

Highlights from the OSCE PA Parliamentary Web Dialogue on Violence Against Women Journalists and Politicians: A Growing Crisis ⁱ

Wednesday, 10 November 2021, 14:00 – 16:00 CET, Zoom

General discussion points highlighted during the web dialogue:

- Reaffirmed the recognition of women’s rights as Universal Human Rights and urged for their protection by state and non-state actors both in the online and offline spheres;
- Highlighted the tangible progress of women’s participation in politics since the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Declaration¹, while also recognizing a severe backlash in regard to women’s rights and safety during the recent decade;
- Underlined the negative effect gender-based violence (GBV) has on democratic institutions, practices and norms, by establishing a climate of intimidation and self-censorship of women engaged in politics and media;
- Pointed out the difficulties in effectively assessing the effect of GBV on democracy, largely as a result of the normalization of GBV practices in societies, underlining the need to distinguish GBV from other forms of violence;
- Touched upon providing a working definition of GBV, recognizing it is characterized by multifaceted and interlinked aspects pertaining to psychological, sexual, physical, economic and semiotic violence;
- Emphasized the importance to move beyond minimalistic and traditional definitions of violence, focusing only on the use of physical force, and underlined the necessity to reinforce efforts towards the cultivation of a broad and people-centered understanding that GBV affects the mental and emotional safety and integrity of a person;
- Iterated that limiting the understanding of violence to physical acts risks not capturing the real dynamics women are facing, particularly online, and thus contributes to perpetrators continuing to target women with impunity;
- Highlighted the intersectionality of female victims of violence, as women may be targeted based on their sex, as well as their colour, age, sexual orientation, ethnic and cultural background, among other identity factors;

¹ According to data provided by ODIHR, female politicians’ participation in National Parliaments has evolved from an average of 11% in 1995 to 29% in 2021.

- Emphasized that an increase of women’s participation in parliaments alone does entail subsequent changes to the established organizational culture of the parliamentary institution;
- Recognized that, however, women in politics often face more violence and abuse after they enter parliament;
- Reiterated the responsibility of men and women in politics to refrain from attacking and discrediting media outlets and journalists, while highlighting the chilling effect that divisive and inflammatory political rhetoric has on the formation of social environments which contribute to violence and abuse;
- Underlined the undeniable challenges to the safety of women politicians and journalists in the online sphere, and emphasizing the importance of recognizing the impacts of online abuse as equal to in-person abuse and appropriately addressing it;
- Recognized that despite the role of digital technologies in empowering public participation, there is a need for meaningful transparency over the decisions taken by social media platforms because new forms of violence have emerged in the context of centric business models that prioritize sensational, deceptive and hateful content online;
- Emphasized the absence of awareness-raising initiatives, training opportunities, comprehensive behavioral codes and action plans in addressing gender-based violence within the legislative bodies of OSCE participating States;
- Reiterated the significance of the 2018 OSCE Milan Ministerial Council Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women, which called for the need for governments and parliaments to address streamlining gaps in OSCE participating States.

Key Recommendations:

- Parliaments have, and should, exercise their central role in setting, defending and promoting good examples in their efforts to combat violence against women and gender-based violence;
- Parliaments should call for the meaningful adaptation of the legislative process, working structures and practices within parliaments to embrace a stronger gender-sensitive approach, assisted in that respect by OSCE tools and in line with OSCE commitments;
- Strong political will and engagement by governments and party leaderships is necessary in order to embrace, promote and implement gender-sensitive policies while unanimously and promptly condemning and taking actions against gender-based violence across sectors;
- Parliaments should support and facilitate comprehensive, inclusive and meaningful consultations with experts in the field, media representatives and civil society as an integral step in all legislative processes, particularly those addressing gender-based violence;
- Governments and parliaments should enhance their cooperation in drafting comprehensive National Act Plans aimed at safeguarding the safety of female journalists and politicians, while upgrading and maintaining the meaningful implementation of these plans as a cross-party policy priority;
- Governments and parliamentarians should prioritize the adoption, revision and implementation of well-tailored legislative and policy frameworks addressing online and

offline gender-based violence, harassment, and abuse, while respecting the right to freedom of expression;

- In this regard, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly should be utilized as a unique platform which allows for the exchange of experiences between parliaments of OSCE participating States related to challenges faced and lessons learned in adoption and implementation of such policy and legislative frameworks;
- Both female and male parliamentarians should forge and implement strong gender-sensitive policies within and beyond regular parliamentary work, and call for the prompt and constructive development of gender-sensitive parliamentary codes of conduct and action plans tackling gender-based violence in all its forms within their parliaments;
- Parliaments should establish and maintain stronger monitoring and accountability mechanisms within legislature, by regularly assessing challenges within the framework of safety of their members, especially women, and by conducting regular gender assessment audits both by internal and external expert bodies;
- Government and parliamentary structures should conduct regular, consistent and disaggregated research on the topic of gender-based violence within parliaments and across state structures;
- The OSCE toolbox in the realm of gender-based violence should be better utilized and streamlined in the national legislative processes across parliaments of the OSCE region, including through the application of mechanisms and structures of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

ⁱ The Parliamentary Web Dialogue served the official presentation of the 2021 Report of the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues Dr. Hedy Fry (Canada), entitled: «*Violence Against Women Journalists and Politicians: A Growing Crisis*» available in [English](#) and [French](#).

Ahead of the Parliamentary Web Dialogue, the Special Representative issued an [Appeal to Act](#) to members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, calling for enhanced and meaningful efforts in addressing Violence Against Women Journalists and Politicians.