

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

# CZECH WOMEN MPS AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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The most common form of violence experienced by the respondents is psychological violence (81 %). 42 % have experienced sexualised violence. Economic and physical violence is the least common (11 %).



28 % of female MPs surveyed limit their political activity for fear of being the target of hateful comments, harassment or violence.



Younger respondents (under 40) are more likely to experience all forms of violence. Threats and intimidating behaviour are also more likely to be directed at parliamentarians working on the human rights agenda.





# Content

	<b>Introduction</b>	3
<b>1.</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	5
<b>2.</b>	<b>MAIN FINDINGS</b>	7
2.1	Different forms of gender-based violence	8
2.2	Psychological violence	8
2.3	Sexualized violence	9
2.4	Physical and economic violence	9
2.5	Hateful comments and threats in cyberspace	9
2.6	Gendered nature of attacks on female politicians	10
2.7	Reporting incidents	11
2.8	Effectiveness of existing tools to address gender-based violence	11
<b>3.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	13
	Appendix: Questions for interviews with women parliamentarians	14



# Introduction

From the figures showing the development of women's representation in Czech politics<sup>1</sup> it is clear that we are still lagging behind the European and world average.<sup>2</sup> This is also confirmed by the latest Global Gender Gap Report published annually by the World Economic Forum, where the Czech Republic is ranked the lowest in gender equality (104th), which is also the worst result in the entire European Union. Traditionally, the Czech Republic has had the poorest results in the area of political decision-making, where it ranked 110th out of 146 countries compared. This is the second worst position of all EU Member States, with only Hungary (131st) doing worse. This reflects particularly negatively on the low representation of women in ministerial positions and the fact that we have not yet had a woman as Prime Minister or President.<sup>3</sup>

To understand the causes of this situation and to find effective solutions, it is necessary to realise that women still face a number of barriers that make it difficult for them to enter and participate in politics. It has also been shown that women have ended their political careers early due to disproportionate pressure (examples include former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin and Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová).

These barriers can be divided into three groups: individual, social and institutional. All three types are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, but at the same time each requires different measures to remove them.<sup>4</sup> Ideally, these measures should work together to help break down these often invisible barriers by pressure from different sides.

Individual barriers are usually on the side of women themselves (but also of men, who, for example, decide who is on the candidate list and in what position) and stem from societal expectations and practices. These include, among other things, women's disproportionately heavier burden of caring for the household and dependents (women generally have less free time), but also their lesser motivation to take an interest in politics and actively participate in it, statistically, lower self-esteem or reluctance to work in a predominantly male collective.

Social barriers are influenced by what roles society has historically considered appropriate for women and men. An example of this is the double standard for assessing the political standing of both genders, where women not only have to defend their abilities and achievements, but also prove that they belong in politics in the first place. The individual failure of a particular female politician is then a reason for the public to critically evaluate the political performance of women as a group. Related to this are the prejudices about women and men that persist in society. Raising awareness of violence against publicly active women must therefore go hand in hand with raising awareness of gender stereotypes and the structural causes of gender inequalities that construct women as the 'weaker sex' and relegate them to the 'safe' private sphere.

Finally, institutional barriers include the overall set-up of the functioning of politics, the electoral system and its parameters, the nomination system and the transparency of nomination processes, or the lack of measures to support women. Unlike the previous two types of barriers, the institutional ones can be removed relatively quickly and easily by revising the existing system and processes and reconfiguring them to be as open as possible. Alternatively, by taking new measures to straighten out a historically unbalanced situation. However, the critical prerequisite here is the political will to address the issue and the willingness to introduce supportive measures (for example in the form of quotas for women and men on the candidate lists).

These barriers are fairly well mapped in the literature and described. In recent years, however, attention has also been drawn to a topic that has not been discussed until then, i. e. various forms of gender-based violence against women politicians. This violence has been intensified by the development of the internet and social networks, which on the

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, <https://padesatprocent.cz/cz/statistiky/zastoupeni-zen-a-muzu-v-politice>.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. [https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date\\_month=12&date\\_year=2024](https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_month=12&date_year=2024).

<sup>3</sup> Global Gender Gap Report 2024, available from: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/>

<sup>4</sup> RAKUSANOVA Petra (2006). Prague: Forum 50 %.

one hand have led to greater polarisation and an escalation of public debate and on the other hand have greatly facilitated direct communication with specific individuals. Violence against women in politics takes various forms: physical, psychological (which often includes hate speech in the online space), sexualised and economic. Men also encounter various forms of violence in politics, but violence against women is gendered. It targets women on the basis of their gender, and the forms of this violence are gendered character, such as sexist remarks or sexual harassment and violence.

Although systematic mapping of the incidence of various forms of gender-based violence against female politicians is lacking, existing data and studies seem to show that violence (whether in the real world, or in cyberspace) against female politicians and publicly active women is a very common phenomenon. A 2018 survey by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Europe found that 85.2 % of female politicians working at parliamentary level have experienced psychological violence.<sup>5</sup> According to UN Women, the UN's special body for gender equality, violence against women in politics is one of the main factors that discourage women from political participation.<sup>6</sup>

In the Czech context, this is still an insufficiently understood problem, similar to domestic or gender-based violence in general. However, breaking the silence about women's experiences in politics, mapping the occurrence of various forms of gender-based violence against women politicians and identifying its structural causes is a basic condition for finding individual and systemic ways to defend against it. The following research report thus provides unique data mapping the incidence and form of various forms of gender-based violence against Czech women MPs.

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<sup>5</sup> Sexism, Harassment and Violence Against Women in Parliaments in Europe, 2018. Dostupné z: <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>.

<sup>6</sup> Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics, 2021. Available from: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf>.

## 1

# METHODOLOGY

The research is based on the aforementioned Inter-Parliamentary Union survey of Council of Europe countries, which was conducted in 2018. However, in contrast, it works with a larger sample of female MEPs, and its results thus better reflect the real experiences of Czech female MEPs. It also builds on the Czech study Analysis of gender-based hate speech against publicly active women in online space,<sup>7</sup> which, however, was limited to cyberspace and was not a research on a representative sample.

In this work, the principles of feminist challenge were respected, an equal valued relationship was maintained between the interviewer and the respondents, and the interviewees were also given the opportunity to ask questions and intervene in the course of the interview. This overcame the classical contradiction between the subject (researcher) and the object (respondent) of research interest. The researcher-respondent relationship was conceived as a subject-subject relationship, thus creating the premise of 'authentic-qualitative, individual expression of individual women's selves.'<sup>8</sup> This is the only way to understand 'how and what strategies individual women developed in the system of power at different levels and in different situations.'<sup>9</sup>

The research also took into account the context – it was mainly about finding out the biographical data of the interviewed women MPs: how long they have been in office, what issues they are involved in, in which committees they are represented, and whether they have been or are active at other levels of politics. The principle of accountability and trust was preserved – all respondents gave their written informed consent to participate in the research. Percentage of female respondents was treated confidentially and all quoted statements were anonymised.

However, in elite surveys, which includes the survey of female members of the lower house, the issue of power is somewhat displaced. In fact, the interviewees themselves have power in the researcher-respondent relationship, determined both by their social status and by the exclusivity and confidentiality of the information they are willing to provide. It is therefore all the more necessary to preserve the anonymity of the respondents.

With regard to the topic of the research, the sample of respondents was clearly defined: they were Czech female MPs who had a mandate at the time of the realization of the survey, i.e. in the period from July to December 2024. All 51 female members of the Parliament of the Czech Republic were contacted with a request to participate in the research and finally 36 of them, i. e. 71 %, participated in the survey.

Most of the respondents fall into the age category of 51-60 years, while there were no respondents under the age of 30. Of the 36 respondents, two have secondary education and 34 have university education. Majority (30, i. e. 83 %) of the female respondents have children, six of them are childless.

Table 1  
**Age composition of the interviewed female MPs**

Age composition	percentage
18–30	0 %
31–40	19 %
41–45	14 %
46–50	8 %
51–60	42 %
61–70	14 %
71–75	3 %

<sup>7</sup> This study was carried out in 2024 within the framework of the project 'Digital Times and Threats to Human Rights' in cooperation with a consortium of NGOs (Forum 50 %, Multicultural Centre Prague, Masaryk Institute of Higher Studies, Czech Technical University, Transparency International – Czech Republic). It focuses on gender-based hate speech against women (especially female politicians) in the public sphere and analyses its occurrence on the social network Facebook. The research not only provides new data on the extent and nature of these expressions, but also provides a detailed analysis of the main types of hate attacks, such as sexism, attacks on appearance, sexual objectification and threats of violence, including sexualized attacks. See Analysis of gender-based hate speech against publicly active women in the online space, 2024. Available from: [https://www.transparency.cz/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/TI\\_STUDIE\\_nenavistne-projevy\\_gender.pdf](https://www.transparency.cz/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/TI_STUDIE_nenavistne-projevy_gender.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> KICZKOVÁ Zuzana et al. (2006). Memory of women: On the experience of self-assertion in biographical interviews. Bratislava: Iris.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 1 METHODOLOGY

Table 2

**Female MPs interviewed by parliamentary group**

Parliamentary group	Number of surveyed female MPs	Share of all surveyed female MPs	Total number of female MPs in the parliamentary group	Share of female MPs from the given parliamentary group participating in the research
ANO 2011	13	36,1 %	19	68,4 %
ODS	4	11,1 %	5	80 %
Piráti	2	5,6 %	2	100 %
SPD	1	2,8 %	5	20 %
KDU-ČSL	3	8,3 %	4	75 %
TOP 09	3	8,3 %	3	100 %
STAN	10	27,8 %	13	76,9 %

All respondents reported having at least one profile on social networking sites. The most frequent social network is Facebook, followed by X and the least active is Instagram.

Women MPs from all parliamentary clubs participated in the research. Most of the respondents (36 %) were from the ANO 2011 club, 28 % from the STAN club, 11 % from the ODS club, 8 % each from the KDU-ČSL and TOP 09 clubs, less than 6 % from the Pirates club and the least (less than 3 %) from the SPD club.

In order to obtain the most accurate and mutually comparable information, the interviews were designed as structured, containing precisely formulated closed and open questions (see appendix). Some questions were accompanied by sub-questions, which were asked if the respondent did not include all the necessary information in her answer. Part of the statements of the respondents were used for the analysis itself, while part of the answers were used to capture the context of the analysed statements.

The questions were directed only at the direct personal experience of the interviewed women MPs with the given form of gender-based violence and its subjective reflection. The research investigated whether the respondents had encountered this type of violence against their person, not in the position of, for example, a witness. The interviews were focused on the entire period of their work in the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic, not on a limited period of time (e. g. 12 months before the interview).

The respondents were contacted by e-mail or by telephone on the basis of contact information obtained on the website of the Chamber of Deputies; some female deputies were contacted repeatedly, without reaction, with the request for an interview. The time and place of the interview were left to the discretion of the respondents, who generally chose to meet directly on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies or to conduct the interview online via the Zoom platform. The interviews took place in the period from September to December 2024.

All respondents were assured of anonymity and agreed to the recording of the interview. The transcripts of the quotations from the interviews are original, only the formal editing was done – general Czech forms were replaced with spelling forms, excess demonstrative pronouns and other ‘stuffed’ terms were deleted. Words in square brackets have been added to make it easier to understand the respondent’s answer (as a rule, the answer is set in the original question).



## 2

## MAIN FINDINGS

The most common form of violence with which the respondents have female experience, the violence is psychological (81 %). Respondent-women face threats of violence (including rape) and are the target of verbal attacks and intimidating behavior. January outside they perceive that compared to the attacks on their colleagues, aggression towards them has a different character – it is much more personal and often with sexual undertones. Almost 60 % of respondents that were met with threats of violence, these incidents did not report to the police.

Almost 42% of the female respondents have experienced sexualized violence, including unwanted touching or sexual advances. One respondent experienced a sexual assault.

The least common forms of violence reported by the female MPs were economic and physical violence (11 %).

28 % of respondents limit their political activity (e. g. public speaking, media interviews, posting on social media) for fear of becoming a target of hateful comments, harassing behavior or violence.

Younger respondents (under 40) are more likely to experience all forms of violence. Threats and intimidating behavior are also more often directed at those MPs who work on human rights agendas such as migration, the Istanbul Convention, marriage for all or climate issues.

Chart 1  
Experience with different forms of gender-based violence

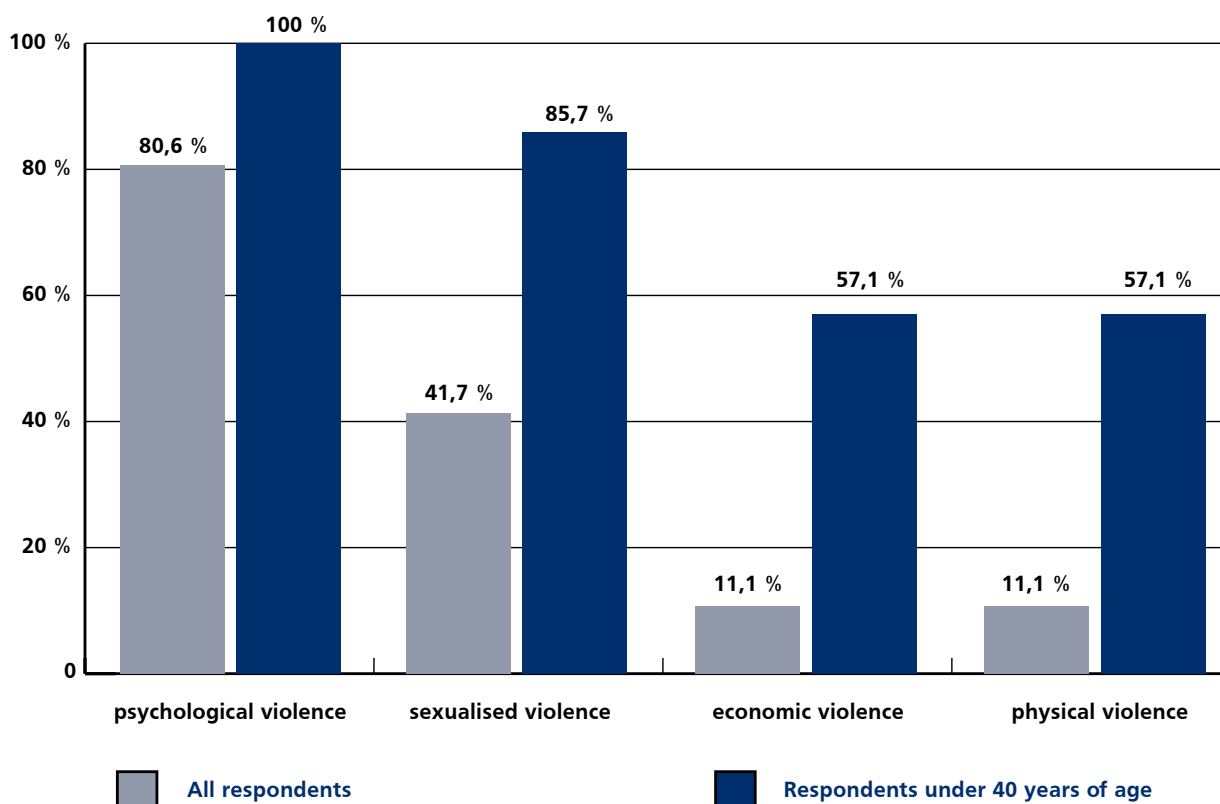


Table 3  
Experience with different forms of psychological violence

Form of psychological violence	All respondents	Respondents under the age of 40
Publication of derogatory/sexually suggestive photos in the media or on social networks	30,6 %	57,1 %
Sexist and sexually suggestive comments	52,8 %	85,7 %
Intimidating or harassing behavior, verbal attacks	55,6 %	57,1 %
Threats of violence	61,1 %	85,7 %

## 2.1 Different forms of gender-based violence

Gender-based violence manifests itself in various forms. It ranges from psychological violence (including verbal attacks and intimidating behavior) to physical assault. In the typology of violence, we base it on the classification of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.<sup>10</sup>

- Psychological violence includes threats (including sexualized ones), verbal attacks, intimidating behavior, damage to reputation, stalking, harassment in cyberspace, modified pornographic or sexualized images with the aim of publicly questioning the abilities of women and shaming them.
- Economic violence includes the denial of salary or political financing, theft or destruction of property.
- Sexualized violence includes sexual harassment, unwanted advances and sexualized assault, rape.
- Physical violence includes assassinations, kidnappings, beatings – often with the aim of forcing women to resign or leave political life, physical attacks, use of a knife, firearms, etc.

## 2.2 Psychological violence

As already mentioned, almost 81 % of the interviewed female MPs have encountered psychological violence, which is the most common form of violence experienced by female members of the lower house of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, across the party spectrum. The frequency of threats and verbal attacks increases with the more exposed the politician is: she appears on television, speaks to the media and is generally more visible in public in connection with the discussion of a law. Intimidating verbal attacks are not limited to the online space, but female MPs also experience them in personal interactions.

The most common form of psychological violence that respondents encounter during their time in the Chamber is threats of violence: more than 61 % of all female MPs surveyed experienced these, and in the case of younger female legislators, almost 86 %. The second most common form is intimidating or harassing behavior and verbal attacks: almost 56 % of respondents experienced them (more than 57 % of women under 40). More than half (52.8 %) have encountered sexist remarks or remarks with sexual overtones, and for younger female MPs this is again almost 86 %. The least often is that derogatory photographs of female MPs or their photographs with sexual overtones are published (whether in the media or on social networks). This happened to 30.6 % of respondents. However, it once again shows that age plays a significant role – in the group of female MPs under 40 years of age, more than 57 % of them have experienced the publication of derogatory or sexualized photographs.

“I had an incident when I was shopping in Nový Smíchov. Suddenly, a man of about 25 to 30 years old was with me. Right next to me. So if he had a gun, I had no chance at all. And he said: “You’re going to hang yourself one day anyway!” And before I came to my senses, he was gone. I stood there like a pillar of salt and of course my legs and arms were shaking.

I received a threat at home that I had a bomb there. A knife also came in the mail several times in an envelope.

Once I received bullet casings in my mailbox.

When my husband and I were leaving a restaurant and we were walking past the tables, a lady made a gun gesture at me with her hand, as if she wanted to shoot me. Unfortunately, very vulgar [verbal] attacks also happen in person on the street or on public transport.

These are vulgarities from passersby, there have been many such incidents. It is unpleasant, for example, when that person has a fighting dog without a muzzle and walks really close to you and shouts vulgarities at you.

I was once so scared that I even contacted the city police in my place of residence to have them watch my house.

I received a threat of liquidation. My daughter was pregnant at the time, so I was very worried.”

<sup>10</sup> Since the questions in this research are based on the Inter-Parliamentary Union survey, the same categorization of various forms of gender-based violence against female MPs is used in the analysis. UN Women uses a slightly different categorization. It does not consider economic violence as a separate form and includes it as a subcategory of psychological violence. Unlike the Inter-Parliamentary Union, sexualized threats, modified pornographic or sexualized images with the aim of publicly questioning women’s abilities and shaming them are classified as sexualized, not psychological, violence. See <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf>.

There were situations when, based on the spread of lies about me, for example, one person wrote to me: "If I met you and had a gun with me, I wouldn't be able to control myself."

The police contacted me that a man wanted to kill me, that they had assessed his threats as serious. They [the police] told me that it would go to court."

## 2.3 Sexualized violence

Almost 42 % of the female MPs interviewed had encountered sexual harassment. The respondents usually deal with these incidents themselves, react assertively and distance themselves. During the interviews, some pointed out that the problem of sexual harassment may concern assistants to a greater extent, for whom it is much more difficult to distance themselves, as they are not in an equal position with MPs. At the same time, there is no mechanism for reporting inappropriate and harassing behavior in the Chamber.

"If gentlemen here [in the Chamber] have a drink in the evening and feel that they can put their hand on my ass, I take the hand off and deal with them. I have clearly set boundaries in this regard, but I understand that not every woman may be of my temperament and it can get her into a difficult situation.

I had a situation where I came to a meeting among men in the summer and one well-mannered man among those present asked me, according to etiquette, if he could take off his jacket. And another commented on the situation: "It's a shame that a colleague doesn't ask us like this if she can take off her clothes." This happened to me specifically from one of the deputies."

One of the respondents had an experience of sexualized assault. However, due to the sensitivity of the topic, she did not want to go into details.

"I can only say that I was told, either yes, you will go on, or no, and nothing will happen. It happened within the political party. I did not report this incident to the police, my husband resolved it with the man in question. But I dealt with it within the political party, the regional and local organizations dealt with it, and the person in question has already left politics. It was really unpleasant. I had a narrow circle of people who knew about it."

## 2.4 Physical and economic violence

A total of four female MPs interviewed (11 %) had encountered physical violence, in the form of various physical attacks or confrontations with a knife.

"I was filming an interview for television. It was filmed outside in front of my home. Suddenly, someone from the house opposite threw a plastic bottle filled with water at me. A downright physical attack. The moment you are concentrating on giving an answer to the camera, something flies past you, and you don't even realize what caused the sound.

A woman with a knife stood in front of my apartment and threatened me. It was related to my parliamentary position. The lady shouted: "What do you think of yourself? You want to make yourself visible, I'll kill you!" and held a knife in her hand. I contacted the city police, and after they arrived, the conflict calmed down and was resolved positively. We talked it out and finally shook hands."

The same proportion of respondents (11 %) encountered economic violence - their property was damaged or destroyed in connection with the performance of their parliamentary mandate.

"I personally think that it was no coincidence that I had a broken window at my parliamentary office. I reported it to the police, but there were no cameras there."

## 2.5 Hate comments and threats in cyberspace

The interviewed MPs agree that hate comments and threats clearly prevail in the online space. According to them, attacks usually occur in waves and are more intense in direct proportion to the spread of chain emails and the sharing of hateful content and disinformation in various groups on the networks. What we as the public see in the comments of female politicians on their social networks is only the tip of the iceberg. In addition, they also receive objectionable content in the form of private messages: via social networks, to e-mail, in the form of SMS or via the WhatsApp application.

In the interviews, the respondents discussed the fact that hate comments and threats are becoming normalized in Czech society. The prevailing narrative in society is that if someone gets a public position and appears in public, they have to take this aspect into account and not complain about it. It is considered a necessary tax for working in high politics. This normalizes the spread of hatred and tolerance towards it.

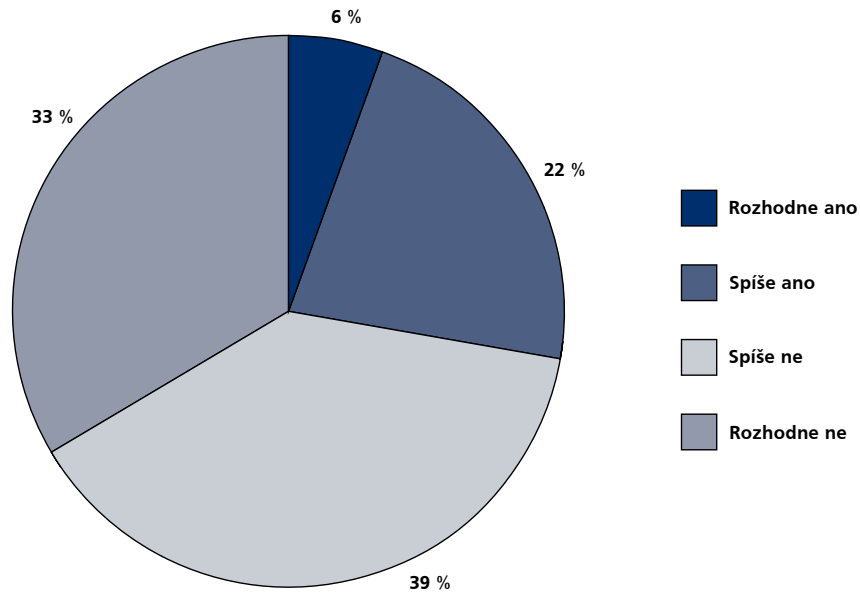
"A lot of people will tell you: "Well, you are a politician, so you must have a higher threshold of tolerance." It is true that sometimes in a political position you feel like public property. Because you are a public person, people treat you like public property and think that they can do a lot to you and say anything to you and that you can handle it. I often hear: "You are in politics, so you have to be used to it and you have to endure it."

Some MPs and their assistants go through the comments and hide or delete the objectionable and threatening ones. They block and report profiles. At the same time, they realize how toxic it is and how much time it takes them. They are therefore calling for greater responsibility from social media operators. Some respondents use paid AI tools to moderate hateful content.

"The problem is that we are not willing to regulate social networks today, and therefore social networks regulate us. I would compare it to having a four-lane highway where we have no rules. And we try to survive there somehow, but there is such traffic that it is not possible to regulate it at all. When we say regulation of social networks out loud, people feel that it is censorship. But we must find the courage to regulate social networks."

Graph 2

**Do you avoid certain topics or limit your political activity for fear of becoming a target of hateful comments, harassing behavior, or even violence?**



Some of the interviewed MPs have reduced their activity on social networks in response to hateful comments that have also affected their children. Given that presenting and making political work visible is a prerequisite for further electoral success, partial self-censorship by female politicians may reduce their chances of re-election in the medium term.

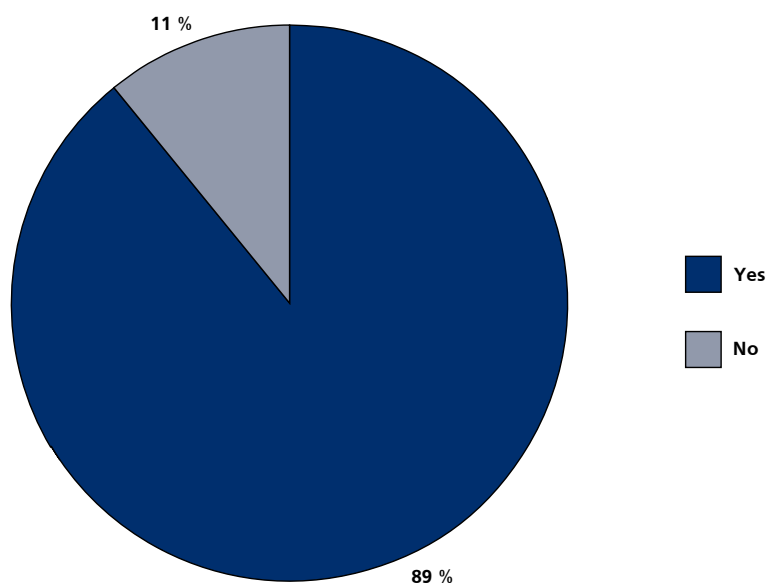
"I have had a lot of self-censorship and at the same time I have feedback from my voters that they feel that I have lost myself. I have omitted the authenticity that I put into

it when I was mayor for reasons of self-defense. I think that hatred, vulgarity and everything that politics brings today represent a fundamental barrier for many women, why they do not go into politics when they see it."

28 % of respondents limit their political activity (for example, public speaking, media interviews, posting on social media) for fear of becoming a target of hateful comments, harassing behavior, or violence.

Graph 3

**Do you think attacks on female politicians are any different from attacks on male politicians?**



## 2.6 Gender conditionality of attacks on politicians

Almost all the MPs interviewed think that attacks on politicians are different from attacks against politicians. They are often sexualized and more personal in nature and contain stereotypical ideas that women do not belong in politics. Hateful and vulgar insults have a sexual overtone, attack the appearance of politicians and question their competence. When politicians move in public, their personal space is more violated, they are perceived as weaker, more vulnerable and easier targets.

“One politician wrote on his Facebook profile that I deserve to go to the Congo River basin to get raped by someone there.”

“I also experienced an absurd insult when I received a vibrator in the mail.”

“Various photo collages of me with someone else’s naked body are circulating on social networks.”

“People are getting closer to us [politicians] and they feel that they have the right to touch us and be in our intimate zone, to shout at us from closer proximity. When I was walking through the square with a colleague, I had exactly this experience.”

“A wider range of tools is used by the opponent to try to discredit her [politician’s] attitudes, opinions, and program, and more often they go after her as a person, not her idea, argument, or opinion, but her as a woman, and it takes on chauvinistic dimensions. But it also includes subtle underestimation, questioning of intellect, experience, questioning of the possibility of expressing oneself on things at all, or body shaming. In the time that I have been in politics, I have seen a huge handicap in femininity in this direction”

“Society is not used to women in high positions. This leads to a constant and repeated disparagement of the position and authority of women in politics. What I consider to be a huge problem is that in the public sphere we are constantly being told that we are just cows. Whatever we do, it does not have the same value as men.”

“And I see this primarily as a societal problem, not so much as an internal problem within political parties. Very often we [female politicians] are put on trial and told that we should pursue other roles and that we are destined for something other than messing around with men in politics. The attacks are much more personal and there is no prohibition on bringing the family into the mix. Moreover, it is done in a very insensitive and hurtful manner.”

## 2.7 Reporting incidents

A large proportion of the female MPs interviewed (almost 60 %) did not report the threats to the police. The reason they often give is that these are one-off matters that did not escalate further. At the same time, they are not sure whether reporting would ultimately make any sense.

“I regularly encounter threats on social media. I once considered reporting, but in the end I did not. I have discussed it with my legal colleagues several times whether we should start reporting these various posts. Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut opinion on where the line is and whether it makes sense.”

“I have doubts about whether to report it [the threats] and how to deal with it. I have to thank Olga Richterová, who is the one who is dealing with this. And I appreciate her a lot for that, because she holds up a mirror for us, that we should not let it go.”

The failure to report incidents is also due to the social trivialization of the possible threat of violence, which can, however, be transferred from the online space to a threat in the physical public space.

“Calls for violence in the online space can unfortunately lead to real violence. That is why I did not let it go and reported it to the police.”

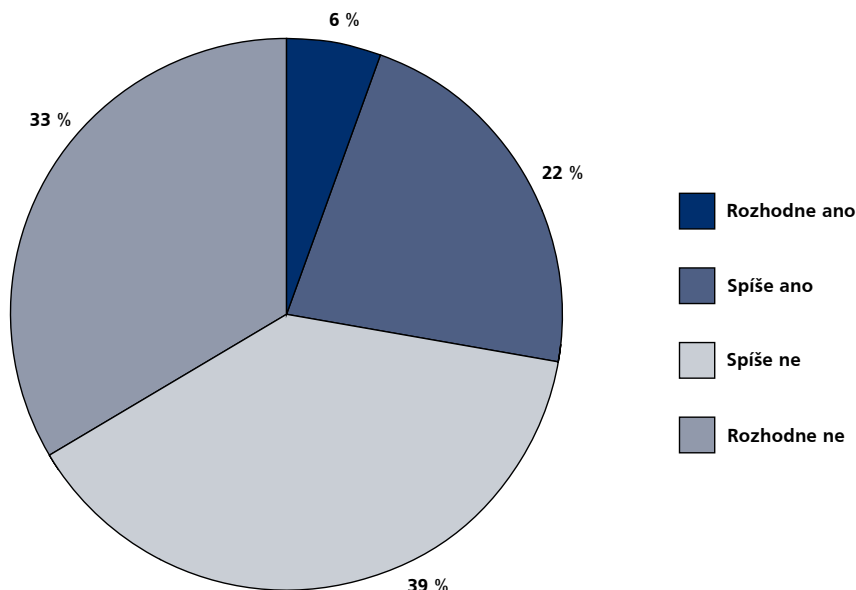
The rate of reporting of various forms of gender-based violence varies. Women most often report incidents involving physical violence – three quarters of those surveyed who had encountered this form reported them. Half of the respondents reported economic violence. Threats of violence were reported by just under 41 % of the MPs surveyed who were targeted. No cases of sexual harassment or assault were reported at all. The respondent who experienced sexualized violence stated that she did not report the incident to the police, but dealt with it internally within the political party.

Table 4  
Reporting rates of different forms of gender-based violence

Forms of violence	Experienced this form of violence	Reported in
Threats of violence	61,1 %	40,9 %
Sexualized harassment	41,7 %	0,0 %
Sexualized assault	2,8 %	0,0 %
Economic violence	11,1 %	50,0 %
Physical violence	11,1 %	75,0 %

Graph 2

**Do you avoid certain topics or limit your political activity for fear of becoming a target of hateful comments, harassing behavior, or even violence?**



## 2. 8 Effectiveness of existing tools to address cases of gender-based violence

The majority (53 %) of the female MPs surveyed consider the mechanisms and tools for detecting and sanctioning harassing, hateful and sexualized speech or violence against female politicians to be sufficient (3 % answered definitely yes, 50 % answered rather yes). In contrast, 27 % of the respondents are not satisfied with the existing mechanisms and tools (8 % answered definitely no and 19 % answered rather no). Finally, 19 % answered that they cannot assess this.

The female MPs who report threats to the relevant authorities assess that the work of the police in this area has improved. It is relatively easy to track down the authors of the threats, and they are subsequently punished for a misdemeanor or a crime.

I must say that the practice has improved significantly in recent years. I also have an assigned police officer, because not so many people within the police are dedicated to this, and they have specialists who are the primary contact. I have not encountered any trivialization of reported threats."

"Since I have been dealing with this [online threats] with the police for about five years, I can see how they have learned and that they have begun to realize how important it is, because there are not that many people who write the worst things. And if they do it with impunity, more will join. Violence from the online space can more easily turn into violence in the real world. So [the police] do not take it lightly."

Respondents who do not consider the current mechanisms and tools for detecting and punishing threats to be sufficient point out that hate speech is not enshrined in the criminal code. They also consider ongoing training for police officers, judges and prosecutors to be crucial. They see the greatest gaps in awareness and education in the area of perception of gender-based violence against publicly active women. Above all, there should be a strong distancing from any violent and hate speech in public and online environments.

"Society's approach to violence against women in general, both physical and verbal, should be improved. It should be completely normal to condemn such behavior, not to excuse it, or even normalize or belittle it by stating that it is a public figure and that he or she must endure a greater degree of "criticism", including in the form of hate speech."

"I know that there is training in this area [inappropriate behavior, hateful comments and attacks] in the European Parliament. I think it is important that women receive psychological support right from the start. Education not only for women, but ideally for men as well. What attacks you can face, recommendations, how to proceed, react, etc. It would help a lot of people and they would not have to look for their own paths, which take a year. This could be introduced for new MEPs when they take office."

### 3

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender-based violence against women politicians is a serious socio-political problem that requires systematic attention and long-term effective solutions. This phenomenon disrupts the functioning of democratic processes, damages the credibility of institutions and discourages many women from entering political life. Various forms of violence thus affect not only its victims, but also have a fundamental negative impact on society as a whole.

To effectively prevent and combat this phenomenon, it is necessary to adopt comprehensive measures including clear and understandable codes of ethics, effective sanctions, support for victims and public education. Women's networks, support for solidarity between politicians across parties, the involvement of men and international cooperation in the form of sharing examples of good practice also play a key role.

Specifically, the current rules of procedure or code of ethics of the Chamber of Deputies should be supplemented with specific provisions regarding harassing or violent behavior. It should be clearly stated what exactly this behaviour entails, what is absolutely unacceptable in the Chamber and how it is punished. Furthermore, an independent complaint and investigation mechanism should be established at the parliamentary level, which will preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided. Similar recommendations (zero tolerance for violence, code of ethics, reporting and punishment mechanism) also apply to political parties.

A key aspect is prevention, which can take the form of raising awareness of the topic through regular communication and awareness-raising initiatives or (mandatory) training

for legislators at the beginning of the electoral term (e. g. following the model of similar training for MEPs).

The incidence of gender-based violence against politicians is accelerated by the development of the Internet and social networks. Cyberspace allows for the rapid dissemination of information and direct access to people active in politics, which greatly facilitates the perpetration of psychological violence and the spread of hate speech, often under the guise of anonymity. Internal parliamentary and party politics can therefore only address part of the problem. It is therefore important to adopt effective mechanisms for regulating the content of social networks and to demand a higher level of responsibility from technology companies for addressing the situation. Pressure on technology companies operating social networks to adopt measures leading to effective protection against attacks presupposes coordinated action by national governments at European and global levels.

## APPENDIX: QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

1. Do you think that women are treated differently in politics than men?
  - a) Definitely yes. How specifically do you think this manifests itself?
  - b) Rather yes. How specifically do you think this manifests itself?
  - c) Rather no.
  - d) Definitely no.
  - e) I don't know, I can't judge.
2. Have you personally ever been the target of sexist remarks or remarks with a sexual overtone?
  - a) Yes. What kind specifically? (Did it happen in personal interaction or in the online space? Where is it more common?)
  - b) No.
3. Have you ever had the media, news or tabloid, publish or broadcast photographs of you that were somehow derogatory or had sexual overtones?
  - a) Yes. What specifically was it?
  - b) No.
4. Have you ever been the target of harassing behavior? In other words, have you ever been exposed to unpleasant or even intimidating behavior? For example, unwanted attention or verbal attacks or any form of interaction that made you uncomfortable or scared?
  - a) Yes. What specifically was it? (Did it happen in a personal interaction or in an online space? Where is it more common?)
  - b) No.
5. Have you ever encountered threats of violence? Whether against you or your loved ones (family, friends, etc.)?
  - a) Yes. Can you describe the specific incident in more detail? (Did it happen in a personal interaction or online? Where is it more common?)
  - b) No.
6. Did you handle any of these incidents officially?
  - a) Yes. How specifically, to whom did you report it? (Reporting to the police /solving within the Police Department of the Czech Republic...)
  - b) No. Did you handle this situation differently? How specifically?
7. What public profiles do you have on social networks? Which ones are official and which ones are personal?
8. Have you ever had photos of you published on social networks that were humiliating or had sexual overtones?
  - a) Yes. What specifically was it about?
  - b) No.
9. Is there hateful content or threats in the comments under your social network posts?
  - a) Yes. What specifically is it about?
  - b) No.
10. Do you receive hateful comments or threats in the form of private messages (on social networks, via SMS or email)?
  - a) Yes. What is their usual form and content? Can you tell who is the typical writer of such messages? Do you receive these messages more often from men or from women?
  - b) No.
11. Have you reported these hateful comments or messages?
  - a) Yes. To whom? (Social media operators / Czech Police...)
  - b) No. Did you handle this situation differently? How specifically?
12. Have you ever encountered behavior that you would describe as sexual harassment? For example, sexually oriented remarks or jokes, sexual suggestions or unwanted touching.
  - a) Yes. What specifically was it? Who committed such behavior?
  - b) No.
13. Have you ever been forced into any sexual practices or sexual intercourse against your will?
  - a) Yes. What specifically was it? Who committed such behavior?
  - b) No.
14. Have you reported sexual assault, sexual harassment?
  - a) Yes. To whom? (Police of the Czech Republic / someone within the political party / PS PČR...)
  - b) No. Did you handle this situation differently? How specifically?



15. Have you ever been denied financial resources to which you were entitled (e. g. parliamentary allowances, sponsorship, campaign contribution)?
  - a) Yes. Can you describe this situation in more detail?
  - b) No.
16. Have you ever been denied parliamentary resources (premises, computers, staff, security) to which you were entitled?
  - a) Yes. What was the specific case?
  - b) No
17. Has your property ever been damaged or destroyed?
  - a) Yes. Can you describe this situation in more detail?
  - b) No.
18. Did you report this incident/these incidents?
  - a) Yes. To whom? (Police of the Czech Republic / someone within a political party / PS PČR...)
  - b) No. Did you handle this situation differently? How specifically?
19. Has anyone ever physically attacked you? Has anyone slapped you, pushed you, hit you or thrown something at you that could have hurt you?
  - a) Yes. Can you describe this situation in more detail?
  - b) No.
20. Have you ever found yourself in a situation where someone wanted to physically harm you by using a firearm, knife or other weapon or actually used it against you?
  - a) Yes. What was it specifically?
  - b) No.
21. Have you ever been detained, beaten or kidnapped against your will?
  - a) Yes. Can you describe this situation in more detail?
  - b) No.
22. Have you ever reported this incident/these incidents?
  - a) Yes. To whom? (Police of the Czech Republic / someone within a political party / PS PČR...)
  - b) No. Did you handle this situation differently? How specifically?
23. Do you think that attacks on female politicians are in some way different from attacks against politicians?
  - a) Yes. In what specific way? Do they differ in intensity?
  - b) No.
24. In your opinion, are there sufficient mechanisms and tools in the Czech Republic to detect and punish harassing, hateful and sexualized expressions or violence against female politicians?
  - a) Definitely yes.
  - b) Rather yes. Is there something that should be improved?
  - c) Rather no. What specifically should be improved in your opinion?
  - d) Definitely no. What specifically should be improved in your opinion?
  - e) I don't know, I can't judge.
25. In recent years, topics that divide society have emerged, for example, migration, the Istanbul Convention, marriage for all or climate issues. Have you spoken out on topics that are perceived as controversial in Czech society?
  - a) Yes. What specifically?
  - b) No.
26. Do you think that speaking out on these topics causes a greater wave of hatred than on other topics?
  - a) Yes.
  - b) No.
27. Do you avoid some topics or limit your political activities (such as public speaking, media interviews, etc.) out of fear that you will be the target of hateful comments, harassing behavior, or even violence?
  - a) Definitely yes.
  - b) Rather yes.
  - c) Rather no.
  - d) Definitely no.
  - e) I don't know, I can't judge.
28. Is there anything else you would like to add to the topic that hasn't been said yet?



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FÓRUM 50 %

**Forum 50 %** is a non-governmental organisation that promotes the balanced representation of women and men in politics and public life. As a watchdog and think tank, it brings new visions, approaches and proposals and helps to put them into practice. It monitors the development of the representation and position of women in Czech politics, motivates them to enter public life and supports them in their public activities. At the same time, it cooperates with political parties and other actors on specific measures. Its main principle is non-partisanship.

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## CZECH WOMEN MPS AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



The MPs interviewed agree that hate speech and threats are clearly prevalent in the online space. According to them, the attacks usually come in waves and become more intense in direct proportion to the spread of chain emails and the sharing of hateful content and misinformation in different groups on the networks. The prevailing narrative in society is that if someone gets a public position and appears in the public space, they have to take this aspect into account and not complain about it. It is seen as a necessary tax for working in high politics. This normalises the spread of hate and tolerance towards it.



Almost all respondents think that attacks on politicians are different from attacks against politicians. They are often sexualised and more personal in nature, and stereotypes that women do not belong in politics are common. Hateful and vulgar insults have a sexual overtone, attack the appearance of politicians and question their competence. When politicians appear in public, their personal space is more violated, they are perceived as weaker, more vulnerable and easier targets.



The rate of reporting of different forms of gender-based violence varies. Women are most likely to report incidents of physical violence – three quarters of all female MPs surveyed who had experienced this form of violence reported it. Half reported economic violence. Threats of violence were reported by just under 41 % of the female MPs interviewed who had been targeted. No cases of sexualised harassment or assault were reported. One respondent who experienced sexualised violence stated that she did not report the incident to the police, but dealt with it internally within the political party.

More information can be found here:  
<https://prag.fes.de>



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