



Inter-Parliamentary Union

For democracy. For everyone.



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Issue brief

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Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in the Asia-Pacific region

Introduction

Since 2016, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) has been gathering testimonies from women working in parliaments, shedding light on the persistent hostility they face in the political arena. Its series of studies on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament has exposed the nature and magnitude of one of the most significant barriers to achieving gender equality in politics.

The studies focus on specific regions and are carried out in partnership with regional parliamentary assemblies or organizations, continuing and expanding the collection of data on gender-based violence experienced by women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, both within parliaments and in the political sphere more broadly. These studies aim to examine how regional contexts and the various political, sociocultural and historical realities of the countries involved shape the experiences of women in parliament. They also monitor the measures developed and actions taken by parliaments to prevent and combat these forms of violence. Such data are essential, as they make it possible to acknowledge, name and denounce acts of violence, as well as to mobilize stakeholders to prevent and eliminate these acts using proven solutions.

The present study focuses on parliaments in the Asia-Pacific region (see list of countries in Annex 3). It was conducted by the IPU in partnership with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA). It follows two previous regional studies carried out by the IPU and partners on this issue: a report on parliaments in Europe in 2018 and another on parliaments in Africa in 2021.¹ Both studies confirmed alarming rates of gender-based violence, which negatively affects the full participation and performance of women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff in exercising their duties. Gender-based violence also undermines the representativeness and inclusiveness of parliamentary institutions, and the reports highlighted how various parliaments have responded to this problem.

This study builds on previous work and was conducted at a time of increasing awareness and recognition of the problem of violence against women in politics. Like the previous studies, it is based on the testimonies of those directly affected. Confidential interviews were carried out with 150 women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff from 33 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. In accordance with representative sampling standards, three women parliamentarians and two women staff members from each parliament were interviewed (see Annex 1 on the study's methodology). Their experiences and valuable contributions form the foundation of the findings summarized in this report. By taking part in the study, these women had the opportunity to speak out on a subject that is difficult to broach, and, for some of them, to name the acts they experienced, propose targeted

solutions, and begin the process of engagement to end gender-based violence in politics and prevent its recurrence, particularly for younger generations (see Part 9: A political space of one's own).

The Asia-Pacific region is marked by major socio-economic, political, cultural, religious, territorial and demographic disparities. Parliaments from countries in the four subregions of East Asia, South-East Asia, South Asia and the Pacific were included in this study. While the realities experienced by women in the region are very diverse, the region ranks second to last globally in terms of women's representation in parliament.² To what extent does violence against women in the political sphere contribute to this low level of participation? It is essential to deepen our understanding of the situation by collecting data that can guide and shape policies and practices aimed at fundamentally transforming the political environment and institutions in the region to uphold women's rights and foster the participation of women in political life.

This report is structured as follows:

Key points

Part 1: Background

Part 2: Comparison of the three IPU regional studies in Europe, Africa and Asia-Pacific

Part 3: Experience of women parliamentarians

Part 4: Experience of women parliamentary staff

Part 5: Effects and consequences of violence

Part 6: Reporting

Part 7: Normative framework

Part 8: This violence is not inevitable; it can be prevented: Recommendations and examples

Part 9: A political space of one's own – Effects of participating in the study

Conclusion

Annex 1: Study methodology

Annex 2: Definitions used in the study

Annex 3: List of participating parliaments

Key points

- This study is based on interviews conducted with **150** women from **33** Asia-Pacific countries (out of 37), including **85** women parliamentarians and **65** women members of parliamentary staff.
- It reveals the extent of sexism, harassment and violence perpetrated against women in the parliamentary world of the Asia-Pacific region.

Prevalence of different forms of violence reported by participants:

| | Women parliamentarians | Women parliamentary staff |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Psychological violence | 76% | 63% |
| Sexual violence | 25% | 36% |
| Economic violence | 24% | 27% |
| Physical violence | 13% | 5% |

Prevalence of specific manifestations of this violence:

| | Women parliamentarians | Women parliamentary staff |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Sexist remarks and behaviour | 61% | 55% |
| Psychological harassment/intimidation | 39% | 40% |
| Threats | 34% | 21% |
| Sexual harassment | 25% | 35% |
| Online attacks | 60% | 9% |

- **Online gender-based violence is on the rise**, compared to rates reported in previous IPU studies. In total, **60%** of the women parliamentarians surveyed have been the target of hate speech, disinformation, image-based abuse or unwanted disclosure of personal data (doxing) online. More than a third of reported cases of intimidation and threats occurred online.
- Rates of violence, particularly psychological and sexual violence, are disproportionately higher among specific groups of **women parliamentarians** than for participants as a whole. This includes women under 40 (+17 percentage points for psychological violence and +11 for sexual violence), women from minority backgrounds (+18 and +6 percentage points respectively), and unmarried women, highlighting the urgent need for an intersectional approach to prevent and eliminate such violence.
- **Women parliamentarians belonging to their country's political opposition** report rates of psychological violence that are 24 percentage points higher than for women parliamentarians as a whole, and rates of sexual violence that are 18 percentage points higher.
- **Parliament** is the main environment where women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff experience sexual harassment and sexist behaviour and remarks.
- Among **women parliamentary staff**, the alarming rates of sexual and psychological harassment perpetrated overwhelmingly by male parliamentary staff and, to a lesser extent, by parliamentarians, raise questions about the nature of parliament as a workplace.

- Women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff who have experienced acts of violence **often do not report them**, especially when they involve sexist remarks and behaviour and incidences of sexual harassment. Much remains to be done to ensure that victims feel safe, protected and supported by institutions that take an unequivocal stand against sexism and gender-based violence.
- Since the IPU’s first study on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments,³ **several parliaments in the region have begun taking steps** to prevent and respond to such actions, including by setting up mechanisms for confidential reporting and handling complaints. This is the case, for example, in Fiji, India, the Maldives, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand. While these measures currently primarily protect parliamentary staff from harassment by peers, the examples of the parliaments of Australia and New Zealand demonstrate the importance of implementing comprehensive reforms to ensure that **parliamentarians and all those working in parliament are fully involved in and covered by such measures**.

Part 1: Background

What is violence against women in politics?

In politics, both women and men can be exposed to violence – whether during or outside of election periods, online or offline. These acts of violence may be gender-based, targeting women because of their sex.

Violence against women in politics is defined 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”.⁴

Such violence is aimed at women to dissuade them from engaging in political activities and exercising their fundamental rights, and to control, restrict or prevent their participation in political life as individuals or as a group.⁵ It prevents women “from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression”.⁶

Violence against women in politics also poses a significant threat to gender equality. Although often overlooked, the denigration of women permeates the origins, manifestations, and effects of violence against women in politics. It is thus a root cause of the legitimization and normalization of women’s exclusion from political life.⁷

A threat to democracy

Violence against women in politics and parliaments is a clear violation of women’s human and political rights, hindering their full participation in decision-making. It remains one of the main obstacles to parity in political life and its deterrent effect on women’s individual and collective political participation has serious repercussions on representative democracy. It can deter young women from getting involved in politics, and in recent years, we have seen women in the highest leadership

positions deciding to give up politics, as they can no longer bear the danger, exhaustion and pressure.⁸

When gender-based violence is pervasive, political processes are impaired, as they are deprived of the full contribution and influence of women and other marginalized voices. The credibility and legitimacy of institutions are compromised. Parliaments fail in their duty to be representative and inclusive, and in their responsibility to serve the whole population in all its diversity.

While the problem of violence against women in politics is not new, it is recognized that it needs to be urgently addressed to ensure the proper functioning of democracy. Research indicates that the equal representation of women in decision-making positions would lead to greater stability and more lasting peace, a world with better leadership and governance, and one that is more responsive to the needs of the population.⁹

Asia-Pacific region

The Asia-Pacific region accounts for around 60% of the world’s population.¹⁰ Each of its subregions exhibits significant socio-economic, political, cultural, religious, territorial and demographic disparities.

The lives of women in the region contrast sharply with those of men. While equality between girls and boys is improving in the area of education, many inequalities remain. The gender gap in labour market participation has widened over the decades, with young women three times more likely than young men to be neither employed nor in education.¹¹ At the same time, in many countries, women have been and continue to be expected to take on most domestic tasks.¹² In the majority of countries for which data are available, the time women devote to unpaid work is two to five times greater than that of men. Women are often relegated to informal, low-skilled jobs, and are excluded from more lucrative careers in the sciences and emerging technologies.¹³

Data on women’s participation in politics and the prevalence of violence against women in the region, as shown below, help to contextualize this study within a regional framework where decision-making processes still fall short of an egalitarian approach.

Low participation of women in politics

The Asia-Pacific region ranks last but one in the world in terms of women’s participation in parliament. According to Parline data, as of 1 October 2024,¹⁴ women account for 21.5% of parliamentarians in Asia, and 19.4% in the Pacific.¹⁵ With the exception of Australia, New Zealand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam, which have reached or surpassed 30% women in parliament, countries in the region are struggling to achieve parity.

Data by subregion reveal the extent of the disparities:

| Percentage of women in parliament by subregion | Lower chamber and unicameral |
|--|------------------------------|
| South-East Asia | 23.0% |
| East Asia | 23.1% |
| South Asia | 14.9% |
| Australia and New Zealand | 41.4% |
| Pacific Islands | 7.1% |

The percentages for South Asia and the Pacific Islands are below the regional average. Moreover, of the 37 parliaments invited to take part in the study, 11 had fewer than 10% women members. Differences in the number of women parliamentarians between countries and parliaments are also considerable, given disparities in their sizes, among other considerations. For example, eight small Pacific countries have only one or two women parliamentarians, while China has over 700.

Across the globe, the increased representation of women in parliaments has been instrumental in advancing women’s rights and combating violence against women.¹⁶ Conversely, low levels of women’s participation in political life can contribute to violence against women more broadly, and specifically target women aspiring to enter politics. Furthermore, since violence hinders women from reaching their full potential, discourages their participation in public life, and enables those who perpetrate it to assert dominance, the high prevalence of violence against women in a given context can also account for the underrepresentation of women in political life.

The prevalence of violence against women

Gender-based violence in parliaments and politics in the Asia-Pacific region also reflects gender inequality and violence against women and girls in the region’s countries.

According to data published by the World Health Organization (WHO), 30% of women aged 15 and older – approximately one in three globally – have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.¹⁷ While the global prevalence of intimate partner violence is 26%, regional data for the Asia-Pacific region reveal significant disparities. The region includes both the highest rates worldwide, in Oceania/Pacific Islands (37%) and South Asia (35%), as well as the lowest, in East Asia (20%), South-East Asia (21%), and Australia and New Zealand (23%).¹⁸

With regard to sexual violence perpetrated by individuals other than intimate partners during a woman’s lifetime, the WHO reports that it affects 6% of women worldwide. Once again, significant disparities are observed within the Asia-Pacific region, with the highest prevalence recorded in the Pacific (19% in Australia and New Zealand, 12% in Micronesia and Polynesia, 10% in Melanesia) and the lowest in South Asia (2%) and South-East Asia (4%).

Sexual violence is a particularly stigmatized issue, especially in highly traditional and patriarchal societies, where victims often fear being blamed for provoking the abuse and face severe retaliation if they come forward. As such, these findings should be interpreted with caution, as the actual prevalence is likely to be significantly higher.¹⁹

Cases of violations of the human rights of parliamentarians

Violence against women in parliaments can also be influenced by a country’s overall level of political and state violence, the role of its police and judiciary system, and the role of political parties in preventing women from taking up political office.

According to data from 2024,²⁰ Asia is the region in the world with the highest number of cases of violations of the rights of parliamentarians reviewed by the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians. Violations against women parliamentarians account for 17.9% of cases in the Asian region. The most common violations of their rights include infringements on freedom of opinion and expression, the unjust invalidation, suspension, or revocation of their parliamentary mandates, the denial of fair trial guarantees, and threats and acts of intimidation.

In some countries of the region, freedom of expression is restricted, and sexism combined with state repression poses significant barriers to women’s access to leadership positions. A study on women in politics in South-East Asia highlights that the main institutional obstacles to women’s political leadership are political parties and state security forces. “Political parties act as gatekeepers to leadership positions in formal politics: they either discourage women from attaining leadership roles or enable them to do so. State security forces repress women political leaders in both formal and grassroots politics, creating an environment of fear and intimidation.”²¹

These institutions sometimes resort to violence against women in politics, particularly if the woman in question belongs to the opposition or is critical of the government. A prominent example from the region is that of Philippine Senator Leila de Lima, who was detained for almost seven years without any substantial evidence, subjected to judicial harassment, and targeted by a smear campaign characterized by hateful and violent rhetoric that was particularly sexist and misogynistic.²²

Part 2: Comparison of the three IPU regional studies in Europe, Africa and Asia-Pacific

In the Asia-Pacific region, as in the other regions analysed by the IPU and its partners,²³ the political arena remains hostile to women. The prevalence of violence is high in all three regions, with only slight variations (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1: Prevalence of violence among women parliamentarians surveyed

| | Asia-Pacific (2025) | Africa (2021) | Europe (2018) |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Psychological violence | 76% | 80% | 85% |
| Sexual violence | 25% | 39% | 25% |
| Physical violence | 13% | 23% | 15% |
| Economic violence | 24% | 29% | 14% |

Table 2: Prevalence of violence among women parliamentary staff surveyed

| | Asia-Pacific (2025) | Africa (2021) | Europe (2018) |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Psychological violence | 63% | 69% | 52% |
| Sexual violence | 36% | 46% | 41% |
| Economic violence | 27% | 34% | 10% |
| Physical violence | 5% | 6% | 7% |

- One striking observation across these regional studies is the remarkable similarity in how the testimonies are expressed. Women who have experienced sexism, harassment, or violence use the same words and phrases, despite having no prior coordination, not knowing one another, being of different ages, and coming from diverse geographical and cultural

backgrounds. It is clear that these testimonies transcend individual experiences and reflect a structural dynamic that repeats itself regardless of the context in which the violence occurs. Societal norms everywhere have historically confined women to the domestic sphere, making them political “outsiders” unless they belong to a prominent political family.

- The lower percentage of psychological violence among women parliamentarians in Asia-Pacific compared to other regions is probably due to high non-response rates, or to responses systematically indicating the non-existence of this type of violence in countries where freedom of expression is limited and fear of reprisals is great.
- A detailed examination of the rates of psychological violence reveals that **60%** of participants from the Asia-Pacific region reported experiencing online sexist attacks – the highest rate for this type of abuse compared to other IPU studies. However, the percentage for sexist remarks and behaviour, as well as threats, is slightly lower.
- Participants in the Asia-Pacific region were more likely than those in Africa and Europe not to report sexist remarks and behaviour. This finding suggests a greater tolerance of such

Table 3: Prevalence of manifestations of psychological violence among women parliamentarians surveyed

| | Asia-Pacific | Africa | Europe |
|--|--------------|--------|--------|
| Sexist remarks and behaviour | 61% | 67% | 68% |
| Online attacks | 60% | 46% | 58% |
| Psychological harassment/intimidation | 39% | 39% | 27% |
| Threats of death, rape, beating or abduction | 34% | 42% | 47% |

Table 4: Reporting by women parliamentarians

| Women parliamentarians who: | Asia-Pacific | Africa | Europe |
|---|--------------|--------|--------|
| have been subjected to sexist remarks and reported them to their authorities of their parliament or political party | 4% | 13% | 18% |
| have been threatened and have reported it to the police | 46% | 48% | 50% |
| have been subjected to sexist attacks online and have reported them to the police, to online platform administrators or to a tribunal | 24% | 24% | 33% |
| have been slapped, pushed or hit and have reported it to the police or to the authorities of their political party | 50% | 27% | 22% |
| have been victims of physical violence committed using a weapon and have reported it to the police | 67% | 57% | 100% |
| have been sexually harassed and have told the authorities of their parliament | 5% | 7% | 24% |

Table 5: Reporting by women parliamentary staff

| Women parliamentary staff who: | Asia-Pacific | Africa | Europe |
|--|--------------|--------|--------|
| have been subjected to sexist remarks and reported them to the authorities of their parliament | 2% | 14% | 19% |
| have been the target of psychological harassment and have reported it to the authorities of their parliament | 32% | 12% | 63% |
| have been slapped, pushed or hit and have reported it to the authorities of their parliament | 67% | 33% | 33% |
| have been sexually harassed and have reported it to the authorities of their parliament | 10% | 13% | 6% |

attitudes in the political environment, and a reluctance to combat inequalities between women and men.

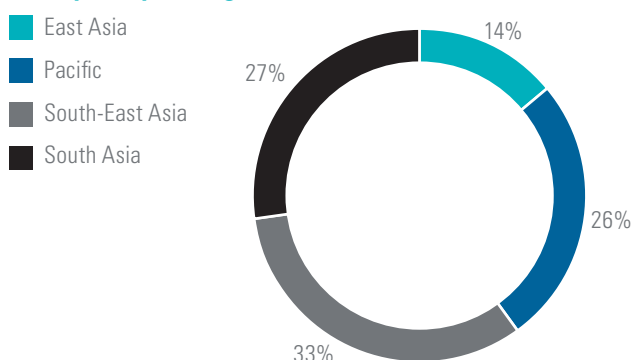
- Reporting of sexual harassment remains very marginal, if not non-existent, in all three studies, as victims are afraid of reprisals and do not trust existing reporting mechanisms.
- The difficulties women face in finding their place in politics are amplified in the Asia-Pacific region, where they are less well-represented in parliament. Combined with restrictions on freedom of expression in some of the region's countries, these difficulties may explain why sexist attitudes and violence, in particular sexual harassment, remain little discussed and are still taboo subjects, even for female participants in the region.
- In total, **32%** of women parliamentary staff surveyed in the Asia-Pacific region who have experienced psychological harassment/bullying reported it to their parliamentary authorities. This reporting rate is 20 points higher than in the Africa study, but 31 lower than in the Europe study. It suggests that such violence in the workplace is beginning to be better recognized, and that women parliamentary staff may increasingly be using trusted internal measures to report psychological violence in the workplace.
- In all regions, physical violence and threats to physical integrity (particularly violence involving weapons) tend to be more reported than other forms of violence. This may be explained by the fact that these acts are better recognized in national criminal legislation, and more widely considered unacceptable in political life.
- Unlike Africa and Europe, the Asia-Pacific region has no specialized regional mechanism for women's rights, violence against women in general or violence against women in politics that would require States to recognize these issues and take the necessary measures to eradicate them (see Part 7: Normative framework). This may also explain why it seems more difficult to address these issues openly in the region.

Part 3: Experience of women parliamentarians

Participation in the survey

A total of **85** women parliamentarians took part in the study. They belong to the parliaments of **33** (out of 37) Asia-Pacific countries and come from the subregions shown below.

Figure 1: Breakdown of women parliamentarians surveyed, by subregion



They represent all age groups (Table 6), and **16%** are young parliamentarians under the age of 40.

90% belong to a political party: **63%** to a majority party and **30%** to an opposition party.

According to their statements, **19%** identify as belonging to a minority group in their country, and **2%** are disabled.

In terms of marital status, **68%** are married, **13%** are single and **18%** are divorced or widowed.

Table 6: Age of women parliamentarians interviewed

| Age of respondents in years | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| 18 - 30 | 2% |
| 31 - 40 | 14% |
| 41 - 45 | 15% |
| 46 - 50 | 17% |
| 51 - 60 | 32% |
| 61 - 70 | 19% |
| 71 - 80 | 1% |

Psychological violence and its manifestations

76% of the women parliamentarians surveyed said they had experienced psychological violence during their term of office.

Psychological violence includes all gestures, acts, words, writings and images that harm the psychological integrity of a person or group of people, and that have the effect not only of weakening and injuring them psychologically, but also of subjugating and controlling them.

For the purposes of the study, psychological violence is characterized by five types of manifestations: sexist remarks and behaviour, the publication of denigrating images or remarks in the traditional media (newspapers, radio, television), intimidation, threats and online gender-based attacks (Table 7).

Table 7: Prevalence of manifestations of psychological violence among women parliamentarians surveyed

| | |
|--|-----|
| Sexist remarks and behaviour | 61% |
| Online attacks | 60% |
| Psychological harassment/intimidation | 39% |
| Threats of death, rape, beating or abduction | 34% |
| Denigrating images or remarks in newspapers or on television | 28% |

Sexist remarks and behaviour: Are women welcome in politics?

Among the women parliamentarians interviewed, **61%** said they had been subjected to sexist behaviour or remarks multiple times during their parliamentary term of office. Participants from the Pacific subregion reported experiencing significantly more incidents of this nature (+16 percentage points above the average). These incidents took place in

Table 8: **Psychological violence: Offline and online spaces**

| | In parliament | Online | Other political and public spaces | Private life |
|--|---------------|--------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Sexist remarks and behaviour | 48% | 18% | 29% | 5% |
| Psychological harassment/intimidation | 27% | 35% | 25% | 14% |
| Threats of death, beating or abduction | 10% | 30% | 37% | 23% |
| Online attacks | | 60% | | |

parliament in **48%** of cases, in other offline political and public spaces (**29%**) and in online spaces (**18%**).

In **40%** of cases, the perpetrators were colleagues from opposing political parties (8.4 out of 10 were men); in **30%** of cases, they were members of the public (7 out of 10 were men); and in **25%** of cases, they were colleagues from the same political party (8.7 out of 10 were men).

On the whole, violence against women in politics conveys the message that politics is a male domain, and that women are either unwelcome or unfit to participate.

Sexist remarks and attitudes are emblematic of this message. They draw on social norms and roles historically ascribed to men and women, as well as on negative stereotypes, in particular societal norms that have confined women to domestic work, making them “outsiders” in the political sphere. As a result, the private and family domain is often portrayed as the proper place for women to “remain confined”. This narrative is often invoked to justify the perceived illegitimacy of women in the political sphere.

Some participants reported being accosted while carrying out their work in parliament by remarks such as, “*Why don’t you stay at home and in the kitchen with the children?*” According to another participant, one of the recurring abusive messages online is: “*Women parliamentarians should give priority to raising their children and resign from office.*”

Masculinist and aggressive behaviour, as well as verbal and physical violence, also contribute to making political spaces, both offline and online, hostile to women. When women enter the political arena, especially in parliaments traditionally dominated by men, they are often met with attitudes that challenge their presence (Box 1).

Box 1 – Parliament: A hostile environment

Some participants said that their parliament, political party or the broader political environment were spaces where the norm of male domination prevails.

Some described their parliament as a physical space where women quite literally have no place: “*Male parliamentarians crowd into the corridors of Parliament, leaving no room to move, and making no effort to respect women or give them space.*”

For others, their male colleagues dominate the space through their aggression:

“*Men are aggressive and loud in Parliament and elsewhere. They take the floor to push through their ideas and speeches forcefully. They dominate Parliament by constantly making*

noise. Women are often intimidated because they always seem to be fighting!”

“*Male parliamentarians push you without apology: it’s their male privilege. It’s a power play that consists of saying: ‘This is a male space; this is our space. You women are just passing through.’*”

“*The way male politicians treat women stems from their belief that they have the power, and that they are seen as stronger and smarter than women. This, in their view, ‘gives them a licence’ to behave badly and perpetuate this kind of inequality.*”

Silencing

The participation of women parliamentarians is also challenged by practices and remarks aimed at silencing them. In some contexts, the mere act of a woman speaking publicly or in parliament can be perceived as a transgression. Respondents shared experiences of being deliberately prevented from speaking to suppress their perspectives and deny them recognition as equals in politics:

“*I was one of the new parliamentarians and the only woman in the ministerial group. A male colleague, younger than me, shouted at me and intimidated me to stop me from speaking. It was very violent and clearly motivated by gender. I was terrified, and no one in the room reacted. Later, he felt ashamed and apologized in front of everyone, but the experience was deeply shocking.*”

“*When you arrive in committee or plenary, you don’t feel welcome. Male parliamentarians undermine women’s opinions. You have to be loud and aggressive to make yourself heard. In my constituency, the situation has improved, but remains challenging with the leadership. They always seem to view you as a threat, as if you’re going to take away their power and decision-making authority.*”

In other cases, violence takes a more insidious or symbolic form. Some participants explained that they had felt invisible as parliamentarians because they had been ignored or treated as if they didn’t exist (Box 2).

Box 2 – Putting words to symbolic violence: Ignoring and invisibilizing

“*At the start of my mandate, many male parliamentarians were not happy to see me. Parliament is simply not seen as a place for women. They wouldn’t talk to me directly, shake my hand or sit next to me. I was, in a way, excluded.*”

"Along with some male colleagues, I accompanied the President on a visit, but my name was the only one not mentioned in the press article. I wasn't in the photos either. I was invisible. Another time, in an article about the celebration of International Women's Day where I was the keynote speaker, the journalist didn't mention my name!"

"Many male parliamentarians, including a Minister of Parliament, do not address me by the honorific expression given to parliamentarian, but instead call me 'Madame' or simply address me with the formal 'you'. Other men have ignored me, failed to greet me, or refused to shake my hand. They made me feel like I wasn't one of them. I felt belittled."

Destroying their image and legitimacy

Another leitmotif of violence against women in politics is the idea that women are unfit for politics: that they are not intelligent enough, not qualified enough and not trustworthy enough. The numerous remarks made on their physical appearance contribute to spreading this narrative. Many participants shared that the comments they receive about their bodies and attire – whether framed as compliments or insults – are primarily intended to ridicule them, undermine their image as politicians and call into question their competence as women parliamentarians.

One participant said, "Male parliamentarians called me a 'beauty queen' while I was discussing the annual budget!" Another received online comments about the size and shape of her breasts. For another, the general public "also makes sexist remarks based on appearance and ranks women parliamentarians according to their looks."

Traditional media play a role in reinforcing these negative stereotypes. A total of **28%** of participants reported that newspapers and television had made slanderous comments about them, or published or broadcast images of them with a sexual undertone:

"I was sitting at a conference and the photos almost showed my underwear. I publicly demanded an apology."

"I was portrayed as a Barbie in the newspapers; it was clearly a gender-based attack."

Religious norms and beliefs can also work against women's political leadership. Participants, particularly in the South-East Asia and South Asia subregions, reported being attacked through the use of religious rhetoric because they did not conform to so-called religious expectations regarding women. The aim was to delegitimize them as politicians. A study carried out in South-East Asia corroborates this use of religious rhetoric to exclude women from politics: "The more religious a voter is, the less likely they are to support women in political leadership, especially among Muslim populations."²⁴

"At a political meeting, some activists shouted at me: 'Wear the hijab before you ask for anything, before you speak.'"

"I've suffered online harassment about my appearance, because some people said I wasn't wearing the headscarf properly. My family was also attacked with hurtful comments."

Other participants in the study entered political life through religious networks and political parties.

According to a 2022 report, "Islamic groups have been found to provide crucial support for supporting women candidates in elections."²⁵ In such cases, members of the public or political opponents sometimes exploited religious prohibitions, such as persistently insisting on shaking hands, or used hate speech rooted in sexist Islamophobia to destabilize these women.

Online violence: When hostility is facilitated and amplified

Violence against women has permeated the online space, with social media providing an extraordinary platform to amplify such attacks. Women in political roles are often prime targets of online attacks.²⁶ They face a growing prevalence of online gender-based violence, exacerbated by artificial intelligence technologies, which facilitate the creation and rapid, often "viral" spread of these attacks. The aim of such violence is to harass, torment, terrorize or threaten women, and ultimately to exclude them from online spaces and political life.

According to the study, **60%** of participating women parliamentarians have been the target of gender-based attacks online (websites, social networks and messaging platforms). This is the highest percentage for this type of attack in all IPU studies (see Part 2). Participants from the Pacific subregion were more affected than those from other subregions (+22 percentage points).

These cases of online aggression are broken down as follows:

| | |
|---|-----|
| Hate speech | 38% |
| Disinformation (deliberately sharing incorrect and often misogynistic information with the aim of causing harm) | 27% |
| Image-based abuse (including deepfakes) | 17% |
| Doxing (sharing personal information without consent) and other tactics | 18% |

While a single harmful piece of content can feel like a violation, women parliamentarians, particularly those who speak out openly and are active on social media, often face a stream of repetitive attacks involving multiple pieces of content, and even organized campaigns. The study indicates that in **85%** of cases, such content has been created and disseminated by members of the public or other actors, including organizations, sometimes resorting to anonymous profiles, trolls and bots that amplify the harm caused.

The increasing use of photos and videos, combined with false information and defamatory remarks, often sexual in nature and targeting a woman's morality and reputation, has devastating effects (Box 3).

Box 3 – Online sexual abuse: Dehumanizing and destructive

Participants reported being targeted by false online rumours and deepfakes of a predominantly sexual nature, as well as image-based sexual abuse and the non-consensual publication of pornographic photos and videos. These highly sexualized photos and videos of a person, fabricated and disseminated without their knowledge, often with the

help of AI and with the sole aim of causing harm, can be classified as sexual violence.

The creation and dissemination of this type of content is now facilitated by AI avatar applications that can generate non-consensual images or videos of a nude person or a person in a sexualized context. Moreover, in addition to their sexist nature, this content perpetuates overtly racist and discriminatory stereotypes.²⁷

The dissemination of such content is intended to tarnish a person's reputation and morals. For women parliamentarians, especially those living in conservative and traditional settings or in small communities where a culture of shame prevails, online sexual abuse and disinformation of a sexual nature can have devastating effects.²⁸

"I really went through a difficult period when a video accusing me of making pornographic films went viral. It really affected me psychologically."

"There were rumours about me, including one suggesting that I held my position as a result of sextortion. This is a form of moral assassination that should not be taken lightly, as it can have significant political repercussions. It is a psychological stress, but I didn't accept this rumour and I worked even harder."

Other participants said that they had been targeted by insults and hate campaigns aimed at destabilizing them:

"I was subjected to intimidating messages and attacks, and all kinds of vile insults were directed at me. There was hate speech too, tinged with racism and class-based stigmatization."

It is also important to note that a significant proportion of the other manifestations of violence identified by the study were perpetrated online: **35%** of cases of psychological harassment/intimidation, **30%** of threats, **18%** of cases of sexist remarks and **9%** of cases of sexual harassment. These figures show that there is no clear distinction between online and offline life, but rather a real fluidity between the two. Intimidation initiated online can continue during public meetings as well as in private life. Conversely, violence initiated offline can escalate into more serious forms online.

Intimidation and threats online and offline

Intimidating and frightening comments and behaviour, persecution, stalking, and late-night phone calls: in total, **39%** of participants reported experiencing acts of intimidation aimed at undermining their psychological integrity. Participants from the East Asia and the Pacific subregions reported higher-than-average rates of intimidation (+19 percentage points and +25 points, respectively). While **35%** of these acts of violence were perpetrated online, **27%** occurred in parliamentary precincts, in other public places (**25%**) and in participants' private lives (**14%**).

These acts of intimidation were perpetrated in **45%** of cases by members of the population, and in 6.8 out of 10 cases by men. In **35%** of cases, the perpetrators were counterparts from opposing political parties (8.4 out of 10 were men), and in **18%** of cases, colleagues from the same party (8.7 out of 10 were men). Law enforcement officers were responsible in **2%** of cases.

In addition to verbal aggression and psychological and physical intimidation, scare tactics can also take the form of threats. For example, **34%** of participants said they had received death threats or threats of being beaten up directed at them or their loved ones. Participants from South Asia reported the highest incidence of such threats (+9 percentage points). The majority of these threats (**60%** of cases) were made in public places and within the private sphere of women parliamentarians, while **30%** were made online and **10%** were made in parliament.

In **59%** of cases, the perpetrators are male members of the population, and in **34%** of cases, they are parliamentarians from opposing parties. According to several participants, those who resort to intimidation and threats "target women first and foremost because they believe women are more easily intimidated and more likely to feel afraid."

Such violence is often perpetrated during election periods to dissuade women from standing as candidates and campaigning. Several participants reported having been threatened with assault by political opponents if they continued their campaign and persisted in running:

"Even people who voted for my own party tried to belittle me during the campaign; they harassed me physically and emotionally. They stopped my vehicle and attacked my house."

"During an election campaign, I was accused, based on false information, of violating labour laws and engaging in human trafficking. They even managed to have me spend a night in prison before I was released due to lack of evidence. I think they thought they could intimidate me easily because I'm a woman."

Other participants began receiving death threats from opponents or were threatened with being removed from office once elected to parliament. Members of the public also undermined their freedom of expression by spreading false allegations to scare and silence them, or by threatening them both online and offline:

"You're useless, resign!" "Shut up or we'll kill you."

"I was the first woman elected in a province. I was completely discredited because I was a woman. I was harassed for the first two years of my term."

"A group of parliamentary colleagues intimidated me and forced me to leave the plenary session of parliament, even though all the political parties had asked me to chair the session."

"In the plenary session, a colleague shouted at me and threatened to hit me. He also threatened to cut off another woman colleague's hand!"

The testimonies above show that intimidation and threats can quickly take the form of assaults that can cause material damage or bodily harm to the targeted person or their loved ones.

Sexual harassment and assault

One fourth of parliamentarians surveyed have been exposed to sexual violence. This percentage does not include online sexual abuse, which could also be included in this category.

Sexual violence refers to all acts of sexually motivated violence inflicted on another person without their consent, including sexual harassment and other unwelcome behaviours driven by sexual motives, such as physical contact, advances, sexually suggestive remarks, or requests for sexual acts. This type of violence also encompasses demands for sexual favours, sexual assault, and rape.

In total, **25%** of women parliamentarians indicated that they had been sexually harassed during their term of office, with East Asian participants being targeted more (+8 percentage points). The acts were committed in **38%** of cases by male parliamentarians belonging to an opposing party, in **35%** of cases by colleagues from the same party, and in **27%** of cases by members of the public. More than half the incidents (**52%**) took place on parliamentary premises. In the words of one participant: “This often happens when there are very few women among many men.” Other locations where acts of sexual harassment were committed include public places and constituency offices (**26%** of cases), political meetings (**9%** of cases) and online platforms (**9%** of cases).

These figures reveal the extent of sexual harassment practices within parliaments and underscore the need for robust measures to prevent and address them, targeting both parliamentary staff and parliamentarians (see Part 8: This violence is not inevitable). Testimonies from participants describe sexual comments and jokes, advances, and physical contact that make the targeted individuals feel uncomfortable.

“After a meeting, a colleague made numerous remarks to me with sexual connotations, began touching my body and kept asking me insistent questions such as ‘Can I walk you home?’”

“I entered politics at the age of 26. Men would drink and try to touch me everywhere, while making propositions like, ‘If you show me your underwear, I’ll vote for you.’ Older MPs would try to lure me to questionable places.”

“Male parliamentary colleagues would talk about their sexual experiences when I was in the room so I could hear them.”

“I was a young parliamentarian, and a senior civil servant decided to talk about erectile dysfunction at a late-night budget hearing in parliament. I was shocked.”

“A colleague touched my back and shoulders and asked me about my breasts while we were having a drink. As I’m single, some colleagues in parliament think I’m an easy target.”

Two respondents said they had been sexually assaulted. One was groped on the buttocks by demonstrators in a public place. The other experienced the same type of assault by male colleagues. None of the participants mentioned having been subjected to sextortion or requests for sexual favours.

Physical violence

Physical violence encompasses a wide range of bodily harm that poses a threat to the life or physical integrity of the person concerned or those close to them. **13%** of respondents said they had experienced physical violence during their mandate.

In **42%** of cases, this physical violence took place in parliament. Another **42%** occurred at political meetings and **16%** occurred in the street.

In **43%** of cases, the aggressors were male counterparts from opposing political parties. In other cases, they were members of the public or religious groups (**28%**), male colleagues from the same political party (**14%**) and members of law enforcement (**14%**).

A total of **8%** of respondents said they had been slapped, pushed, hit, or targeted by a projectile. One parliamentarian reported that “a colleague had spat on her”; another that “a colleague had thrown water in her face and insulted her”, and yet another “was hit by a projectile thrown by a senior leader of a political party”.

Others have testified to acts of physical violence committed at political rallies and election campaigns by political opponents or members of conservative groups.

“During the campaign, I was confronted by voters who pushed me around and tore down my banners. Female and male voters were violent, especially when they were drunk.”

“During my campaign, I was attacked by a conservative group who yelled at me and tried to physically assault me.”

8% of participants said they had been threatened with a weapon. Two participants reported having been beaten up in the street by the police, one by a female police officer and the other by a male.

Economic violence

There is a form of violence that falls midway between physical and economic violence: **17%** of participants reported that some of their belongings or those of loved ones had been damaged or destroyed during their term of office. In **three fourths** of cases, these acts were committed by members of the population. The **remaining quarter** was attributable to members of opposing political parties.

“A gang of individuals attacked my house with my sisters and my mother inside. The motorcycle in my yard was burnt. The mob also attacked my father’s house. The ruling party (my party), which oversees the police and the administration, turned a blind eye. I felt so powerless; the police did not intervene, and no one was held accountable. It was a deeply traumatic experience for me.”

Economic violence uses economic barriers and deprivation as a means of control, most often by destroying a person’s property or undermining their livelihood to intimidate them.

24% of respondents reported experiencing economic violence during their term. In addition to the destruction of their possessions or those of their loved ones as a form of intimidation, **5%** of respondents indicated they had been denied funds (allowances and parliamentary mission expenses) to which they were entitled. Similarly, **8%** reported being denied access to parliamentary resources they were eligible to receive.

Through their testimonies, respondents explained that the leaders of their political parties showed little regard for them. This is reflected, for example, in the fact that they receive less funding from their party during election campaigns. Others feel that their party uses them solely as a voting reserve in parliament, while denying them financial resources for projects and preventing them from taking part in missions.

At the parliamentary institution level, while one participant reported being denied a vehicle she was entitled to, other testimonies referred instead to discrimination in the distribution of positions of responsibility, as well as a lack of technical support from the parliamentary administration, particularly in informing them about the resources they are entitled to as parliamentarians.

“No one had told me that as a parliamentarian I was entitled to a vehicle for official use. It was a young female parliamentary official who provided me with this information one day when she saw that I was using my personal car to get around.”

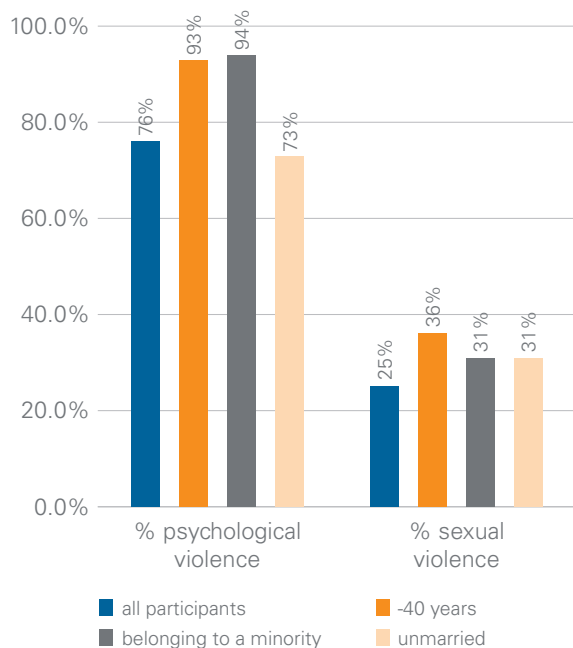
The intersectional nature of gender-based violence against women parliamentarians

While addressing the structural and universal aspects of violence is important, it is equally essential to understand that not all women experience the same forms of discrimination and violence, and that some endure multiple forms simultaneously. The study explicitly highlights how multiple and intersecting forms of oppression can exponentially increase gender-based violence against some women parliamentarians.

The first form of intersectionality²⁹ is linked to the identity of the women parliamentarians who took part in the survey. Women under 40, those from minority groups, and those who are unmarried experience greater and qualitatively different forms of violence than other women parliamentarians.³⁰

Figure 2 shows that the incidence of violence is higher for women facing multiple discrimination factors.

Figure 2: Intersectionality and violence



Based on the differences between these percentages, the age of participants (psychological violence +17 percentage points; sexual violence +11) and their belonging to a minority group³¹ (psychological violence +18 percentage points; sexual violence +6) emerge as significant criteria for discrimination. Similarly,

among respondents who are unmarried, the percentage of sexual violence is higher than the overall percentage.

As highlighted by some respondents' statements, the intersectional nature of violence is intrinsically linked to discrimination and stereotyping of women.

Young women are often dismissed for their supposed incompetence, and their credibility in the political arena is called into question:

“I’m young, supposedly naive and not competent enough to run for parliament. I’m confronted with very sexist questions like, ‘Who looks after your children at home?’”

“Being a single woman is criticized, especially in politics. It made me vulnerable at the start of my career.”

“As a young MP, I had no experience and was called ‘little miss’.”

These attacks tend to diminish over time and with experience, as some respondents shared:

“When I was younger, I was subjected to remarks about my clothes and my physical appearance. I was constantly accused of having extramarital affairs. Now that I’m older, I experience this less.”

Attacks directed at unmarried women imply that they are sexually available or that they refuse to contribute to demographic efforts:

“I’m asked every day if I’m married. The fertility rate in the country is very low; if you don’t have children, you’re not patriotic.”

“When I was a young, single woman, I received constant remarks about my attire and my plans for having children.”

Some of the women interviewed said that coming from a minority background can be stigmatizing in politics:

“People question my abilities and achievements as a young woman from an ethnic minority. I was told that I only achieved this appointment because of my various connections. I don’t fit in with the norm.”

“I am subjected to racist attacks, with people calling me a mixed-blood.”

A second form of intersectionality relates to the position and political activities of women parliamentarians. Gender-based violence can then be used as a weapon against a woman or against the political ideas she defends. This violence can take a gendered form, such as sexual violence, and be motivated by both political and gender-based reasons. The study confirms this phenomenon in particular for women belonging to their country’s political opposition. Table 9 shows that the 24 women parliamentarians from their country’s opposition who took part in the study all experienced psychological violence, with a difference of more than 24 percentage points compared to all participants. For sexual violence, the rate is also significantly higher (+18 percentage points).

Table 9: Women parliamentarians belonging to the opposition

| | % psychological violence | % sexual violence |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| All respondents | 76% | 25% |
| Belonging to the opposition | 100% | 43% |

Regardless of the party to which women parliamentarians belong, defending women's rights or gender equality can expose them to more attacks. This is particularly the case for women parliamentarians who take feminist positions, reject gender stereotypes or promote legislation on gender equality or sexual and reproductive health:

"At the start of my first term, I had to deal with a lot of sexist remarks aimed at belittling me because I was very committed to women's rights. There were rude remarks from those who had been in office for a long time and didn't accept a female leader."

"I'm pro-choice on abortion and therefore a target for angry men. I changed my use of social media after receiving death threats."

Moreover, while the introduction of quotas to encourage women's participation in political life – such as through reserved seats in parliaments – has enabled many women to enter politics in the Asia-Pacific region, those who are elected thanks to this system may find their legitimacy called into question by their colleagues or by public opinion:

"I entered Parliament through the reserved seat system, so people don't support me and think my appointment was undeserved."

"I have faced insults and discrimination from my colleagues in parliament and family members because I was appointed to parliament through the reserved seats system."

Part 4: Experience of women parliamentary staff

Participation in the survey

The **65** women parliamentary staff members who took part in the study come from **31** Asia-Pacific countries. They span all age groups, with women 40 and under being the most represented (Table 10).

Table 10: Age of women parliamentary staff interviewed

| Age of respondents in years | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|------------|
| 18 - 30 | 17% |
| 31 - 40 | 40% |
| 41 - 45 | 19% |
| 46 - 50 | 6% |
| 51 - 60 | 15% |
| 61 - 70 | 3% |

All are parliamentary civil servants, except for six parliamentary assistants and one political party employee. They belong to three occupational groups, as shown below.

Table 11: Occupational groups of women parliamentary staff interviewed

| Groups | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| Management/senior staff | 46% |
| Middle management (administrators, committee secretaries) | 42% |
| Officers/employees (administrative assistants) | 12% |

Table 12: Extent and nature of violence: Prevalence of different forms of violence among women parliamentary staff surveyed

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Psychological violence | 63% |
| Sexual violence | 36% |
| Economic violence | 27% |
| Physical violence | 5% |

Psychological violence

Of the women parliamentary staff surveyed, **63%** said they had experienced psychological violence in the course of their work in parliament.

Table 13: Women parliamentary staff

Percentage of various manifestations of psychological violence experienced or witnessed by participants

| | Victims | Witnesses |
|--|---------|-----------|
| Sexual or sexist remarks | 55% | 55% |
| Psychological harassment/intimidation | 40% | 38% |
| Threatened with loss of job or having professional advancement blocked | 21% | 24% |
| Sexist attacks online | 9% | 10% |
| Death threats, threats of rape or beating | 6% | 11% |

Sexist behaviour and remarks

Fifty-five per cent of women members of parliamentary staff surveyed said they had been subjected to sexist behaviour and remarks on multiple occasions in the course of their work. In particular, they said they had been subjected to jokes and disparaging remarks about their physical appearance (e.g. clothing, makeup), and had experienced behaviour aimed at diminishing their role or questioning their skills simply because they are women. Unmarried women are often prime targets, as they are seen as not conforming to the social norms expected of women.

"Sexist remarks and inappropriate gestures are so common that we tend to ignore them. Perpetrators defend themselves by placing them in the 'it's just a joke' category."

"There are so many examples, I don't know where to start. For example, parliamentary assistants are also expected to perform 'tasks expected of a woman'; they're supposed to serve coffee, wash laundry and offer flowers at political ceremonies!"

"Men differentiate between single and married. If you're single, they think they can cross the line. It has to do with both gender and age. Being younger than my male counterparts, I'm not taken as seriously as they are. I don't feel valued; I feel discriminated against."

"I get negative comments when I am perceived as too determined and assertive in a meeting. If you're divorced, you get insults. Stereotypes are deeply entrenched; even with a high level of education, your 'nature' is to serve your husband."

"When things are going well, we're fine, but when the situation is unfavourable for parliamentarians, we're accused of not thinking with our brains, but with our legs. We are verbally abused and insulted. We can be removed from our positions at any time."

"I had to manage the suppliers, who were men, and they'd say to me, 'You should smile more, my love.' Every day. No one was bothered. It shocked me, because I'd come from the private sector where this kind of attitude had long been banned."

Many also testified to the difficulties encountered in moving up the hierarchy as a woman, due to entrenched misogynistic stereotypes.

"As a woman, I wasn't considered for a position in the office and was told, 'You'll have to devote your entire career to serving tea.' Similarly, my application for a position abroad was not accepted, as it was considered unsuitable for women who could have children at any moment."

"Although I have earned the respect and trust of parliamentarians, management is reluctant to let me progress. In a male-dominated parliament, it's hard to get promoted as a woman."

"During meetings, women's points of view are not taken into account. When I put forward solid arguments, my male colleagues often speak louder to assert themselves."

In **79%** of cases, these remarks and behaviours occurred on the premises of parliament. They also occurred in electronic communications (**7%**) and during work-related trips within the country or abroad (**7%**). In **59%** of cases, they were perpetrated by colleagues working in parliament, and in 8 out of 10 cases, these colleagues were men. Male parliamentarians were also the perpetrators in **31%** of cases.

Psychological harassment and intimidation

In total, **40%** of women parliamentary staff said they had been psychologically harassed in the course of their work in parliament. In **73%** of cases, the acts were committed by parliamentary colleagues (in 3 out of 4 cases by men, and in 1 out of 4 cases by a woman). In **24%** of cases, the harassment was committed by parliamentarians (likewise in 3 out of 4 cases by men, and in 1 out of 4 cases by a woman).

These incidents of harassment occurred on parliamentary premises in **82%** of cases, and online in **10%** of cases. Respondents reported, for example, that colleagues or parliamentarians shouted at them, attempted to damage their

reputation to hinder their career progression, or assigned them menial tasks to demean them. They often mentioned that their male colleagues disliked women who worked hard and achieved strong results.

"I was verbally abused by a male colleague. I didn't complain for fear of reprisal."

"There were rumours and lies spread about me by male colleagues because I was the first woman to be appointed to a senior position in parliament."

"A male colleague acted in an intimidating and threatening manner. He coveted my position, which he eventually obtained, and I was transferred to another department. It took me a long time to recover from this episode. I lost my self-esteem and doubted my abilities."

Many also spoke of toxic working conditions, marked by high pressure, unattainable targets and impossible deadlines. Most of these actions had significant impacts on the mental health of those who experienced them (see Part 5: Effects and consequences of violence).

"The workload is too heavy. Most of my team members are women with children, and the massive workload affects them mentally and physically."

"In disregard of staff regulations, our organization sets very high targets that are not reasonably achievable in the time available. I've suffered burnout and mental health problems. Turnover is high and our department is understaffed. Work-life balance is a major issue for everyone in the office."

Several participants also reported threats (**6%**) and sexist attacks online (**9%**).

"An MP called me and threatened to physically harm me."

"I'm very active on social media. Colleagues and strangers have called me a bitch and used my divorce as a weapon to attack me."

Economic and physical violence

Economic violence is also used to exert psychological pressure on women parliamentary staff. For example, **21%** of participants report having been threatened with losing their jobs or having their career advancement blocked. **Half** of these threats were made by parliamentarians, both male and female. The participants emphasized the precariousness of their employment contracts and the fact that they were constantly on the alert for these threats, with parliamentary assistants being particularly affected.

A further **6%** said that a hierarchical superior (in **75%** of cases) or parliamentarian (in **25%** of cases) had denied them funds to which they were entitled, such as their salary or a bonus. One participant reported that in the past, senior male colleagues had deliberately delayed the payment of women staff members' salaries, and that she had had to intervene several times to resolve the problem.

"I'm entitled to benefits that I've never received, while my male colleagues who arrived more recently have been granted them."

"When there is a departmental restructuring, it primarily affects women."

Five per cent of women parliamentary staff surveyed said they had been hit or pushed in parliament, and **7%** had witnessed this type of physical violence against other women parliamentary staff. In two of the three cases reported, the acts were committed by male parliamentarians.

"A parliamentarian was drunk; he pushed me and insulted me. I was very scared in the elevator with him."

"A colleague broke a table in my office."

Sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence

Thirty-five per cent of women parliamentary staff surveyed said they had been sexually harassed in the course of their work in parliament, and **46%** said they had witnessed sexual harassment of their female colleagues. They mentioned unwelcomed sexual advances, sexual remarks and solicitations for sexual acts from male parliamentary staff (in **67%** of cases) and male parliamentarians (in **29%** of cases). Several respondents described incidents that amounted to sexual assault, such as forced kissing, slapping the buttocks and non-consensual touching of the breasts or thighs. In **57%** of cases, these acts of sexual harassment were committed on parliamentary premises. In **42%** of cases, they took place during official trips within the country or abroad.

"They smell our perfume, stare at us, look at our breasts, touch our bodies, behave inappropriately with interns. We have an unofficial list of 'weird' male parliamentarians. I didn't realize it was sexual harassment, but it's not right."

"I was sexually harassed by a colleague who kissed me and asked me to sleep with him. I didn't file a complaint, but I struggled to do my work afterward."

"I'm tired of hearing sexual jokes and trying to set boundaries with my male colleagues. Nothing works."

"During a team training session outside Parliament, my superior tried to force me into his hotel room while touching my face and body. I was disgusted and ran away. Often he would get very drunk and touch my shoulder, whispering in my ear, 'I can touch you, can't I?'"

When asked about acts of sextortion or requests for sexual favours, **16%** of respondents said they had not experienced them directly, but had witnessed them.

Among women parliamentary staff, one respondent reported being a victim of sexual assault or rape committed by a parliamentary staff member. However, as noted above, some respondents do not necessarily perceive the acts committed against them as sexual assault.

Part 5: Effects and consequences of violence

Sexism, harassment, and violence against women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff undermine their dignity and fundamental rights, potentially causing harmful effects on their health and work performance, and more broadly, on the effective functioning of parliament.

When asked about the effects and consequences of such violence, **63%** of women parliamentarians said they had been deeply affected and suffered as a result of the acts. They described feeling a form of pressure weighing down on them: "I felt helpless for a while." Participants who had experienced online violence spoke of its devastating effects on their mental health.

Fifty per cent of women parliamentarians who experienced violence felt isolated and abandoned. The acts of violence also had an impact on their behaviour.

"I became a silent person because of this harassment."

"I limit my interactions with my male colleagues; I avoid being alone with them."

"My husband accompanies me to political meetings and I surround myself with inspiring women politicians."

In addition, **60%** of respondents said they feared for their safety or that of their loved ones, and **36%** have reinforced their security systems at work or at home.

"I'm more nervous than I used to be, even when I'm safe at home."

"I request police presence for certain events."

"I'm more cautious; I have installed locks and cameras."

Several participants indicated that they had experienced violence in their private lives (and some were still enduring it at the time of the interview):

"In the past, I suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder caused by coercive control in a context of domestic violence. It took me some time to name this behaviour. And it has resurfaced in this new job."

Among respondents who shared their experiences with others, **78%** confided primarily in their family and friends. Very few sought psychological or medical help, though some mentioned receiving support from their religious advisor.

For **46%** of them, these incidents called into question their ability to carry out their mandate and freely express their opinions. Despite the psychological impact, only **8%** decided not to stand for re-election as a result of the violence. Conversely, **84%** said they were determined to continue their parliamentary careers.

Of the women parliamentary staff who had experienced harassment and violence, **84%** said they were upset by the experience, and **52%** feared losing their jobs. Some participants expressed guilt during the interview:

"I felt guilty about being harassed, as if I was the cause of these attitudes. I went into therapy. A friend of mine is a psychologist, and she helped me feel less guilty."

53% felt isolated and abandoned, and **65%** stressed that these acts had affected their ability to carry out their work normally. In general, several respondents expressed the view that the violence had affected their self-confidence and self-esteem, and more broadly, their mental health:

“If you say anything, they will terminate your contract. So I’m not able to be myself and, deep down, it really affects me.”

These testimonies reveal the extent to which violence can disrupt the working environment and have lasting impacts on individuals. Such a situation is unacceptable in representative, democratic and inclusive institutions.

Part 6: Reporting

The study shows that reporting violence remains extremely rare, both among parliamentarians and parliamentary staff.

Women parliamentarians

- Nearly all respondents from Asia-Pacific who experienced sexist behaviour or remarks – **96%** of them – did not report the incidents. This rate of non-reporting is higher in this study than in those conducted in Africa and Europe. It suggests a greater tolerance of such attitudes within the political environment, a reluctance to address gender inequalities, and challenges in reporting violence, including the lack of appropriate frameworks or mechanisms for doing so.
- **21%** of parliamentarians who were the targets of intimidation and **46%** of those who were threatened reported the incidents, most often to the police.
- **24%** of those who experienced sexist attacks online reported them to online platform administrators (in **46%** of cases), to a tribunal (in **23%** of cases) or to the police (in **15%** of cases).

- **Half** of the respondents who had been slapped, pushed or hit reported it to the police or parliamentary authorities; **67%** of those who experienced physical violence committed using a weapon reported it to the police. Two participants who said they had been hit in the street by the police lodged a complaint, one with the police and the other with the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians.
- **60%** of those whose property was damaged or destroyed reported it to the police.
- Only **5%** of respondents who were sexually harassed reported it to the authorities in their parliament. **One of the two** participants who were sexually assaulted reported it to her parliament, which filed a complaint and reported the matter to the police – with no outcome.

Women parliamentarians are more likely to report physical violence, particularly when a weapon is involved, or when their personal property is destroyed. Threats to physical integrity are also reported more frequently. However, online attacks and intimidation are still under-reported.

Cases of sexual harassment and sexist remarks are almost never reported.

Women parliamentary staff

- Only **one** of the respondents who had experienced sexist behaviour or remarks officially reported the incident.
- **32%** of those who experienced psychological harassment/intimidation reported it to an internal mechanism within their parliament.

Table 14: Reporting by women parliamentarians (identical to table 4 in Part 2)

| Women parliamentarians who: | Asia-Pacific | Africa | Europe |
|---|--------------|--------|--------|
| have been subjected to sexist remarks and have reported them to the authorities of their parliament or political party | 4% | 13% | 18% |
| have been threatened and have reported it to the police | 46% | 48% | 50% |
| have been subjected to sexist attacks online and have reported them to the police, to online platform administrators or to a tribunal | 24% | 24% | 33% |
| have been slapped, pushed or hit and have reported it to the police or to the authorities of their political party | 50% | 27% | 22% |
| have been victims of physical violence committed using a weapon and have reported it to the police | 67% | 57% | 100% |
| have been sexually harassed and have told the authorities of their parliament | 5% | 7% | 24% |

Table 15: Reporting by women parliamentary staff (identical to table 5 in part 2)

| Women parliamentary staff who: | Asia-Pacific | Africa | Europe |
|--|--------------|--------|--------|
| have been subjected to sexist remarks and have reported them to the authorities of their parliament | 2% | 14% | 19% |
| have been the target of psychological harassment and have reported it to the authorities of their parliament | 32% | 12% | 63% |
| have been slapped, pushed or hit and have reported it to the authorities of their parliament | 67% | 33% | 33% |
| have been sexually harassed and have reported it to the authorities of their parliament | 10% | 13% | 6% |

- **67%** of respondents who had been slapped, pushed or hit reported it to an internal mechanism in their parliament.
- Only **10%** of respondents who experienced sexual harassment told their supervisor about it, when the supervisor was a woman.

Women parliamentary staff tend to report physical violence more frequently. While one third have used an internal parliamentary mechanism to report incidents of psychological harassment or intimidation, they have not used it to report cases of sexual harassment or sexist remarks or behaviour.

As we have seen, gender-based violence, particularly sexual harassment, has profound consequences for victims. However, the issue remains highly stigmatized and taboo in the region. Reporting such acts is often associated with fear of retaliation and being blamed. Too often, the sociocultural, political, and institutional environment shames and isolates victims, disregarding the many obstacles they face. For victims to engage with a reporting mechanism, they must feel safe, protected, and supported by an institution that unequivocally opposes sexism and gender-based violence. Respondents cited the following reasons to explain why they frequently chose not to report these incidents.

They mentioned **the fear of reprisals**, whether for parliamentary staff, of losing their jobs, or for parliamentarians, of political repercussions that could also have a long-term impact on their party or career:

"My colleague filed a complaint with management because she was being harassed. She was transferred to another division, while the perpetrator remained in his position."
– A parliamentary officer

"I didn't report it, because it could have a negative political impact on me. I simply draw a clear line and assert my position when it happens. – A parliamentarian

Many also pointed out that there was simply **no mechanism for reporting violence**:

"There was no specific procedure and no desire to have one."
– A parliamentarian

"I didn't file a complaint, because there is no mechanism to protect against such abuses." – A parliamentarian

"There is no reporting mechanism and it would be a waste of time to report it. Sometimes I simply respond by saying that it is not appropriate and that it is unprofessional to say such things." – A parliamentary officer

When reporting mechanisms do exist, they do not always guarantee confidentiality. The steps involved can seem long and burdensome, and victims are unsure of whether they will truly be heard and believed. There is also the risk of **secondary victimization**, particularly if the hierarchy is ineffective, tolerates gender-based violence or has not been trained to support and protect victims:

"There is no safe place to report harassment. We are afraid that reporting an incident will come back to haunt us and that we will be the ones punished. This lack of trust in society prevents most of us from making a complaint." – A parliamentary officer

"There is a Code of Conduct for employees, which stipulates that you must report incidents to your supervisor. There is also an investigation office. It would be helpful if the supervisor could provide support. However, the victim is not presumed innocent: 'What did you do to provoke it? What were you wearing?' It is always the woman who is blamed."
– A parliamentary officer

"My superior discouraged me from filing a complaint by asking me what I had done to provoke him. I burst into tears and three months later I was transferred to another department."
– A parliamentary officer

"I told my supervisor, who said, 'You're brother and sister, it shouldn't be a problem'." – A parliamentary officer

"I was told, 'Ignore the problem, it will go away. If you report it, you'll have even more problems.'" – A parliamentary officer

Amicable settlement proposals are common for addressing incidents that are often seen more as personal conflicts than acts of violence, to avoid tarnishing the party or institution.

Other reasons are also cited, including the difficulty of finding evidence, and the perception that some perpetrators of violence are untouchable, particularly due to their senior status. In some cases, it is impossible to identify the perpetrators, especially in instances of online violence.

"I did not report the incident, because who do you report it to when the perpetrator is the chief executive?"
– A parliamentarian

In some cases, participants reported reacting in the moment, which helped stop the harassment. Others found the courage to report it, to set an example and prevent other women from suffering the same fate.

"I responded directly to the harasser, telling him, 'I never want to hear what you just said again.' He never did it again."
– A parliamentarian

"I told him out loud, 'This is sexual harassment in the workplace. If you don't stop, I'll file a complaint.' It worked. I think men often don't know what sexual harassment is."
– A parliamentary officer

"I filed a complaint to set an example for younger generations aspiring to public office, and to defend my rights."
– A parliamentarian

Part 7: Normative framework

Several international human rights instruments require States to promote and protect the right of women to live a life free from violence and participate fully in political life. These include instruments to combat violence against women, including violence against women in politics, as well as legal and policy frameworks covering online violence and violence in the workplace.

Unlike other regions of the world,³² the Asia-Pacific region has no specialized regional mechanisms or legally binding instruments on women's rights, violence against women or violence against women in politics.³³ However, in South-

East Asia, non-binding initiatives such as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women, supported by the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) and the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), aim to address these issues.

The right of women to a life free from violence, in public and political life

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) provides States with the first recognized definition of this type of violence as well as a plan of action.³⁴

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also obliges States to prevent, investigate and punish all acts of violence against women in all areas, including the parliamentary and political spheres. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has proposed a very broad definition of violence against women, describing it as “violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”. The Committee regards gender-based violence against women as “being rooted in gender-related factors, such as the ideology of men’s entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity, and the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles or prevent, discourage or punish what is considered to be unacceptable female behaviour. Those factors also contribute to the explicit or implicit or social acceptance of gender-based violence against women”.³⁵ General Recommendation No. 35 also extends the notion of violence against women beyond the physical space to include “technology-mediated environments, such as contemporary forms of violence occurring online”.³⁶

The Convention also provides States with an international framework for action on women’s participation in the political sphere. On this point, since the adoption of General Recommendation No. 40 in 2024, the Committee has made it clear that “equal and inclusive representation” requires at least 50-50 parity between women and men. According to the Committee, this indisputable standard guarantees equal access for all women and girls to any decision-making system, whether in public, private, political, economic or digital spaces.³⁷ The Committee has identified gender-based violence against women, including in politics, as one of the obstacles to parity. While emphasizing the importance of adopting and implementing strong legislation to combat violence against women, and enforcing all the rights set out in the Convention, the Committee recommends that States adopt and implement a series of measures to prevent and combat gender-based violence in politics (Box 4).

Box 4 – CEDAW Committee recommendations to States parties under GR 40 on violence against women in politics

- (a) Adopt and enforce comprehensive legislation, including criminal legislation, and implement awareness-raising and educational measures, to prevent and eliminate all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and provide all necessary services and access to justice for victims.

- (b) Prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish all forms of gender-based violence against women, intimidation and hate speech in decision-making and against women candidates and office holders and combat the culture of silence and impunity.
- (c) Introduce codes of conduct, with an intersectional perspective, in parliament, government, regional and local councils and political parties, public service and private sector companies to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence against women and hate speech, with independent complaint mechanisms and confidential counselling and provide corresponding training to all officials and staff.
- (d) Provide effective redress and support services for women who are victims of gender-based violence in decision-making.
- (e) Offer safety, security, cybersecurity and digital defence training for women in decision-making roles, including supporting peer groups for young women facing gender-based violence against women caused by power imbalances in the workplace.
- (f) Ensure security at polling stations and during elections and prevent and punish election-related violence.
- (g) Ensure that social media companies have systems, contextualized to the region and country where they are used, to respond immediately, effectively and efficiently to user- and artificial intelligence-generated content constituting online gender-based violence against women and harassment, and ensure accountability through the adoption and implementation of laws and international regulations with an approach based in human rights, in particular women’s rights.
- (h) Collect and publish systematic disaggregated data on the extent, causes and effects of gender-based violence against women in decision-making, and on the effectiveness of prevention and response measures and tailor and improve systems and measures accordingly.
- (i) Apply a strong intersectional perspective in all measures taken.

In 2018, the report from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, which addressed violence against women in politics, called on States to fight against impunity for violence against women in politics. Addressing national parliaments directly, she encouraged them to take the following measures:

1. Adopt new legislation or adapt existing legislation to protect women in politics against violence and use oversight powers to ensure its strict implementation;
2. Adopt new codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms, or revise existing ones, stating clearly the zero tolerance of parliament for sexual harassment, intimidation and any other form of violence against women in politics;

3. Conduct surveys and public debates periodically to raise awareness of the issue of violence against women in politics and the crucial role that male parliamentarians can play in preventing violence against women in politics;
4. Address the impunity of members of parliament with regard to violence against women in politics and examine immunity rules that should not, by any means, protect the perpetrators of such violence.³⁸

Violence and harassment in the world of work

The adoption of International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 in 2019 imposed new international standards and a common framework to prevent, combat and eliminate violence and harassment in the workplace, including gender-based violence and harassment.³⁹ To date, only 5 of the 45 countries that have ratified the Convention belong to the Asia-Pacific region.⁴⁰ This suggests that there is still some way to go before these new standards are fully respected in the region. The Convention recognizes that “women are particularly vulnerable to violence and harassment in the world of work.” It calls on Member States to adopt measures that take this into account and address “the related underlying causes, such as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, unequal gender-based power relations, gender stereotypes, and gender, social and cultural norms that support violence and harassment.”⁴¹

The Convention makes some key and pioneering contributions to the elimination of violence against women in politics, particularly in parliaments. Above all, the Convention assumes that it is not possible to provide adequate protection by focusing solely on the physical workplace in the classical sense, and instead addresses violence and harassment in the “world of work”, a concept that encompasses public and private spaces being used as a workplace, work-related trips, training and events as well as work-related communications, including online (internet, telephone, social networks), amongst other things. Therefore, the Convention recognizes parliament as a workplace that is not limited to the premises of parliament. Furthermore, the Convention protects workers and other people in the world of work, whatever their contractual status.⁴² It thus resolves any ambiguities concerning parliament as a workplace by covering all categories of people working in parliament, including parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, parliamentary assistants and other people, such as security personnel, chauffeurs, party or political group assistants, interns, etc.⁴³

Standards for parliaments

In 2019, the IPU published guidelines to combat sexual harassment and violence against women in parliament.⁴⁴ This document provides parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with practical advice and information to make parliaments gender-sensitive spaces free from sexism and violence. Using this tool, parliaments are encouraged to:

- assess the situation in their institutions
- adopt specific policies or revise existing regulations to end sexism and gender-based violence against parliamentarians and anyone working in parliament
- provide access to confidential support for victims

- provide remedies, including complaint and investigation mechanisms, and enforce disciplinary sanctions for perpetrators
- raise awareness and provide training for everyone working in parliament

Additionally, in 2020, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) published the CPA *Anti-Harassment Policy Guidelines*⁴⁵ to support Commonwealth parliaments in their efforts to address and eliminate all forms of harassment in parliamentary workplaces. Drawing from a wide range of anti-harassment policies and procedures from parliaments in the Commonwealth, these guidelines provide a detailed step-by-step approach that offers insights and case studies on what appropriate methods should be included when parliaments develop or update their respective anti-harassment policies. The document encourages parliaments to take the time to reflect on what additional activities can be done to promote their anti-harassment policy and ensure that it is understood by everyone. Parliaments are encouraged to look into areas such as:

- Accessibility and awareness
- Continued support for parliamentarians, their staff, and parliamentary staff
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Policy updates

In 2024, the CPA also published its updated *Standards for Codes of Conduct for Members of Parliament and the Parliamentary Workplace*, which addresses the need for parliaments to have a “commitment to a safe and respectful workplace”.⁴⁶ The document offers minimum standards that should be adopted by parliaments to prevent the abuse of power, harassment and bullying and to promote fairness and equity in the workplace. The document also offers guidance on how codes of conduct can address areas such as online behaviour, social media, artificial intelligence, information management, complaints, independent investigations, procedural fairness, rectification and sanctions, in an effort to help parliaments uphold the highest standards of good governance.

These tools enable parliaments to identify which standards are effective. They also provide them with the means to implement strict policies against gender-based violence, sexual harassment and intimidation of women in parliament, as well as to establish independent and effective procedures for handling complaints that may result in severe sanctions.

More broadly, for the three partner organizations in this study, zero tolerance of sexism and violence against women in parliaments is an essential condition for ensuring gender-sensitive institutions and decision-making that respond to the needs and interests of both women and men through their structures, rules of procedure, activities, methods and work.^{47, 48}

Furthermore, in response to the lack of a framework covering the Asia-Pacific region, the new AIPA Plan of Action⁴⁹ and Implementation Framework⁵⁰ on Promoting Women’s Political Participation and Leadership 2024-2030 calls for the development of regional normative and policy frameworks aimed at strengthening and empowering women from diverse

backgrounds in leadership and political participation, and at better protecting women from violence in politics. Political institutions, such as political parties and parliaments, are encouraged to promote measures aimed at creating political environments free from all forms of violence against women, including providing counselling and protective measures for women candidates and parliamentarians who are victims of political violence.

Part 8: This violence is not inevitable; it can be prevented: Recommendations and examples

Legislative reforms

Laws to combat violence against women offline and online

According to data from the World Bank, of the 37 countries in the Asia-Pacific region included in the study, 16 have adopted domestic violence laws and 16 have legislation governing sexual harassment in the workplace.⁵¹ Many participants, particularly parliamentarians, stressed the importance of these laws in combating violence against women, including in politics and parliament. Whether they were parliamentarians or parliamentary staff, very few indicated that there were no mechanisms or that they were unaware of laws or policies available to address gender-based violence. However, many lamented that laws and policies in this area are not well enforced. Combating impunity and ensuring accountability for perpetrators of violence relies heavily on the effective implementation of these laws and requires vigilance in the face of the backlash against women's rights observed around the world. It is essential for parliamentarians to be heavily involved in monitoring and guaranteeing this implementation, particularly through the budgetary process and awareness-raising.

No country in the region has adopted legislation specifically addressing violence against women in politics.⁵² Only 12 countries in the region have adopted laws against cyberharassment targeting women,⁵³ and only a handful of these cover sexual harassment and the most harmful and widespread forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (Box 5).

Faced with the scale of online violence against women, including, as confirmed by the results of this study, against women parliamentarians, parliaments must take urgent action. Laws must be adopted to define cyberharassment, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence and sexual harassment, as well as to clearly describe prohibited behaviours and their impact on victims. Laws must also impose sanctions on perpetrators of cyberharassment offences and establish consistent procedures to facilitate victims' access to justice, including reporting and investigation mechanisms. **Parliaments can further enhance the regulatory frameworks governing companies that own online platforms to ensure these entities uphold online accountability,** fulfill their duties of diligence and transparency, and implement safeguards to

protect women from the various forms of cyber harassment. Parliaments can also ensure that these platforms provide mechanisms for reporting abuse and sanctioning perpetrators.⁵⁴

Box 5 – Cyberharassment legislation and other initiatives to address online sexual harassment in the Asia-Pacific region

Australia has a government agency dedicated to keeping people safe online, the eSafety Commissioner (eSafety). Established in 2015, it is the world's first independent online safety regulator and has robust powers to educate and protect both adults and children on most online platforms and forums. Through its regulatory functions under the Online Safety Act 2021, eSafety can investigate and remove harmful content related to child cyberbullying, adult cyber abuse and intimate images or videos shared without consent. It has a dedicated programme on online risks for women and on domestic and other gender-based violence.⁵⁵ It is also developing a social media self-defence course for women in politics, which will be available internationally.

In 2021, the Republic of Korea introduced new legislation aimed at combating digital sex crimes, such as the illegal filming and distribution of videos depicting intimate scenes without consent, which disproportionately affect women.⁵⁶

Under Philippine cybercrime laws, the National Police Anti-Cybercrime Group (PNPACG) is tasked with handling complaints of gender-based online sexual harassment, developing an online mechanism for real-time reporting of gender-based online sexual harassment, and apprehending perpetrators. The national Cybercrime Investigation and Coordination Centre also coordinates with the PNPACG to prepare appropriate and effective measures to monitor and sanction gender-based online sexual harassment.⁵⁷

With legislation intended to ensure online safety lacking everywhere, initiatives and training programmes are beginning to emerge to equip women and girls with tools and strategies for self-protection, self-defence and response to online violence. Some initiatives are specifically designed to meet the needs of women in politics, such as the Social media self-defence for women in politics course developed by the Australian Government's eSafety Commissioner,⁵⁸ and the Rapid Online Support and Assistance mechanism (ROSA) from the National Democratic Institute (NDI).⁵⁹

Institutional reform in parliaments

Parliaments should be safe, inclusive and respectful workplaces for all. As such, they are called upon to recognize sexism and gender-based violence within their institutions for what they are: violations of fundamental human rights that cannot be tolerated.

Internal policies and codes of conduct

96% of participants believe that having an internal policy or code of conduct against harassment and gender-based violence in parliament would be effective. Calling for the implementation of such measures in their parliaments, several participants insisted that effective internal policies must precisely define sexism, sexual harassment and psychological harassment, with supporting examples of prohibited behaviour.

Furthermore, in accordance with IPU guidelines, these policies must also clearly set out the available remedies for reporting, investigating and stopping harassment, and must include specific sanctions for perpetrators. They should also explicitly establish protections for all individuals working in parliament, regardless of their contractual status or differing needs, including parliamentary staff, parliamentarians, assistants, interns, volunteers, journalists, service provider staff, and others.⁶⁰

Some parliaments in the region have begun implementing internal policies by adopting national laws on sexual harassment in the workplace that require employers to take action against this form of violence. This is the case, for example, in Fiji, India, the Maldives, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea, where specific policies and measures have been introduced to protect parliamentary staff from harassment by peers. These policies include complaint and investigation mechanisms, disciplinary sanctions for perpetrators and, in some cases, reparations for victims (Boxes 6 to 9 and 14). The Parliament of Thailand also has a disciplinary policy for staff, which specifically mentions sexual harassment (Box 10).

However, these policies do not apply to parliamentarians, whose behaviour is most often governed by internal rules of procedure, a code of conduct or parliamentary bodies such as ethics committees or procedural commissions. These bodies do not generally include psychological or sexual harassment among the prohibited behaviours (see “Regulating and protecting parliamentarians” below). As a result, the scope of the internal measures described below provides only limited protection for parliamentary staff against harassment by parliamentarians. Furthermore, these measures do not offer protection to parliamentarians – whether women or men – who experience harassment from their colleagues.

Box 6 – Fiji

In 2019, the Parliament of Fiji adopted a policy to prevent sexual harassment of parliamentary staff. This policy complies with laws⁶¹ that require employers to take action against harassment.

Its guiding principles are to provide a safe working environment and ensure that parliamentary staff have an avenue for redress with respect to sexual harassment in the workplace. It provides a clear definition of sexual harassment with extensive examples of its manifestations. It focuses not only on acts of harassment that take place in parliamentary precincts but also on acts that take place on the occasion of official activities, including official trips, training sessions, workshops, meetings or conferences. The policy is distributed to all staff and awareness-raising sessions are held to ensure compliance and adherence.

Members of staff who believe they have been sexually harassed must report the matter to a senior human resources officer, the Sexual Harassment Grievance Officer, using the Sexual Harassment Complaint Form.

It is up to victims to decide whether they wish to make a formal or informal complaint. If the victim wishes to make a formal complaint, an Investigation Panel will be appointed, consisting of at least three trained members of staff. The investigation process, which should be completed within 14

days, is managed internally by the Parliamentary Secretariat and the final decision rests with the Secretary General.

The nature of the sanctions depends on the gravity and extent of the harassment and may range from a verbal or written warning to dismissal/termination. All complaints of sexual harassment will be treated confidentially, which means that information about a case will be handled and shared on a need-to-know basis only and will be kept in a secure location with restricted access.

Box 7 – India

In accordance with India’s legislation on sexual harassment,⁶² the Rajya Sabha Secretariat has an Internal Complaints Committee, which is responsible for receiving and investigating complaints from staff members. The Committee is made up of at least four members who are appointed by the Secretary General. It is chaired by a female senior officer, and at least half of the members must be women.

The proceedings of the Committee are confidential, and the inquiry must be completed within a period of 90 days. When determining the sum of compensation for the victim in cases of sexual harassment, the Committee shall consider the mental trauma and emotional distress caused to the victim, the loss of career opportunity due to the incident, and the medical expenses incurred by the victim for physical or psychiatric treatment. The Secretary General is responsible for imposing disciplinary sanctions in view of the findings of the Committee’s inquiry.

Box 8 – The Maldives

In 2019, in compliance with the law,⁶³ a Sexual Harassment Committee was established in the Parliament of Maldives to receive, investigate and take action on complaints of sexual harassment against parliamentary staff. The Committee is composed of three senior parliamentary staff members, both male and female. They are trained by the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, the regulatory body for legislation on sexual harassment.

A complaint form is available on the Parliament’s website, which can be filled in and sent with a request for confidentiality. The Committee is currently working on setting up a folder on the intranet and providing access to a dedicated email address, accessible only to Committee members. The investigation procedure is confidential and should be completed within a 60-day period. It involves gathering evidence and statements from both the complainant and the respondent, calling witnesses and seeking expert advice where necessary. If the investigation concludes that harassment has occurred, it is up to the Committee to decide on the appropriate sanction, which can range from a warning to termination of employment.

There is currently no code of conduct for members of parliament,⁶⁴ and cases of harassment involving members of parliament would fall under the remit of the Committee on Member’s Privileges and Ethics.

Box 9 – The Philippines

As part of national efforts to combat gender-based violence,⁶⁵ the House of Representatives of the Philippines has set up the Gender and Development Focal Point System. Its role is to anchor the principles of gender equality in the institution, including prevention and support measures to ensure safety and respect for all in a work environment that is safe, inclusive and free from harassment and gender-based violence.

In 2020, a Committee on Decorum and Investigation (CODI) was established to enable employees to report cases of harassment and gender-based violence. The Committee is made up of seven members, the majority of whom are women, and includes representatives from both management and staff. It conducts investigations and submits detailed findings and recommendations to the Disciplinary Board, which decides on the administrative sanction to be applied, ranging from a fine or suspension to dismissal. For similar cases brought against House members, the House Committee on Ethics has exclusive jurisdiction.

There is also a support service for victims of gender-based violence and harassment which operates in partnership with a lawyers' association that provides free legal advice. Employees of the House who act as first responders in such cases are trained through a partnership with a local government unit shelter, which can also provide safe accommodation and support in case of need. A hotline is available for reporting gender-based violence.

Since the establishment of the CODI and campaigns to address gender-based violence, employees and House members are more aware of their rights and obligations, and the number of disclosures has increased. In 2024, five people used the hotline to report acts of gender-based violence. Two cases have already been heard by the CODI and are now pending resolution by the Disciplinary Board.

Box 10 – Thailand

In the Parliament of Thailand, the code of ethics applicable to parliamentary officials explicitly prohibits sexual harassment.⁶⁶ Among the acts listed as constituting sexual harassment are physical contact of a sexual nature, sexually suggestive remarks or gestures, and the display of pornographic images. A booklet on the code of ethics is distributed to all parliamentary staff.

In cases of sexual harassment, complaints must be filed with the hierarchical superior of the alleged perpetrator or with a disciplinary division. Both entities may appoint an investigative committee of up to five members, including at least one member of the same gender as the complainant and a trusted individual designated by the complainant.

Regarding disciplinary sanctions, in cases involving sexual harassment by officials holding leadership or expert positions, responsibility lies with the President of the House of Representatives or the President of the Senate, as appropriate. In other cases, the Secretaries-General of both chambers, if applicable, have the authority to appoint an investigative committee if there is evidence of serious misconduct. Following the investigation, the committee

submits a report to the appointing authority, which then decides on the measures to be taken. Dismissal or termination of employment may be imposed, depending on the severity of the case.

Once a complaint is filed, the complainant and witnesses must not be subjected to any reprisals or measures that could affect their duties, employment, or livelihoods. If actions are deemed necessary, the consent of the complainant or witnesses must first be obtained. Additionally, the requests of the complainant or witnesses must be considered by the departments involved in conducting the investigation.

Establishing regulations for the conduct and protection of parliamentarians

In the Asia-Pacific region, as elsewhere in the world, the behaviour of parliamentarians is generally governed by rules of procedure or a code of conduct. However, most parliamentary codes of conduct and parliamentary regulations do not define psychological harassment/bullying, sexual harassment or gender-based violence, and lack specific provisions on their prohibition and penalties. Their enforcement structures are often internal parliamentary bodies, such as ethics or procedural committees. These bodies often lack specific mandates, expertise or resources to deal with harassment issues. The vast majority are political bodies composed exclusively of parliamentarians in positions of power and influence. In such a context, self-regulation and peer judgment can prove ineffective: for instance, a parliamentarian accused of harassing a female employee will be judged by other parliamentarians, leading victims to distrust these mechanisms. Committees that operate publicly are also particularly ill-suited to addressing harassment cases, where confidentiality is paramount.⁶⁷

Independent mechanisms free from political influence to handle complaints against parliamentarians remain extremely rare. According to some participants, political will is often lacking, and progress is very slow. In some cases, more than a decade has passed between the adoption of a national law against workplace harassment and its implementation in parliament. When it comes to establishing a code of conduct for parliamentarians that includes harassment among prohibited behaviours, the lack of political will becomes even more apparent.

In the region, the parliaments of Australia and New Zealand have recently established independent bodies tasked with receiving, investigating, and resolving complaints related to the conduct of parliamentarians. In both countries, the starting point was the undertaking of independent inquiries to assess working conditions, psychological harassment/bullying and sexual harassment within their institutions. These independent inquiries, which followed the public exposure of several cases of gender-based and sexual violence, triggered significant internal reforms (see Boxes 11 and 12).

Box 11 – New Zealand

Following several cases of misconduct involving members of parliament, the New Zealand Parliament commissioned an independent expert to conduct an inquiry into bullying and harassment. A report published in 2019 revealed the systemic nature of bullying and harassment within the

institution.⁶⁸ Among its 85 recommendations, the report called for the adoption of a code of conduct for MPs and staff, and the creation of an independent body to handle complaints and improve parliamentary employment conditions for staff. Since then, work has been undertaken on most of the recommendations.

Parliamentarians from all political parties worked with members of staff and trade unions to develop the 2020 *Behavioural Statements for the Parliamentary Workplace*. The document sets out the core principles that all people working in Parliament must follow to ensure a safe working environment, the first of which is to “show that bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment, are unacceptable.”⁶⁹ While not yet included in Parliament’s Standing Orders, the document is nonetheless a binding parliamentary rule through two mechanisms.⁷⁰ First, in order to have access to staff, members of parliament must sign an agreement with the staff member and the Parliamentary Service, agreeing to abide by the Behavioural Statements and health and safety obligations.⁷¹ Secondly, access to the parliament building is governed by acceptance of the Behavioural Statements.

Since 2023, an independent body, the Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards, has been responsible for receiving, investigating and resolving complaints involving the conduct of members of parliament that does not comply with the Behavioural Statements. If the findings conclude that misconduct has occurred, a report is sent to the Speaker. However, a system of sanctions to be applied to MPs is not yet in place, nor is a specific group to consider such sanctions, as recommended by the external independent review.⁷²

The codes of conduct for parliamentary staff were updated in 2022 to include a clear obligation to avoid bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment.⁷³ Complaints about the conduct of a staff member and breaches of the Behavioural Statements⁷⁴ are dealt with in accordance with the Parliamentary Service’s internal procedures under the New Zealand Protected Disclosures Act.

In 2023, the same independent expert conducted a review⁷⁵ which highlighted significant progress towards a positive and safe parliamentary workplace culture. Parliamentarians and staff “are more alert to the need for respectful and constructive workplace relationships, more vigilant as to inappropriate conduct and more mindful of the link between demonstrated behaviours and the health of our democracy.” The report also identified areas that still need to be addressed, such as the remaining power imbalance between staff and MPs and improving employment arrangements and human resources support.

Box 12 – Australia

After serious incidents of sexual assault of women MPs and women parliamentary staff came to light, the Parliament of Australia implemented a series of reforms beginning in 2021 to better prevent and address bullying and sexual harassment in the parliamentary workplace.

The first major initiative was the independent review of parliamentary workplace culture conducted by the

Australian Human Rights Commission and led by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins.⁷⁶ The review, entitled *Set the Standard*, focused on the experiences of both staff and parliamentarians. It found that 37% of people currently working in parliament had experienced some form of bullying and 33% had experienced sexual harassment. Sexual harassment was a major problem for women parliamentarians. As many as 63% had experienced sexual harassment within parliamentary workplaces, compared to 24% of male parliamentarians.⁷⁷ The review also contained 28 recommendations to remedy this situation and ensure safe and respectful parliamentary workplaces. It called for the establishment of regulatory and accountability mechanisms in Parliament independent of political influence, in particular a new independent human resources body for staff and parliamentarians and an independent body to investigate complaints and apply sanctions.

To deliver these innovative and ambitious reforms, and to ensure ownership and consensus, the Parliament established the Parliamentary Leadership Taskforce, a cross-party leadership group, to oversee and drive forward the implementation of these recommendations and the whole reform process.⁷⁸ As part of this process, three new codes of conduct were developed – one for parliamentarians, one for staff and one for all who enter the parliament space.⁷⁹ The codes apply to both Houses of Parliament and make it clear that “bullying, harassment, sexual harassment or assault, or discrimination in any form, including on grounds of race, age, gender, sexuality, gender identity, disability or religion, will not be tolerated, condoned or ignored.” All three codes were endorsed by both Houses of Parliament in February 2023.

In the same year, the new independent human resources body, the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service, was established⁸⁰ (Box 14) to provide human resources services and support, including in filing complaints for inappropriate behaviour in the parliamentary workplace. Such complaints can be made to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission (IPSC), established in 2024.⁸¹ The IPSC is responsible for investigating and recommending sanctions against MPs, staff and other persons primarily working in Parliament. It consists of a minimum of seven and a maximum of nine independent commissioners, four of whom must be women. In the event of a complaint, the Chair Commissioner appoints an investigating Commissioner to investigate the case with the consent of the complainant.⁸²

As far as decision-making is concerned, if the respondent is a current or former parliamentarian, the Chair Commissioner must constitute a parliamentary decision panel consisting of the investigating Commissioner and two other Commissioners. For other respondents, the decision-maker will be the investigating Commissioner. The decision-maker must prepare a draft report which includes preliminary findings, a summary of evidence and, where relevant, proposed recommendations and sanctions. If there is a preliminary finding of a serious breach by a sitting parliamentarian, the case may be referred to the relevant Privileges Committee. If the respondent is a parliamentarian assistant, the decision-maker may make a range of recommendations, from a written reprimand to termination of the contract. If the respondent is neither a parliamentarian nor an assistant, the decision-maker may recommend that

their employer take any action considered appropriate within a specified period.⁸³

Awareness-raising and training

According to **97%** of participants, awareness-raising and training are an effective first step. They bring the issue of harassment to the forefront and generate discussions in parliament. Their aim is to ensure that everyone present has access to the same level of information and to foster a shared understanding of issues such as sexism, sexual harassment, and psychological harassment or bullying. As these are often taboo and sensitive issues, it is difficult to combat them when we are unable to identify them and understand their consequences. For many participants, such training is most effective when it is provided on a regular basis, when it is compulsory for all those working in parliament (parliamentarians and parliamentary staff), and when its format includes information exchange and dialogue rather than online modules. It is essential that these training courses generate discussion and that men take part in them.

“Training is important, because the majority of colleagues and parliamentarians don’t know what is acceptable or not, or what constitutes sexual harassment. They are also unaware of the negative impact of sexual harassment.” – A parliamentary officer

“Online training is useful, but it requires a certain level of introspection and reflection: some colleagues took the training without realizing that they were perpetrators of harassment.” – A parliamentary officer

Box 13 – Examples of raising awareness and training in parliaments

The Philippines: The House of Representatives is using comic strips in a campaign to raise awareness and encourage employees to stand up against abuse, discrimination and harassment. A training programme for trainers is also underway to train in-house individuals and equip them to conduct interactive training sessions with all members of the House and staff. All officials and employees will be required to attend the training sessions. In this way, everyone working in the House of Representatives (more than 3,000 people) will benefit from basic training on gender sensitivity and receive the information they need on support and guidance as well as on how to report cases of harassment.

The Maldives: Awareness sessions, facilitated by the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, are held twice a year for all Secretariat staff of the Parliament. These sessions cover the definition and understanding of sexual harassment, its impact on victims and the work environment, and provide a comprehensive review of the Sexual Harassment Act. Fact sheets explaining discrimination and sexual harassment, with examples of such behaviour, are also available on the Parliament’s website.

India: Parliamentary staff are encouraged to attend online training sessions on sexual harassment throughout the year. These include workshops on the sexual harassment of women in the workplace and gender sensitization organized

by the Parliamentary Research and Training Institute for Democracies (PRIDE) and run by the Lok Sabha Secretariat through the Government Learning Platform.

New Zealand: All staff must complete a Positive Workplace Culture programme to raise awareness of and prevent bullying and harassment.

Republic of Korea: The Secretariat of the National Assembly, through the Parliamentary Training Office, conducts online training sessions for members and staff of the National Assembly on the prevention of sexual harassment, sexual violence, prostitution and domestic violence. This training is mandatory for all staff and members of the National Assembly.

Counselling and support services

As part of measures to prevent and combat harassment in parliaments, it is crucial that individuals who believe they are victims have access to counselling and support services, where they can share not only the facts but also their suffering.⁸⁴ This view is shared by **91%** of women parliamentarians and **93%** of women parliamentary staff surveyed.

In Australia and the Republic of Korea (Box 14), parliaments have established structures that provide listening, counselling and support services, where victims can express themselves in complete confidentiality and receive psychological and legal support.

The role of human resources services was also highlighted by several participants in the study. These services must be attuned to safety and well-being in the workplace, and ensure that working conditions do not facilitate harassment. In some parliaments, particularly in the Pacific region, these services may be relatively new, and some health and safety standards have not yet been fully implemented.

Box 14 – Advice, support and counselling services

Australia Parliamentary Workplace Support Service

The Parliamentary Workplace Support Service⁸⁵ provides independent and confidential human resources advice to create and maintain safe, respectful and inclusive workplaces. In an effort to bring about cultural change in the institution, the Service, which consists of trained advisers, aims to improve working conditions by providing a broad range of human resources advice and assistance to parliamentarians and their staff.⁸⁶ The Service also provides a range of trauma-aware support and complaint handling services, including counselling, referral to specialist services and assistance with filing a police report. It also collects data on gender equality and responses to misconduct, and provides education and training, particularly on the prevention of harassment.

The National Assembly Human Rights Centre in the Republic of Korea

The Human Rights Centre of the National Assembly, established in 2022, has dedicated counselling rooms for consultations on issues related to human rights, sexual harassment, sexual violence and bullying at work, ensuring easy access and confidentiality.

The Centre can receive complaints about violence from parliamentary staff by phone, email, website or in person. An investigation is then launched and a report of its findings is sent to the Secretary General. The findings may also be reviewed by a seven-member advisory committee. Based on the committee's decision and the investigation report, the Secretary General may take disciplinary or other action against the offending staff member.

From January 2022 to July 2024, the Centre dealt with a total of 386 counselling cases, of which 169 related to human rights violations, 153 to workplace bullying and 54 to sexual harassment and sexual violence. During the same period, the Centre received 38 complaints, including 9 cases of human rights violations, 15 cases of workplace bullying, 8 cases of sexual harassment and sexual violence and 1 case of discrimination.

Role of women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff

This study once again highlights the pivotal role played by women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff, particularly those in leadership positions, in initiating and implementing measures to address harassment, including sexual harassment, within parliaments. Many of the measures discussed earlier were often spearheaded by women clerks and secretary generals or deputy clerks and secretary generals, who championed these initiatives and demonstrated their merit. The testimony of one woman parliamentary officer perfectly illustrates the impact of having women in decision-making roles:

"Currently, there are no clear policies or administrative procedures on how to handle cases of staff being subjected to harassment – whether physical, psychological, or intimidation. The former male director used to say, 'That doesn't happen in our parliament.' Thankfully, we now have a new female director with whom we can discuss this issue."

When women parliamentarians come together and collaborate in a dedicated forum, they can help draw attention to gender-based violence and encourage the institution of parliament to stop tolerating such abuse and take action to eliminate it. In the Parliament of Sri Lanka, for example, the combined efforts of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus and the Secretary General of Parliament led to concrete steps to combat the sexual harassment of female staff and to end the impunity of perpetrators (Box 15).

Box 15 – Sri Lanka

Allegations of sexual harassment against women employees of Sri Lanka's Parliament were reported in the media in 2023. The Chair of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus immediately raised concerns about such harassment within the Parliament and the Secretary General of the institution undertook to conduct an internal investigation. She appointed a committee of three senior female officials from the Parliament to investigate the matter. Any staff member who had been a victim or was willing to provide evidence was invited to meet individually with members of the

Committee or to submit a written document anonymously if they did not wish to reveal their name, as staff members identified as victims were reluctant to lodge a complaint for fear of losing their jobs because one of the alleged perpetrators was their supervisor.

After collecting the information and studying the situation, the Committee submitted a report to the Secretary General. In light of the report's conclusions, charges were filed against the accused male employees and they were suspended pending further investigation of the case. Two parallel investigations are currently underway. The Parliament Secretariat has initiated a disciplinary investigation against the three employees under the Parliamentary Staff Act and the Disciplinary Procedure while general criminal proceedings are being conducted independently by the courts.

Following this incident, the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus and the Oversight Committee on Children, Women and Gender published a booklet entitled *Know your Rights – Preventing Sexual Harassment at the Workplace* to raise awareness of the collective responsibility to create a safe and fair workplace, free from sexual harassment. The booklet contains numerous examples, illustrated with cartoons, of what constitutes sexual harassment and provides a protocol for responding to sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as a list of available support resources. It also highlights employers' responsibilities and obligations, particularly under ILO Convention 190.

Within the Secretariat, discussions are also underway to establish a focal point for sexual harassment complaints by female employees, who often feel uncomfortable reporting incidents of sexual harassment to their supervisors.

Role of security services

Security services in parliaments also have a key role to play in providing a safe and protective environment for all parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. These services need to be made aware of incidents of harassment and sexual or gender-based violence, whether they occur offline or online. In addition, they should be trained to respond to such acts appropriately and with the same seriousness as any other form of violence. They can also anticipate potential risks, provide advice and propose appropriate measures to ensure the safety of parliamentarians and staff.⁸⁷

In India, for example, a dedicated mobile app has been developed for employees of the Rajya Sabha Secretariat who work late hours. Through the app, employees can request a vehicle and be driven home. In New Zealand, members of parliament have access to Safe Hub, an app that allows users to request emergency assistance from parliamentary security services.

Today, parliamentary security services must also be well versed in the digital environment in order to provide advice and assistance to parliamentarians targeted online by bullying, threats and insults, including of a sexist and sexual nature. They are also called on to establish security protocols and provide guidance on self-protection online and social media monitoring.

Part 9: A political space of one's own – Effects of participating in the study

Participating in the study provided women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff with an opportunity to discuss issues that are rarely addressed in either professional or personal spheres. The guarantee of confidentiality and the progressive nature of the questions – covering the continuum of violence, from sexist remarks to sexual violence – helped establish a climate of trust and relative intimacy, allowing participants to open up more easily.

This type of interview space, both confidential and reassuring, helps participants speak freely about subjects that may be considered taboo, and it responds to their need to be heard, which has a positive impact. The experience also raises awareness among participants, sensitizes them to the issue of violence against women in parliament, and fosters a sense of engagement. The testimonies included in this section were shared spontaneously by participants at the end of their interviews. They are not responses to a direct question about the usefulness of the interview or the study.

Having a space to talk and be heard

Participants in the study appreciated having a space to talk and be listened to. Taking part in the study was an enriching experience for many, both for those who have experienced violence and for those who have not. Participants who had experienced violence in parliamentary and political environments were able to share their experiences, some for the first time.

“How quickly time flies when we’re talking about a subject that means so much and touches the lives of so many women. It’s so sad that in this day and age, we’re still faced with such narrow mentalities. May your research help us to find a solution as quickly as possible.” – A parliamentary official

“I’ve never told anyone about this experience. This is the first time and it makes me feel better to do so.” – A parliamentary official

The study responds to the need felt by some participants to be listened to, to put into words what they have experienced, or to learn how to do so.

“I’m opening up thanks to this survey. Talking like this feels like a counselling mechanism; it provides instant guidance.” – A parliamentary official

For some, the interview provides an opportunity to break the isolation they feel. It enables them to articulate their sense of resignation in the face of violence, a lack of recourse and the absence of career prospects. They describe feeling trapped and use the space to share their suffering.

“I’m not myself working here, it really affects me to the core.” – A parliamentary official

“I couldn’t do anything about it, it will always be like that, life goes on.” – A parliamentary official

Some participants spoke about the personal benefits of such a space.

“Thank you very much for the interview, at least there’s a channel I can use to express my feelings about experiences I’ve had in the past, and this could be a means of healing.” – A parliamentary official

“By taking part in the interview, I was able to express things that were deeply repressed inside me. It feels like a remedy or medicine!” – A parliamentary official

For participants who had not experienced violence but were interested in the subject of violence against women, taking part in the study enabled them to understand how a study works and the usefulness of a questionnaire. It also allowed them to gain a better grasp of the concepts surrounding violence, and to promote awareness of violence against women in politics more broadly.

“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present my point of view and my experience. The research you have carried out and the conclusions you will draw will certainly be very useful to all women in parliaments.” – A parliamentary official

Recognizing and naming violence

Through their testimonies, some participants recognized the incidents they were describing as acts of violence. They affirmed that these were indeed acts of violence, and that they were victims, particularly when they shared the incidents for the first time. They used the interview setting as an opportunity to open up. Some, however, did not consider sexist jokes or pats on the shoulder as sexist behaviour.

“They’re just joking among men.” – A parliamentary official

“It wasn’t serious sexual harassment.” – A parliamentary official

At the start of the interview, some participants underestimated the impact of such violence, and did not want to be perceived as victims, even though the events described constituted sexual harassment. Over the course of the interviews, some of the interviewees gradually began to describe previously unidentified incidents as acts of violence.

“Do you think this is sexual harassment, or psychological harassment?” – A parliamentary official

For some participants, the violence is deciphered in retrospect.

“The questionnaire helped me remember what happened and it was useful to be able to share my experience.” – A parliamentary official

Others, who have not personally been victims, are becoming aware of the extent of the phenomenon.

“Does this really happen in parliaments?” – A parliamentary official

Whether in the section on experiences of violence or on strategies that parliaments can implement, this study serves as a tool for raising awareness and preventing sexual and gender-based violence. The question of training, particularly in verbal and physical self-defence, gives rise to interesting discussions on the definition of sexual and gender-based violence, and highlights the importance of clear definitions to better address these issues.

Recognizing a form of activism

The questionnaire prompts participants to reflect on solutions for themselves and their colleagues. Participants often expressed a desire to pave the way for more women, including young women, to enter politics. Participating in the study allowed them to highlight their commitment to preventing other women from experiencing similar situations.

"I'm working to create a network of inspiring women politicians to share challenges and perspectives and help prepare future candidates." – A parliamentarian

"I am aware that I need to protect young women entering politics." – A parliamentarian

"I'm doing more for women so that they don't go through what I went through. I want to set an example and encourage women to enter parliament. Parliament is not just for men. It's for all of us." – A parliamentarian

Some have developed inspiring strategies and remarkable resilience, agency and activism after experiencing violence. They shared their insights at the end of the interview:

"This gives me more courage to lead the campaign for gender equality and raise public awareness." – A parliamentarian

"I want to speak openly about it to pave the way for the next generation." – A parliamentarian

"I had the pleasure of contributing to this study. I am confident that after our interview, I will find the courage to speak out and condemn the sexist remarks directed at me and my female colleagues." – A parliamentary officer

Conclusion

The existence of sexism and violence against women in parliaments is now widely acknowledged. However, few studies on the subject have been carried out in the Asia-Pacific region, and among those that do exist, none have examined the situation in parliaments on such a comprehensive scale. The data analysed in this report highlights the reality and scale of these issues in parliaments in the Asia-Pacific region, as described by the women who work there. The study calls for their voices to be heard and for their accounts to be taken seriously, without minimizing them. It also underscores the detrimental impact of this structural issue in the region, particularly for advancing the equitable and diverse participation of women in parliament as well as improving the working environment and well-being of parliamentarians and staff, regardless of gender.

At the same time, the study shows that parliaments in Fiji, India, the Maldives, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand have begun taking steps to prevent and address such acts. This progress is to be welcomed. However, these internal measures, which specifically address harassment and sexual harassment, currently mainly concern parliamentary staff. The examples of the parliaments of Australia and New Zealand demonstrate the importance of implementing comprehensive reforms to ensure that both parliamentarians and the staff who support them are fully included and

protected. Strict zero-tolerance policies on violence against women in parliaments must be implemented for all individuals involved in the parliamentary world. Victims need to know that they will be heard and that support is available. We hope that these examples will inspire other parliaments, and that this study will encourage parliaments in the region and beyond to share best practices to ensure the online and offline safety of all women working within their institutions.

Today, the major challenges posed by gender-based violence online and the use of artificial intelligence to perpetrate such violence require parliaments to urgently undertake coordinated actions with governments, political parties, tech companies, online platforms and civil society organizations.

In the face of gender-based violence, the responsibility lies with everyone, both individually and collectively. It is incumbent upon all to help create a supportive and safe environment that enables women to participate equally in political life and play leading roles.

Annexes

Annex 1: Study methodology

Sample of respondents

Data for the study were collected through confidential individual interviews with 85 women parliamentarians and 65 women parliamentary staff members serving in 33 of the 37 Asia-Pacific parliaments⁸⁸ between October 2023 and November 2024. For the purposes of the study, the 37 active national parliaments invited to participate were those that make up the IPU Asia-Pacific Group (with the exception of a few).^{89, 90}

Participation in the study was voluntary. The secretariats of the IPU, CPA and AIPA wrote to the relevant parliaments to present the study and encourage women working in these institutions to take part. The invitation included an information and consent form to ensure the confidentiality of participants' contributions. The information was collected, recorded and used in such a way as to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

This was not a socio-demographic survey, but rather a tool designed to shed light on the nature and extent of violence against women in the parliamentary sphere. The aim was to raise awareness of the problem and propose appropriate solutions. To ensure that the study was as representative as possible, interviews were conducted with three women parliamentarians and two women parliamentary staff from each parliament. Care was also taken to ensure that representation was as diverse and equitable as possible in terms of age, affiliation and function (political party, upper house, lower house, etc.). However, the low number of women in some Asia-Pacific parliaments made it challenging to fully achieve this goal – in some cases, it was more difficult to find female participants in this region than for the previous IPU studies in Africa and Europe. Similarly, it was not always possible to interview three women parliamentarians and two women staff members, as a number of parliaments in the region have few or no women.

Questionnaires and data

The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining the collection and use of both qualitative and quantitative data. The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted in person, online, or by telephone, using standardized questionnaires – one for parliamentarians and another for parliamentary staff – similar to those used in the two previous studies in Europe and Africa. The use of similar questionnaires enables comparison of the results across the different studies.

Participants were asked about types of manifestations of psychological, sexual, physical or economic violence that they had experienced or were currently experiencing in the course of their parliamentary mandate or duties. The questions also sought to gather information on where the violence occurred, who committed it, whether the respondents reported the incidents and why they did or did not report them. Participants were also asked about the causes of the acts, their impact and solutions for preventing and addressing them (Box 16).

Scope and limitations of the results

Like the previous studies, this study focuses on women parliamentarians and women parliamentary staff, as these groups are the most affected by gender-based violence in parliaments. It does not aim to compare the experiences of these women with those of their male counterparts, who can also be victims of such violence (particularly when they do not conform to normative standards of masculinity), a dynamic that can likewise undermine the effective functioning and inclusivity of parliaments.

The study's title, which includes the terms "sexism", "harassment" and "violence", may have discouraged some women from participating, either because they did not feel personally affected or because they believed that only those wishing to testify were invited to respond. To mitigate this bias, the invitation sent to national parliaments and individual women explicitly stated that all women parliamentarians and parliamentary staff were encouraged to participate, whether or not they had experienced violence. Nevertheless, the severely restricted freedom of expression in some countries in the region significantly impacted women's participation and the nature of their responses, despite assurances of confidentiality.

Box 16 – Summary of questions asked

Psychological violence

In the course of your parliamentary term of office/work in parliament:

- Have you ever been the subject of sexist remarks or behaviour?
- Have newspapers or the television published or broadcasted pictures of you or comments about you that were highly humiliating or sexually charged? (asked only to women parliamentarians)
- Have you ever been psychologically harassed or exposed to persistent and intimidating behaviour?

- Have you ever received threats of harm to you and/or those close to you?

- Have you ever been the target of online attacks (image-based abuse, doxing, hate speech, etc.)?

Economic violence

In the course of your parliamentary term of office:

- Have you ever been refused any funds to which you were entitled (for example, parliamentary allowances)?
- Have you ever been refused any parliamentary resources (office, computers, staff, security) to which you were entitled?
- Has your property ever been damaged or destroyed?

In the course of your work in parliament:

- Have you ever been threatened with losing your job or having your professional advancement blocked?
- Have you ever been refused any funds to which you were entitled (for example, salary, bonus)?

Physical violence

In the course of your parliamentary term of office/work in parliament:

- Has anyone ever slapped, pushed or hit you or thrown something at you which could have hurt you?
- Has anyone ever threatened to use or actually used a firearm, knife or any other weapon against you?
- Have you ever been beaten, held captive, or abducted?

Sexual violence

In the course of your parliamentary term of office/work in parliament:

- Have you ever been the target of sexual harassment?
- Have you ever been in a situation where a person in a position of authority abused his/her power to obtain sexual favours from you in exchange for a benefit that that person was empowered to withhold or confer?
- Have you ever been the victim of an attempted sexual assault or rape?

Each of these questions included additional open-ended questions (qualitative approach):

- Can you explain how the incident occurred and in what context?
- Where did the violence occur?
- Who committed this act of violence?
- Did you report the incident to the relevant authorities?
- In your opinion, what are the reasons for the acts of sexism and violence committed against you?
- How did the violence affect you? What action did you take or what did you decide to change following this experience?

- What strategies/measures could your parliament adopt to combat harassment and violence against women in politics and parliament?

Annex 2: Definitions used in the study

The perception of violence is shaped by social and geographical contexts. Our aim was to remain as close to the facts as possible, as participants may not necessarily be familiar with legal definitions or may not identify what they experience as violence. For this reason, the concepts presented and the various types of violence (sexism, psychological harassment, sexual harassment, sexual assault) were explained both in the questionnaire and orally, using concrete examples that could be easily understood by all participants.

Violence against women: any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.⁹¹

Gender-based violence: “violence which is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”, and which constitutes a violation of their human rights.⁹²

Gender-based harassment: harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, including sexual harassment.⁹³

Violence against women in politics: any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence resulting in physical, sexual or, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression.⁹⁴

Psychological violence: includes all gestures, acts, words, writings and images that harm the psychological integrity of a person or group of people and that have the effect of not only weakening and injuring them psychologically, but also of subjugating and controlling them.

Economic violence: uses economic barriers and deprivation as a means of control, most often by destroying a person’s

property or putting their livelihood in jeopardy as a form of intimidation.

Physical violence: encompasses a wide range of bodily harm that poses a threat to the life or physical integrity of the person concerned or their loved ones.

Sexual violence: any act of violence of a sexual nature committed against someone without their consent, including sexual harassment and other unwelcome behaviours of a sexual nature (physical contact, advances, sexually charged remarks or requests for sexual acts). It includes sexual assault, rape and requests for sexual favours.

Sexual harassment: any form of unwelcome verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour motivated by sexual intent, such as physical contact and advances, remarks with sexual connotations or requests for sexual acts with the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity, in particular when this behaviour creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Sextortion or request for sexual favours: a situation in which a person abuses their power to sexually exploit another individual and obtain sexual favours in exchange for an advantage that they are in a position to refuse or grant. “Sextortion is a form of corruption in which sex, rather than money, is the currency of the bribe.”⁹⁵

Sexual assault: any act of sexual violence committed against another person without consent, including rape, or coercing another person to engage in non-consensual sexual acts with a third party.

Sexist behaviour or remarks: any behaviour or remarks directed against a person because of their gender that have the purpose or effect of demeaning them and their dignity. This may include jokes or derogatory remarks about physical appearance, marital status or private life, negative stereotypes, insults or signs of disrespect, and practices aimed at denigration or exclusion.

Psychological harassment: any persistent and intimidating behaviour, including verbal and non-verbal aggression, such as acts of intimidation, attacks on reputation, attempts to isolate the targeted person, withholding of information, assigning tasks that do not correspond to the person’s abilities, or setting objectives to be achieved with unrealistic deadlines.

Annex 3: List of participating parliaments

| LIST OF PARLIAMENTS BY SUBREGION |
|----------------------------------|
| East Asia |
| China |
| Japan |
| Mongolia |
| Republic of Korea |
| Pacific |
| Australia |
| Fiji |
| Kiribati |
| Micronesia (Federated States of) |
| Nauru |
| New Zealand |
| Papua New Guinea |
| Samoa |
| Solomon Islands |
| Tonga |
| Vanuatu |
| South-East Asia |
| Brunei Darussalam |
| Cambodia |
| Indonesia |
| Lao People's Democratic Republic |
| Malaysia |
| Philippines |
| Singapore |
| Thailand |
| Timor-Leste |
| Viet Nam |
| South Asia |
| Bangladesh |
| Bhutan |
| India |
| Iran (Islamic Republic of) |
| Maldives |
| Nepal |
| Pakistan |
| Sri Lanka |

Notes

- 1 IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe*, 2018; IPU and the African Parliamentary Union (APU), *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa*, 2021.
- 2 IPU, Parline, "Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments", situation as of 1 October 2024.
- 3 IPU, *Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians*, 2016.
- 4 United Nations General Assembly, *Violence against women in politics*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, 2018.
- 5 National Democratic Institute (NDI), *Not the Cost: Stopping Violence against Women in Politics*, Washington, 2016.
- 6 UN Women and UNDP, *Preventing violence against women in elections: A programming guide*, 2017.
- 7 Mona Lena Krook, *Violence against Women in Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2020.
- 8 In the region, at the beginning of 2023, Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, stepped down and also decided to give up her seat in Parliament. Others, such as Sanna Marin, former Prime Minister of Finland, and several prominent Dutch parliamentarians, have announced that they are ending their political careers. IPU, *Women in parliament in 2023*.
- 9 For example, see Catalina Crespo-Sancho, "The Role of Gender in the Prevention of Violent Conflict", *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, World Bank, Washington, 2017; Raghabendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo, "Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India", *Econometrica*, vol. 72, no. 5, 2004; Kathleen A. Bratton and Leonard Ray, "Descriptive representation: Policy outcomes and municipal day-care coverage in Norway", *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2002; Jenn Richler, "Effect of female representation", *Nature Climate Change*, vol. 9, 2019.
- 10 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "*UN population and development review in Asia and the Pacific urges focus on individual rights and choices*", News, 17 November 2023.
- 11 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Towards a brighter future: Pathways to gender equality in Asia and the Pacific", November 2024.
- 12 Statista, *Women in the Asia-Pacific region - statistics & facts*, 2024.
- 13 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Towards a brighter future: Pathways to gender equality in Asia and the Pacific", November 2024.
- 14 IPU, Parline, "Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments", situation as of 1 October 2024.
- 15 This percentage for Asia in Parline includes the subregion of Central Asia, which is not considered in the present study.
- 16 Zohal Hessami and Maria Lopes da Fonseca, "Female Political Representation and Substantive Effects on Policies: A Literature Review", 2020; Magdalena Delaporte and Francisco J. Pino, "Female Political Representation and Violence against Women: Evidence from Brazil", *IZA Discussion Paper*, no. 15365, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA), 2022.
- 17 They have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former spouse or intimate partner, or sexual violence by someone other than a current or former spouse or intimate partner, or both forms of violence, at least once since the age of 15. WHO, *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018*, published in 2021.
- 18 WHO, *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018*, published in 2021.
- 19 WHO, *Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018*, published in 2021.
- 20 IPU, Parline, "Human rights of parliamentarians", Interactive data on cases monitored by the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians", November 2024.
- 21 Westminster Foundation for Democracy, *Women's political leadership in the ASEAN region*, Research report, 2022.
- 22 ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, *Parliamentarians at risk 2020-2023*.
- 23 IPU and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe*, 2018; IPU and the African Parliamentary Union (APU), *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa*, 2021.
- 24 Westminster Foundation for Democracy, *Women's political leadership in the ASEAN region*, Research Report, 2022.
- 25 Westminster Foundation for Democracy, *Women's political leadership in the ASEAN region*, Research Report, 2022.
- 26 Eleanora Esposito, "Cyberviolence against women in politics", *The Routledge Companion to Gender, Media and Violence*, Routledge, 2023; Hannah Phillips, Agostina Bergia and Rosario Grimà Algora, *Strengthening democracy by reducing threats to women in politics - A review of explanations and solutions to online violence against women in politics*, University of Oxford, Blavatnik School of Government, 2024.
- 27 UNESCO, *Women for ethical AI: Outlook study on artificial intelligence and gender*, 2024.
- 28 See NDI, *Violence against women in Politics in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands*, 2021.
- 29 On the idea of the two forms of intersectionality that shape the experience of violence against women in politics, see Mona Lena Krook, *Violence against Women in Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2020.
- 30 The limited sample of 85 women parliamentarians allows us to consider psychological violence and sexual violence as the two most significant forms of gender-based violence in this context. We did not include disabilities among the forms of discrimination analysed, as only two parliamentarians with disabilities took part in the study. Both reported experiencing at least one form of psychological violence.
- 31 To determine belonging to a minority group, participants were asked to respond "yes" or "no" to the question: "Do you consider yourself as belonging to a national, ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority, or to an Indigenous group?"
- 32 Efforts have been made throughout the Americas, Africa and Europe to establish coherent and consistent frameworks for combating violence against women. These include the following legally binding instruments: the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). There is also an Inter-American model law on violence against women in politics, which aims to help harmonize national legal frameworks on this issue in the region of the Americas.
- 33 Yoko Hayashi, "*The possibilities of the regional human rights mechanism for women's rights to be free from violence: the Asian case*", in Sara De Vido and Micaela Frulli, *Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, 2023.
- 34 United Nations General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, A/RES/48/104, 1993. According to the Declaration, "the term 'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".
- 35 United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation No. 19*, 2017.
- 36 United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation No. 19*, 2017.
- 37 United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No. 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems*, 2024.
- 38 United Nations General Assembly, *Violence against women in politics*, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, 2018.
- 39 ILO, *Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190)*, 2019.
- 40 *Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Samoa*.
- 41 ILO, *Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 in brief*, Geneva, 2021.
- 42 The *ILO Convention on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work* (2019) establishes the principle that it is necessary to protect "workers and other persons in the world of work, including employees as defined by national law and practice, as well as persons working irrespective of their contractual status, persons in training, including interns and apprentices, workers whose employment has been terminated, volunteers, jobseekers and job applicants, and individuals exercising the authority, duties or responsibilities of an employer" (article 2.1).
- 43 For more details, see IPU, *Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament*, 2019.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 CPA, *Anti-Harassment Policy Guidelines*, 2020.
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- 48 CPA, *Gender Sensitising Parliament Guidelines: Standards and a Checklist for Parliamentary Change*, 2020.
- 49 AIPA, *Plan of Action on Promoting Women's Political Participation and Leadership 2024-2030*, 2024.
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- 51 World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law*, 2024.
- 52 UN Women, *Guidance Note: Preventing Violence against Women in Politics*, 2021.
- 53 World Bank Group, *Protecting women and girls from cyber harassment: A global assessment of existing laws*, *Global Indicators Briefs*, No. 18, 2023.
- 54 IPU, *Inter-parliamentary dialogue on gender-responsive recovery post-COVID-19*, *Violence against women and girls*, online, 14 April 2021.
- 55 *Australia eSafety Commissioner*.
- 56 *"Breaking Barriers: A Global Review of Legislative Reform on Women's Rights"*, JURISTnews, 2024.
- 57 World Bank Group, *Protecting women and girls from cyber harassment: A global assessment of existing laws*, *Global Indicators Briefs*, No. 18, 2023.
- 58 Australia's eSafety Commissioner's Social Media Self-training raises awareness about the gendered and intersectional nature of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and its impact on those in the public eye, including politicians, activists and human rights defenders, and supports individuals to develop the skills and confidence to proactively safeguard their online presence, and advocate for systemic reform. This training has been developed by eSafety for international use by government, multilateral bodies, civil society organizations and advocacy groups.
- 59 NDI, *ROSA Global - Rapid Online Support and Assistance Mechanism*.
- 60 IPU, *Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament*, 2019.
- 61 Employment Relations Act 2007, and the National Policy on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace 2008.
- 62 Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.
- 63 The People's Majlis passed the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act in 2014.
- 64 One of the recommendations of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), in *Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures* for the Maldives is to "introduce a Code of Conduct for all Members to ensure that the highest standards of behaviour/propriety are adhered to in Parliament and bring Maldives in line with international best practice", 2024.
- 65 Based on the legislative framework of the Magna Carta of Women (2009), the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act (1995), and the Safe Spaces Act (2019).
- 66 Rules of the Committee of Parliamentary Officials on the discipline of parliamentary officials B.E.2555 (2012).
- 67 IPU, *Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments*, 2019.
- 68 Debbie Francis, *External Independent Review: Bullying and Harassment in the New Zealand Parliamentary Workplace*, 2019.
- 69 *Behavioural Statements for the Parliamentary Workplace*, New Zealand Parliament, 2020.
- 70 Marian Sawyer and Maria Maley, *Toxic Parliaments. And what can be done about them*. Gender and Politics, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.
- 71 In New Zealand, staff working for parliamentarians are employed by the parliament rather than directly by their MP.
- 72 "I recommend a Sanctions Working Group be established (...)The group would determine and agree the suite of available sanctions for poor conduct by a Member or Minister, particularly where that behaviour may not be covered by matters of contempt addressed by Parliament's Privileges Committee." Recommendation 81, Debbie Francis, *External Independent Review: Bullying and Harassment in the New Zealand Parliamentary Workplace*, 2019.
- 73 *Parliamentary Service Code of Conduct; Office of the Clerk Code of Conduct*.
- 74 All parliamentary staff, as well as staff supporting members of parliament and the political offices of the political parties.
- 75 Debbie Francis, *Culture in the New Zealand Parliamentary Workplace: A future excellence horizon*, 2023.
- 76 Kate Jenkins, *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021.
- 77 Kate Jenkins, *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Marian Sawyer and Maria Maley, *Toxic Parliaments. And what can be done about them*. Gender and Politics, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.
- 78 This body included parliamentarians from both chambers (the House of Representatives and the Senate) as well as ministers and was led by an independent (external) chair.
- 79 A *Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary Standards* was set up in February 2022, tasked with developing codes of conduct for parliamentary workplaces.
- 80 It is headed by an independent chief executive officer and overseen by an advisory board which consists of a Chair who is a former senior public servant, a former federal court judge, a former political staffer and a social inclusion policy expert.
- 81 The IPSC was established in September 2024 under the Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023.
- 82 The Parliamentary Workplace Support Service Act 2023 sets out a detailed investigation framework.
- 83 Australian Government, *Independent Parliamentary Standards Commission*.
- 84 IPU, *Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments*, 2019.
- 85 PWSS, *"HR Advice"*.
- 86 For example, the working conditions of parliamentary assistants, which were extremely precarious due to the fact that they were employed on "event" contracts that were easy to terminate, have been improved and parliamentarians must now comply with new requirements regarding recruitment, authorization and termination of employment. Marian Sawyer and Maria Maley, *Toxic Parliaments. And what can be done about them*. Gender and Politics, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024.
- 87 IPU, *Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments*, 2019.
- 88 The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Marshall Islands, Palau and Tuvalu did not respond to invitations and reminders, and are not represented in the study.
- 89 The study does not include Canada, which is a member of the IPU's Asia-Pacific geopolitical group. The parliaments of Brunei Darussalam, Kiribati, Nauru and the Solomon Islands have been added.
- 90 The parliaments of Afghanistan and Myanmar are suspended. Afghanistan's parliament was dissolved after the Taliban seized power in August 2021. Myanmar's parliamentary elections were last held in November 2020, but a military coup took place on 1 February 2021, the day the elected parliamentarians were due to be sworn in. As a result, there is currently no functioning parliament in Myanmar. IPU, *Parline*, "Global data on national parliaments", 2024.
- 91 United Nations General Assembly, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, A/RES/48/104, 1993.
- 92 CEDAW (11th session), General Recommendation No. 19 on violence against women, 1992; General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating General Recommendation No. 19.
- 93 *ILO Convention on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work*, art. 1b, 2019.
- 94 UN Women and UNDP, *Preventing violence against women in elections: A programming guide*, 2017.
- 95 International Association of Women Judges, Marval, O'Farrell & Mairal, Thomson Reuters Foundation, *Combating Sextortion: A Comparative Study of Laws to Prosecute Corruption Involving Sexual Exploitation*, 2015.

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