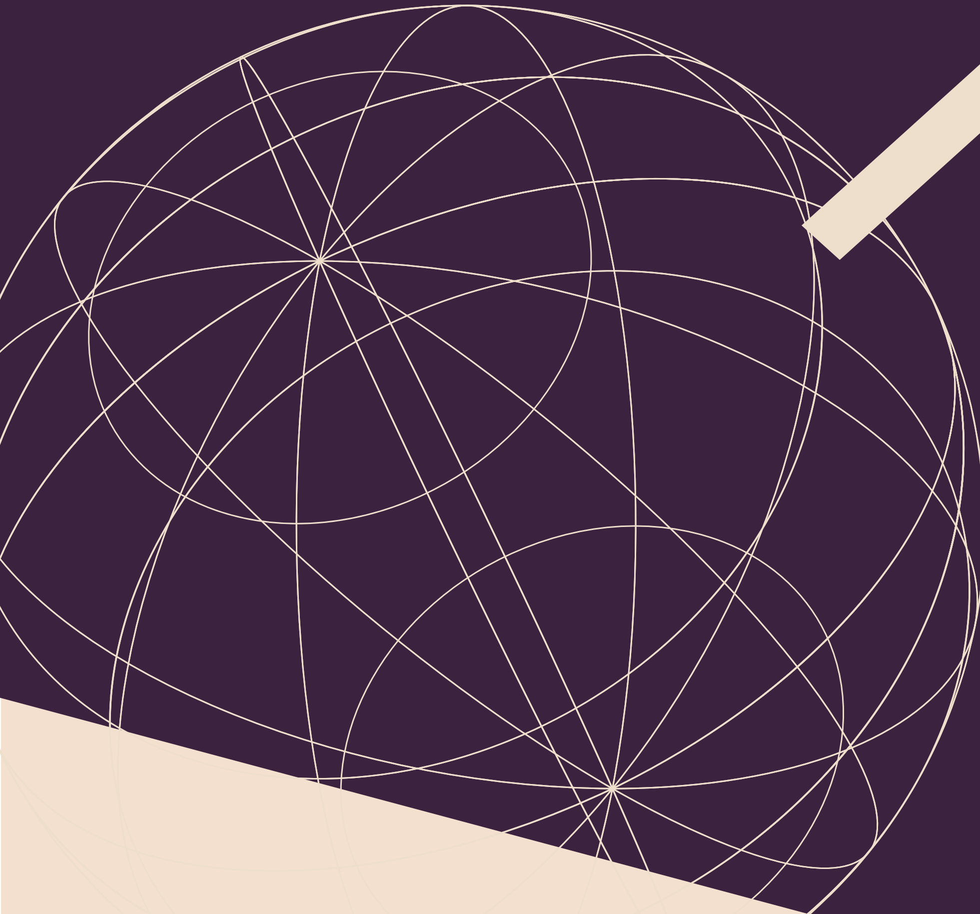
Recognize Resist Rise up



Comparative report:
Findings on gender-based violence experienced by women parliamentarians

Co-funded by
the European Union

Project *Recognize, Resist, Rise Up: Tackling Gender-Based Violence against Women in Politics* is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

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Introduction

Women‘s political participation has expanded globally over recent decades, yet significant structural barriers continue to constrain it. Among the most serious, and yet least visible, of these barriers is gender-based political violence – known as Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWiP). The United Nations‘ 2018 definition[1] encompasses any act of gender-based violence, or threat of such acts, that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm and is directed against a woman in politics because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately. This conceptual framework[2] spans physical assault and sexual harassment, online hate speech, psychological intimidation, economic exclusion, and symbolic delegitimisation[3]. The phenomenon is not merely a series of individual incidents: it manifests systematically and in recurring patterns, with the aim and effect of restricting women‘s political agency and maintaining male dominance in political space. As such, it poses a direct threat to the integrity of democratic participation.

This comparative report was produced as part of the Recognize, Resist, Rise Up (3R) project, under Work Package 3 (WP3). It synthesises the findings of empirical research conducted in the national parliaments of five European Union member states – Czechia, Hungary, Ireland, Germany, and Slovakia with the aim of identifying common European patterns and context-specific differences, and thereby contributing to the development of institutional solutions that strengthen women‘s political safety and equal participation. The research was conducted in 2025–2026, within a shared thematic and ethical framework that enables direct cross-country comparison despite differing national contexts.

The empirical material from all five countries is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews, online questionnaires, or a combination of both, supplemented in some cases by document and social media analysis. Participants were recruited from full outreach to all female parliamentarians in the respective parliaments: in Slovakia, 82% of the 33 female MPs contacted participated; in Czechia, 61% of 67; in Hungary, approximately 39% of 31; and in Ireland, 34% of 70. In Germany, the response rate to the online questionnaire – relative to the 205 current and 36 former Bundestag members contacted – remained extremely low; the German data are therefore to be treated as qualitative, illustrative content, and are not suited to statistical generalisation.

The comparative analysis organises its findings along eight thematic categories: psychological violence, online violence, sexualised violence, economic violence, physical violence, the impact on political work and self-censorship, reporting practices, and the assessment of existing response mechanisms. These categories are grounded in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)[4] and UN VAWP frameworks.

The methodology and conditions for comparability are addressed in detail in the methodology chapter; the main findings chapters present the empirical analysis of each category, based on synthesised patterns, quotes, and contextual interpretations drawn from the data of all five countries.

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1 Simonovic, D. (2018). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences: Violence against women in politics.* UN General Assembly, A/73/301. https://docs.un.org/en/A/73/301

2 Bardall, G., Bjarnegård, E., & Piscopo, J. M. (2020). How is political violence gendered? Disentangling motives, forms, and impacts. *Political Studies, 68*(4), 916–935. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0032321719881812

3 Krook, M. L. (2020). *Violence against Women in Politics.* Oxford University Press. https://academic.oup.com/book/36672

4 *Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians.* Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016).https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians

Political context of the countries studied

The five countries represent different political and institutional contexts, which directly shape the forms, intensity, and visibility of gender-based political violence.

In Czechia, while a record number of women were elected in the 2025 elections, this was largely the result of voters‘ preferential voting rather than party list reforms. In Hungary, the research was conducted during the 2022–2026 parliamentary cycle, at the end of which women accounted for 15.6% of MPs; the spring 2026 elections will substantially alter this figure. Both countries are characterised by an absence of institutional protection frameworks, and neither has ratified the Istanbul Convention – as is also the case in Slovakia, which records one of the EU‘s weakest performances in the power domain of the EIGE Gender Equality Index[5].

Ireland is the only country studied where a statutory party list gender quota is in place, and where parliament has established a formal Task Force for safe political participation – making it the most institutionally documented case in terms of existing responses[6]. In Germany, the deterioration of political discourse, driven in part by the rise of far-right populism, and a growing number of hate crimes against politicians, coincide with stagnating and even declining shares of women in politics.

Yet the similarities are striking: in none of the parliaments studied does a standalone, binding institutional mechanism exist for addressing gender-based political violence; the online space functions in every context as the most widespread and most intensive infrastructure for violence; and reporting rates everywhere fall dramatically short of the prevalence experienced. This self-perpetuating invisibility – whereby most cases go unrecorded, perpetrators remain unaccountable, and violence becomes normalised – is not an exception but a structural condition in each of the contexts studied.

5 EIGE Gender Equality Index 2025 – Szlovákia hatalmi dimenziója European Institute for Gender Equality (2025), https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2025

6 Oireachtas Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life (2024). *Report of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life*. https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/parliamentaryBusiness/other/2024-05-15_task-force-on-safe-participation-in-political-life_en.pdf

Methodology

This comparative report is part of the international project Recognize, Resist, and Rise-Up: Tackling Gender-based Violence against Women in Politics. The methodology is based on research conducted in each of the five partner countries: Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, and Slovakia as part of the national research.

The aim of this report is to synthesize findings and present comparable data and findings on gender-based violence experienced by women parliamentarians in these five countries. Each country team designed its data collection within a shared thematic framework: investigating the prevalence, nature, sources, and consequences of gender-based violence (GBV) against female parliamentarians, while adapting instruments and procedures to their specific political contexts. This synthesis identifies the common methodological foundations, highlights meaningful differences in approach, and draws out key considerations for cross-country comparison.

All five studies target the same population: women holding a parliamentary mandate at the time of data collection. In four countries (Czechia, Ireland, Slovakia, and Germany), all female MPs were invited to participate — a census approach. Hungary also began with a census approach but shifted to snowball sampling when initial response rates were low due to political constraints. Across all five studies, data collection was carried out between November 2025 and March 2026.

Data collection method

The five countries employed two distinct primary data collection instruments: semi-structured interviews and online questionnaires (surveys). All three interview-based studies used audio recording (subject to consent), with subsequent transcription and formal anonymisation. Ireland and Germany employed online questionnaires as their primary instrument. Both questionnaires were distributed via email to MPs‘ parliamentary email addresses and hosted on digital platforms.

The Irish questionnaire was hosted on Google Forms and distributed to all 70 female parliamentarians across both houses (Dáil and Seanad). Germany‘s survey was hosted on Lamapoll and sent to all 205 current female MPs of the German Bundestag and 36 former MPs from the previous legislative period (which had only ended in spring 2025). In both cases, anonymity was built into the survey design from the outset, rather than applied post-collection.

Both questionnaires combined closed and open-ended items. The open-ended format was emphasized, where participants were encouraged to respond in their own words with as much or as little detail as they were comfortable sharing. Hungary also employed supplementary data sources beyond interviews and questionnaires in the form of a qualitative online survey sent to those who declined personal interviews, document analysis of publicly available materials, and a targeted social media analysis covering Facebook, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter), examining comments directed at female MPs‘ posts and public appearances.

All five country studies applied consistent ethical principles, including informed consent in written or verbal form, voluntary participation with the right to withdraw at any time, anonymization of all cited data and quoted statements, compliance with GDPR requirements for data storage and processing, and sensitivity protocols.

Response rates and sampling outcomes

Response rates vary substantially across the five studies and are directly related to both the instrument used and the political context of each country.

Table 1: Response rates and women's parliamentary representation by country[7]

Country	Total seats in parliament	Female MPs (N)	Women's representation (%)	Female MPs invited to study	Responded (N)	Response rate (%)
Czechia (CZ)	**200**	**67**	**33.5%**	**67**	**41**	**61%**
Hungary (HU)	**199**	**31**	**15.6%**	**31**	**12***	**~39%***
Ireland (IE)	**234**	**70**	**29.9%**	**70**	**24**	**34%**
Slovakia (SK)	**150**	**33**	**22.0%**	**33**	**27**	**82%**
Germany (DE)	**630**	**205**	**32.5%**	**205 (+ 36 former)**	**22****	**~4%*****

** Hungary: 11 interviews + 1 survey response; rate reflects combined participation.*
*** Germany: 22 total questionnaires received (16 fully completed) across current and former Bundestag members*
**** ~4% response rate among current women MPs*

Slovakia achieved the highest participation rate (82%), which may reflect both the smaller parliamentary cohort (33 female MPs) and the sustained outreach effort. Czechia similarly achieved a strong participation rate (61% of 67 female MPs). Both studies used interviews as the primary instrument, which typically generates higher engagement from elite participants than self-administered questionnaires.

7 In countries with a bicameral parliamentary system, the comparative report focuses exclusively on the lower chambers of parliament.

Ireland achieved a 34% response rate via anonymous online survey. Germany's online survey recorded an approximately 4% response rate among current Parliament members. The German research team explicitly acknowledges this limitation, noting that the low response rate meant the quantitative data could only be analysed qualitatively, as an exploratory and indicative, rather than representative sample.

Hungary's participation rate was shaped significantly by political factors: while opposition MPs engaged more readily, government-affiliated MPs largely declined, delayed, or withdrew following initial agreement. The research team notes that this asymmetry itself reflects the politically sensitive nature of gender-based political violence in Hungary's current institutional environment.

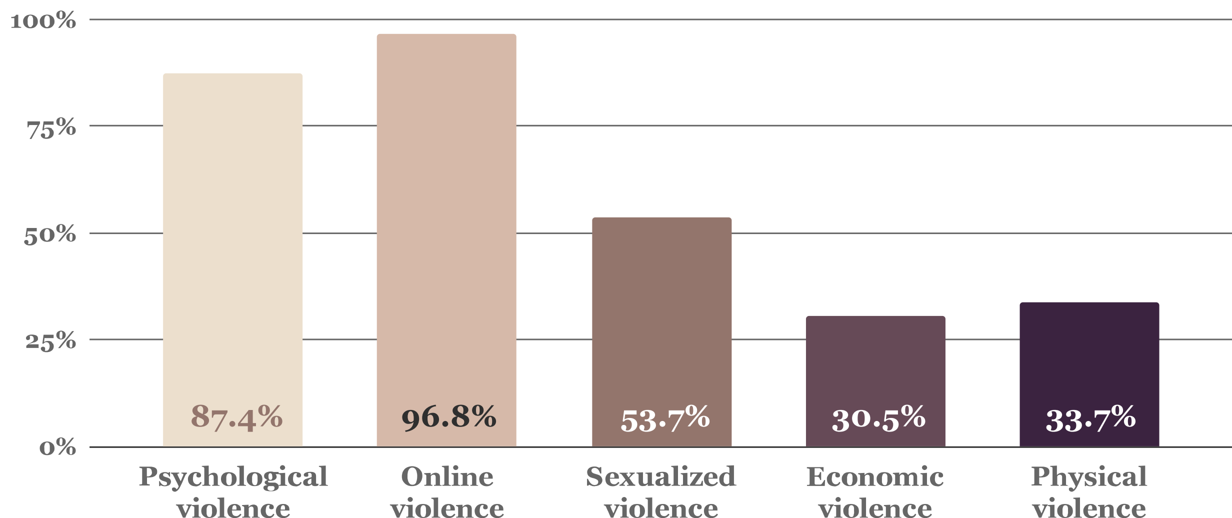
Across all five studies, the absence of responses from certain political parties or parliamentary groups is noted. The Czech and Hungarian reports discuss party-level participation in detail, while Slovakia deliberately omitted party affiliation from the published analysis to protect respondents' identities.

Main findings

The comparative findings across the five participating countries demonstrate that gender-based violence against women politicians is widespread and takes multiple interconnected forms. Although the prevalence and intensity of individual forms of violence vary between countries, the data consistently shows that violence constitutes a significant barrier to women's full and equal political participation. Experiences described by respondents further indicate that these forms of violence often overlap, reinforce one another, and intensify during periods of increased public visibility such as election campaigns, parliamentary debates, or media appearances.

Chart 1 summarises the prevalence of the five main forms of gender-based violence experienced by women parliamentarians across the surveyed countries: psychological violence, online violence, sexualised violence, economic violence, and physical violence. The findings demonstrate that gender-based violence is not an isolated or marginal phenomenon, but a pervasive and structural feature of women's political participation across the countries included in the research.

Chart 1: Experience with various forms of gender-based violence



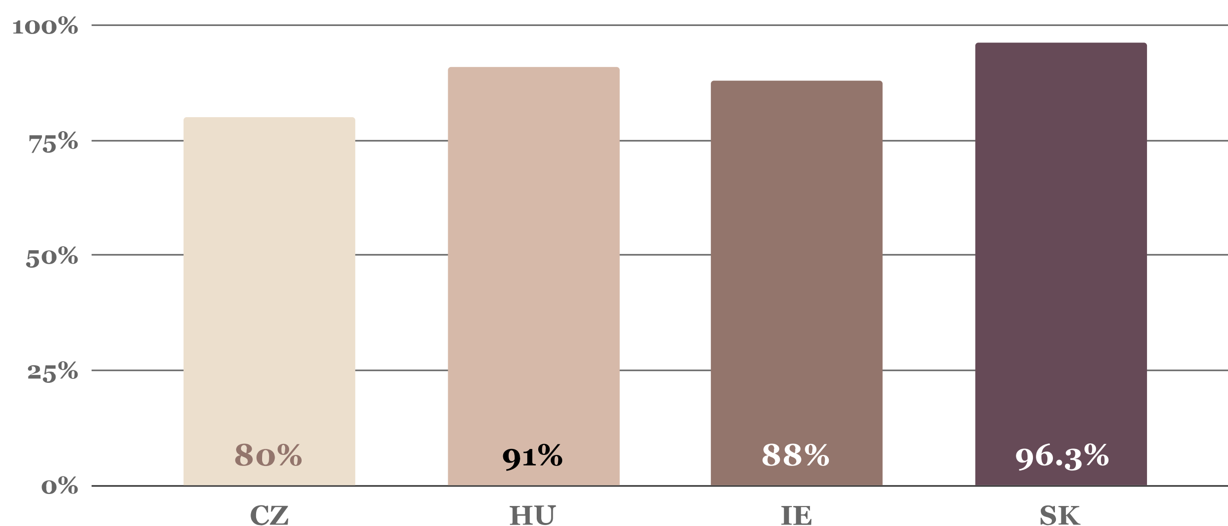
Online violence emerges as the most prevalent form overall, experienced by 96.8% of respondents across the four quantitatively comparable countries. Psychological violence follows closely at 87.4%, indicating that verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, and degrading treatment constitute a near-universal aspect of women politicians' experience. Sexualised violence was reported by 53.7% of respondents, while physical violence affected 33.7%. Economic violence, although the least prevalent category at 30.5%, nevertheless represents a significant form of exclusion that directly undermines women's ability to exercise their political mandate.

Psychological violence

The category of psychological gender-based violence includes various forms: sexist or sexualized remarks, publication of degrading or sexualized images, intimidating or threatening behaviour, including verbal attacks and threats of violence.

Chart 2 depicts the prevalence of psychological violence – in any form – against women politicians in Czechia, Hungary, Ireland and Slovakia and shows consistently high levels across all four countries.

Chart 2: Prevalence of psychological violence (any form) in respective countries



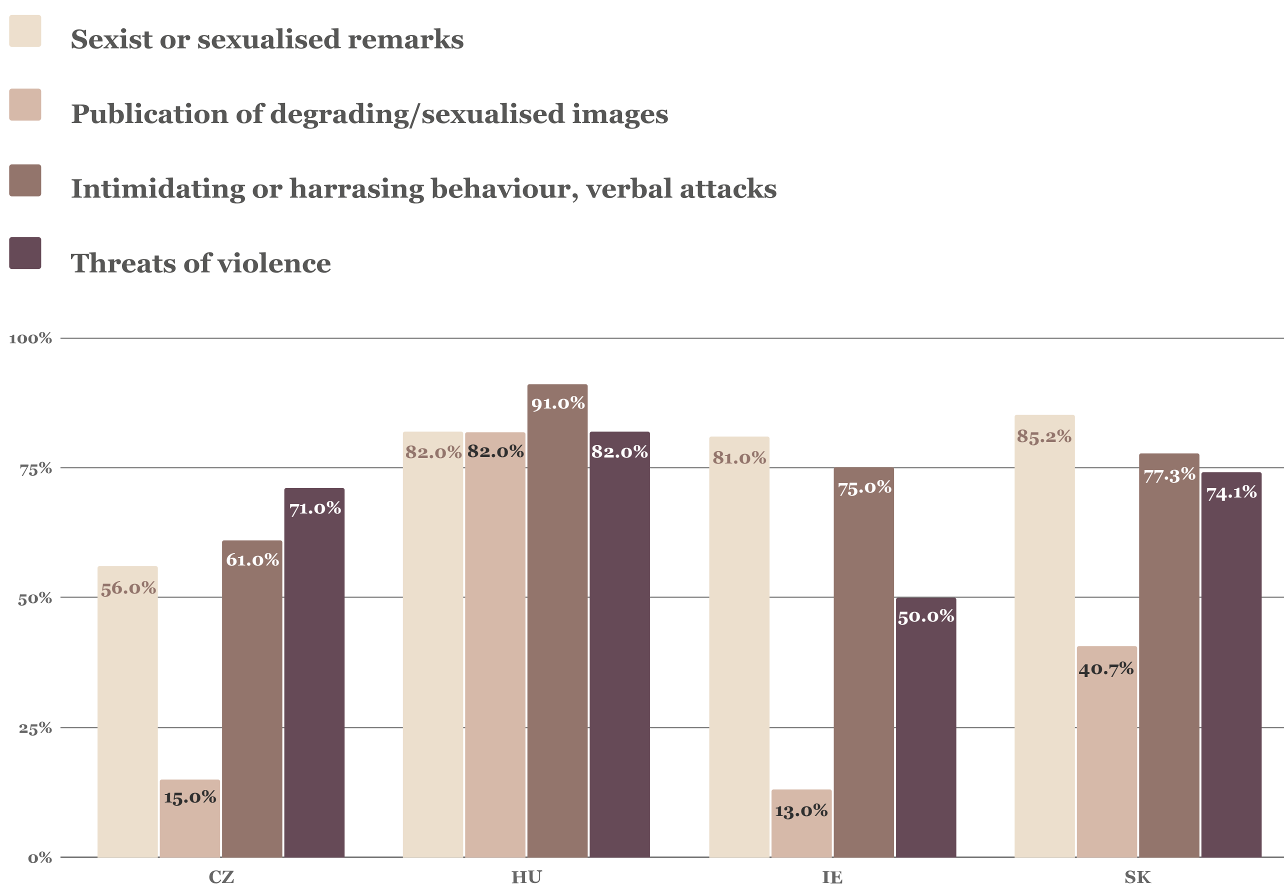
The highest prevalence of psychological violence is reported in Slovakia, reaching 96%, and lowest in Czechia – 80%, with Hungary and Ireland reaching 91% and 88% respectively. This prevalence shows that experience of psychological violence is high across all four countries as well as in line with the qualitative data gathered for Germany. Respondents report frequent verbal attacks or intimidating behaviour on social media but also in person, perpetrated by both strangers in public spaces or colleagues on the premises of parliaments. Many report that frequency and intensity of violence increases after publicized events, such as appearance in debates, press conferences or during political campaigns.

> *"At a campaign stand, a person came, tore my head off a leaflet and ate it in front of me. That frightens you. Or a group of cyclists attacked me, saying that I may be a 'sex bomb' but I am stupid because I defend certain people."* – ***CZ respondent***
>
> *"They sent the intelligence service after me to break me down."* – ***HU respondent***
>
> *"Especially after the elections, it became clear that I must have done this or that to get there, because I'm a woman. So, yes, there are comments like these. And I have to say that even my son experienced this; one of his friends in the schoolyard told him that at home, his parents were talking about how, and I'm quoting, 'your mom must be blowing [the party chairman] really well, because she has been everywhere lately.'"* – ***SK respondent***

Chart 3 analyses the prevalence of different forms of psychological violence in the four countries. On average, sexist or sexualized remarks together with intimidating or harassing behaviour are the most common form of psychological violence experienced by 71.6% of respondents across the four countries. The third most common category of psychological violence across all four countries is threats of violence, experienced by 69.5% of respondents across four countries.

Respondents frequently receive sexist or sexualised remarks from strangers, most commonly on the internet, but also from colleagues in the parliament.

Chart 3: Experience with various forms of psychological violence in respective countries



Across countries, several respondents mentioned general normalisation and acceptance of sexist comments and behaviour, especially in male-dominated environments and political parties. Likewise, almost all MPs surveyed in Germany stated to have received sexist or sexualized remarks. Among those under 40 years old, all female MPs have in fact stated that they experienced this form of psychological violence as MPs.

> *"In [online] comments, such as: 'Someone should rape me to test whether I would still support so-called humanitarian refugee policy. Maybe the far-right actors will drop by to see me then'."* ***– DE respondent***
>
> *"And then, of course, there are also various types of comments, whether from fellow MPs, whether it's the coalition or the opposition—it doesn't matter at all. It's mainly older men who make remarks about how I look, how I seem, what I'd probably be like in bed, what my mouth looks like, and things like that."* ***– SK respondent***

Hungary reports consistently highest rates of all types of psychological violence, especially intimidating or harassing behaviour (91%), with all other categories reaching 82%. These findings point to a generally intimidating environment for the surveyed women MPs. Slovakia also reports a concerningly high prevalence for all types, with the exception of publication of degrading or sexualized images, reaching 40.7%. Publication of degrading or sexualized images is likewise the least prevalent in both Czechia (15%) and Ireland (13%).

In Germany, references to traditional gender roles as justification for the attack were reported several times by MPs surveyed, pointing to a strong persistence of stereotyping and semiotic violence:

> *"I was frequently labelled as incompetent and stupid, often in reference to being a woman [...] 'We need women, but certainly not in leadership positions. The world is male and always will be.' I was also told in writing that I should go back to the kitchen and cook for my husband."* – **DE respondent**

When it comes to threats of violence, respondents across surveyed countries reported that their families, and specifically parents or children, are common targets for perpetrators.

> *"When I was pregnant, one member of the Parliament said that he likes pregnant women, that he likes to impregnate them. ...There are also some sexist jokes like that, and I can't repeat them now, but it's just common jargon sometimes even among very conservative members of the Parliament, including those from the Christian Democratic Party [KDH]."* – **SK respondent**
>
> *"For example, at the time when the case of the rape of a girl (...) by a migrant was being discussed, people wrote to me that they wished rape by a 'black man' on me and my daughter. It was very frequent."* – **CZ respondent**
>
> *"On Instagram, I am regularly sent pictures of male genitalia,"* and
> *"Someone even created fake pornographic content in my name."* – **HU respondent**

In Germany, threats of harm even extended to pets and were overall (against oneself, family or friends) reported by all MPs under 40 and nearly all female MPs across all ages.

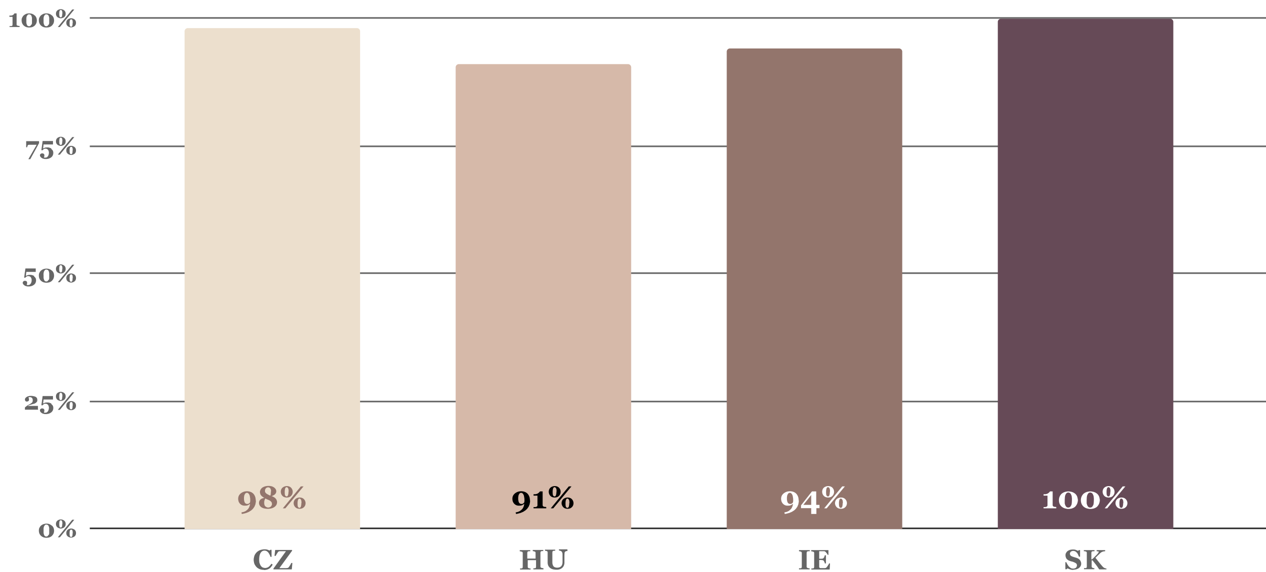
> *"Once, a participant in one of the [...] demonstrations [...] approached me while I was sitting on the balcony and asked if 'that cat' was mine, if I loved it, and what would happen if the cat didn't come home anymore. I took that as a threat to kill my cat."* – **DE respondent**

Online violence

Online violence includes hateful comments or threats under social media posts, hateful comments or threats in the form of private messages, emails, or letters, the publication of humiliating or sexualized photos or videos (real or altered) on social media, and the disclosure of personal information (doxxing).

Chart 4 depicts the prevalence of online violence – in any form – against women politicians in Czechia, Hungary, Ireland and Slovakia and shows consistently high levels across all four countries. Data for Germany is not included as the findings from the research among female Members of the Bundestag are not representative.

Chart 4: Prevalence of online violence (any form) in respective countries



Slovakia reports universal exposure with 100% of respondents indicating experience of online violence. Czechia also shows an extremely high rate at 98%, closely followed by Ireland at 94%. Hungary, while slightly lower, still records a substantial 91%.

Although there is some variation between countries, the differences are relatively narrow and all figures exceed 90% indicating that online violence is a near-ubiquitous experience across all four countries. All of the female politicians surveyed on this issue in Germany spoke of receiving hateful comments or even threats online in the course of their public service.

Overall, the chart highlights online violence as a pervasive and widespread issue, affecting the vast majority of respondents in each country, with particularly acute levels reported in Slovakia and Czechia.

> *"For me, Facebook is probably the worst, even though a large part of it consists of artificially created profiles and trolls. The most disgusting comments from real people appear on platform X, but the largest volumes and frequency of attacks are on Facebook. (...) Every time I appear on television or a video of my speech in Parliament is shared, I receive several such emails and private messages."*
> ***– CZ respondent***

*“The increase in attacks is linked to the moment when specific women politicians are picked up by the disinformation scene. They share your content in their groups and then it all comes at you. Moderating hateful comments used to take me several hours a day. I consider it important so that my content is not ‘taken over’ elsewhere, but it limits me in terms of time. Most of the aggression takes place in the online space. Those politicians will not say anything to your face, they behave themselves in the plenary, but then they ‘throw you to the crowd’ on social media.” – **CZ respondent***

*“For example, I’ll post something on social media, and they’ll share it in some of their troll groups, and then everyone swarms in and starts insulting that person—so it’s as if it’s coordinated to some extent sometimes.” – **SK respondent***

*“Okay, so I’m reading: scum, lazy, stupid, you’re a disgrace to Slovakia, Soros’s lackey, depraved woman, pathetic creature, you’re a whining cunt, rabble, liberal shit, cancer, what kind of monster is this, you’re spouting bullshit, and also a herd of monkeys, scum, society’s trash, mold and a blister on the nation [sic!], you don’t know what you’re talking about, bitch, go hide somewhere, rainbow shit, shit emoji.” – **SK respondent***

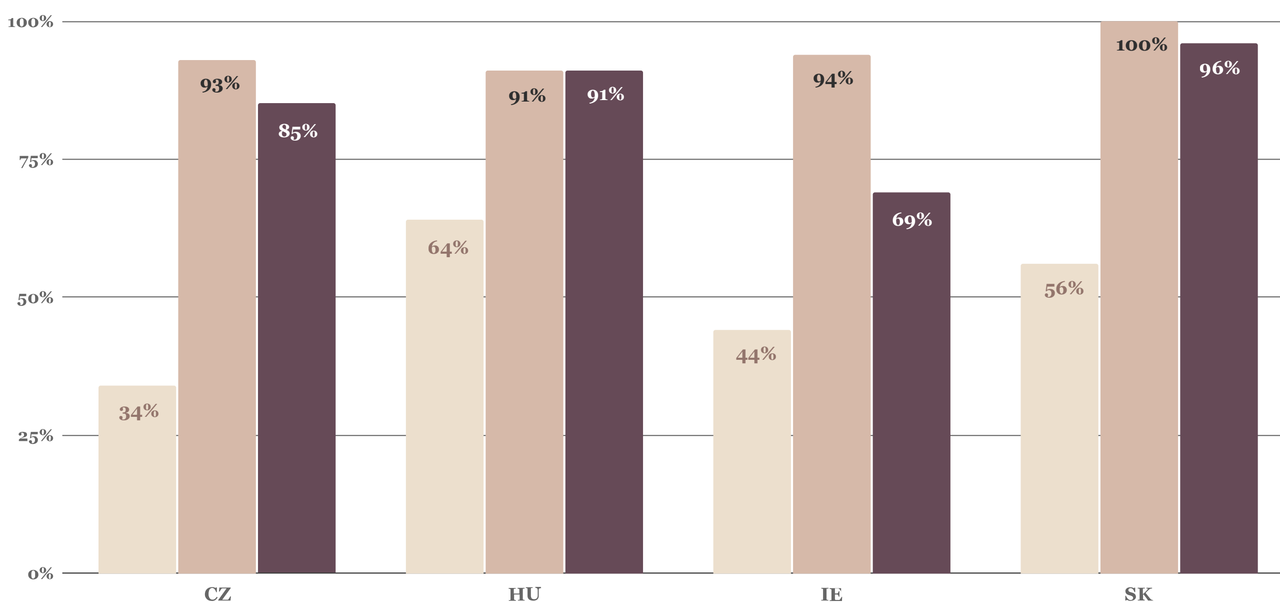
Chart 5 analyses the types of online violence experienced across Czechia, Hungary, Ireland, and Slovakia focusing on three categories: photos shared on social networks, hateful content/threats in comments, and hateful content/threats received via direct messages (DMs).

Chart 5: Experience with various forms of online violence in respective countries

Photos on social networks

Hateful content / threaths – comments

Hateful content / threaths – DMs



A consistent pattern across all countries is that the receipt of hateful content and threats in comments is the most prevalent form of online violence. Slovakia records the highest level at 100%, followed closely by Ireland at 94%, Czechia at 93%, and Hungary at 91%. Germany reported similar trends in their research. This suggests that public-facing online spaces, such as comment sections, are a primary source of abuse across all five countries.

Experience of hateful content and threats via direct messages is also widespread, though slightly lower overall than public facing comments. Slovakia again reports the highest prevalence at approximately 96%, followed by Hungary at 91% and Czechia at 85%, while Ireland shows a comparatively lower rate at around 69%. Most survey participants in Germany reported having received private hate messages, insults, or threats, for example, via email or direct message. This indicates that while private channels are a significant vector for abuse, there is more variation between countries.

The sharing of photos on social networks is consistently the form of online violence least reported by respondents, though still affecting a notable proportion. Hungary reports the highest level at 64%, followed by Slovakia at 56%, Ireland at 44%, and Czechia at 34%. Some of the German MPs surveyed reported having experienced image-based digital violence, such as receiving unsolicited images of genitals. Additionally, about one in three German respondents experienced having photos of herself with degrading or sexualized connotations published by others. While image-based abuse is less common than text-based harassment, the data suggests that it remains a significant issue.

Overall, the data highlights that text-based abuse, particularly in public-facing online spaces, is the dominant form of online violence, with private messaging also playing a significant role. Image-based violations, while less prevalent, still affect a considerable number of respondents, underscoring the multifaceted nature of online abuse in all five countries.

As stated in Ireland country report:

"One participant indicated that the forms of abuse she receives online are 'too many to describe in detail', ranging from sexist comments about how she gained political office to 'being called ignorant, thick, corrupt, biased, stupid, a waste of space, not wanted in Government...'" and "One participant indicated her belief that the private nature of the online abuse further enabled a sense of impunity on the part of perpetrators."

"Someone even created fake pornographic content in my name" ***– HU respondent***

"Death threats in online media: 'I will be hanged,' 'they should rape us,' this happened to everyone." ***– HU respondent***

"Whenever I post something about equality or women's issues, I'm bombarded with misogynistic comments. I just don't read them anymore." ***– DE respondent***

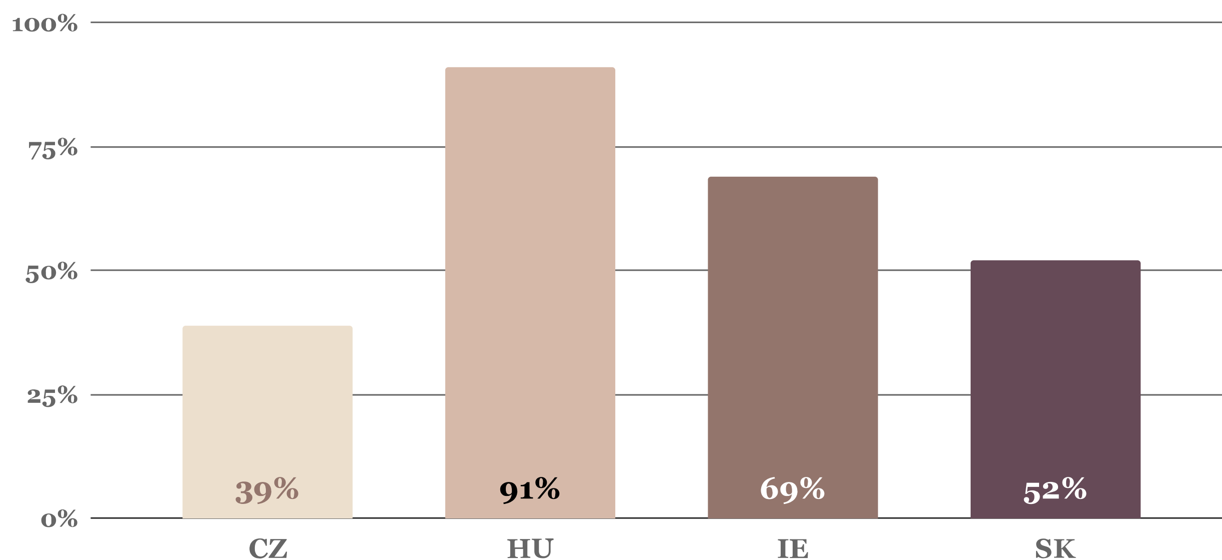
"[I have] constantly been sent dick pics or received dating requests. I've also received comments on my appearance under posts or inappropriate 'compliments' when it came to professional content." ***– DE respondent***

Sexualised violence

Sexualized violence includes sexual harassment (sexual remarks or jokes, sexual advances, unwanted invitations, or unwanted touching) and sexual violence (coercion into sexual acts, activities, or rape).

Chart 6 summarises the overall prevalence of sexualised violence (in any form) across Czechia, Hungary, Ireland, and Slovakia and reveals a clear variation in reported experiences between the four countries.

Chart 6: Prevalence of sexualised violence (any form) in respective countries



Hungary records by far the highest prevalence, with 91% of respondents reporting experience of sexualised violence. This indicates a near universal experience of sexualised violence among respondents. Ireland follows with a substantially lower, though still high, rate of 69%, suggesting that over two-thirds of respondents report some form of sexualised violence. Slovakia reports a slightly lower figure at 52%. Czechia shows the lowest prevalence, at 39%, although this still represents a considerable proportion of respondents. German research found that a sexualised hostile climate, such as sexual harassment and sexualised threats, is a recurring feature of the everyday political life of women MPs. Among the MPs surveyed below the age of 40, more than two thirds experienced hostile sexualised remarks and behaviour.

Overall, the data highlights that sexualised violence is a widespread issue across all countries, with particularly high prevalence in Hungary and Ireland. The variation between countries may point to differences in social context, reporting practices, awareness, or lived experiences, but in all cases the figures indicate a significant and concerning level of sexualised violence. The experiences of women came through in interviews and survey responses.

> *"I object, but I simply do not register it anymore. Unfortunately, I am so used to it that I do not deal with it. Or sometimes I deal with it by being even harsher than the person in question. (...) [A colleague MP] touched me under my shirt and got slapped."* – ***CZ respondent***

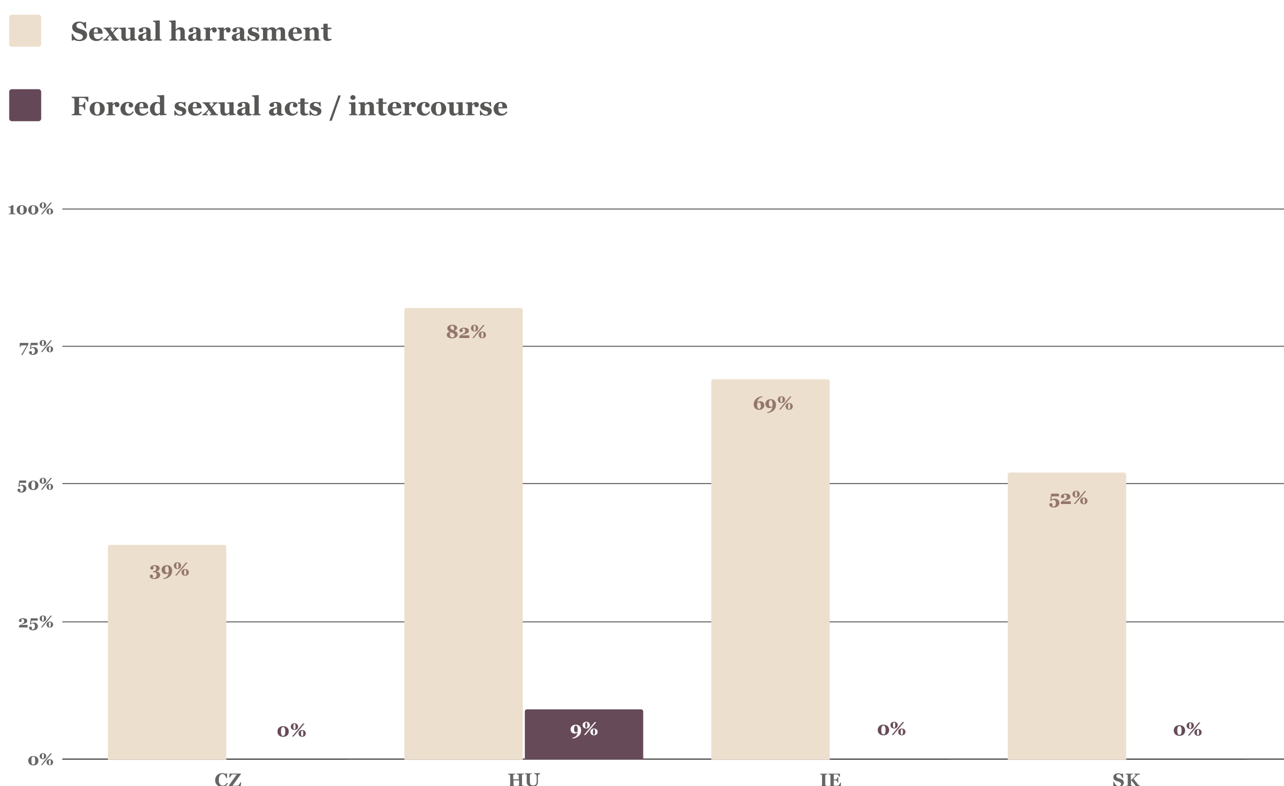
“Then there are dozens of messages like: ‘I will fuck you one day anyway, I know you are a whore.” – ***CZ respondent***

“It’s happened to me a few times that I just met someone on a work trip, and then that guy started sending me inappropriate messages—they might have started out innocently, but they really escalated into harassment, to the point where I was even sent inappropriate photos of their genitals and things like that. I think it happened to me three times.” – ***SK respondent***

“Unwanted comments about my appearance, which actually happened regularly, every time we met (…) he’d start telling me how sexy I looked in some video (…)”. – ***SK respondent***

Chart 7 breaks down the experiences of two forms of sexualised violence—sexual harassment and forced sexual acts/intercourse.

Chart 7: Experience with various forms of sexualised violence in respective countries



Sexual harassment is reported at notably higher rates in all countries compared to forced sexual acts. Only Hungary reports experiences of forced sexual acts/intercourse with a figure of 9%. Hungary also records the highest prevalence of sexual harassment, with 82% of respondents reporting such experiences. This is followed by Ireland at 69%, Slovakia at 52%, and Czechia at a considerably lower rate of 39%. In Germany, nearly half of the 15 female politicians who responded to this question said that they had experienced behaviour that they themselves considered sexual harassment in their role as lawmakers.

The stark difference between the two categories indicates that while sexual harassment appears widespread to varying degrees, experiences of forced sexual acts are either significantly less common, underreported, or not captured in the same way across the five countries.

Overall, the data highlights two key trends: first, that sexual harassment is a pervasive issue across all countries, though with notable national differences; and second, that reports of more severe forms of sexual violence are minimal in this dataset, with Hungary again differing slightly from the other countries.

"They said I should be raped…"; "I am a whore." **– HU respondent**

"On Instagram, I am regularly sent pictures of male genitalia." **– HU respondent**

"It's so normal - it can be subtle reference/unwanted touching/comments on physical appearance." **– IE respondent**

"Culture of 'laddish' behaviour with sexist comments…[that]…should simply be seen as unacceptable across the board now." **– IE respondent**

"[…] A colleague in my parliamentary group has also made sexist remarks to me; for example, when he picked something up off the floor next to me, he said it depended on my skirt whether he could manage not to look underneath it." **– DE respondent**

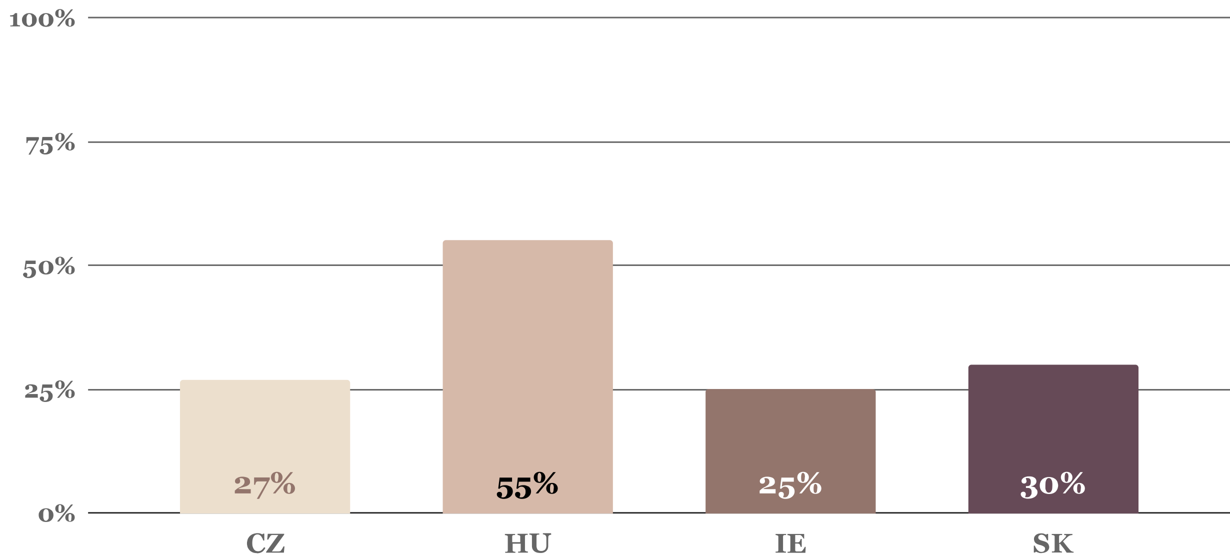
Economic violence

Analysts of political violence tend to treat economic violence as a secondary phenomenon: less visible, less likely to reach public attention, and harder to prove than physical assault or online harassment. It is therefore unsurprising that, on the basis of comparative data, this is the least prevalent of the five forms of violence examined – Chart 1 shows that 30.5% of respondents experienced it, compared to 96.8% for online violence, 87.4% for psychological violence, 53.7% for sexualised violence, and 33.7% for physical violence. Yet this low figure is misleading. The political consequences of economic violence are qualitatively different from other forms: while psychological or online violence primarily harms the person, economic violence directly undermines the conditions for exercising a parliamentary mandate.

An MP who is denied the floor, cannot access data, does not receive campaign funding to which she is entitled, or whose constituency office is ransacked, suffers harm not only to her dignity but to her representative function. In this sense, economic violence is one of the most effective tools of political exclusion: it quietly and persistently narrows the room for manoeuvre of women MPs, and creates a vulnerability that reduces their resilience against all other forms of violence.

Chart 8 presents the prevalence data for the four countries included in the comparison, and reveals stark differences. Hungary stands out with a prevalence of 55% – nearly double the 30% recorded in Slovakia, and more than double the figures for Czechia (27%) and Ireland (25%). Although findings from Germany are not representative and almost exclusively refer to vandalism, roughly every third MP surveyed has had to deal with attacks on their professional property and resources.

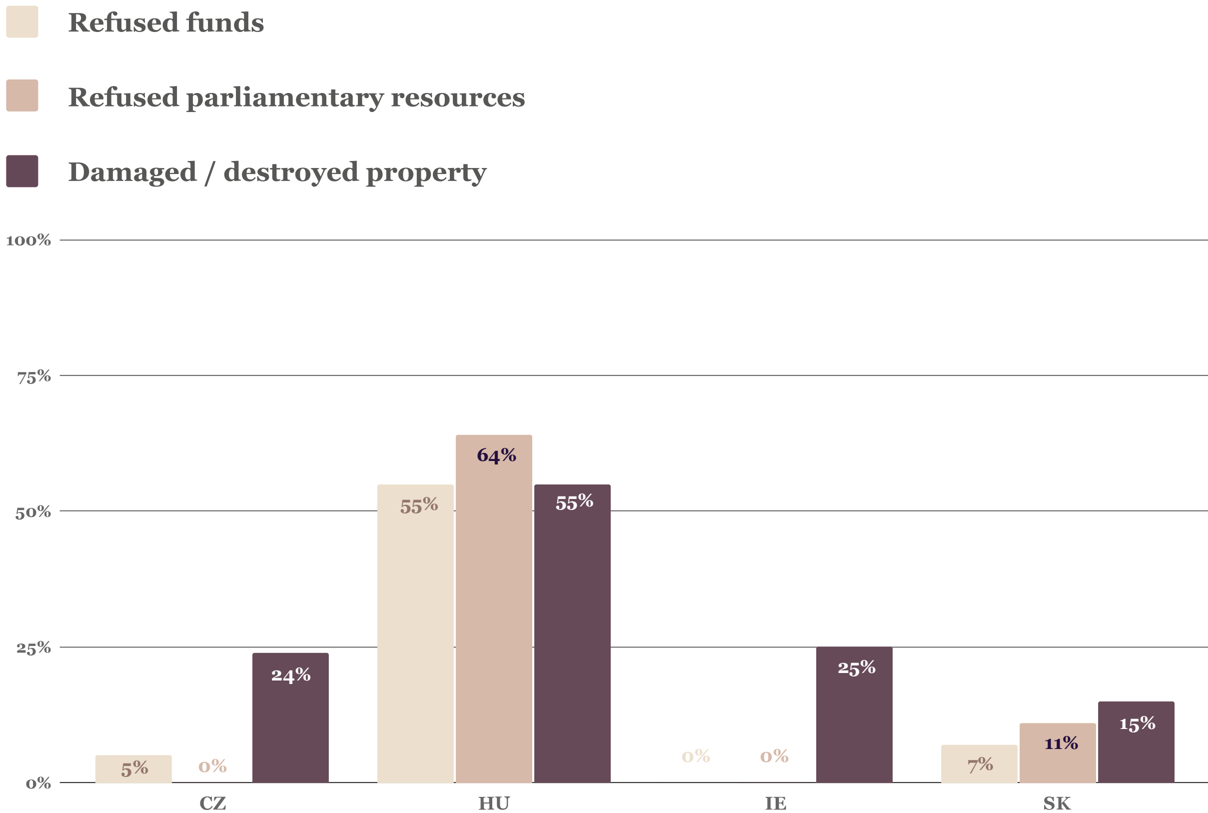
Chart 8: Prevalence of economic violence (any form) in respective countries



The distribution among the more representative findings itself calls for interpretation: the highest prevalence does not appear in the country that sends the most women to parliament, but in the one with the most concentrated institutional power structures. Economic violence does not simply accompany political inequality – to a significant degree, it produces it.

Chart 9 further nuances the picture through a breakdown by subtype. Three forms are examined: the denial of financial resources, the denial of parliamentary resources, and the damage or destruction of property. It is this distribution that reveals most about the true nature of the phenomenon.

Chart 9: Experience with various forms of economic violence in respective countries



Two qualitatively distinct mechanisms emerge from the data, both remaining within the conceptual framework of economic violence but operating through different logics. The first is institutional resource deprivation: the deliberate restriction or denial of access to parliamentary and intra-party resources. This form is most severe in Hungary: 55% of respondents experienced the denial of financial resources, and 64% experienced the denial of parliamentary resources. These figures far exceed those of other countries – in Czechia, denial of financial resources stands at 5% and denial of parliamentary resources at zero; in Ireland, both are zero. In Slovakia, institutional resource deprivation is present but more modest: 7% of respondents experienced denial of financial resources and 11% denial of parliamentary resources. The qualitative interviews make clear that in Hungary this is not random or incidental but targeted and coordinated: blocking access to parliamentary speaking time, obstructing data requests, withholding staff salaries, and systematically denying committee positions and media access together create conditions in which the exercise of the representative mandate becomes nearly impossible.

> *"They did not allow me to speak in parliament; they made data requests impossible. They also withheld my staff salaries. This was already blackmail and pressure."* – ***HU respondent***

Slovak institutional resource deprivation – though of smaller scale – manifests in equally telling cases. One of the most illustrative involves a female MP who was prevented from travelling with a delegation to a plenary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – on procedural grounds that did not apply to other members. This case shows precisely how institutional rules can become tools of exclusion when applied selectively, on a gender basis.

> *"My trip was repeatedly denied on the grounds that they did not want an opposition MP to go alone, and needed coalition MPs to remain in Parliament."* – ***SK respondent***

The qualitative material available from Germany – which is not statistically representative due to its questionnaire-based methodology and low response rate, and therefore does not appear in the comparative charts – records a subtler and less visible form of institutional resource deprivation: the unequal distribution of public relations and communications resources within parliamentary groups, which systematically reduces women MPs political visibility without formally violating any rule.

> *"I received significantly less support from the parliamentary group public relations department than many others – for example, redistribution of press releases on the parliamentary group channels, dissemination of speech quotes, or similar."* – ***DE respondent***

The second mechanism is violence against property: the physical infrastructure of parliamentary presence – offices, campaign materials, posters, vehicles – is subjected to destructive acts. This form does not directly restrict access to resources but renders the material conditions of political work precarious, and through its deterrent effect, increases the personal and financial burden of maintaining a political presence. On the basis of the data, this form is present in every context studied – and in Hungary it is equally severe as institutional resource deprivation: 55% of Hungarian respondents experienced damage to or destruction of property, the highest figure among all countries studied and on a par with the rate of financial resource denial. Hungary is thus the only country in which both mechanisms operate simultaneously and at high intensity, systematically eroding both the institutional conditions for exercising the mandate and the physical infrastructure of representative work.

In Czechia (24%) and Ireland (25%), violence against property is similarly significant, but it is the only form present – institutional resource deprivation is almost absent. In Slovakia, property damage is more modest (15%) but is present alongside institutional resource deprivation. This pattern – in which violence against property is a cross-national phenomenon while institutional resource deprivation is strongly context-dependent and exceptionally severe in Hungary – is one of the most important comparative findings. It is not coincidental that acts against property occur almost exclusively during campaign periods: electoral competition is the moment when women candidates are most exposed to attacks on the material accessories of their political presence. The Czech interviews provide a particularly detailed picture of this dynamic – from the mutilation of campaign posters, through lock replacement and vehicle damage, to the deliberate and internally organised denial of campaign funding.

> *"During the campaign, they destroyed locks, cut banners and slashed faces on billboards."* – ***CZ respondent***
>
> *"I was denied campaign funding. Our party leader was very afraid that I would overtake him, so all support went to him and all finances were used to sponsor his own pages. (...) Fortunately, I had strong social media, so I did not rely on campaign funding, but it still happened."* ***– CZ respondent***

In Germany, violence against property also appears in serious forms: nearly one in three survey respondents reported damage to their constituency offices – including one case involving arson – as well as broken windows, graffiti, and swastikas, and the regular vandalising of campaign materials. In Ireland, the survey-based methodology means that individual direct quotes are not available for this category; the Irish national report records in aggregated form that parliamentarians experienced the theft of campaign signage and damage to their constituency offices.

The two mechanisms – institutional resource deprivation and violence against property – follow different logics but ultimately serve the same purpose: to make women MPs political presence harder to sustain, less visible, and less effective. Economic violence thus operates as one of the structural tools of gender-based political exclusion – not as a series of individual incidents, but as the sustained creation of conditions in which the material prerequisites for equal political participation are regularly undermined.

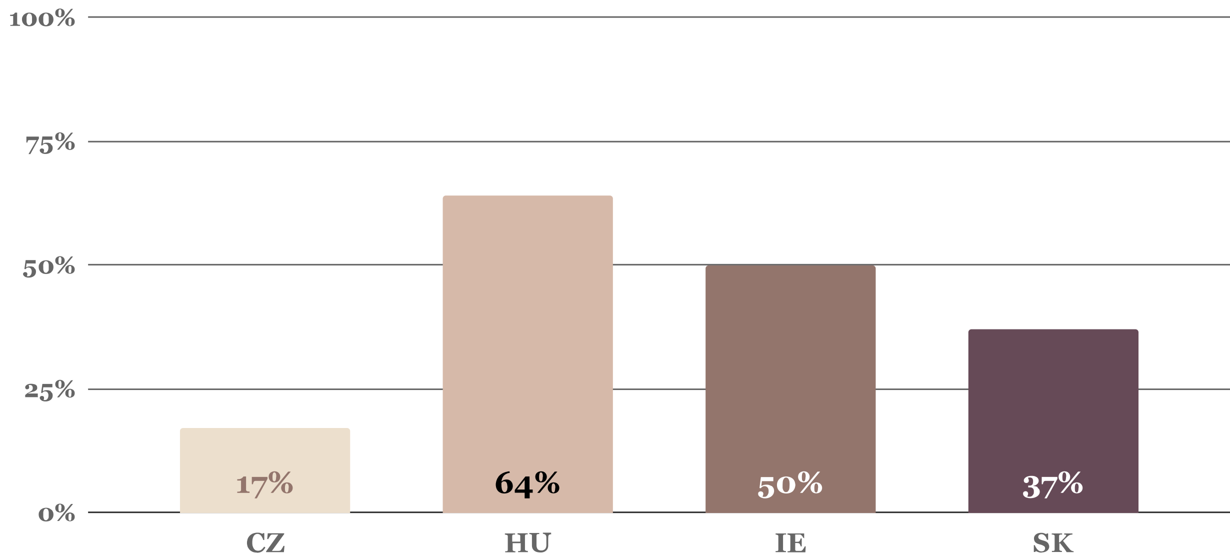
Physical violence

Physical violence occupies a special place in the literature on gender-based political violence. It is the only form that the law most clearly sanctions and that the public is most readily prepared to identify as violence – yet it is the second least prevalent of the five forms examined. Chart 1 shows that 33.7% of respondents experienced it: the second lowest figure after economic violence (30.5%), far below online violence (96.8%) and psychological violence (87.4%). Yet this low figure is misleading – or rather, it is precisely what demands explanation.

The political function of physical violence lies not primarily in direct harm but in deterrence. A campaign table kicked over, a threat made with a weapon, or a shove in a public space reaches far beyond the individual affected: it sends a message to every woman who remains in politics or is considering entering it. In this sense, the impact of physical violence cannot be measured by prevalence data alone – it is present in the behaviour of those who have never experienced it but fear it.

Chart 10 presents the prevalence data for the four countries and reveals the sharpest cross-country variation of any form examined. Czechia records the lowest figure at 17%; Slovakia follows at 37%; Ireland at 50%; and Hungary stands out at 64%.

Chart 10: Prevalence of physical violence (any form) in respective countries



This wide cross-country variation is itself an analytical finding: physical violence is the form most sensitive to each country political culture, the structure of public space, and the degree of institutional tolerance for violence against women MPs.

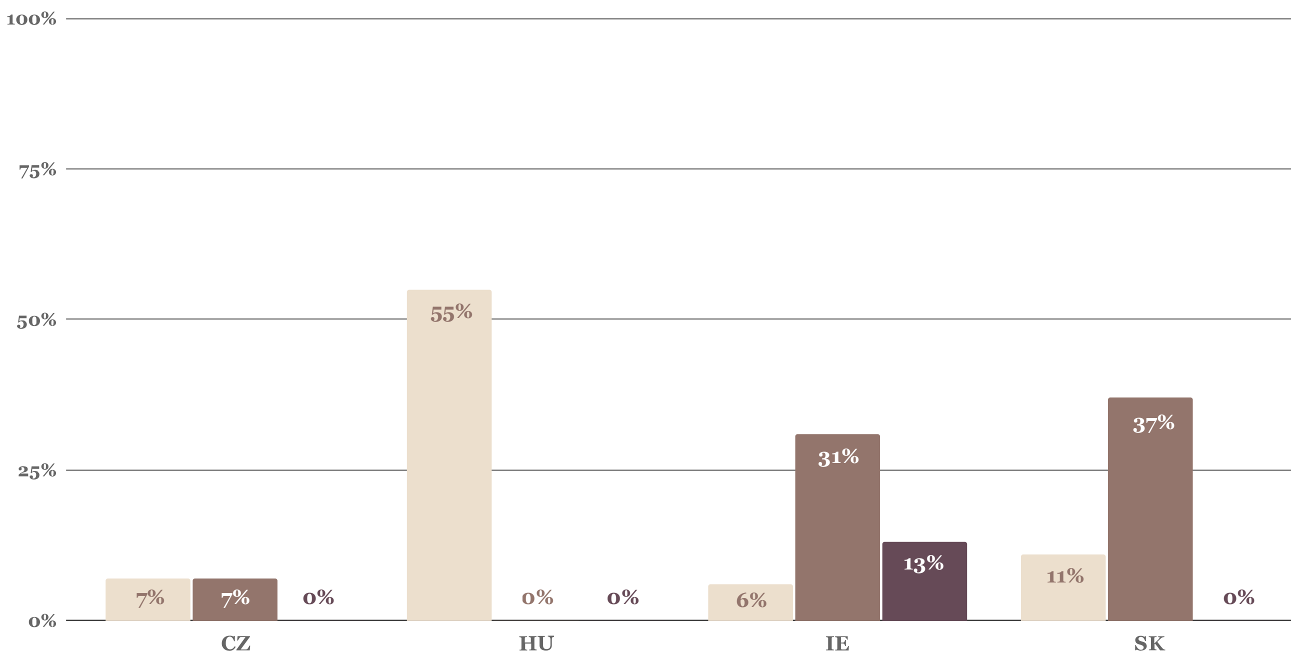
Chart 11 further nuances the picture through a subtype breakdown. Three forms are examined: direct physical assault (pushing, hitting, striking), threats involving a weapon, and restriction of freedom of movement (confinement, abduction).

Chart 11: Experience with various forms of physical violence in respective countries

Slapping, pushing, hitting

Threat of using weapon

Confinment, restriction, abduction



Two qualitatively distinct patterns emerge from the subtype distribution. The first is direct physical assault: personal confrontation in public space, at campaign events, or near the parliament building. This form is exceptionally high in Hungary – 55% of respondents experienced this type of violence – far exceeding the figures for other countries (Czechia: 7%, Ireland: 6%, Slovakia: 11%, and likely Germany, where only one incident was disclosed by survey respondents). The qualitative interviews indicate that these incidents typically occur during campaign periods, often as a direct attack on the exercise of political presence: violence at signature-collection stands, events, and public spaces that targets the unimpeded conduct of representative work.

> *"During signature collection, they kicked over my table and screamed at me; I have also been spat on in a public place."* ***– HU respondent***

In Czechia, direct physical incidents are less frequent (7%), but the qualitative material documents them. Characteristically, these cases almost invariably go unreported – partly because security personnel did not respond adequately, and partly because the MPs themselves do not consider them worth reporting.

> *"Someone threw an airsoft grenade at me. We did not report the incident to the police. There was security present, but they reacted later than I did – they basically ignored it."* ***– CZ respondent***
>
> *"During the campaign, they threw things at me – tomatoes, crumpled paper. At the stand, someone would sometimes deliberately bump into me."* ***– CZ respondent***

The second pattern is weapon-based and death threats: violence that does not necessarily materialise physically but generates deeper anxiety than direct assault through its organised character and severity. Slovakia stands out most markedly in this form: 37% of respondents received weapon-based or death threats, primarily involving threats to kill with a firearm or a bomb. The Slovak material also documents a mass threatening message sent to all opposition MPs residences threatening bomb placement – the police subsequently searched the affected homes.

> *"There are also threats that if you come to [city], I will be waiting for you and I will strangle you."*
> ***– SK respondent***

In Ireland, weapon-based threats are also substantial (31%), and the qualitative material records extremely serious cases: threats involving a gun, a guillotine, and a rope all appear. Particularly telling is that one respondent did not report the guillotine threat at all – one of the most direct illustrations of the normalisation of violence and the rising threshold for reporting.

> *"I was threatened with being killed – they told me there was a rope for around my neck."*
> ***– IE respondent***

Restriction of freedom of movement, such as confinement, being unable to leave a venue, appears as a meaningful category only in Ireland (13%), where women MPs experienced being unable to leave a public event due to the pressure of a hostile crowd. However, similar but anecdotal incidents are reported by the German research: One MP describes how violent protestors around the Bundestag had an impact on her daily routines for weeks, i.e., by changing her routes and taking detours to avoid confrontation. Another MP in Germany felt

endangered by a driver, who was provided by the parliament's car service. The driver sported a reckless driving style in spite of being asked to be more careful and verbally made the MP feel uneasy while being confined and dependent on him inside the car:

> *"One night, I had a driver from the car service who talked my ear off and made me increasingly uneasy. Specifically with strange statements about his private life, his ex, and how if she were to die, he would be there for her until the very end. He claimed to have experience in emergency medical services and to have cut through a torso before... all while driving with his hands off the steering wheel. Despite my comments and requests to keep his hands on the wheel, he just told me that he was a professional."* ***– DE respondent***

The qualitative material available from Germany – which does not appear in the comparative charts due to the non-representative response rate – also records the only case among the five countries of a completely unprovoked direct physical attack on a female MP in a public space by a far-right rally participant. Among younger German women MPs under 40, the rate of weapon-based threats is particularly high: approximately one in three reported such an experience.

> *"I was once jumped on from behind by a man (a participant in a far-right rally) and kicked in the back of the knees while I was waiting at a crosswalk—I nearly fell into the street and into traffic, and the only reason I wasn't seriously injured was because the attacker slipped as he kicked my leg."* ***– DE respondent***

The cross-country subtype pattern is itself a significant analytical result. Hungary is exceptional in direct physical assault (55%), while recording zero weapon threats in the comparative data – suggesting that physical violence there typically presents as spontaneous, impulse-driven confrontation rather than an organised intimidation strategy. Slovakia, by contrast, is dominated by weapon-based and death threats (37%), and the mass, coordinated threatening messages present a picture of organised political intimidation. Czechia records the lowest values in all categories, though campaign-period physical incidents are not absent there either. Ireland – even allowing for the methodological caveats – exhibits the broadest spectrum of physical threat, with all three subtypes present.

Taken together, these findings indicate that physical violence is strongly context-dependent not only in its prevalence but in its nature: it reflects each country's political culture, the configuration of perpetrators, and the degree to which violence against women MPs in the public domain of political space is tolerated. Despite its low aggregate prevalence, physical violence is the form whose threatening shadow falls most widely – reaching even those who never personally experience it.

Reporting of incidents

The reporting rate – the proportion of affected women MPs who turned to any formal channel with their experience – is one of the most revealing indicators in research on gender-based political violence. It measures not only what the affected person did, but what she considered worthwhile, possible, and safe to do. In this sense, reporting data are not merely behavioural statistics: they are indirect indicators of institutional trust, the extent of normalisation, and the actual accessibility of available protection mechanisms. A low reporting rate is therefore not an individual failing, but a structural condition – the point at which individual experience and systemic institutional shortcomings meet.

Chart 12: Reporting rates of different forms of gender-based violence

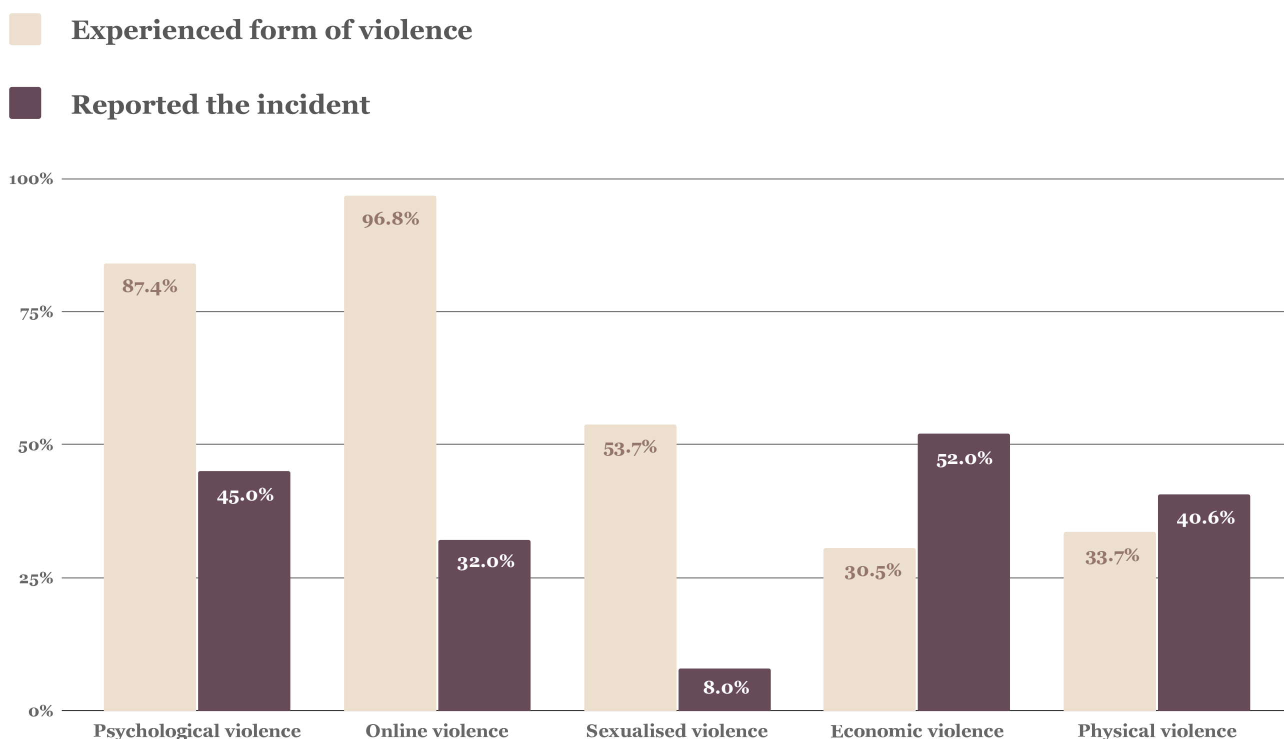


Chart 12 compares the prevalence data for the five forms of violence with actual reporting rates. In three categories, reporting rates fall dramatically short of experienced prevalence. The most severe gap appears for sexualised violence: although 53.7% of respondents experienced some form of it, only 8% reported it through a formal channel – the lowest rate of any form examined. The most favourable picture emerges for economic violence: of the 30.5% who experienced it, 52% took some form of action – the highest reporting rate, despite it being the least frequently occurring form of violence. The reporting rate stands at 40.6% for physical violence, 45% for psychological violence, and 32% for online violence.

A counter-intuitive but analytically important pattern emerges from this ordering: the most widespread forms are reported least often, and the rarest most often. Online violence, with the highest prevalence (96.8%), is reported by only 32% of those affected, while economic violence, with the lowest prevalence (30.5%), is reported by 52%. This inverse relationship points to the mechanism of normalisation: the more commonplace an experience, the less likely the person affected is to perceive it as worth reporting. Regularly incoming online hate messages, recurring sexist remarks, and persistent psychological pressure all gradually become the background noise of political work – and it is precisely for this reason that they recede from the threshold of reportable incidents.

Reporting channels

Understanding reporting rates requires an overview of which formal and informal channels are available in each country, and how accessible, safe, and effective these channels are from the perspective of women MPs.

Ireland has the most developed network of available channels. For physical violence and death threats, affected MPs turn primarily to the Garda Siochana; where threats are serious but no physical harm has occurred, senior party staff and party HR offices are the first port of call. For sexualised violence, specialised sexual violence support services are available alongside the Gardai. For online content, platform operators are notified, sometimes in parallel with the police. The Irish material is the only one among the five countries to record

positive and effective institutional experiences: one MP found both the Gardai monitoring support and her party HR office helpful; another described positive party support in response to sexist social media content. This indicates that where institutional channels genuinely function, they are used and found to be effective. The Irish material records these experiences in narrative summary form, without direct verbatim quotation.

In Slovakia, the Office for the Protection of Constitutional Figures stands out among formal channels for its positive track record – it is the only institution about which an affected MP gave an unambiguously positive assessment.

> *"But I have to say that when it comes to the Office for the Protection of Constitutional Figures, I had really, really good cooperation there, I just came across people who were just perfect, really perfect, so at least from this point of view I have to say it was great."* – ***SK respondent***

The police appear accessible, but the qualitative material documents that outcomes depend heavily on the attitude of the investigating officer – in several cases, dismissive, belittling, or technically unprepared responses were recorded. Intra-party reporting infrastructure exists in only some parties; no complaint mechanism or investigation procedure exists within the institutions of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

In Czechia, the police and online platform operators are the primary formal channels.

> *"I reported it to the police. There is basically nothing else that makes sense, because blocking a profile does not solve anything in reality."* – ***CZ respondent***

Female MPs consciously avoid parliamentary institutional channels – primarily the Mandate and Immunity Committee – as the qualitative material shows: due to the transparency and politicised nature of the procedure, cases almost inevitably reach the media, which constitutes secondary victimisation for the person affected. Some MPs use paid artificial intelligence moderation tools to manage online harassment – an individual, market-based solution to a structural problem for which they receive no institutional protection.

In Germany, an array of reporting channels is available, but there is no institutionalized or centralized mechanism to which all politicians and public officials can turn to. The police and public prosecutor office are the primary routes used by those affected; some have also directly informed the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), e.g., by sending threatening letters for review. Within some parliamentary groups, internal procedures exist: incidents can be flagged to group leadership, a dedicated or trusted peer or even intra-party ombuds offices. However, having such mechanisms in place varies highly from party to party and outcomes were described as unsatisfactory for the women involved, as the following example illustrates:

> *"When I made a complaint, there was neither public criticism nor bilateral consequences. Internal party power struggles took precedence, and the man had powerful supporters within the party."* – ***DE respondent***

Although complaints mechanisms on online platforms and counselling support services are generally available, specialized services are often reserved for local politicians or offer referral counselling, meaning that the affected individual has to go through several points of contact and often needs to invest their own time and financial resources rather than being assisted in a centralized procedure.

In Hungary, the question of reporting channels takes a particularly serious and distinctive form. Gender-based political violence does not appear as an independent legal category in Hungarian law, the Istanbul Convention

has not been ratified, and institutional parliamentary protection mechanisms are absent. Where the institution itself – the parliament, the parliamentary group, the party leadership – is a participant in or passive enabler of violence, reporting is not merely ineffective but essentially inconceivable: there is no neutral internal forum to which the person affected can turn.

> *"As long as the Istanbul Convention is not ratified, there is no point in talking separately about the protection of women politicians – the whole system is deficient. If we introduce a special rule only for politicians, it could backfire."* ***– HU respondent***

Barriers to reporting and the dynamics of normalisation

The overall 8% reporting rate for sexualised violence illustrates the dynamics of normalisation most sharply, and reflects the deepest taboo of any form examined. The Czech and Hungarian data are the most striking: of all the MPs who experienced sexual harassment, not one made a formal complaint – the reporting rate is zero. The Slovak figure is higher (14%), the Irish higher still (20%), but across all countries the data[8] share a common feature: sexualised violence is almost never treated as a reportable act. The qualitative material consistently identifies the underlying reasons: fear of stigmatisation, the power asymmetry between perpetrator and affected person, the absence of a formal parliamentary complaint mechanism, and the widely shared conviction that reporting may carry more severe consequences than not reporting.

> *The problem is victim-blaming. Violence – whether physical or verbal – should not be underestimated. When you accuse someone, you yourself are forced to defend yourself. It is as if someone stabbed you and you had to prove that you had not provoked it."* ***– CZ respondent***

The reporting rate for physical violence (40.6%) is comparatively higher – and the Irish figure is particularly striking: among Irish MPs who experienced physical violence, 80% reported it to the Gardai or to senior party staff, the highest reporting rate of any country and any form of violence in the study. This suggests that physical violence – direct bodily harm, weapon-based threats – is the form most readily understood as reportable by both the person affected and the authorities. Similarly high reporting rates for economic violence in Czechia (63.6%), Slovakia (63%) and based on the sample also in Germany, although data collected there is not representative, reflect the fact that property damage as a criminal offence is clearly identifiable and leaves evidence suited to police procedure.[9]

Yet reporting willingness alone does not guarantee effective institutional response. The data from several countries indicate that the gap between making a report and receiving meaningful institutional action is at least as wide as the gap between experiencing violence and reporting it. In Slovakia, the qualitative material documents that when women MPs do file police reports, they regularly encounter dismissive, belittling, or technically unprepared responses – particularly for online violence and anonymous threats, where identifying perpetrators almost never succeeds.

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8 See individual country reports available at https://padesatprocent.cz/en/datahub
9 For more detailed findings see individual country reports at https://padesatprocent.cz/en/datahub

> *"When I previously reported it, the investigating officer had a very belittling approach. He noted that I am a public figure and must therefore endure a higher level of criticism. That is what he called it – so in his view, threats against my family amounted to criticism. (...) Since then, I have lost trust in the police and simply do not contact them anymore."* **– SK respondent**
>
> *"They have difficulty tracking in the case of these different forms, both letters and online. They found out that the person had created an email address just to send the threat, then cancelled it, so by the time they got to it, it was already deleted and they could not find out anything more about the sender."* **– SK respondent**

In Hungary, the failure to report is not the result of individual decision-making but of the structure of the system. In the final stage of normalisation, the person affected no longer perceives her experience as worth reporting, because she regards it as the price of political presence.

> *"Those who enter public life must endure everything."* **– HU respondent**

In Czechia, the qualitative material records the lesson of retrospective reflection: affected MPs sometimes regret in hindsight that they did not take action, but at the time saw no channel or realistic prospect of success.

> *"Today I know I would do it differently. (...) At the time, I was told it was pointless, that trying to punish the perpetrator was useless and would only cost me money. Today I know it is important to talk about it and not be afraid to take legal steps."* **– CZ respondent**

An MP in Germany described that an incident she reported was not taken as seriously as it should have. Such responses may increase victim-blaming as the affected MP is left to feel like her experience does not matter or that she may even be overreacting, when in fact her case should have been examined on its own merits:

> *"I felt the dismissal [of a case because an investigation for a more serious offense was already underway] was a direct message to me [...], that it simply didn't matter if someone insulted me so badly. I didn't feel supported by the rule of law, neither by the police nor by the judiciary. If someone steals a car and also commits a serious assault, the case for the car theft isn't dismissed just because the potential penalty for the assault is higher, right?"* **– DE respondent**

In Ireland, two further characteristic reasons for low reporting rates emerge: lack of time and energy, and distrust of the reporting channels available for online content.

> *"I intended to send on the emails but never got around to it."* **– IE respondent**
> *"I do not bother doing anything with the online stuff except turning comments off and blocking users."* **– IE respondent**

In Germany, the general willingness to report seems higher than in the other countries studied – the majority of those who were surveyed and experienced violence turned to some contact point at least once, particularly when it comes to economic and psychological violence. In the one case of physical violence disclosed, police was already present when the incident happened and immediately intervened. The politician affected, however, does not know if there were any consequences for the attacker, she was apparently not asked if she wanted to press charges.

Although there seems to be an infrastructure available for general reporting, the effectiveness of reporting is not self-evident in Germany either: e.g., in not a single case involving vandalism of offices or campaign materials did the identification of perpetrators succeed, which over time erodes the motivation to report. Similarly to data from Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, and Ireland, sexualized violence is rarely reported in Germany. The incidents that were disclosed in the survey often pointed to colleagues and superiors as perpetrators and suggested a preference for internal reporting, if at all, so as to not tarnish the party's (or person's) public image:

> *"[...] male colleagues, often MPs for many years or even in government positions, who happen to place their hand on your back a bit too low when they want to appear particularly gallant, or who 'miss' a greeting kiss on your cheek with particular passion, [...]. As a young female member of parliament, you learn very quickly to just put up with it and not make a fuss, so as not to be labelled a 'bitch'."*
> ***– DE respondent***

Behind the reporting rates lie not random individual decisions but identifiable structural barriers. These include: normalisation as a cognitive filter, which makes violence part of the background of political work and excludes it from the threshold of reportable incidents; distrust of authorities and internal institutional channels; fear of re-victimisation; the normative expectation of a higher tolerance threshold for public figures, which in Slovakia is applied by the police themselves; the absence of formal internal parliamentary complaint mechanisms, consistently flagged in the qualitative material from every country studied; and, finally, the experience-based conviction that reporting is ineffective, which appears in both Germany and Slovakia.

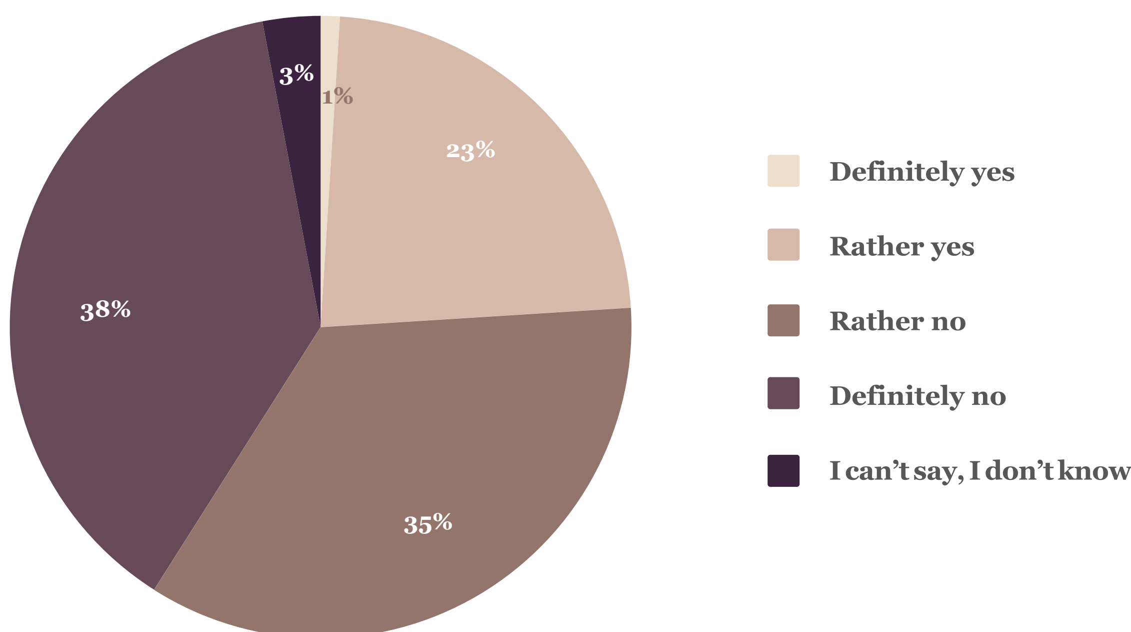
> *"[...] I felt left alone and at the mercy of my experiences—both with sexist members of my own parliamentary group (the cases were less severe, but particularly unpleasant due to our shared group affiliation) and with misogynistic attacks coming from outside the parliament."* ***– DE respondent***

These barriers are not independent factors but form a mutually reinforcing system. Low reporting rates sustain the impunity of perpetrators, which further normalises violence, which further reduces the willingness to report. This self-perpetuating cycle is one of the most important reasons why the prevalence of gender-based political violence remains high across every form examined, while meaningful institutional response falls short of what would be expected in almost every context.

Effectiveness of existing tools

Chart 13 illustrates respondents' perceptions of whether sufficient mechanisms and tools exist to detect and address harassment, hateful expressions, and sexualised violence against women politicians. The responses indicate a strong overall lack of confidence in existing systems.

Chart 13: Do you think that in your country there are sufficient mechanisms and tools to detect and address harassing, hateful, and sexualised expressions or violence against women politicians?



A clear majority of respondents express negative views. The largest share, 38%, replied "definitely no" to the question while a further 35% replied "rather no". This means that a combined 73% of respondents feel existing measures to detect and address the various forms of violence against women politicians are insufficient.

> *"Sometimes the people responsible lack the will to do it; sometimes they lack the resources, for example, technical ones—so it's a combination of that, plus the fact that it depends on who, for instance, is leading the ministry and how the politicians currently in power at the highest levels communicate—what they say and how they say it—and that certainly influences how people set their priorities and so on."*
> ***– SK respondent***

In contrast, a smaller proportion indicated confidence in current mechanisms, with 23% of respondents replying "rather yes", and just 1% replying "definitely yes". A small minority, 3%, replied that they don't know or cannot judge.

Overall, the results indicate that the prevalent view among respondents is that current tools and mechanisms are inadequate, with only a minority expressing even moderate confidence. This points to a clear need for stronger, more effective systems to prevent and respond to harassment and violence against women in politics, with special attention paid to online environment.

> *"I honestly believe we should focus more on safety in the online space. I fully understand freedom of speech and freedom of expression—that's all well and good—but on the other hand, I simply think we should regulate social media in some way; otherwise, these aren't platforms that should be used in a political context."* – ***CZ respondent***

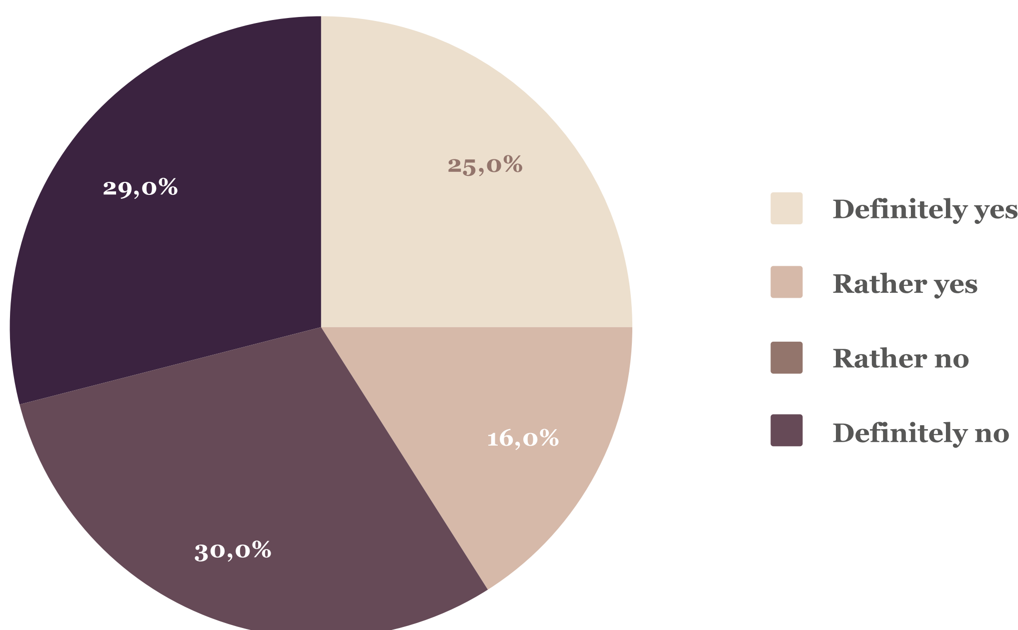
Even in Ireland, with its well-developed network of available reporting channels, *"participants indicate a perceived inadequacy of the current situation, emphasising the need for enforcement or implementation of existing legislation on social media users and platform providers."*

Impact on political work

Experiences of gender-based violence against women in politics can have severe consequences on their professional and personal lives including their mental and physical health. Another well-documented consequence of gender-based violence is self-censorship or limitation of one's political activity, for example in the form of leaving social media, not participating in public debates, changing the focus areas of policy expertise to domains perceived as less triggering or in extreme cases leaving the public sphere altogether.

Chart 14 displays respondents' reported avoidance of certain topics or restriction of political activity. Overall, 41% indicate some degree of restriction, with 25% reporting "definitely yes" and 16% "rather yes". At the other end of the spectrum, roughly two-thirds do not restrict their activity, split almost evenly between those who definitely do not (29%) and those who rather do not (30%).

Chart 14: Do you avoid certain topics or restrict your political activity out of concern that you may be targeted by hateful comments, harassment or even violence?



These restrictions take several concrete forms. Most notably, many respondents scale back their social media presence or delegate its management entirely to their assistant teams. Beyond the digital sphere, respondents across all five countries also describe adjusting their schedules and reconsidering which activities they take part in, motivated by the need to reduce their exposure to physical violence or threats. Together, these patterns illustrate a broader trend: gender-based violence exerts a pronounced chilling effect on women's political participation.

> *"It is not that I would not comment on a topic at all, but I constantly consider what I will wear, what exactly I will say, how I will present it as a young woman and what kind of hate it will trigger. It is a constant part of my decision-making."* ***– CZ respondent***
>
> *"There were times when I completely shut myself off from Facebook for months."* **– HU respondent**
>
> *"I now adhere to a schedule of where I will be when I am out and about alone and also check in with staff when I am back."* ***– IE respondent***
>
> *"At the time, I was also afraid to walk to the Bundestag; I took detours or used the parliamentary car service where I would normally have walked, out of fear of physical attacks."* ***– DE respondent***
>
> *"I would say that it's a big one, that it's just a burden on mental health, learning to function with it and it's like feedback and comments on your appearance, we can be the most mentally stable or, I don't know, self-aware, but it still shakes a person and creates doubts and, in short, it takes up a lot of my time, because I focus on things that I wouldn't otherwise have to think about and I could use that time better. Also, a sense of security."* ***– SK respondent***

Although German findings are non-representative, roughly one in four female MPs does avoid specific topics (such as COVID-19 measures, migration policy, topics related to specific countries or regions) for fear of becoming targets of hate and harassment. Even though the German sample size is too small to make generalizations, it is noteworthy that half of the female politicians who say they tend to avoid certain topics also identify as having a so-called migration background, pointing to a greater chilling effect for women from marginalized communities. Therefore, self-censorship and commenting on topics with a direct (assumed) connection to their background affects this group stronger than women MPs without a so-called migration background, serving as an additional entry point for criticism, hate, and violence that is intertwined with their gender identity.

Conclusion

Comparative analysis across the five participating countries – Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland and Slovakia – highlights that violence against women in politics is not isolated, episodic or context-specific but rather it is systemic, pervasive, and embedded across the five democracies.

While political systems, levels of women's representation, and institutional frameworks differ between countries, the findings reveal a striking commonality: gender-based political violence is experienced by the vast majority of women parliamentarians, particularly psychological and online violence. The incidence of online abuse, combined with high levels of psychological and sexualised violence, underlines that such experiences are not exceptional but constitute a routine feature of women's political participation.

The data shows that psychological and online violence are near-universal experiences among women parliamentarians, with prevalence rates exceeding 90% in most of the countries studied. Sexualised violence is also highly prevalent, while economic and physical violence, though less common, play a distinct and critical role in undermining women's ability to exercise their mandates. In particular, economic violence emerges as a strategic mechanism of exclusion, targeting the material conditions necessary for political participation, while physical violence functions as a deterrent force, extending its impact beyond direct victims to shape the behaviour of others, including family and staff.

At the same time, the research highlights a critical paradox at the heart of the relationship between prevalence and reporting. The most widespread forms of violence – particularly online and psychological violence – are the least likely to be reported, while the less prevalent – such as physical or economic violence – are most likely to trigger formal action. This inverse relationship reflects a process of normalisation whereby repeated exposure lowers expectations of redress and erodes trust in institutional responses. Ultimately this contributes to the long-term underrepresentation of women in politics.

The absence of dedicated, accessible, and trusted institutional mechanisms across all five countries is a key finding of this report. Even where reporting channels exist, they are often fragmented, inconsistent, or perceived as ineffective. In some contexts, particularly where abuse is perpetrated from within the political system itself, reporting can be not only futile but inconceivable. This systemic gap shifts the burden of managing violence onto women parliamentarians themselves, leaving them to manage risk individually and often at great personal, professional, and financial cost.

The consequences of violence against women in politics extend beyond individual harm. The research shows evidence of self-censorship, modified behaviours, and a reduction in and even withdrawal from public engagement demonstrating a clear chilling effect on political participation. In this way violence functions not only as a form of personal attack but as a mechanism of democratic exclusion, limiting whose voices are heard, whose perspectives are represented, and ultimately, how democracy operates.

The report points to the need for a fundamental shift in how violence against women in politics is understood and addressed. It must be recognised not only as an individual or gender equality issue, but as a broader structural democratic and institutional challenge requiring coordinated and systemic responses. The persistence and normalisation of such violence directly affects women's political representation, limits equal access to political participation, and weakens the inclusiveness, legitimacy, and resilience of democratic institutions.

Overall, the findings highlight an urgent need for coherent, enforceable, and gender-sensitive institutional responses at both national and European levels, including accessible reporting mechanisms, effective protection frameworks, ethical standards, and safe reporting pathways within parliamentary environments. Addressing violence against women in politics therefore requires moving beyond ad hoc or reactive measures towards long-term systemic interventions and strengthened accountability mechanisms, including addressing the online environment as a primary site of harm.

Without such measures, the persistence of gender-based political violence will continue to undermine not only women's equal participation, but democracy itself.