



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta  
an Duine agus Comhionannas  
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Sent via email: [taskforcesp@oireachtas.ie](mailto:taskforcesp@oireachtas.ie)

Bríd Dunne  
Secretary to the Task Force  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2,  
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25 July 2023

**Re: Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life**  
**Your Ref: TSPPL-I-017**

Dear Bríd,

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the recent establishment and Terms of Reference for the *Task Force for Safe Participation in Political Life* and the stated intention of the Task Force to lay a final report before the Houses of the Oireachtas by the end of the year. Thank you also for your invitation to the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission to make a written submission to inform the work of the Task Force by 11 August 2023.

I see that you are seeking, in particular, information on how abuse and harassment can impact on equality of participation in politics; and on any measures that IHREC have considered to promote equality in political life. While we are not in a position to provide a full written submission in such a short time frame we warmly welcome the work of the Task Force and suggest the consideration of the following IHREC publications that may provide some valuable guidance to this important work.

In 2020, IHREC made a [Submission to the Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality](#) of which a full chapter was dedicated to the participation of women in political and public life. Our findings and recommendations can be found at pp14-20. One of IHREC's recommendations at that time was that the new electoral commission should engage with groups facing



barriers to electoral participation, and that political parties should be monitored on their efforts in gender recruitment practices. We also recommended that State leadership is needed to develop a comprehensive regulatory framework to combat hate speech including misogynist speech. Any proposed reform of harassment laws also needs to account for legal responses to cyber harassment and abuse.

Likewise in our [Recommendations on the Establishment of an Electoral Commission](#) we address standards in political discourse in election and referendum campaigns. We are clear that political discourse that fosters a climate of hostility and intolerance can exclude targeted groups from the public sphere. Such exclusion restricts the extent to which these groups can participate at all levels in the democratic process. We recommended at that time that the electoral commission would be mandated to address the use of discriminatory rhetoric and hate speech in political campaigning by developing and promoting standards in political discourse during elections and referenda.

Finally, Chapter 14 of our [Submission to the Human Rights Committee on Ireland's 5<sup>th</sup> Periodic Report on civil and political rights](#), from June last year, also makes recommendations relevant to the political participation of structurally vulnerable groups. Within that report we recommended that efforts to legislate for hate crime and incitement to hatred prioritise ongoing training for An Garda Síochána, the judiciary and the legal profession, the provision of clear and precise definitions of relevant terms, and the establishment and maintenance of strong reporting mechanisms and transparent data sharing policies.

I hope the above is helpful and I wish you well in your important work.

Le meas,

Sinéad Gibney  
Chief Commissioner