



# From Research to Action

## *Guidelines for Implementing Protections for Women in Irish Political Life*

[Women for Election](#): August 2026

### Introduction

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In July 2026 Women for Election published a report entitled [Recognize, Resist, Rise Up: Tackling Gender-Based Violence against Women in Politics](#), which shared research into the experiences of women members of the Oireachtas. The research was conducted as part of a comparative study of five European countries, through an EU-funded partnership of EAF Berlin (Germany), Možnosť voľby (Slovakia), JÓL-LÉT Alapítvány (Hungary), Fórum 50% (Czechia) and Women for Election (Ireland). The research documents near-universal exposure to online violence, widespread psychological abuse, and a pattern of gendered harm that is materially affecting how women serve in Irish political life.



In producing this research, we were acutely aware of the ground already covered. In May 2024, the [Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life](#), chaired by former Garda Commissioner and former UN Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security, .Nóirín O'Sullivan and including Women for Election among its members, published a comprehensive report on abuse in political life. That report set out 16 recommendations (see Appendix), supported by an overarching action plan, covering research, awareness, criminal justice, social media platforms, the Houses of the Oireachtas, local authorities, and political parties.

Women for Election endorses the [Task Force recommendations](#) in their entirety. We have no desire to reinvent the wheel. The Task Force did its work rigorously and well, and the framework it established remains the right one. With this in mind, our new research does not set out a new set of proposals but rather calls for the full, timely, and properly resourced implementation of Task Force's recommendations.

This statement sets out what the two bodies of work - the *Task Force Report* and the *Recognize, Resist, Rise Up* research - say together; what the new research adds; and what Women for Election is specifically calling for.



## What the evidence tells us

The Task Force concluded in 2024 that abuse in political life is prevalent, escalating, and disproportionately targeted at women and minority groups. It found that online abuse in particular is intensifying and becoming normalised, and that the impact of abuse on individuals, families, and democratic participation is far-reaching. The findings of the [Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life](#) drew on a survey of 61 Members and 200 political staff, 94% of whom reported experiencing some form of abuse.

Two years later, the Women for Election [research](#), conducted specifically with women members of the Oireachtas, places hard numbers behind those conclusions:

- 96% of female Oireachtas members surveyed have experienced online violence
- 88% have experienced psychological violence — sexist remarks, harassment, and threats
- 71% have received threats targeting themselves or people close to them, including their children
- 65% have changed how they engage with social media as a direct result of abuse
- 63% have experienced sexualised violence, yet only 20% reported it
- 46% have changed their canvassing and campaigning behaviour for safety reasons.



These are not just statistics; they describe the working conditions of the women elected to our national parliament. Speaking at the launch, former Garda Commissioner Nóirín O'Sullivan described them as *"an alarm call for our democracy"*. Taken together with the Task Force report, the findings constitute an unambiguous and well-evidenced picture of the unacceptable challenges faced by women politicians.

The Women for Election research also found that the violence experienced led to clear patterns of behavioural change amongst women politicians. Individuals reported that they had changed the way in which they engaged with social media, were more guarded and careful in public settings and had altered their canvassing and campaigning behaviour for safety reasons. This highlights how political violence impacts not just the individuals targeted but also their work as a public representative and their engagement with constituents. This poses a threat to the very fundamentals of how our democracy functions.

The question is no longer whether the problem exists or whether it is serious. Both have been established. The question rather is why, more than two years after the Task Force reported, the problem is as bad if not worse.



## What the new research adds

The Women for Election study deepens the Task Force findings in three areas that are worth highlighting:

- ***The gendered burden of hypervigilance***

The Women for Election research documents not only the behavioural changes women make in response to abuse such as avoiding lone canvassing, varying routines, or leaving events early but also highlights the sustained cognitive and psychological cost of maintaining constant

alertness to threat. This hypervigilance is not captured in any existing support framework. It is invisible and ongoing, and it falls on women in a way that has no equivalent for most of their male colleagues. Any meaningful institutional response must acknowledge this burden and address it.

- ***The reporting gap***

Only 20% of women who experienced sexualised violence reported it. Across all violence categories, reporting rates are low. The Women for Election research makes clear that this is not a function of the severity of experiences but of a system that has failed to create the conditions in which reporting is safe, accessible, and trusted to lead to a response. Lowering the tolerance threshold for reporting, as the Task Force recommended, requires active institutional effort: it does not happen by default.

- ***The European comparative dimension***

The Women for Election study is part of a [five-country European comparative project](#). The consistent pattern of findings across Ireland, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, and Czechia confirms that this is not an Irish anomaly but a systemic European problem. Ireland is not an outlier but that is not a reason for complacency. It is a reason for Ireland to engage actively with European partners on shared frameworks, and for Coimisiún na Meán to pursue the Task Force recommendation to consider joining the *Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*.





## What Women for Election is calling for

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Women for Election makes no major new recommendations that cut across the Task Force's work. Instead, we call for the following, building directly on the Task Force framework:

➤ ***Full implementation of the Task Force recommendations***

The 16 recommendations of the [\*Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life\*](#), published in May 2024, represent the agreed roadmap for action. Women for Election calls on the Houses of the Oireachtas, the Government, political parties, social media platforms, An Garda Síochána, and Coimisiún na Meán to implement each recommendation fully, with clear timelines and public accountability.

➤ ***Specific institutional responses to the hypervigilance finding***

The Task Force recommended psychological support services for politicians (Recommendation 2) and the development of peer support networks (Recommendation 3). We call on these to be designed and resourced with explicit recognition of the cognitive and psychological burden of hypervigilance and slow violence.

➤ ***A dedicated response to the reporting gap***

The Task Force called for incident reporting to become the norm, with clear mechanisms and a zero tolerance approach across the system. The Women for Election research shows that this has not happened. Women for Election calls for a specific review of the barriers to reporting across all forms of gendered violence in political life, with particular attention to sexualised violence where the reporting rate stands at 20%. This review should be led by the Senior Officials Oversight Group who are tasked with implementing the Task Force recommendations.

➤ ***Annual public reporting on progress***

The Task Force recommended annual reporting to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission on the implementation of its recommendations. Women for Election calls for this reporting to begin immediately, to be published and publicly accessible, and to include specific data on the gendered dimensions of abuse, including the experiences of female Oireachtas members, so that progress can be measured against the evidence base that now exists.

➤ ***Support for Councillors***

The most recent Women for Election research focused on the experience of members of the Oireachtas. At local government level, Councillors operate without any administrative staff or support in a part-time role while managing other jobs and responsibilities. The Hope and Courage Collective have reported that Councillors, and candidates in local elections, in particular those from minority backgrounds, often experience higher levels of abuse and harassment, sometimes more acute and targeted than those in national politics. It is important therefore that, as recommended by the *Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life*, any



measures adopted at national level apply or have an equivalent measure at local government level and are fully resourced, implemented and support including by local authorities.

## Conclusion

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In 2024, the *Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life* diagnosed a significant problem and set out a series of recommendations and interventions to address it. In 2026, the Women for Election research confirms that the problem has not abated. The women surveyed are managing threats, absorbing abuse, carrying the invisible weight of hypervigilance, and doing so without adequate institutional support or in some cases, without any institutional support at all.

Women for Election does not ask for new commitments. We ask that existing commitments be honoured. The work has been done and the framework exists meaning that what is required now is the political will to act on it with the seriousness, the resources, and the urgency that the evidence demands. The right of women to participate in political life without fear is not a favour to be granted. It is a democratic imperative. It is time to treat it as one.





## Appendix

### Recommendations of the Task Force on Safe Participation in Political Life

1. It is recommended that An Coimisiún Toghcháin, as part of its research programme, undertake comprehensive research of the prevalence of abuse of politicians, at national and local level, and of political candidates, and establish a baseline assessment of the issue. This should include the targeted abuse of women and minority groups during election cycles and identify barriers to participation and inform the policy response to address them.
2. It is recommended that local authorities provide psychological support services to local representatives, similar to the model of services provided through the Houses of the Oireachtas Workplace Support Programme.
3. It is recommended that consideration should be given to the greater development, through government funding of support networks for women and minority groups involved in political life, including the women's caucuses.
4. It is recommended that it should no longer be a requirement for the home addresses of election candidates to be published and this should be optional.
5. It is recommended that Government adopt a long-term strategic approach to increasing political participation by under-represented groups, to achieve greater diverse and inclusive representation, as a matter of priority. This objective should be supported by current and coordinated equality, integration and inclusion strategies. The strategies should include specific, measurable and timebound actions and be adequately resourced to achieve stated outcomes.
6. Funding streams available to NGOs and community groups under all inclusion strategies should be widely publicised to support initiatives.
7. That the full implementation of Recommendations 26 and 27 of the Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality which relate to school resourcing and curriculum redevelopment be prioritised to address sexism and gender inequality from a young age, as these are identified as drivers of abuse of women in politics.
8. It is recommended that An Coimisiún Toghcháin, as part of its awareness and education programme, undertake a campaign to raise awareness of the impact of abuse in political life, including on the participation of women and minority groups.



9. It is recommended that formalised structures are put in place within AGS to provide cohesion and consistency in safeguarding those in political life, including:
- i. that AGS, in conjunction with the Houses of the Oireachtas authorities, strengthen arrangements to exchange information, assess the prevailing security situation and agree appropriate security measures.
  - ii. that comprehensive security reviews be conducted on a periodic basis to ensure appropriate and proportionate measures are in place to maintain safe access and egress to the Leinster House complex, while balancing the rights of individuals and citizens to engage with the democratic process.
  - iii. that AGS assign a dedicated, appropriately resourced team of personnel, with sufficient knowledge of the workings of the Houses and their environs, to liaise with Leinster House authorities and to ensure the required day to day security and liaison arrangements are in place.
  - iv. that AGS appoint dedicated points of contact at national, regional and local level to proactively provide tailored security advices to elected representatives and establish reporting mechanisms to receive and coordinate responses to incidents of abuse.
  - v. that information regarding reports of threats and investigations, including the outcome of enquiries and investigations, be collated at national level to inform the overall threat assessment and the design and implementation of appropriate security measures.
  - vi. that AGS engage with An Coimisiún Toghcháin and Local Authorities in providing general crime prevention and security advice to prospective candidates and arranging crime prevention briefings, as appropriate, through the Divisional Crime Prevention Officers. Details of designated contact points for electoral candidates should be published online by AGS to report incidences of abuse.
  - vii. that AGS proactively engage and build strong working relationships with the proposed Oireachtas social media monitoring unit [see Recommendation 13(ii)], and Oireachtas engagement forum [see Recommendation 13(iii)] to monitor, assess and action as appropriate infractions of the code or breaches of the criminal law.
  - viii. that An Garda Commissioner designate the Assistant Commissioner, Garda National Crime and Security Intelligence Service (GNCSIS), specific responsibility



for the overarching implementation of the above recommendations in view of the urgency and seriousness of the issue.

**10.** It is recommended that social media companies take proactive measures to address abuse against those in political life by:

- i. active participation in the engagement forum with the Houses of the Oireachtas [see Recommendation 13 (iii)] and other stakeholders on the collective response to online abuse.
- ii. increasing engagement with political representatives and their staff, including through the provision of continued training and information seminars.
- iii. dedicating adequate resources to moderate harmful content against politicians.
- iv. reviewing Content Policies to provide those engaging in political life with the same protections as private individuals.
- v. adhering to the forthcoming Online Safety Code.
- vi. cooperating and building strong working relationships with Coimisiún na Meán, AGS and designated trusted flaggers in pre-emptively countering and removing harmful content.

**11.** It is recommended that Coimisiún na Meán:

- i. fully utilise its powers to ensure appropriate protections for elected representatives and candidates online, given the potential impact and harm of online abuse to individual politicians and to the democratic process.
- ii. accredit the Houses of the Oireachtas, local authorities and political parties as trusted flaggers so that platforms are obliged to give priority to reports received from them.
- iii. consider applications from NGOs for accreditation as trusted flaggers so that platforms are obliged to give priority to reports received from them.
- iv. consider the benefits and make recommendations on joining the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse.
- v. build strong working relationships with relevant entities across the system to fulfil their mandate.

**12.** It is recommended that Dáil and Seanad Standing Orders provide that, at the first sitting of each Dáil and Seanad, the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach make a statement seeking Members' collective commitment to civil and respectful discourse in political debate in the Houses.



**13.** It is recommended that the Houses of the Oireachtas:

- i.** establish and resource a Senior Officials Implementation and Oversight Group comprising representatives from the Houses of the Oireachtas, relevant Government Departments and other relevant stakeholders to oversee the implementation of the recommendations of the Task Force. The Group should report annually to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission.
- ii.** establish and resource a comprehensive social media support service for Members, to include:
  - a.** an opt-in social media monitoring service to monitor and report abusive, intimidating and harmful content directly to social media platforms as trusted flaggers for action and to report online abuse to AGS; and
  - b.** training on safe engagement online for Members and their staff, including technical assistance in using tools available to deter and report malicious content.
- iii.** establish a forum for engagement with representatives from social media companies, Coimisiún na Meán and AGS on the collective response to online abuse of Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- iv.** facilitate information sessions for Members and their staff on workplace security measures.
- v.** establish a dedicated single point of contact in the Superintendent's Section to whom security related incidences can be reported, including an escalation process to AGS as appropriate.
- vi.** in conjunction with AGS, create strong working relationships to facilitate the exchange of information, conduct periodic security reviews and agree and implement appropriate security measures.
- vii.** undertake a review of the Security Requirements Allowance scheme to assess that it sufficiently meets the requirements of Members and identify the reasons for the low uptake to date.
- viii.** implement the relevant recommendations of the [\*Family Friendly Forum Report\*](#) (FFF Report) including:



- to review existing codes of conduct on appropriate behaviour for Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas and set out clear sanctions for breaches of these codes (Recommendation 25 of the FFF Report); and
- to undertake an audit of the Houses of the Oireachtas using the gender sensitive toolkit provided by the IPU (Recommendation 31 of the FFF Report).

**ix.** review and update the existing Codes of Conduct under the Standards in Public Office Act for TDs and Senators to include provisions to address abuse, including online abuse, and discriminatory behaviours.

**14. 14.** It is recommended that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Local Authorities:

- i. review the security allowance scheme to ensure that it sufficiently meets the requirements of elected members of local authorities.
- ii. provide information sessions on security matters to local councillors and directly elected mayors, in conjunction with AGS on workplace security measures.
- iii. explore the feasibility of establishing comprehensive social media support services for local councillors and directly elected mayors, to include:
  - a. an opt-in social media monitoring service to monitor and report abusive, intimidating and harmful content directly to social media platforms as trusted flaggers for action and report online abuse to AGS; and
  - b. training on safe engagement online, including technical assistance in using tools available to deter and report malicious content.

**15.** It is recommended that political parties:

- i. put in place measures to support women and minority members and candidates, noting the particular challenges these groups may encounter in participating in political life.
- ii. promote and implement the Anti-Racism Election Protocol.
- iii. have in place internal codes of conduct for members of their party that prohibit abuse, both for elected members and for ordinary members, with sanctions for those who do not comply.
- iv. have complaints processes and trained points of contact within the political parties for members of the party who experience abuse.



- v. have systems in place to collate data on reported incidences and outcomes of abuse to facilitate the monitoring and assessment of the prevalence and impact of abuse.
- vi. equip election candidates with campaign training that incorporates measures to protect against abuse.
- vii. undertake a benchmarking exercise of their policies and procedures against the NWCI Toolkit on Social Media Policies for Political Parties and the OSCE toolkit for political parties to tackle violence against women.
- viii. work collectively to develop an all-party code of conduct or civility code for parties and their membership to adopt.

16. In view of the need to protect the integrity and sustainability of our democracy and the leadership required in that regard, it is recommended that political party leaders and group leaders convene annually under the leadership of the Ceann Comhairle and Cathaoirleach to share progress on actions taken by the political parties on foot of the recommendations in this Report.

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**Women for Election** is a non-partisan, feminist, not-for-profit organisation working for gender parity in Irish politics at local, national and European levels. We inspire, equip and support women in all their diversity to enter and succeed in politics, while advocating to remove the systemic and structural barriers they face. We believe greater diversity in political representation strengthens democracy, improves decision-making and helps build a fairer, more inclusive and resilient society.

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**Recognize, Resist, Rise Up** is a five-country comparative research project led in Ireland by Women for Election, in partnership with [EAF Berlin](#) (Germany), [Možnosť voľby](#) (Slovakia), [JÓL-LÉT Alapítvány](#) (Hungary), and [Fórum 50%](#) (Czechia). The project is funded through the EU Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme.

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