly online, and that online abuse is intensifying and becoming normalised, fuelled by the anonymity provided by digital platforms. Furthermore, that women and minority groups experience more online abuse, including sexualised abuse, and this extends to women and minorities in political life.

iii. The Task Force concludes that there are information gaps on the prevalence and impact of the problem and strongly supports the call by academics for further research to fill these gaps, particularly with respect to the consequences of abuse against women and minority groups in politics.

iv. On the impact of abuse, the Task Force recognises that abuse can negatively impact individuals and their families, and can be far-reaching, in particular on women and minority groups' participation and representation in political life.

v. The Task Force acknowledges the importance of networks such as the women's local and regional caucuses in supporting women in political life.

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26 See among others: IPU and PACE, "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe". Available online at: https://www.ipu.org/resources; Australian Human Rights Commission, "Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces" (2021). Available online at: https://humanrights.gov.au/sites.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that An Coimisiún Toghcháin, as part of its research programme, undertake comprehensive research of the prevalence of abuse of politicians, at national and local level, and of political candidates and establish a baseline assessment of the issue. This should include the targeted abuse of women and minority groups during election cycles and identify barriers to participation and inform the policy response to address them.

2. It is recommended that local authorities provide psychological support services to local representatives, similar to the model of services provided through the Houses of the Oireachtas Workplace Support Programme.

3. It is recommended that consideration should be given to the greater development, through government funding, of support networks for women and minority groups involved in political life, including the women's caucuses.

4. It is recommended that it should no longer be a requirement for the home addresses of election candidates to be published and this should be optional.

CHAPTER 2: Measures to Address Abuse in Political Life: Raising Awareness of the Value of Political Participation

Introduction

This Chapter considers measures to address abuse by raising awareness of the value of political participation, through education and other government policies. It considers the detrimental impact of all forms of abuse, in person or online, in deterring political participation across Irish society. It also considers the role of civil society in that context. The Task Force met with representatives from the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY), academics and representatives from civil society and considered written submissions received on this topic.

Evidence Presented to the Task Force

2.1 Awareness through Education

i.   Submissions received by the Task Force recommended raising awareness, through education and training, of the value of political participation and public service and of the detrimental impact of abuse in deterring political participation across Irish society.

ii.   The Task Force was informed of the intrinsic link between gender equality and healthy, democratic societies[27]. To address political violence directed at women requires long term structural changes at a societal level to mitigate the deep-rooted causes of gendered abuse[28].

iii.   The Task Force notes the recently published Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) Baseline Evaluation Report for Ireland[29] which urges the Irish authorities "to ensure that the issues listed under Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention – gender stereotypes, gender equality and the various forms of violence against women – are included in the mandatory school curriculum and taught, in practice, to all pupils at all levels of education".

iv.   The Task Force heard that the report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (2021)[30] included recommendations to advance women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in politics, public life and the workplace. These recommendations were considered by the Joint Committee on Gender Equality, which published its *Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality – Final Report* (2022)[31]. The report sets out recommended actions to improve gender balance in politics.

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27   Caroline Hubbard, Senior Gender Advisor with the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), evidence to the Task Force on 26th October 2023.

28   Dr Lisa Keenan (Trinity College Dublin) written submission received on 16th August 2023.

29   GREVIO is an independent human rights monitoring body mandated to monitor the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210, "the Istanbul Convention") by the parties to the convention. GREVIO report on Ireland (November 2023) https://rm.coe.int/grevio-s-baseline-evaluation-report.

30   Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality (2021). Available online at: https://citizensassembly.ie/wp-content.

31   Joint Committee on Gender Equality, "Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality" – Final Report (2022). Available online at: Unfinished Democracy: Achieving Gender Equality (https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_gender_equality/reports/2022/2022-12-15_final-report-on-unfinished-democracy-achieving-gender-equality_en.pdf).

v.   Recommendations 26-30 of the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality make specific reference to the role of the education sector vis-à-vis tackling gender stereotypes and norms. Recommendations 26 and 27 focus on appropriate resources for schools and curriculum redevelopment to tackle sexism and gender inequality from a young age.

vi.   The Department of Education informed the Task Force on actions taken on foot of the above report and stated, "A core value of the education system in Ireland is equality, inclusivity and diversity. Across all levels of schooling, it aims to foster inclusivity where gender equality and diversity are promoted. It is equally for all learners from all backgrounds – regardless of gender, socio economic background, race or creed." It also provided the Task Force with an update on the relevant initiatives which is published at https://data.oireachtas.ie2024-05-15_correspondence-received-department-of-education_en.pdf.

vii.   The Task Force notes the important role that An Coimisiún Toghcháin can play, through its education remit, in building awareness of the impact of abuse in political life, including on the participation of women and minority groups.

2.2 Integration and Inclusion

i.   The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) is responsible for promoting equality, gender equality and integration. DCEDIY provided an overview to the Task Force[32] of their current actions to support participation in political life by groups which have historically been under-represented in Irish politics. These include:

- Funding initiatives under the National Strategy for Women and Girls to support women in leadership, including in politics.

- Funding of civil society and other organisations engaged in outreach and training of women aspiring to political life, with a focus on groups that are under-represented in Irish politics, such as women with disabilities, younger women and women from minority ethnic or migrant backgrounds.

- Actions within the framework of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, such as funding of the National Traveller Women's Forum (NTWF) to support Traveller women to take leadership roles within their own and the wider communities.

- Support for the National Action Plan Against Racism (NAPAR) to combat racism and foster racial equality and community cohesion. A NAPAR Coordination Committee will coordinate activity under the plan and gather the data necessary for monitoring the implementation of the actions.

- The LGBTQI+ Community Services Fund to promote inclusion, protect rights and improve quality of life and well-being for members of the LGBTQI+ community, to promote full participation in social, economic, cultural and political life.

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32   Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) evidence to the Task Force on 9th November 2023.

- Action Plan on the Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-Making to support structures including the National Youth Assemblies, Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg, Seanad na nÓg and Hub na nÓg.

- A public consultation process is underway in respect of the successor to the National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2022.

ii.   Submissions from civil society groups working with minorities highlighted the challenges faced by minorities who participate in political life and called for the adoption of public awareness-raising and education measures to address discrimination and prejudice and for adequate resourcing of the new National Action Plan Against Racism.

One participant recounted being questioned as to why migrants or ethnic minorities were "allowed into local politics".

[Different Paths, Shared Experiences: Ethnic Minority Women and Local Politics in Ireland (2022)]

iii.   DCEDIY outlined public awareness measures to promote equality and to challenge prejudice to be included in the new equality strategies in 2024, including the successors to the National Strategy for Women and Girls and the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy. The Task Force notes that a number of the integration strategies outlined by DCEDIY have concluded and new strategies have yet to be published.

2.3 Role of Civil Society

i.   The Task Force recognises the important role of civil society in raising awareness of abuse and, in particular, abuse experienced by women and minority groups. Civil society actively supports diversity in representation in Irish political life and democracy. Submissions received from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) included those representing the voices of women, immigrants, Travellers in Ireland, the trans community, men's development groups and others.

ii.   The OSCE Toolkit on the Role of Civil Society and Women's Movements in Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics[33] notes that "While civil society actors lack the power to sanction offenders directly, they can raise awareness about violence against women in politics, ultimately driving positive change through triggering and supporting public discourse and improvements in the legislative framework as well as a change in social mores and values, and support the women who experience violence."

iii.   Civil society groups working on the ground can raise awareness of the problems of sexism, racism and homophobia. Women's networks such as the women's caucuses provide the space for women politicians to discuss and campaign on issues predominantly affecting women. These networks present alternative means to highlight issues for those who may be reticent to report instances of abuse through formal pathways. They also have a role in creating safer environments through providing training and support to women and minority groups who wish to engage in political life. Civil society groups can also work to inform and mobilise for policy reforms to address abuse against those in political life and encourage civil political discourse on contentious topics.

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33   OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics Toolkit (2022). Available online at: 532187_0.pdf (https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/5/532187_0.pdf).

Conclusions

i.   The Task Force recognises that abuse threatens our democracy and that, without concerted action to understand and address it, its corrosive nature could have far-reaching impacts on our democratic and political systems, including acting as a barrier to inclusive participation in public life.

ii. The Task Force concludes that raising awareness is a key tool in addressing the root causes of abuse and is also important in increasing societal understanding of the role of politicians, including the importance of diverse participation and representation in the democratic process. As such, the Task Force further concludes that a strategic approach to raising awareness and promoting inclusion is required by Government and its agencies.

iii. The Task Force notes information provided by DCEDIY in respect of their current strategies and actions to support participation in political life by groups which have historically been under-represented in Irish politics. Such measures can contribute to challenging the attitudes that underpin discrimination, abuse and intolerance and therefore support the creation of a safer political environment. The Task Force notes that a number of the integration strategies outlined by DCEDIY have concluded and new strategies have yet to be published.

iv. The Task Force also notes the update on the Department of Education action plan relating to the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality and Joint Committee on Gender Equality.

Recommendations

5. It is recommended that Government adopt a long-term strategic approach to increasing political participation by under-represented groups, to achieve greater diverse and inclusive representation, as a matter of priority. That this objective be supported by current and coordinated equality, integration and inclusion strategies. The strategies should include specific, measurable and timebound actions and be adequately resourced to achieve stated outcomes.

6. Funding streams available to NGOs and community groups under all inclusion strategies should be widely publicised to support initiatives.

7. That the full implementation of Recommendations 26 and 27 of the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, which relate to school resourcing and curriculum redevelopment, be prioritised to address sexism and gender inequality from a young age, as these are identified as drivers of abuse of women in politics.

8. It is recommended that An Coimisiún Toghcháin, as part of its awareness and education programme, undertake a campaign to raise awareness of the impact of abuse in political life, including on the participation of women and minority groups.

CHAPTER 3: Measures to Safeguard and Support Those in Political Life

Introduction

This Chapter considers the importance of the role and response of the criminal justice system, including An Garda Síochána (AGS), in preventing abuse and safeguarding political participation and the democratic process. The Task Force met with representatives from the Department of Justice, AGS, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and UN Women.

Evidence Presented to the Task Force:

3.1 The Response of the Criminal Justice System

i.   The Task Force heard from UN Women[34] on the UN Women Guidance Note on Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics. The Guidance Note[35] includes practical guidance on addressing the areas of (1) Building the evidence-base on abuse in political life (2) Legislative reform (3) Monitoring and reporting (4) Capacity-building, specifically referring to security and policing capacity and to judiciary capacity (5) Support during electoral processes and (6) Coordination, advocacy campaigns and awareness-raising.

ii. A range of issues around the role and response of criminal justice system were discussed by the Task Force, including:

- The need for clarity of roles and responsibilities, including clear pathways for reporting and mechanisms for monitoring responses and outcomes.

- In more egregious cases that adequate and appropriate supports be provided to those impacted throughout the investigative process and the judicial system.

- A need for the collection of statistical analysis of reported cases of abuse and harassment of those in political life and the outcome of those cases.

- The need for greater understanding among key actors in the criminal justice system on abuse in political life and, in particular, its impact on the individual and the democratic process.

iii. The Department of Justice has a key role, through An Garda Síochána, in maintaining the safety and security of the institutions of the State and of those who participate in political life. The Department noted[36] that while abuse, online or offline, is frightening, traumatising, criminal and a genuine threat to democracy, this must be balanced with the need for debate, political disagreement and protest, which are also fundamental to a healthy democracy and constitutionally protected rights.

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34   Task Force meeting on 26th October 2023.

35   Leadership and Governance Section, UN Women, "Guidance Note: Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics" (2021). Available online at: Guidance note: Preventing violence against women in politics (https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/07/guidance-note-preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics).

36   Department of Justice evidence to Task Force on 9th November 2023.

iv.   It provided an overview to the Task Force of existing protections in the criminal law for those who participate in public life, and planned changes aimed at enhancing those protections. These include public order offences, updated harassment offences that apply to online behaviour as well as real-world actions and hate crime offences. The Task Force noted the new harassment legislation, including the new system of civil orders, yet to be commenced, where a court can order a person engaging in harassing behaviour to stop communicating with or about another person and to stay away from them. The Department stated that this system "will provide another avenue short of criminal prosecution to put a stop to distressing and harmful behaviour".

v.   The Department also referenced the proposed new Criminal Justice (Incitement to Violence or Hatred and Hate Offences) Bill 2023, which simplifies the incitement offences, includes incitement to violence specifically, and updates the language to ensure the offences comprehensively address incitement to hatred in the online context. Several submissions to the Task Force expressed support for the Bill and its potential to provide increased protection for those engaging in political life and upholding the democratic process. While some submissions sought further legislative protections, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties[37] in their presentation to the Task Force urged caution regarding the creation of additional criminal offences unless robust evidence indicates a clear gap or inefficacy in the existing criminal code which needs to be addressed. The Task Force supports the need for the balancing of rights between protecting those who engage in political life and upholding the right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression.

vi.   The Task Force heard calls for increasing awareness across the criminal justice system of the impact of abuse against politicians, both on the individual and, potentially, on the democratic process. Several submissions highlighted that training for criminal justice and other frontline workers should be sensitive to the impact of gender and other forms of discrimination (including ethnicity, race and ability). The Task Force noted that, in its evidence, AGS confirmed that its members receive training on gender-based violence (GBV) and on victim-centred approaches[38].

3.2   An Garda Síochána

i.   An Garda Síochána (AGS) in its presentation to the Task Force acknowledged its role in supporting democracy and the evolving nature of the role to respond effectively to changing dynamics[39]. It highlighted the delicate balance in policing legitimate protests and maintaining the right to freedom of expression and responding appropriately and proportionally when these activities stray into criminality, in whatever form that takes.

ii.   In relation to the protection of those in political life, AGS outlined its plans to enhance resourcing at divisional level through the appointment of Liaison Managers to ensure a consistent approach across each Garda Division to the security needs of elected members and their staff. The importance of the relationship at local level between Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) and elected representatives was emphasised. AGS acknowledged the need for access to tailored and current security guidance for elected members (particularly for newly elected members) and national and local election candidates.

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37   Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) evidence to Task Force on 9th November 2023.
38   An Garda Síochána (AGS) evidence to Task Force on 12th October 2023.
39   An Garda Síochána (AGS) evidence to Task Force on 12th October 2023.

iii.   Understanding and having designated pathways for reporting incidents of abuse and harassment is key to protecting those involved in political life at all levels and preventing the adverse outcomes. Repeated submissions to the Task Force highlighted the current under-reporting of abuse against politicians. Reasons for under-reporting include lack of awareness of how, where and what to report, stigmatisation of those in political life who report abuse and a belief that reporting would not effect change or result in prosecutions.

iv.   Regarding social media, AGS stated that it has open lines of communications with social media platforms and is engaging with Coimisúin na Méan to support its work in this area.

v.   The Task Force discussed the role of AGS in providing crime prevention and security advices to elected representatives and candidates. The Northern Ireland 'Joint Guidance for Candidates in Election', published by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Electoral Commission, Electoral Office and the Public Prosecution Service, was frequently referenced as a good example[40]. The Guidance note provides information to candidates on how to recognise and respond to harassment, intimidatory and criminal behaviour.

Conclusions

I.   The Task Force acknowledges and strongly supports the right for citizens to engage with the democratic process, including the right to engage in peaceful protest, freedom of association and freedom of expression, and views these as integral to democracy. Therefore, the response of the criminal justice system must balance these rights with the right to safely participate in political life and engage with the democratic process.

ii.   In relation to the security of Parliament, the Task Force points to the UK Houses of Parliament coordinated and risk-based approach to security, involving the parliamentary authorities, the police forces, security agencies and Government (see Chapter 5.2 for more details).

iii.   On reporting incidences of abuse, the Task Force concludes that although politicians are increasingly willing to report experiences of abuse generally, it is still under-reported. Reporting should become the 'norm', with clear mechanisms established for this purpose and a 'zero tolerance' approach applied across the criminal justice system, political life and civil society.

iv.   The Task Force concludes that actors across the criminal justice system have critical roles and responsibilities in supporting democracy and safeguarding the democratic process. Furthermore, mechanisms for more enhanced cooperation and information-sharing between AGS and the Houses of the Oireachtas are required to counter emerging threats, prevent harm and safeguard those in political life and support the democratic process.

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40   PSNI, Electoral Commission, Electoral Office & Public Prosecution Service, "Joint Guidance for Candidates in Election: When It Goes Too Far". Available online at: Guidance for Election Candidates (https://www.psni.police.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/Guidance%20for%20 Election%20Candidates_0.pdf).

Recommendations

9. It is recommended that formalised structures are put in place within AGS to provide cohesion and consistency in safeguarding those in political life, including:

i.   that AGS, in conjunction with the Houses of the Oireachtas authorities, strengthen arrangements to exchange information, assess the prevailing security situation and agree appropriate security measures.

ii.   that comprehensive security reviews be conducted on a periodic basis to ensure appropriate and proportionate measures are in place to maintain safe access and egress to the Leinster House complex, while balancing the rights of individuals and citizens to engage with the democratic process.

iii.   that AGS assign a dedicated, appropriately resourced team of personnel, with sufficient knowledge of the workings of the Houses and their environs, to liaise with Leinster House authorities and to ensure the required day to day security and liaison arrangements are in place.

iv.   that AGS appoint dedicated points of contact at national, regional and local level to proactively provide tailored security advices to elected representatives and establish reporting mechanisms to receive and coordinate responses to incidents of abuse.

v.   that information regarding reports of threats and investigations, including the outcome of enquiries and investigations, be collated at national level to inform the overall threat assessment and the design and implementation of appropriate security measures.

vi.   that AGS engage with An Coimisiún Toghcháin and Local Authorities in providing general crime prevention and security advice to prospective candidates and arranging crime prevention briefings, as appropriate, through the Divisional Crime Prevention Officers. Details of designated contact points for electoral candidates should be published online by AGS to report incidences of abuse.

vii.   that AGS proactively engage and build strong working relationships with the proposed Oireachtas social media monitoring unit [see Recommendation 13(ii)], and Oireachtas engagement forum [see Recommendation 13(iii)] to monitor, assess and action as appropriate infractions of the code or breaches of the criminal law.

viii.   that An Garda Commissioner designate the Assistant Commissioner, Garda National Crime and Security Intelligence Service (GNCSIS), specific responsibility for the overarching implementation of the above recommendations in view of the urgency and seriousness of the issue.

CHAPTER 4: Social Media

Introduction

This Chapter considers the response of social media platforms to online abuse against those in political life and the role and response of Coimisiún na Meán in mitigating these behaviours. The Task Force met with representatives from Meta at its Headquarters in Dublin, representatives from Coimisiún na Meán, and the Australian eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant. Evidence from academics and NGOs was also considered. It is regrettable that X were unable to accept the invitation to attend the Task Force meeting.

Evidence Presented to the Task Force

4.1 Use of Social Media in Political Life

i. The Task Force was informed that social media serves as a vital tool for politicians to connect with their constituents and engage diverse audiences. These platforms can strengthen the bridge between representatives and the public they serve[41]. Social media is widely used by those in political life, and is now an important means to reach potential voters in elections, particularly for women candidates.[42]

ii. While the digital world holds the potential to amplify the voices of women in politics, it has also given rise to new forms of online abuse against them.[43]

4.2 The Response of Social Media Platforms to Abuse

i. Meta facilitated a meeting with representatives of the Task Force at Meta's European Headquarters in Dublin[44]. Discussions focused on Meta's engagement with the Houses of the Oireachtas, Oireachtas Members, political parties and its approach to female safety and its Safety and Content Policy. It outlined the escalation channels available for Oireachtas Members and stated that it is working to increase engagement levels, including through training and information seminars.

ii. Discussions took place on the potential for formalising a role for the Houses of the Oireachtas to act as the feedback channel to social media companies, to monitor and report on Members' social media interaction and to encourage greater adoption of the tools available. The Westminster Social Media Monitoring Service (SMMS) was referred to as an effective escalation model in responding to harmful content. The Westminster model is considered further in Chapter 5.

> The UK Parliament Social Media Monitoring Service (SMMS) is provided by the Members' Security Support Service. MPs can sign up to the Service, which monitors traffic on social media and reports potential breaches of social media companies' policies based on trigger words appearing in connection with MPs who have signed up to the service.

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41   Dr Tom Felle, National University of Galway, evidence to Task Force on 7th September 2023.

42   Women for Election evidence to Task Force on 21st September 2023.

43   Caroline Hubbard (USAID) evidence to the Task Force on 26th October 2023.

44   Meeting at Meta Headquarters on 21st November 2023.

iii. On its content policies, it was noted that its policy for public figures, including politicians, has a higher threshold for removal of harmful content. Meta explained this approach by citing the need to balance rights, including free speech in the public sphere. Members of the Task Force raised concerns regarding the higher threshold and questioned the rationale where those in public life should tolerate abuse that is not permitted against private individuals. Allowing such abuse against public representatives can have a detrimental effect on the democratic process. Other concerns included that the onus is on politicians to report harmful content and that online abuse is still highly prevalent despite the policies and tools that social media platforms have in place.

4.3 The Role of Coimisiún na Meán in Addressing Abuse

i. The Task Force met with representatives from Coimisiún na Meán and with the Australian eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, as an example of good international practice in that field.

ii. Coimisiún na Meán was established under the Online Safety and Media Regulation (OSMR) Act 2022 to regulate broadcasters and online media, and to support media development. Its functions include setting up a new regulatory regime for online safety, including a complaints mechanism which gives users the right to report illegal or harmful content to online platforms and forces platforms to respond.

> **Excerpt from personal testimony**
>
> *The abuse and threats online … are vicious, insidious and relentless.*
>
> *I've reported at least 2,000 hateful comments on social media and 2 of those comments were seen to be not of the rules of [the social media platform].*

iii. It stated that online abuse of politicians, journalists and others in public life is a serious problem which can disincentivise individuals from entering political life and that it has particular concerns regarding misogynistic abuse and other forms of hate speech online.[45]

iv. The Coimisiún will enforce the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), which places obligations on social media companies to address unlawful or harmful content hosted on platforms. It will also develop an online safety code with power to investigate breaches of both the DSA and OSMR, and to impose sanctions, including heavy fines. It will accredit organisations as 'trusted flaggers'[46] and social media platforms will be obliged to give priority to reports of illegal content from those trusted flaggers.

v. The Coimisiún is a member of the National Counter Disinformation Working Group and participates in the electoral integrity and democracy oversight subgroup established by An Coimisiún Toghcháin.

vi. The Australian eSafety Commissioner commended the decision to provide a complaints scheme through the Coimisiún and noted that the evidence gathered through a complaints scheme provides intelligence on systemic failings within social media companies, based on how they respond.[47]

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45 Coimisiún na Meán evidence to Task Force on 23rd November 2023.

46 "Trusted flaggers" status is awarded by the Digital Services in line with the following conditions: it has particular expertise and competence for the purposes of detecting, identifying and notifying illegal content; it represents collective interests and is independent from any online platform; it carries out its activities for the purposes of submitting notices in a timely, diligent and objective manner.

47 Julie Inman Grant evidence to the Task Force on 23rd November 2023.

vii.   Australia participates in the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse. The Partnership brings together countries[48], international organisations, civil society and the private sector to better prioritise, understand, prevent and address the increase in technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV). These networks are important in ensuring that gender-based online abuse is addressed and the Commissioner encouraged Ireland to join the global partnership.

Conclusions

i.   In Chapter 1 it was concluded that abuse is prevalent and is experienced increasingly online. Women and minority groups experience more online abuse, including those in political life. Measures to address online abuse are therefore essential. Social media platforms and Coimisiún na Meán have critical roles to play in addressing abuse in political life.

ii.   Given the prevalence of abuse online, social media platforms have a particular responsibility to take proactive measures to protect those in political life to ensure a safe place for civil political discourse.

iii.   Coimisiún na Meán must be supported and resourced in order to regulate social media platforms and to administer the system for managing complaints, including the designation of 'trusted flaggers'.

Recommendations

10.   It is recommended that social media companies take proactive measures to address abuse against those in political life by:

i.   active participation in the engagement forum with the Houses of the Oireachtas [see Recommendation 13(iii)] and other stakeholders on the collective response to online abuse.

ii.   increasing engagement with political representatives and their staff, including through the provision of continued training and information seminars.

iii.   dedicating adequate resources to moderate harmful content against politicians.

iv.   reviewing Content Policies to provide those engaging in political life with the same protections as private individuals.

v.   adhering to the forthcoming Online Safety Code.

vi.   cooperating and building strong working relationships with Coimisiún na Meán, AGS and designated trusted flaggers in pre-emptively countering and removing harmful content.

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48   Partners of the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse are the United States of America, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Chile, Australia, Republic of South Korea, New Zealand & Canada. Available online at: Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (https://techfordemocracy.dk/action-coalitions/action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/).

11. It is recommended that Coimisiún na Meán:

i. fully utilise its powers to ensure appropriate protections for elected representatives and candidates online, given the potential impact and harm of online abuse to individual politicians and to the democratic process.

ii. accredit the Houses of the Oireachtas, local authorities and political parties as trusted flaggers so that platforms are obliged to give priority to reports received from them.

iii. consider applications from NGOs for accreditation as trusted flaggers so that platforms are obliged to give priority to reports received from them.

iv. consider the benefits and make recommendations on joining the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse.

v. build strong working relationships with relevant entities across the system to fulfil their mandate.

CHAPTER 5: Role of the Houses of the Oireachtas, Local Authorities and Political Parties in Addressing Abuse and Promoting Civil Discourse in Public Life

Introduction

This Chapter considers the respective roles of the Houses of the Oireachtas, the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, in conjunction with local authorities, and political parties. The Task Force met with representatives from the Houses of the Oireachtas Service, the administrative arm of the Houses of the Oireachtas, and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and considered written submissions from the political parties, as key actors in the democratic process. The Task Force considered the results of a comparative analysis undertaken of other European Parliaments on their responses to abuse. It also heard from an official representative of the UK Parliament and undertook a fact-finding visit to the Houses of Parliament in Westminster to consider its response to threats against Members of Parliament in the wake of tragic incidences experienced there.

Evidence Presented to the Task Force

5.1 Comparative Analysis of European Parliaments

i.   An international comparative survey was carried out by the Houses of the Oireachtas Service to gather up-to-date information from other European Parliaments on measures to address abuse of parliamentarians and their staff. This research was carried out through the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) and responses were received from 23 (of 27) parliaments. A summary of responses is published on the Task Force webpage at ECPRD responses: 'Safe Participation in Political Life' (**https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/ libraryResearch/2024/2024-05-02_l-rs-note-ecprd-responses-safe-participation-in-political-life_en.pdf**) (**oireachtas.ie**).

ii.   In summary, the responses show that while members in most parliaments had raised concerns about abuse, few parliaments had introduced many measures to address abuse. Four parliaments collect prevalence data on abuse of members. Most parliaments had introduced a complaints mechanism where members can report abuse and codes of conduct (or other formal guidelines) for parliamentary debate. Most parliaments had not introduced measures to protect members from online abuse. The Houses of the Oireachtas have some measures in place, including financial support to Members to assist with their security and psychological support services to members, their family members and political staff. The UK was the only parliament to report having all measures enquired about in place to some extent.

5.2 Westminster Model

i.   The Deputy Director of the Parliamentary Security Department at Westminster informed the Task Force[49] of some of the measures taken by the UK Parliament as part response to the tragic murders of Sir David Amess and Jo Cox, Members of the UK Parliament.

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49   Task Force meeting on 26th October 2023.

- Information: improved proactive collection of information on the threats, bringing together police intelligence, government information, open source and social media monitoring, and the tracking of incidents reported by MPs and their staff.

- Risk: using information to undertake joint assessments of the risk, and the rapid triage of and coordinated response to incidents.

- Police support and response across the UK, bringing cohesion and clarity to the role of each local police force in delivering their duty to protect MPs in their force area.

- Threat Reduction: proactive and coordinated offender management, with offender-focused tactical tasking and coordination of investigations and prosecution of those abusing MPs.

- Security Measures: the provision of physical, technical and personal security to MPs, for their homes, offices, surgeries and person.

ii.   The UK response highlighted the coordinated approach and partnership between parliament, government and its agencies in maintaining the safety and security of parliamentarians, underpinned by appropriate governance procedures. It also highlighted the value of strong working relationships with social media platforms in responding to abuse against politicians. The importance of reporting incidences by Members and their staff was highlighted.

5.3   Role of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service in supporting Oireachtas Members and promoting political participation

i.   The Task Force met with the Secretary General and Clerk of the Dáil[50] and other representatives to consider the measures taken by the Houses of the Oireachtas to provide a safe and secure environment. In addition to the establishment of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life, these include:

- the provision of psychological supports to Members, political staff and their families through the Workplace Support Programme, which provides confidential counselling services and wellbeing content

- security briefings provided by An Garda Síochána (AGS) for Members and their staff

- increased coordination with AGS on security in the Leinster House complex

- introduction of a Security Requirements Allowance of 50%, to a maximum value of €5,000, of the cost of personal safety measures in the Member's office or the Member's home, where such measures have been recommended by AGS

- the Dignity and Respect Statement of Principles which sets the standards of respect, dignity, safety and equality that apply to everyone in the parliamentary community to prevent bullying, harassment and sexual harassment in the parliamentary workplace

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50   Representatives of the Houses of the Oireachtas evidence to the Task Force on 14th December 2023.

- training for Members and their staff, including on Dignity and Respect, and training for political staff on topics such as dealing with aggressive callers, dealing with constituents in crisis and conflict resolution

- commissioned research on the prevalence, experiences and impact of abuse against Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and their staff.

ii. The Secretary General stated that the security of Leinster House and its environs is a priority for both the Houses of the Oireachtas Service and AGS and went on to outline the formal arrangements in place in that regard. These include:

- the allocation of gardaí on site in Leinster House.

- regular meetings between AGS and Leinster House authorities regarding security arrangements.

iii. The Houses of the Oireachtas is actively learning from other parliaments on security approaches. It plans to further develop the security strategy, upgrade risk-mitigation measures and security procedures through appropriate investments in infrastructure and training. The Service acknowledges the need to achieve an appropriate balance for the safety of all those working and visiting the Oireachtas with the right to protest, which is a fundamental democratic right.

iv. The Houses of the Oireachtas communication services and engagement programmes aim to enhance public understanding of the role of parliament, demonstrate the value of, and build confidence in, the institution of parliament and the democratic process. The Service aims to build a better understanding of the work of parliament by delivering trusted sources of information about the Houses of the Oireachtas and through the following:

- an annual programme of engagement initiatives and events to increase awareness and enhance understanding of the work of parliament, e.g., Dáil na nÓg.

- a targeted education programme that is designed to inform the next generation of voters about parliamentary and democratic processes in Ireland. The programme is tailored to different levels, from exploring democracy at primary level to lesson plans that are aligned with the national curriculum for CSPE (Junior Cycle) and Politics & Society (Senior Cycle).

5.4 Codes of Conduct for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas

i. The Standards of Public Office Act 2001 provides for Codes of Conduct for TDs and Senators which were published in 2002. These codes set out the principles of behaviour that Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas must adhere to in the performance of their duties. The Task Force heard calls for a review of these codes to include provisions for addressing abuse, including online, and discriminatory behaviours.

ii. In relation to parliamentary conduct and debate, the Parliamentary Code of Standards, adopted in 2010, includes principles and guidance relating to the standards of behaviour of Members in the Dáil Chamber. The Code specifically prohibits the use of offensive, provocative or threatening language during debate in the House, including personal attacks.

iii.   Recommendation 25 of the Report of the Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament recommended a review of existing codes of conduct on appropriate behaviour for Members that include clear sanctions for breaches of these codes.

5.5   Guidance for Parliaments to Support Women and Minority Groups

i.   The IPU published[51] a set of guidelines on how to devise and implement policies to address sexism and gender-based violence in the parliamentary workplace which included:

   ■   carrying out an assessment of the situation,

   ■   adopting specific policies on sexism and gender-based violence,

   ■   provision of assistance and support services to victims,

   ■   provision of independent complaints and investigation mechanism,

   ■   implementing disciplinary sanctions against perpetrators,

   ■   raising awareness and provision of training, and

   ■   monitoring and evaluating policy implementation.

ii.   The Task Force was informed of toolkits that are available to parliaments to support women, such as the European Institute for Gender Equality toolkit for gender audits[52] and the OSCE Toolkit for Addressing Violence Against Women in Parliaments[53].

iii.   In 2023, the IPU and the UN (jointly) published a Handbook for parliamentarians on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It recommends parliaments adopt legislation and policies to eliminate violence against women in politics, suggesting the implementation of the IPU guidelines on the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament.[54]

> **The OSCE Toolkit states**
>
> *"In a democracy, elected bodies such as parliaments must be model institutions and a place of work where women and men can fulfil their representative duties on an equal footing and in total safety … with a zero tolerance policy towards sexism and gender-based violence".*

iv.   The Report of the Houses of the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament[55] addressed issues facing women and minority groups in parliament and the Task Force supports the implementation of the relevant recommendations of the Forum. The work of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit of the Houses of the Oireachtas Service was referenced in evidence, including calls for its remit to be expanded and resourced to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the parliamentary community.

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51   Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament" (2019). Available online at: https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications.

52   European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) toolkit for gender audits. Available online at: Gender Audit | EIGE (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/tools-methods/gender-audit?language_content_entity=en) (europa.eu).

53   OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Addressing Violence Against Women In Politics Toolkit (2022). Available online at: 532187_0.pdf (https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/5/532187_0.pdf).

54   Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations (on behalf of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), "The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol: Handbook for Parliamentarians No.36" (2023). Available online at: Handbook for Parliamentarians No.36 (https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/OHCHR-IPU-CEDAW-Handbook-revised-edition.pdf).

55   Report of the Houses of the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (2021) available online at: Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBusiness/other/2021-11-02_report-of-the-forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament_en.pdf).

5.6 Role of Local Authorities in Supporting Local Councillors

i.   Representatives of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage met with the Task Force[56] regarding its role and remit in relation to the safety of local councillors. It acknowledged the findings of the AILG survey on abuse of local councillors and accepted that they face genuine security risks directly from their participation in political life. It acknowledged that women and minority groups seem to be disproportionately affected.

ii.   Its measures in place to support local councillors were outlined, which include:

- a security allowance scheme[57], under which councillors may claim up to 50% of the cost of measures they take to improve their personal security, to a maximum value of €2,500

- funding to Local Authorities and Political Parties to support activities that improve local councillors' security, both online and in person, and to promote gender balance and diversity

- funding to assist with the establishment and running of local or regional caucuses for women councillors. These seek to provide an apolitical space for women councillors to come together and discuss issues affecting them in the course of their duties.

- funding to non-governmental organisations, such as Women for Election, to support women who are considering running for election, for example through safety and resilience training.

- funding the development of the NWCI Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties, which includes guidelines to better respond to social media abuse.

5.7 Political Parties and Leadership in Promoting Safe Participation and Civil Discourse

i.   The evidence provided to the Task Force pointed to the crucial role played by political parties in establishing a culture that ensures that abuse is not tolerated. It is fundamental that political parties have measures in place to ensure that abuse and discrimination do not happen within parties and that there is an increasing understanding that diversity in Parliament can only be achieved where candidates feel safe and supported. It is crucial that parties have robust and accountable internal policies that promote fair political and parliamentary discourse[58].

ii.   The need for political party leaders and individual politicians to lead by example in setting the tone of public discourse and not engaging in language which engenders abuse was also highlighted.

> **The OSCE Toolkit states**
>
> *"As the 'gatekeepers of democracy', political parties have a responsibility to ensure that all citizens, women and men in all their diversity, can participate in parties and in politics without fearing or experiencing violence, and can receive due protection and support in case such violence occurs."*

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56   Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage evidence to the Task Force on 9th November 2023.

57   S.I. No. 449 of 2023 – Local Government Act 2001 (Section 142) (Security Allowance for Local Authority Members) Regulations 2023.

58   Women for Election evidence to Task Force on 21st September 2023.

iii. The Task Force heard calls for political parties to use the OSCE Toolkit for Addressing Violence Against Women in Political Parties[59], which can assist political parties in taking internal steps to tackle violence against women within their structures. It includes a Checklist for Political Parties to assess their effectiveness in addressing abuse against women in their parties.

iv. Research included in the National Women's Council's Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties[60] found evidence that political parties differ in their approach to dealing with the online harassment that their members may be subject to, and that such approaches may differ in their effectiveness. The Toolkit is a resource available to parties to deal with the online abuse of their female members.

v. The Task Force notes the recommendations for political parties contained in the report Women's Experience of Running for Election in Ireland[61], including:

■ the provision of equality, diversity and inclusion training for all party members;

■ a check-in system during election campaigns and

■ appropriate supports for candidates, particularly first-time candidates and those from under-represented and marginalised communities.

vi. Submissions from civil society groups representing minorities highlighted the need for political parties to support members and candidates from minority groups, through training and other supports paying particular attention to the differential treatment they may encounter in canvassing and online. The Task Force also heard calls for the promotion and implementation by political parties of the Anti-Racism Election Protocol during election cycles.[62]

vii. The Report of the Houses of the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament[63] also recognised the role of political parties in improving the diversity of the parliamentary community to better reflect society in Ireland and made recommendations for political parties to increase ethnic minority participation in politics.

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59 OSCE/ODIHR Toolkit (2022). Available online at: 532187_0.pdf (https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/b/5/532187_0.pdf).

60 Claire McGing and Valesca Lima, Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties (2022). Available online at: NWC_Toolkit_SocialMediaAbuse_2022 (https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC_Toolkit_SocialMediaAbuse_2022FINAL.pdf).

61 Fiona Buckley and Lisa Keenan, "More Women – Changing the face of politics" (2021). Available online at: WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics (https://www.womenforelection.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/WFE-More-Women-Changing-the-Face-of-Politics-small.pdf).

62 The Anti-Racism Election Protocol (AREP) was developed by the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) in partnership with all political parties to ensure that elections are conducted in a way that they do not incite hatred or prejudice on the grounds of race, religious belief or membership of the Traveller Community and is available online at Anti-Racism Election Protocol » INAR (https://inar.ie/our-work/campaigns/anti-racism-election-protocol/).

63 Report of the Houses of the Oireachtas Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (2021) available online at: Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBusiness/other/2021-11-02_report-of-the-forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament_en.pdf).

Conclusions

i.   The Task Force concludes that, given the prevalence of abuse in political life and its impact on the democratic process, leadership, coordination and a sustained effort among all relevant stakeholders is required to address abuse in political life. The Task Force recommends that the Houses of the Oireachtas lead through the establishment of a Senior Officials Implementation and Oversight Group to implement the recommendations of the Task Force Report.

ii. The Task Force concludes that politicians and political candidates must be supported to safely participate at every level in the democratic process. Key supports are provided by the Houses of the Oireachtas, local authorities and political parties. Increasingly threats to physical security are a key consideration for those participating in political life which must be responded to in a coordinated way between the various organs of State.

iii. The Task Force recognises that political parties play a key role in the Irish political system and in fostering a culture that upholds democratic values, including equality, diversity and respect among its membership. Party leaders have collective responsibility to demonstrate leadership in their commitment to promote these principles and to ensure civil and respectful discourse in political debate.

iv. The Task Force concludes that political parties should have internal codes of conduct that prohibit abuse, with sanctions for those that do not comply.

v.   The Task Force further recognises the unique responsibility of Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas, individually and collectively, in setting the tone of debate and discourse through their interactions in Dáil and Seanad Éireann and in wider political debate, including online.

vi. The Task Force notes that guidance is available for parliaments and political parties in the form of Toolkits developed by OSCE and other organisations to support democratic processes and to address abuse.

Recommendations

12. It is recommended that Dáil and Seanad Standing Orders provide that, at the first sitting of each Dáil and Seanad, the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach make a statement seeking Members' collective commitment to civil and respectful discourse in political debate in the Houses.

13. It is recommended that the Houses of the Oireachtas:

i.   establish and resource a Senior Officials Implementation and Oversight Group comprising representatives from the Houses of the Oireachtas, relevant Government Departments, and other relevant stakeholders to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force. The Group should report annually to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.

ii. establish and resource a comprehensive social media support service for Members to include:

      a.   an opt-in social media monitoring service to monitor and report abusive, intimidating and harmful content directly to social media platforms as trusted flaggers for action and to report online abuse to AGS; and

      b.   training on safe engagement online for Members and their staff including technical assistance in using tools available to deter and report malicious content.

   iii.   establish a forum for engagement with representatives from social media companies, Coimisiún na Meán and AGS on the collective response to online abuse of Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas.

   iv.   facilitate information sessions for Members and their staff on workplace security measures.

   v.   establish a dedicated single point of contact in the Superintendent's Section to whom security related incidences can be reported, including an escalation process to AGS as appropriate.

   vi.   in conjunction with AGS, create strong working relationships to facilitate the exchange of information, conduct periodic security reviews and to agree and implement appropriate security measures.

   vii.   undertake a review of the Security Requirements Allowance[64] scheme to assess that it sufficiently meets the requirements of Members and identify the reasons for the low uptake to date.

   viii.   implement the relevant recommendations of the Family Friendly Forum Report[65] (FFF Report) including:

      ■   to review existing codes of conduct on appropriate behaviour for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and set out clear sanctions for breaches of these codes (Recommendation 25 of the FFF Report); and

      ■   to undertake an audit of the Houses of the Oireachtas using the gender sensitive toolkit provided by the IPU (Recommendation 31 of the FFF Report).

   ix.   review and update the existing Codes of Conduct under the Standards in Public Office Act for TDs and Senators to include provisions to address abuse, including online abuse, and discriminatory behaviours.

14.   It is recommended that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Local Authorities:

   i.   review the security allowance scheme[66] to ensure that it sufficiently meets the requirements of elected members of local authorities.

   ii.   provide information sessions on security matters to local councillors and directly elected mayors, in conjunction with AGS on workplace security measures.

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64   S.I. No. 196/2023 – Oireachtas (Allowances) (Amendment) Regulations 2023.

65   Family Friendly Forum Report: Forum on a Family Friendly and Inclusive Parliament (https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBusiness/other/2021-11-02_report-of-the-forum-on-a-family-friendly-and-inclusive-parliament_en.pdf).

66   S.I. No. 449 of 2023 – Local Government Act 2001 (Section 142) (Security Allowance for Local Authority Members) Regulations 2023.

iii. explore the feasibility of establishing comprehensive social media support services for local councillors and directly elected mayors, to include:

   a. an opt-in social media monitoring service to monitor and report abusive, intimidating and harmful content directly to social media platforms as trusted flaggers for action and report online abuse to AGS; and

   b. training on safe engagement online, including technical assistance in using tools available to deter and report malicious content.

15. It is recommended that political parties:

i. put in place measures to support women and minority members and candidates, noting the particular challenges these groups may encounter in participating in political life.

ii. promote and implement the Anti-Racism Election Protocol.

iii. have in place internal codes of conduct for members of their party that prohibit abuse, both for elected members and for ordinary members, with sanctions for those who do not comply.

iv. have complaints processes and trained points of contact within the political parties for members of the party who experience abuse.

v. have systems in place to collate data on reported incidences and outcomes of abuse to facilitate the monitoring and assessment of the prevalence and impact of abuse.

vi. equip election candidates with campaign training that incorporates measures to protect against abuse.

vii. undertake a benchmarking exercise of their policies and procedures against the NWCI Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties and the OSCE toolkit for political parties to tackle violence against women.

viii. work collectively to develop an all-party code of conduct or civility code for parties and their membership to adopt.

16. In view of the need to protect the integrity and sustainability of our democracy and the leadership required in that regard, it is recommended that political party leaders and group leaders convene annually under the leadership of the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach to share progress on actions taken by the political parties on foot of the recommendations in this Report.

APPENDIX 1: Terms of Reference

The health of our democracy relies on equal and diverse representation. Recent reports in the media and survey results indicate that there is a significant level of abuse, including online abuse, and harassment experienced by those who participate in political life and that this abuse disproportionately impacts women. These behaviours are deeply problematic and will have long term negative impact on women and minority groups' participation in political life.

The Ceann Comhairle and the Cathaoirleach have established a Task Force to be known as the *Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life* to examine and make proposals on how to safeguard and support participation and to promote civil discourse in political life.

Terms of Reference

The Task force will:

1. Consider the nature, prevalence and impact of abuse, including online abuse, and harassment of those who participate in political life within the Irish context.

2. Consider measures to address the problem of abuse and harassment within political life such as:

    i.   raising awareness, including through education and training, of the value of political participation and public service and of the detrimental impact of abuse, including online abuse, and harassment in deterring political participation across Irish society;

    ii. public policy, including legislation, to safeguard and support those in political life;

    iii. the response of social media platforms to address online abuse and harassment;

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

3. Consider how to monitor the continuing level of the problem and the effectiveness of measures that are put in place to reduce the problem.

The Task Force shall agree its own operating procedures and shall hear and/or consider such submissions as it thinks fit, either verbal or written, as relate to its remit.

The Houses of the Oireachtas Service will provide administrative, legal and research services to the Task Force.

The Task Force shall make a final report to the Ceann Comhairle and the Cathaoirleach, for transmission to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, not later than 31 December 2023. Any extension of the deadline for submission of the final report shall be approved by the Ceann Comhairle and the Cathaoirleach.

APPENDIX 2: Stakeholder Engagement

The Committee held a series of engagements with stakeholders which provided evidence from a broad perspective. These engagements took place as follows:

List of Engagements with Stakeholders

Theme 1: Prevalence, Experience and Impact of Abuse Harassment on the person, the institution and political life	7th September 2023

- Dr Tom Felle – Head of Journalism and Communication, University of Galway
- Prof. Maura Conway – Professor of Government and International Studies, School of Law and Government, Dublin City University (DCU)
- Dr Ian Richardson – Affiliate member, Dublin City University (DCU) Institute for Future Media Democracy and Society

Theme 1: Prevalence, Experience and Impact of Abuse Harassment on the person, the institution and political life	21st September 2023

- Dr Brigitte Filion – Programme Officer, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
- Dr Fiona Buckley – Department of Government and Politics, University College Cork (UCC)
- Dr Lisa Keenan – Department of Political Science, Trinity College Dublin (TCD)
- Brian Sheehan – CEO, Women for Election
- Alison Cowzer – Chairperson, Women for Election
- Liam Kenny – Director, Association of Irish Local Government (AILG)
- Cllr. Emma Blain – Fine Gael Councillor, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County
- Brian Killoran – Chief Executive Officer, Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Valéria Aquino – Integration Manager, Immigrant Council of Ireland

Briefing on Trauma Informed Approaches	29th September 2023

- Sarah Benson – CEO, Women's Aid

Theme 1: Prevalence, Experience and Impact of Abuse Harassment on the person, the institution and political life	5th October 2023

Personal testimonies

Theme 2: Mitigation Measures, including those to prevent and protect, and international experience, best practice and current measures in Ireland	12th October 2023

- Michael McElgunn – Assistant Commissioner, National Crime and Security Intelligence Service, An Garda Síochána
- Jo O'Leary – Detective Chief Superintendent, Liaison and Protection, An Garda Síochána

Theme 2: Mitigation Measures, including those to prevent and protect, and international experience, best practice and current measures in Ireland — **26th October 2023**

- Caroline Hubbard – Senior Gender Advisor, Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, USAID
- Ted Barry – Deputy Director (People Security), Parliamentary Security Department, UK Parliament
- Rachel Weston – Regional Advisor in Europe and Central Asia Office, United Nations

Theme 2: Mitigation Measures, including those to prevent and protect, and international experience, best practice and current measures in Ireland — **9th November 2023**

Session A:
- Deirdre Meenan – Assistant Secretary, Department of Justice
- Rachel Woods – Assistant Secretary, Department of Justice
- Carol Baxter – Assistant Secretary, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Diarmuid O'Leary – Principal Officer, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Louise Purcell – Assistant Principal, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Sarah Shiel – Assistant Principal, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Session B:
- Liam Herrick – Executive Director, Irish Council for Civil Liberties
- Dr Johnny Ryan – Director of Enforce, Irish Council for Civil Liberties

Theme 3: Online Abuse and Harassment Meeting at Meta Campus — **21st November 2023**

Meta Presenters:
- Anne O'Leary – Head of Meta Ireland/VP EMEA, Global Business Group
- Cindy Southworth – Global Head of Women's Safety Policy
- David Miles – Head of Safety Policy, EMEA
- Dualta Ó Broin – Head of Public Policy
- Kirsten Nelson De Búrca – Government and Social Impact Partner Manager, UK and Ireland
- Shane Fitzgerald – Content Policy Manager, Core Policy
- Stephanie McCourt – Trust and Safety Manager, Law Enforcement Outreach

Theme 3: Online Abuse and Harassment — **23rd November 2023**

- Jeremy Godfrey – Chairperson, Coimisiún na Meán
- Niamh Hodnett – Online Safety Commissioner, Coimisiún na Meán
- John Evans – Digital Services Commissioner, Coimisiún na Meán
- Tiernan Kenny – Director of Communications tand Public Affairs, Coimisiún na Meán
- Julie Inman Grant – Australia's eSafety Commissioner
- Paul Clark – Australia's eSafety Executive Manager Education Prevention and Inclusion

Theme 4: Role of the Political System	14th December 2023

- Meg Munn – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights international consultant and former Minister for Women and Equality in the United Kingdom
- Art O'Leary – CEO, An Coimisiún Toghcháin
- Brian Dawson – Communications and Public Engagement Manager, An Coimisiún Toghcháin
- Mary Clare O'Sullivan – Head of Electoral Integrity, An Coimisiún Toghcháin
- Peter Finnegan – Clerk of the Dáil and Secretary General, Houses of the Oireachtas Service
- Michael Errity – Deputy Secretary General, Corporate and Members Services, Houses of the Oireachtas Service
- Rosemary Keogh – Assistant Secretary, Corporate and Members Services, Houses of the Oireachtas Service
- Barry Ryan – Superintendent, Houses of the Oireachtas Service

The Task Force also received a number of written submissions – contributors are listed below.

Written Submissions Received

Contributor	Date Received	Topic
Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation	25/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)	04/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
Men's Development Network	11/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI)	28/09/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
Pavee Point	14/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
Safe Ireland	15/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
See Her Elected	11/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
Together for Safety	28/07/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)	18/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
WCI Limerick	03/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
Women's Aid	11/08/2023	Civil Society and non-Governmental
An Garda Síochána	22/11/2023	Government and Statutory Bodies
Coimisiún na Meán	16/08/2023	Government and Statutory Bodies
Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media	29/08/2023	Government and Statutory Bodies
Dr. Mary Upton – Former Chair of Family Friendly Forum	09/08/2023	Government and Statutory Bodies
IHREC	25/07/2023	Government and Statutory Bodies
National Disability Authority	11/08/2023	Government and Statutory Bodies
Northern Irish Assembly	11/08/2023	Government and Statutory Bodies
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	23/10/2023	International
Dr. Claire McGing – Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT)	15/08/2023	Irish and International Academics
Pauline Cullen and Shane Gough – Maynooth University	11/08/2023	Irish and International Academics

Contributor	Date Received	Topic
Dr. Sofía Collignon – Queen Mary University of London	11/08/2023	Irish and International Academics
Prof. Yvonne Galligan – Technological University Dublin (TUD)	11/08/2023	Irish and International Academics
Dr. Lisa Keenan – Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	16/08/2023	Irish and International Academics
Prof. Aisling Swaine – University College Dublin (UCD)	30/07/2023	Irish and International Academics
Dr. Ian Richardson – Affiliate member, Dublin City University (DCU) Institute for Future Media Democracy and Society	09/08/2023	Irish and International Academics
Fianna Fáil	22/09/2023	Political Parties
Fine Gael	22/09/2023	Political Parties
Green Party	22/09/2023	Political Parties
Labour Party	20/09/2023	Political Parties
Seanad Independent Group	22/09/2023	Political Parties
Sinn Féin	22/09/2023	Political Parties
Social Democrats	25/09/2023	Political Parties

Notes