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Women Members of Parliament and Gender-Based Violece in Slovakia: Democracy with a Male Face?

Research report

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This analysis and report was produced as part of the project **Recognize, Resist, Rise Up: Tackling Gender-Based Violence Against Women in Politics**, which is co-financed by the European Union. However, the views and opinions expressed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the European Union or the European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

Women Members of Parliament and Gender-Based Violece in Slovakia: Democracy with a Male Face?

Research report

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Možnosť voľby, 2026

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Introduction

We live in a society characterized by persistent gender inequality and discrimination against women. This systemic gender inequal societal structure means that throughout their lives, women are exposed to increased frequency and risk of violence compared to men and face different forms of violence.

One specific form of this gender-based violence is **violence against women politicians**. Its aim is to discredit women, deter them from active participation in political life, and silence their voice. Research findings in this area point to its nearly epidemic scale and increasing trend. **Women in politics are exposed to various types of violence—ranging from online violence and sexual harassment to physical violence. They experience severe forms of threats, attacks on their dignity, and constant questioning of their competence.** Violence against politically active women has become one of the key barriers to women's greater and more equal participation in the political sphere and it discourages many women from actively participating in public affairs.

In regional assessments of gender equality, Slovakia has long ranked at the bottom of the European Union. In the Gender Equality Index[1], Slovakia consistently ranks in the bottom third of the list and has long lagged behind the EU average, with a slower pace of improvement, than in most member states. According to the latest Gender Equality Index 2025, Slovakia ranked 20th within the EU (with 57.2 points out of 100).[2] Slovakia scores particularly low in the domain of decision-making and power (22.9 points). Women hold only 14 % of ministerial positions, one of the lowest shares of women in the EU. Their representation in the National Parliament stands at 23 %, and in regional assemblies at just 17 %.

The unequal distribution of power, which manifests in the low representation of women in political and economic decision-making, creates an environment in which women are marginalized, overlooked, and discriminated against. Their specific needs and life experiences remain "invisible" or are rarely reflected in public policies. The result of male dominance in the political sphere is a system that is not neutral but tailored to "male realities and experiences". It reinforces gender-biased structures, policies, and processes that are unfavorable to women.[3]

On a symbolic level, this imbalance reinforces societal gender stereotype that politics is primarily a "male domain". At the same time, the low representation of women is systematically influenced by overall discrimination against women, gender inequality, and persistent stereotypes. As a result, discrimination against women in the political and decision-making spheres becomes systemic, structural, and difficult to overcome. This is a mechanism, which academic literature refers to as a vicious cycle of marginalization and discrimination.[4]

Academic literature has described the numerous and diverse barriers that hinder women's entry into politics and their equal participation in political decision-making in depth. They are a combination of systemic, societal, and individual obstacles (and even when we speak of the individual level, this level is also influenced by societal factors and gendered burdens to a large extent).

The low number of women in decision-making positions creates an environment that is culturally and organizationally geared primarily toward

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1 The Gender Index is a composite index compiled by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) that monitors six domains of the EU's gender equality policy framework: work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health.

2 For details, see https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2025/country/SK

3 For example, long parliamentary sessions - work in politics is designed for someone who is available 24/7 and has no, or minimal, caregiving responsibilities, which means fever women in politics, leading to a situation where issues stemming from women's experiences - and which would contribute to a more gender-equitable society - are less frequently addressed. At the same time, fewer accessible care facilities place a greater burden on women, who thus have less time to devote to public policy, etc.

4 The vicious cycle of marginalization and discrimination is a social mechanism in which one disadvantageous factor triggers another, creating a closed system from which it is nearly impossible for individuals or a group (in this case, women) to escape without external intervention or measures. Some sources also refer to a circular cumulative causality of negative factors (individual negative characteristics accumulate, mutually condition and reinforce one another, and lead to marginalization).

men, or toward people who are not as burdened by caring duties. Due to gender-stereotypical socialization and prejudice, many women believe they are less qualified for political positions than men with the same experience. Major barriers include a lack of measures to balance work and personal life (such as flexible voting or accessible childcare) and the overall unfair burden of unpaid work placed on women. Women are also deterred by the competitive nature of politics and the lack of targeted support and motivation from political parties.

The political parties, in which men still largely dominate in leadership positions, often act as "gatekeepers" – for example by influencing nominations and the order of candidates on electoral lists, selection for regional and party structures, and the allocation of resources. Gender stereotypes help men attain leadership positions because the traits and skills expected of people in these positions are associated with "masculine" traits (assertiveness, rationality, drive), and thus leadership—as well as politics itself—is associated with men.

Formal and informal networks within political parties play a crucial role for reaching top positions and influencing the implementation of political change. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (hereinafter EIGE), the existence of these networks in male-dominated spheres maintains male dominance and leadership.[5] Significant barriers also include women's unequal access to financial resources, needed to, for example, fund election campaigns. Electoral systems, as well as gender-biased rules, processes, and conditions established within political parties and public institutions, also come into play. Last but not least, one of the key factors is gender bias in the media, which often perpetuates and reinforces the notion that women are less legitimate and capable politicians than men.

In recent years, thanks to the work of non-governmental organizations and human rights institutions focused on promoting gender equality, attention has turned to another significant barrier: violence against women in politics. UN Women notes that online threats of death, rape, and physical violence against women in politics and public life have become alarmingly common, and the rise of artificial intelligence may further intensify the scale and impact of such online abuse.[6] It also seems that instead of fundamentally rejecting such violence and implementing effective measures, such violence is being normalized (especially in societies with significant gender inequality).

In Slovakia, we have so far insufficiently addressed the problem of gender-based violence against female politicians and have failed to reflect upon this common experience of women. This is despite the alarming and widely publicized cases of violence and discrimination experienced by former President Zuzana Čaputová, Member of the Parliament Lucia Plaváková, and many others. Only a few media outlets have reported on how, as a result of their experiences with violence, several publicly active women have withdrawn from public life and politics. Almost no institution has responded with proposals for systemic changes.

Our research report aims to help break the silence surrounding the violence and barriers faced by politically active women and to highlight these issues as a structural problem linked to gender inequality. For the first time in Slovakia, we have mapped the prevalence and nature of various forms of gender-based violence experienced by women in top-level politics, specifically women members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. We believe that these unique findings, based on the experiences of women who have faced violence, will open a public debate on violence and help ensure that this phenomenon is addressed with a highest degree of priority in Slovakia. We believe that by establishing a system for the prevention and elimination of violence against female politicians, we will pave the way not only for women's greater political participation but also for the strengthening of democracy in our country.

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5 For more information, see here: https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2016.1523_mh0116064skn_pdfweb_20170511095723.pdf

6 UN WOMEN, 2024 Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2024/09/five-actions-to-boost-womens-political-participation

Methodology

This research is part of the international project ***Recognize, Resist, Rise Up: Tackling Gender-Based Violence Against Women in Politics***, funded by the EU CERV grant scheme. This research builds on the research activities of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which conducted the first survey among female and male members of the European Parliament[7], and subsequently on the 2025 study "Czech Female MPs and Gender-Based Violence," conducted by the organization Forum 50 %.[8]

This research report presents the results and analysis of a prevalence study that examined gender-based violence against women in politics, specifically against female members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter NCSR). The aim of the research was to gather information on the prevalence and nature of gender-based violence. Data collection was conducted through research interviews with women members of the NCSR who held a mandate as of November 2025. The target sample consisted of all women members of the NCSR. We approached all 33 female members with a request for an interview; ultimately, 27 of them participated in the research, i.e., 82 %. These include women members from all parliamentary clubs except the Slovak National Party (SNS) club.

Most respondents are between the ages of 41 and 50; two are younger than 30, and the oldest respondent is 58 years old. All respondents have a college education, and 93 % have children. 81 % of the respondents have held their parliamentary seats since 2023, 7 % are currently serving their third term in parliament, and 4 % are serving their second term. One respondent has been serving in the National Council of the Slovak Republic for less than 6 months.

Table no. 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age category	Percentage of respondents in the sample
18–30	7 %
31–40	22 %
41–50	37 %
51–60	33 %

7 IPU. (2016). Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians. Inter-Parliamentary Union. https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians
IPU, & PACE. (2018). Sexism, harassment, and violence against women in parliaments in Europe. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/human-rights-documents-online/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe;hrdhrd1021201810210012

8 Kos Mottlová, M. & Šprincová, V. (2025). Czech Female MPs and Gender-Based Violence. Available at: studie_ceske-poslankyne-a-genderove-podminene-nasili.pdf

The research interviews were designed as semi-structured interviews with both closed and open-ended questions regarding respondents' direct experience with various forms of gender-based violence since the beginning of their tenure in the National Council of the Slovak Republic (interview structure and questions in the attachment). The interviews also focused on questions regarding the reporting of violent incidents, available mechanisms for reporting, investigation, and sanctioning of gender-based violence, the impact of violence on their professional and personal life, as well as recommendations for institutions. It is important to note that many female respondents mentioned serious violent incidents—ranging from sexual assault to death threats and being held at gunpoint - that they experienced while working in regional politics, the executive branch, or civil society organizations. This points to even higher actual prevalence of gender-based violence, as these incidents are not accounted for in this research report.

All women MPs were repeatedly invited to participate in the study via email sent to their parliamentary email addresses as well as to their assistants' email addresses. Some MPs were also contacted by phone, in cases where the research team had this information. The email contained detailed information about the project and an informed consent form, which included information about the research interview, data processing, and guarantees for the preservation of respondents' anonymity. The document also included a contact list of organizations that provide support to victims of gender-based violence, to minimize the risk of re-traumatization. The date and location of the interviews were tailored to the respondents' preferences and availability; they were most often conducted online via the Zoom platform or in person at the premises of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The interviews were conducted from November 2025 to February 2026. In the research report, we used original direct quotes from the interviews, which were edited only in terms of form, using standard language, removing filler words, or omitting parts of sentences, which is indicated by (...).

All respondents provided written consent to participate in the interview; in cases where they agreed to interview recording, consent was given verbally at the beginning of the recording. Before the interview began, all respondents were informed of their rights to withdraw consent at any time, to refuse to answer specific questions, to interrupt or terminate the interview, and to ask any questions during the interview. Via these tools the principles of feminist research were implemented to the research. These aim to address power imbalances between the respondent and the researcher. Research interviews with female lawmakers also constitute elite research, in which respondents possess important and unique information from the not-so-easily-accessible world of politics.[9] For these reasons, it is important to ensure that the published information does not have a negative impact on their professional or personal lives. In this research report, we have taken care to preserve anonymity, although due to the low number of female MPs and the media coverage of certain incidents, this cannot always be guaranteed. To protect the respondents' identities, we have decided not to provide detailed information about their affiliation with political parties or parliamentary groups.

9 Boucher, A. (2017). Power in elite interviewing: Lessons from feminist studies for political science. Available at: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277539516301972

Key Findings

- Violence against female politicians is often gendered and reflects persistent gender stereotypes in our society. Female MPs are regularly subjected to attacks targeting their appearance, questioning their competence, or criticizing their role as working mothers. The values they advocate for—such as human rights, gender equality, reproductive health and rights, and the protection of minorities and LGBTI people – also become targets of these attacks.

- **Every female MP surveyed reported experiencing violence in the online space, and as many as 96 % have also encountered psychological violence.** Most commonly, this took the form of hateful comments and threats, including death threats, as well as attacks directed at their loved ones and children. Violence in the online environment, however, proves difficult to prosecute, as law enforcement institutions often lack the necessary technical and personnel resources to effectively address it.

- **One in two female MPs has experienced sexual harassment, but only 14 % of them officially reported it.** This low rate is linked to the absence of effective mechanisms for reporting and investigating such behavior, as well as its persistent normalization in the predominantly male political environment.

- **Fifty-nine percent of the female MPs surveyed have encountered gender-based discrimination.** Discrimination is also present in the National Council of the Slovak Republic, where female MPs often lack the conditions necessary to fulfill their mandates while balancing their responsibilities for caring for children and loved ones. It also persists within party structures—women do not have an equal share of power or access to decision-making processes.

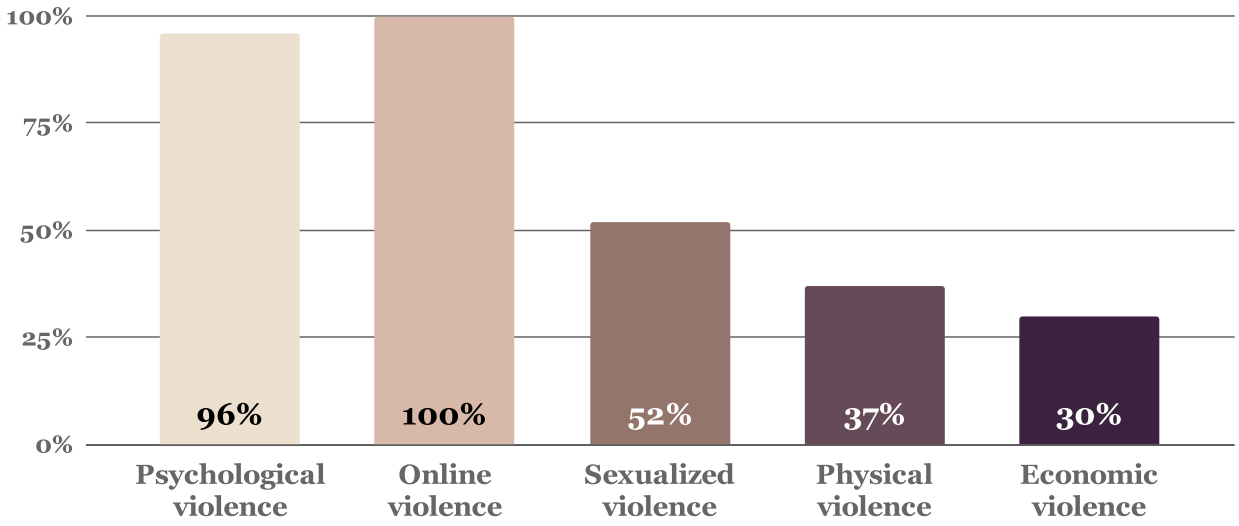
Experience with Gender-Based Violence

Every respondent has encountered at least two forms of gender-based violence. The most common form experienced is online violence, which every female MP surveyed has experienced. As many as 96 % of respondents have experienced psychological violence, most often in the form of sexist remarks or comments, and 78 % of respondents have also encountered intimidating behavior or harassment.

Every other respondent (52 %) has encountered sexualized violence, which in all cases took the form of sexual harassment. Thirty-seven percent of the female lawmakers surveyed have experienced physical violence; most commonly, this involved threats to kill with a firearm or a bomb, and some MPs have also faced physical assault.

Economic violence is the rarest form, experienced by nearly one in three respondents—specifically 30 %—with the most common cases involving damage or destruction of property, as well as the denial of financial or parliamentary resources. Age did not play a significant role in the occurrence of gender-based violence against female politicians—female MPs under the age of 40 encountered various forms of violence at approximately the same rate as the entire sample, unlike discrimination, which women MPs over the age of 40 experienced more frequently.

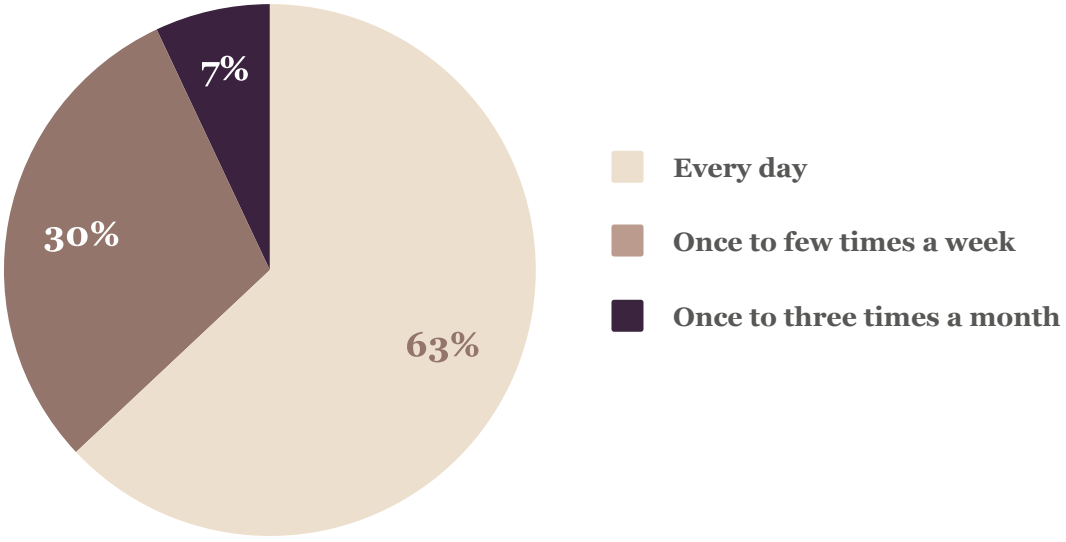
Chart no. 1: Prevalence of gender-based violence



Fifty-nine percent of the female MPs surveyed had encountered gender-based discrimination. Experience with discrimination was most frequently reported by female lawmakers in the 41–50 age group, at 70 %; followed by 67 % of respondents aged 31–40 and 56 % of female lawmakers over 51. Respondents under 30 had not reported discrimination.

Attacks and insults directed at female lawmakers most frequently target their appearance, gender identity, the values they represent, and their competence; to a lesser extent, they also target their age or personal or sexual lives, specifically, for example, their role as mothers. Some female MPs face frequent attacks targeting their ethnicity, sexual orientation, or physical disability. These findings highlight the greater vulnerability of female lawmakers who belong to a minority group.

Chart no. 2: Frequency of gender-based violence



It is alarming that nearly two-thirds of female respondents face attacks every day, particularly on social media; 30 % face attacks one to several times a week; and 7 % are subjected to violence one to three times a month. These findings point to a very high frequency of violence and attacks to which female lawmakers are exposed every day, which undoubtedly impacts and influences their daily professional and private lives.

Various Forms of Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence takes various forms and manifestations; for the purposes of this study, we have divided them into five categories: psychological, online, sexualized, physical, and economic violence. We have chosen the following classification and categorization of the forms and manifestations of gender-based violence against women in politics; it is also important to note that individual forms may overlap or fall into multiple categories simultaneously:

- **Psychological violence** includes sexist comments or remarks with sexual undertones, harassment and intimidating behavior, threats against female lawmakers or their loved ones, stalking, and the publication of degrading or sexualized photographs by the media.
- **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).
- **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).
- **Physical violence** includes physical assault such as slapping, hitting, shoving, or throwing an object; threatening to use or using a firearm, knife, or other weapon; and kidnapping or other restrictions on freedom of movement.
- **Economic violence** includes the withholding of financial resources to which the MP is entitled, such as salary, parliamentary allowances, campaign contributions, sponsorship donations, rewards, or bonuses; furthermore, the denial of parliamentary resources, such as an office, premises, staff, technical or other equipment; and damage and theft of property.

Psychological Violence

Table no. 2: Experience with various forms of psychological violence

Forms of psychological violence	Respondents who experienced it
Sexist comments or comments with sexual undertones	85 %
Harassment, intimidating behavior, verbal attacks	78 %
Threats	74 %
Stalking	37 %
Publication of degrading or sexualized photos by the media	41 %

Nearly every female MP surveyed (96 %) has experienced psychological violence in various forms. 85 % of respondents have encountered sexist comments or comments with sexual undertones.

"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]."

"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. "

"Basically, all the female colleagues, from what I observe—all women in the public sphere – are confronted with the fact that their value is tied to, or their opinions are considered less valuable, or even tied to, how we look. Personally, I am often confronted with the idea that because I look a certain way, I must have nothing in my head—that I can't be smart because I'm sexy."

"In the online space, but also in the National Council itself, some male colleagues in particular feel that their female colleagues—especially younger ones—don't have the same legitimacy to speak on every issue as they do, or don't carry the same weight, and shouldn't even be addressing certain matters at all, and so on. At the same time, they're very quick to comment on our appearance."

"And what I consider to be sexism, is when someone tells me that, based on my appearance and clothing, my opinions are less valuable."

"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.'"

One of the female MPs described an experience in which she received an envelope containing semen-filled condom delivered to her in the Parliament. She decided not to publicize the incident out of fear that such practices might spread to other female colleagues and that it might diminish her standing in the eyes of the public. However, she contacted the Chancellery of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, which later introduced a mail scanner. Such an example of self-censorship demonstrates that a hostile social environment without zero tolerance for violence against women affects the ability of women to speak publicly about incidents of violence and to demand compensation and redress.

"The first incident was when I received a condom filled with semen in an envelope at the National Council. Now, what was interesting about this was that I decided not to go public with it; I only mentioned it to the National Council's administration office so they could take some measures—my assistant had opened the envelope, and as soon as she pulled it out, she just burst into tears; she was completely distraught about what had happened to her, and so I was trying to figure out how it could happen that this ended up in the mail of an MP at the National Council, (...) I was terribly angry and wanted to address it publicly, but I just thought it through (...)"

The second most common form is harassment or intimidating behavior or verbal attacks, which as many as 78 % of female MPs have experienced. These experiences ranged from unpleasant encounters with strangers in public to experiences with other MPs or public officials.

"Yes, it happened to me, for example, in Bratislava, (...) I was walking across a bridge, and a guy on a bike started circling around me and talking to me as if he were addressing me directly, he knew who I was, and he started asking me why I wasn't in the Parliament, what I was doing there (...) at that moment I was genuinely afraid, because it's not far-fetched to think someone might throw you off the bridge into the Danube."

Several respondents (15 %) mentioned situations involving a specific MP who does not respect their personal space, is very vulgar and aggressive, and they stated that he makes them feel afraid and threatened.

"Jožo Pročko is a special case. He's the kind of person who attacks you—he'll actually grab your phone, start filming, get right into your face, invade your personal space. I mean, I don't mind being touched, but with Pročko, it's totally common—he grabbed my phone, knocked it out of my hand, and wouldn't let me get into the car."

"So Mr. Pročko, who really invades personal space and goes after everyone without discrimination, but he certainly doesn't spare women. And Mr. Matovič, too, but he isn't that rude; he does it for the show, but with Mr. Pročko, I get the feeling (...) as if he downright hates women."

"For example, with this man (Mr. Pročko), he's an aggressive psychopath, and I really feel threatened around him."

As many as 74 % of the female MPs surveyed have received threats against themselves or their families. Most often, these took the form of online communication via messages or emails, though letters and phone calls also occurred. Respondents often report threats of physical harm or injury to law enforcement authorities or consult them with the Office for the Protection of Constitutional Officials or other legal counsel.

Several respondents also mentioned an incident in which all opposition MPs received a mass threatening message about a bomb at their residences. The police subsequently searched their homes and properties and, in some cases, monitored the surrounding area.

"I used to receive letters of such a nature that they were watching me, they know what I know, what I'm doing, and I know where you'll be, and that was terribly unpleasant, because I couldn't quite figure out how serious it was."

"There are also threats that if you come to [city], I'll be waiting for you and I'll strangle you."

"email messages that contained explicit death threats against me and my daughter, along the lines of first they'll kill her, so I'll suffer, and then they'll kill me."

One in three respondents (37 %) has experienced stalking, not only online but also in everyday life. One female lawmaker described a three-year ordeal with a stalker who sent her thousands of messages, videos, and photos of sexual nature and was eventually convicted of stalking. Two other female lawmakers have long faced harassment through letters or messages from unknown individuals. Other respondents have had their social media accounts hacked or experienced identity theft through fake profiles.

As many as 41 % of the female lawmakers had the media publish demeaning images of them or images with sexual undertones. Several lawmakers noted that the media often take photos from their social media accounts, or from other politicians, without their consent.

"I feel like the tabloids and the oppositional newspapers, or the media in general seem to deliberately pick photos where we don't look our most pleasant or attractive. That was the intention; I've noticed it many times, even though they have plenty of photos available where we actually look completely ordinary, normal, even pretty."

"This happened to me after giving birth; I had a very difficult first delivery, and when I came to the Parliament a few days after giving birth, I couldn't sit on a chair, so I asked for two so I could sit on the edge of the two chairs. And then [media outlet] took a photo of me from above, showing me sitting on those two chairs just a few days after giving birth, and they kept using that photo long after that, whenever they wanted to include an illustrative shot from the Parliament."

Online Violence

Table no. 3: Experience with various forms of online violence

Forms of online violence	Respondents who experienced it
Sexualized or degrading photos or videos posted on social media	56 %
Hateful comments or threats on social media	100 %
Hateful comments or threats in the form of messages, letters, or emails	96 %
Disclosure of personal information	11 %

Online violence is the most common form of violence experienced by all female MPs in the sample; most frequently, they encountered hateful comments and threats under social media posts or in the form of private messages, emails, or letters. These findings are linked to the high frequency of violence, which two out of three respondents experience every day. Facebook, and to a lesser extent TikTok and Instagram, were identified as the platforms where respondents experience the most attacks.

"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."

"Is this the stupid bitch who has a working DICK up to her knees?"

"You should've jumped off the train at full speed instead of making appearance at a protest, you fucking idiot."

Several respondents pointed out the coordinated nature of online attacks, which intensify after their appearances in television debates or at press conferences, after which they receive hundreds of aggressive and vulgar messages and comments. Even though online violence is the most common form of gender-based violence, law enforcement officials often underestimate it—even though it can involve dangerous stalking or threats and can have serious impacts on the mental and physical health of victims.

"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."

"At the same time, I basically receive these on a regular basis, but mostly after TV debates, when I appear with someone from the coalition—and especially with MPs from the Smer party—I receive letters, whether at my permanent address or at the National Council, which contain not only threats, but also, for example, various wishes that I should have a 20-kilogram tumor on my uterus, or that my children should be hung from a bridge and similar things, or that I should not reproduce, since I am the way I am."

Hateful comments and threats in the form of private messages or letters are also common; female lawmakers receive these in their mailboxes at the National Council of the Slovak Republic, at their temporary of residence, or at their official permanent address. Several female MPs described letters sent to their permanent residence addresses as particularly hurtful, since their parents or other family members often live at these addresses and open and read these hateful and threatening letters. The respondents indicated that they are more afraid and concerned for their loved ones and the harm this could potentially cause them than they are of the actual content of the letters.

"And I'll just add that both were sent to my parents' address, which was very upsetting for me, because that person clearly wanted to make it clear that they know where my parents and I live. I think the first one was addressed directly to my father, so he opened it and was also quite shocked. That was probably the most unpleasant aspect for me."

"They also came to my home address, even sending bullets in an envelope, but I was in the Parliament at the time, so my mom took it from the mailbox. Paradoxically, it scared her more than it did me, as I didn't even see it."

At the same time, during the interviews, several respondents expressed concerns about their safety due to insufficient protection of personal data, particularly their place of residence, since this information is available through the land registry office or various other documents accessible online and thus easily traceable. In extreme cases, two respondents requested data protection in the form of blocking their personal information.

Sexualized Violence - Sexual Harassment

Every other respondent (52 %) has experienced sexualized violence, specifically sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is defined as a range of behaviors with sexual undertones that is unpleasant to the person and considered harassing. Sexual harassment can include inappropriate comments and jokes with sexual undertones, unsolicited and unwanted invitations or propositions, or unwanted touching. The female lawmakers surveyed

have experienced various forms of sexual harassment, most commonly inappropriate comments or compliments with sexual undertones, but several have also encountered unwanted touching.

"And those comments about my big mouth, that I'd be good at (...) I don't know what, those are just the usual things men say that I hear all the time, and it doesn't matter if you're a politician or wherever you are, then the comments about me not wearing a bra and stuff like that, that I was basically inviting it, that I was basically a slut."

"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 (...) and I don't want to spend my time educating someone about gender equality, for example, or sexually motivated behavior (...)"

"Once, for example, something happened that was the most unpleasant for me: I was sitting and another male MP was sitting next to me; he was bending over a bit, I don't know if he had a bag or a laptop there—I don't remember that anymore - and he grabbed my leg, and I know there was even a comment about it, something like, 'legs like that,' I don't know what, and that was very unpleasant."

"I mean, I've also had someone slap me on the butt, but I know how to handle that, but it's basically normal in our society that when I'm talking to someone in a friendly way, I'm still the open type, so it happened that a colleague slapped me on the butt and said I looked great, so I said thank you very much and that next time he does it again, he won't look great."

"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."

At the same time, there are varying degrees of sensitivity to sexual harassment among the respondents, with some considering even opening doors, compliments on clothing, or touches without sexual intent to be unwanted, while others justify or explain such behavior by citing generational differences, a male-dominated environment, or the notion that "boys will be boys", These differences also highlight that sexual harassment and inappropriate behavior are, to a large extent, accepted and normalized in society. In the political arena, which remains predominanty male, it is all the more difficult to stand up against such behavior, especially in the absence of formal rules prohibiting sexual harassment and functional reporting mechanisms.

"Someone touches you without asking or something, touches your shoulder or whatever—you know, they treat it like it's given. It's not like, someone asks you if they can touch your shoulder, but they just touch you, plain and simple."

"Besides the fact that sometimes I just want to shake hands and not get that kiss on the cheek, sometimes it's that someone pulls you in and wants to give you that kiss, but it's not like it's sexual. It's more like they're used to it, and when you shake their hand, it's not enough for them, you know, like even when congratulating someone."

We also identified mechanisms that some female lawmakers use to cope with the fact that they work in a harassing environment where inappropriate comments, jokes, but also unwanted touching are common, particularly by downplaying such behavior or claiming that while it's unpleasant, they know how to deal with it.

"such behavior is common in male-dominated workplaces, so it really depends on whether something is directed at you specifically, or whether you perceive it that way, but I didn't perceive it that way, because I don't know—I don't think it was aimed at me personally, but as a woman, of course, it's unpleasant when such jokes are told or a remark is made, you know, but I would say, not that I'm immune to that kind of behavior, but I just know how to distance myself from it, to create that comfortable space so that nothing affects me, and if it does, I'm able to speak up."

Physical Violence

Table no. 4: Experience with various forms of physical violence

Forms of physical violence	Respondents who experienced it
Slapping, hitting, kicking, throwing an object	11 %
Use or threat of use of a firearm, knife or other weapon	37 %
Abduction, restriction of movement	0 %

The most common form of physical violence encountered by the respondents is threats involving the use of a firearm, knife, or other weapon, or threats of physical harm. 37 % of the respondents had faced such threats. None of the respondents had encountered the use of a weapon during their parliamentary mandate.

"There was even a phone call that they were going to come and shoot my entire family."

"Yes, shoot, fuck [name], drag her behind a car, etc."

"There was one threat that I would just shoot you, something like that, yeah, but that was online. And I got scared too and I also wrote to him that this was eligible for a criminal complaint, something like that."

"Once they wanted to smash my head with an ashtray, but we didn't make a big deal out of it."

11 % of the female MPs surveyed have direct experience with physical violence; one was shoved by another MP during a heated situation right on the floor of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, while another got into a physical altercation with a fellow female MP outside the parliament building. One female MP experienced a physical attack during the campaign when, after an event, a man lunged at her and tried to punch her, after which he was escorted away.

"It's mostly verbal attacks; in fact, there was one physical incident—I wouldn't actually call it an attack—but Mr. [name] shoved me."

Economic Violence

Table no. 5: Experience with various forms of economic violence

Forms of economic violence	Respondents who experienced it
Denial of financial resources	7 %
Denial of parliamentary resources	11 %
Damage or destruction of property	15 %

Nearly one in three female MPs surveyed (30 %) had experienced economic violence; 15 % had had their property damaged or destroyed, most commonly in the form of graffiti on their cars, unidentified liquids poured on their cars, or attempted break-ins, but also having their property stolen. **11%** of respondents were denied parliamentary resources to which they were entitled. This included, for example, the non-approval of foreign trips, which two female lawmakers mentioned.

> *"It's the refusal to approve foreign work-related travel. I am a member of the delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, where plenary sessions are held four times a year. Initially, when I was elected to this delegation, my trip to that plenary session was repeatedly denied, on the grounds that they didn't want to let an opposition MP go alone and needed to have coalition MPs in the Parliament. I then resolved the issue with the acting chair at the time, that is, the vice-chair."*

Several female lawmakers were expelled from or denied entry to the plenary session; one because she had a 6-month-old baby with her, and another was expelled for violating the rules of procedure because she had stickers on her laptop. However, this expulsion was purposeful, as several other members had various other stickers and they were not expelled.

> *"What was denied to me, my parliamentary rights, was entry into the plenary session, because I had a child. I was forbidden to enter the plenary session of the Parliament, they explicitly did not let me in, the security guards did not let me in because I had a six-month-old baby wrapped in a baby wrap carrier. Because children are not allowed in there, only MPs are allowed in there, even though journalists go there, waiters and waitresses go there, and they did not let me in there at that time."*

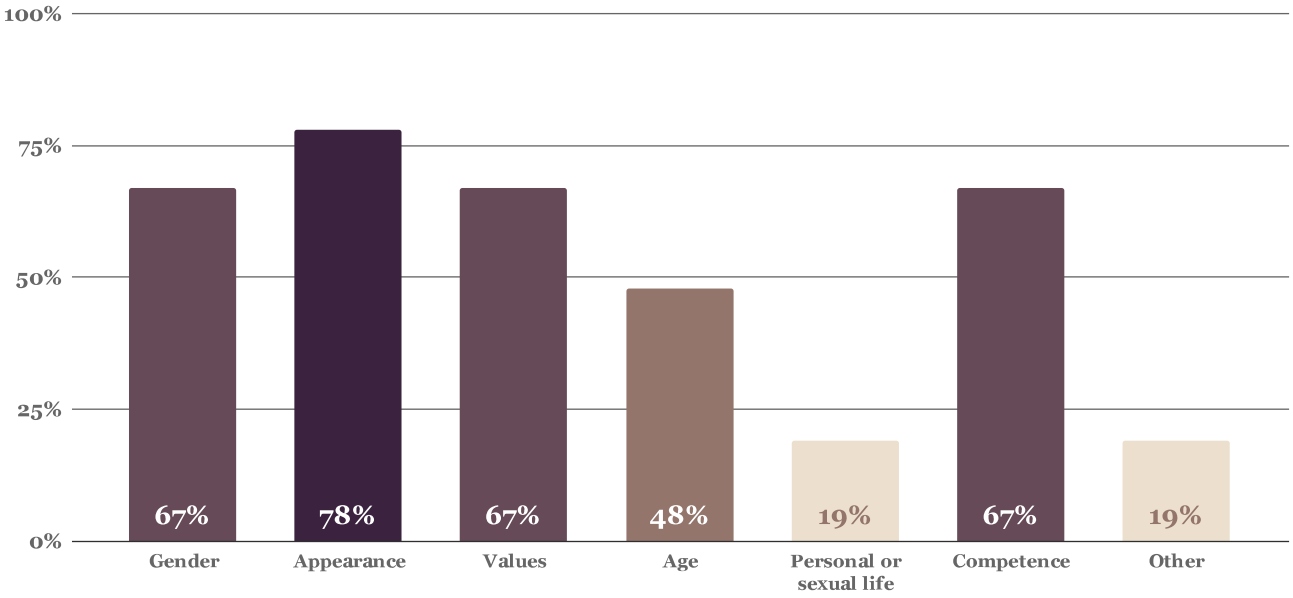
This experience highlights the institutions' lack of preparedness and unwillingness to create conditions that facilitate the balance of family and work life.

7 % of respondents were denied the financial resources they were entitled to, including a campaign contribution and, in another case, a long-term payment of a tax bonus.

"I didn't receive the child tax credit here in the Parliament for two years, even though I'd already had my second child and brought in the birth certificate, but the woman in charge of that paperwork probably just forgot due to human error and didn't enter it (...) and then I realized, after I stopped going on those trips abroad, that something didn't add up. So when I went to see the parliamentary leadership to explain that that I had actually been deprived of it for several months, they were able to reimburse me for the six months prior, but they never paid me the rest - about a year and a half's worth - because a mistake had been made and nothing was ever done about it afterwards."

Gendered Violence against Women in Politics

Chart no. 3: What did the attacks target most commonly? (Respondents could select multiple options)



Violence against women is directly linked to persistent gender inequality and discrimination against women. The gendered nature of people's expectations regarding how female politicians should behave, what they should look like, and which public issues they should address has also been confirmed in the attacks and violence they experience. The academic literature extensively documents that female politicians face not only a higher frequency of violence but also different types of attacks than male politicians. Forms of violence are more often sexualized and more frequently target their personal characteristics, appearance, or competence.

Our research also confirmed that violence against women MPs is gendered. Attacks and insults directed at female lawmakers most often target their appearance; with as many as 78 % having experienced this. Two-thirds (67 %) of the female lawmakers surveyed have experienced attacks targetting their gender ("they attack me because I am a woman"), the values they represent, and, to the same extent, their competence. Nearly half of the female lawmakers surveyed (48 %) have faced attacks related to their age.

"that I shouldn't be wearing that kind of lipstick, that it doesn't suit me now that I'm over forty, that I'm not a lady, that I'm a hag, ugly, that I have a big nose, that my glasses are too flashy."

"I think they're largely driven by the fact that I'm a woman. That it's particularly irritating, and there's a segment of society that thinks I shouldn't actually be in that position or hold such views, or that it undermines my views [that I am a woman]."

"It's such a hateful environment that you can feel it terribly (...) even in the Parliament, you always feel there's a tendency towards humiliation towards women."

"Competencies—that's more about the fact that I'm a woman... for example, [a well-known expert in labor relations] sends me so many charts and tells me that I don't understand any of it and that I have no business getting involved in these topics (...) and that's terribly exhausting, because you constantly have to prove [that you know what you're doing]"

When it comes to values, female lawmakers are often attacked over human rights issues related to the protection of minorities, LGBTI people, refugees, and marginalized Roma communities. Particularly hateful reactions arise when defending women's rights and gender equality, especially regarding violence against women or the issue of abortion in the context of reproductive rights and health.

"It was so brutal, and I saw that, after all, even at the Council of Europe, we devote a lot of attention to protecting activists who advocate for reproductive rights, and that is truly the most brutal, I feel that nothing is as brutal as this part of the public debate, and it really shocked me at the time."

"Well, I think it's largely caused or motivated by the fact that we openly support and have queer people in our ranks (...) and then of course the fact that we're women, well, a lot of people are very bothered by the way we express ourselves"

"I gave such an emotional speech when the statute of limitations for rape was shortened, because I've been working on this issue for a long time and (...) and these are the kinds of issues that, you know (...) then I got hit with so much hate that I just couldn't handle it emotionally... "

"When I was talking about abortions, yeah, of course, too bad your mother did not get an abortion with you, or hopefully your children will find out what a terrible mother you are"

19 % of the female lawmakers surveyed reported having experienced attacks targeting their personal and/or sexual lives, with many of these attacks specifically targeting their motherhood. These attacks are based on the stereotypical belief that women should primarily devote themselves to caring for children and ruled out the possibility of reconciling their professional and maternal roles (working mother). Such narrow conceptions of motherhood serve to legitimize the exclusion of women from the public, in this case the political sphere, or as an argument for limiting their participation in these spheres.

"that I am neither a good mother nor a good MP, that why am I going there, I should be at home with the child and that I for sure don't take care of him and so on."

"For me, abnormal motherhood is, this kind of neglect of children, that I should be at home and so on, it's like it's completely out of line now."

"Even more than appearance, the status of a working mother [is triggering], the actual expectations of society that as a woman who has small children or after giving birth she should not be active in terms of employment."

For many female lawmakers, gender identity overlapped with other characteristics that expose them to multiple forms of intersecting discrimination. Some face frequent attacks targeting their ethnicity, sexual orientation, or health-related disability. These findings also highlight their heightened vulnerability caused by the intersection of disadvantages.

"Roma ethnicity and gender. Exactly the stereotypes that are often associated with women in the Roma community, they associate this with me, and so when they send me back to the settlement, I have to go back, because what should a woman, a gypsy, do in politics (...) exactly the questioning of competence, what have gypsies ever achieved and go back to the settlement and have children instead"

"They will call you a lesbian and a Jew, a lesbian and so on, and so on, and it doesn't matter whether it's my identity or not, but the minority is being insulted."

"I'm in a wheelchair, so this disadvantage is doubled, and the toilets and parliamentary spaces in the Parliament are not sufficiently barrier-free (...) so I feel it doubly, both because I'm a woman and because I'm a woman in a wheelchair."

Discrimination

59 % of respondents have faced gender-based discrimination. They most often encounter indirect discrimination within political parties or in Parliament. Approaches to gender equality vary within political parties; in some, they are more formalized and structured, while in others, the status of women is handled informally, or supposedly based on individual abilities and merits, regardless of gender. However, discrimination was identified by female MPs belonging to all political parties and parliamentary groups represented in the study. Respondents repeatedly mentioned that they lack access to decision-making, for example when it comes to strategic issues. Although the representation of women in leadership roles within party structures is gradually increasing, important strategic decisions are often made by men outside of formal meetings and discussions. Respondents also face situations where their input is not taken equally seriously, or where their male colleagues repeat what they have already said and take credit for it.

"X-times it happens to me that I say something in a meeting and after me some man repeats the same thing and has a different response and so on and so forth. And many times, men are preferred in various situations, especially when it comes to some negotiations, decision-making."

"From my point of view, I often feel that women are the ones who do more, are more involved, speak up more and yet those top positions and that decision-making authority in those narrow circles, that actually stays mainly among men, that they are the ones who make more decisions than women."

Some respondents also point out that political parties sometimes use women to improve their image. They give them a platform to make the parties appear supportive of women, but this platform often has nothing to do with the individual merits of these women or with any genuine recognition of their contributions.

"For example, there were situations during the campaign where the male candidates were, let's say, given preferential treatment, while the women were just there for show–we were on the candidate list just for the sake of being there. And this happened, for instance, at press conferences, where a woman was needed to be present, but she wasn't allowed to say anything."

"There are some mechanisms that they want to get women into their ranks, but it's not a priority, just as it's not the topic of the day, that we now have more women, they want to have, they always want to have, even on the last candidate list for the Parliament I had a very good position, on the candidate list I was [number], and according to some internal agreement I should have been in 30th place, because I was not a party member, but they understood in that party that it was appropriate for the time that they actually should have more women in the top ten and that was also an argument"

In another instance, one female respondent was not given a higher position on the candidate list or within the party structures to avoid public speculation that she was being favored or, alternatively, that this was a reward for sexual favors. Such an experience highlights the immaturity and unpreparedness of some political parties to integrate women into their structures, which can have negative effects on women's motivation to participate in politics and decision-making.

With regard to the parliamentary work, female lawmakers often face discrimination due to their motherhood or family care responsibilities, as they are unable to adequately balance these obligations. This problem has multiple dimensions; female MPs are not allowed to take maternity leave, and therefore, if they do not wish to give up their parliamentary seat, they must return to the Parliament soon after giving birth. For a long time, the National Council of the Slovak Republic lacked facilities that would facilitate childcare, such as a breastfeeding room. To date, there is no playroom for infants or space for older children. The schedule of sessions and meetings also fails to account for the individual needs of women or other caregivers—sessions often run late into the evening or even through the night. Moreover, the breaks during sessions are too short for female lawmakers to breastfeed their children or provide other care. Furthermore, in their efforts to bring about changes and better balance parenting with their legislative work, some respondents encountered a lack of understanding and ridicule even from other female lawmakers.

"I was sorry because I really didn't plan a pregnancy at this time in my life, I hadn't been able to have children for a long time, and then when it happened at the time I was elected to the Parliament, I really wanted a parliament that would be sensitive to the various life situations that female MPs can find themselves in, even unplanned ones, and the exact opposite happened."

Reporting and Investigation of Incidents

Table no. 6: Reporting rates for various forms of gender-based violence

Form of gender-based violence	Respondents who experienced it	Reported the incident (% of those experienced it)
Psychological violence	96 %	58 %
Online violence	100 %	33 %
Sexualized violence	52 %	14 %
Physical violence	37 %	50 %
Economic violence	30 %	63 %

The rate of reporting incidents of gender-based violence varies depending on the form of violence—respondents most frequently report economic, psychological, and physical violence. In cases of psychological and physical violence, these mostly involved dangerous threats, which respondents reported either within the party—if the party had the necessary infrastructure—or to the Office for the Protection of Constitutional Figures or law enforcement agencies. In cases of economic violence, female MPs reported stolen or damaged property to the police, and in cases of denial of parliamentary or financial resources, they addressed the issue with the relevant authorities.

Sexualized violence, specifically sexual harassment, has the lowest reporting rate, at just 14 %. This can be partly explained by the fact that harassment of female lawmakers often occurs behind closed doors. Only one parliamentary party formally prohibits sexual harassment and has a reporting mechanism in place, while the institutions of the National Council of the Slovak Republic have no reporting or investigation mechanisms. Women would also risk potential stigmatization, especially if the harassment is committed by their colleagues and such behavior is accepted in that environment.

When reporting online threats or dangerous messages, some respondents encountered dismissive attitude from law enforcement authorities, as well as a lack of preparedness or adequate resources to effectively investigate and prosecute online violence:

"But in the past when I reported it, the investigating police officer had a very belittling approach. So, it was noted that I am a public figure, so I have to endure a higher level of criticism. He called it that, so threats against the family in his opinion are criticism. 'But wait, when it catches up with you, we wish this on you and that and this and that will happen to you.' He said that he could protect me when it actually happens to me. I think I wouldn't care about that at that point. But I've lost trust in the police that they will investigate something like this, and that's why I don't even contact them anymore."

"They have the problem of tracking in case of these different forms, both when it comes to letters and in the case of the online form. They have a lot of trouble tracking down the sender, in the case of the online forms it was explicit, they found out that the person actually created the email address just to send it to me, then canceled it, so when they got to it, it was already deleted, so they couldn't track down anything more about the sender."

When the respondent went to the police to file a complaint about a stalker who had been sending her numerous sexual videos and photos, she had the following experience with the police:

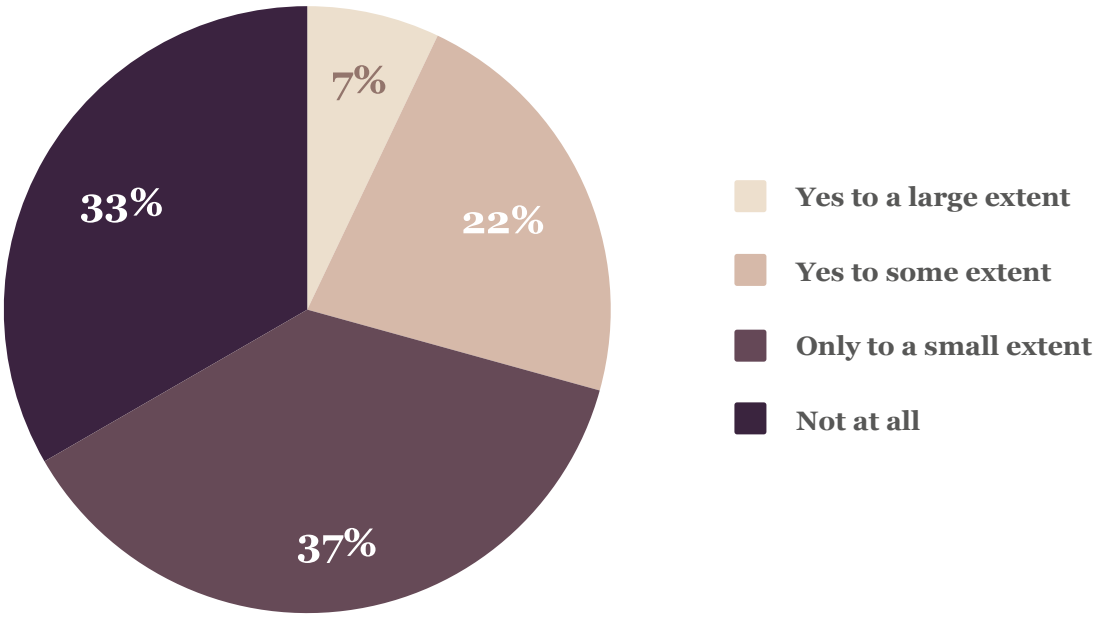
> *"Well, they called two other colleagues and it wasn't that they were humiliating me, but it was like they were making fun of me, and I laughed too, yeah, these jokes, but I can imagine that when a woman comes who is not like me, she doesn't have the same personality as me, I think that's an impassable barrier for her."*

These experiences highlight the technical and personnel gaps within law enforcement agencies, particularly in their approach to addressing gender-based violence against female politicians or, more specifically, in investigating online violence or cases of anonymous threats. Some female respondents also had positive experiences reporting threats.

> *"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."*

Impacts of Gender-Based Violence on the Personal and Professional Lives of Female Members of Parliament

Chart no. 4: Do you limit your activity in any way in order to avoid potential attacks?



Nearly one-third of female respondents acknowledge that they limit their political activities to some extent to avoid potential attacks. At the same time, 63 % of female respondents have taken measures to protect themselves or better manage difficult situations. Most commonly, this involves limiting the use of social media or delegating its management to assistants, or using so-called "troll walls," which automatically block comments containing certain words. Some respondents also mentioned seeing a therapist or carrying pepper spray. In rare, more serious cases, they also sought police protection or requested data protection, i.e., blocking their personal data in public records. Some others chose self-censorship as a strategy.

"my defense of the right to abortion, and I've been thinking about it ever since, I haven't actually communicated anything about abortion since then and I have to admit that there was some kind of self-censorship and that to some extent this just works, because it was so brutal (...)"

The female lawmakers surveyed described various ways in which experiences of violence have affected their personal and professional lives. Just under a third of them said that the violence had no impact on them. They most often explained this by saying that they had grown accustomed to it, had learned to steel themselves against it, or viewed it as part of their political work.

"Not a big one. I'm fine with it, because it's not a lot and it's not that personal, so I'm handling it for now, because I'm a pretty resilient person by nature."

"None, it's about personality, it doesn't affect me, I don't have anxiety."

"It definitely makes the job more unpleasant in some way, like when I have to look at the negative aspects, yes, but at the same time, I think it's also very much about my personality type, that I'm someone who can probably separate myself from it quite well and also because I've been managing social media for quite a while, so I'm kind of used to it anyway (...)"

"They toughen me up. And I went into politics a little naively and I didn't know what it all entailed. And during the period of the strongest pressures, it also affected my mental health, but I find great strength in my family, and I certainly feel very strongly that I can't let myself down for the sake of my children."

7 % of female respondents even perceive a positive impact of gender-based violence on their careers, particularly in terms of their visibility and its effect on their inner motivation.

"Well, I started to be relevant when the attacks started. So, it´s positive. I'm laughing, I don't know how to explain it to you, but you probably understand what I'm talking about (...) It's obvious, I wouldn't be able to pay for such a PR campaign with any agency [as resulted from the attacks]. And I take it really positively, because a politician needs to be recognized, that means yes, it helped me become recognizable, so that's why I say that for me it's more positive."

"In my opinion, it's motivating. Because it's like, yes, it surprises you at first, but then you say, well, you probably need to do a little more to convince those people."

However, most respondents perceive the negative impacts of gender-based violence primarily on their mental health, family life, and professional life–especially in terms of their motivation. Some respondents also mentioned a diminished sense of safety and concerns for their loved ones.

"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."

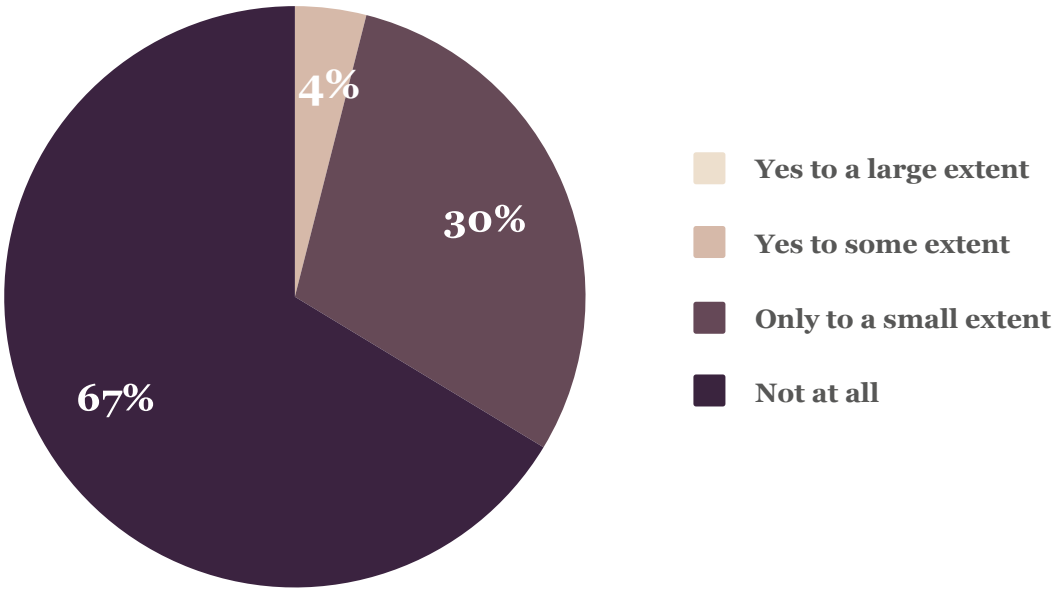
"Those consequences are certainly unpleasant, it affects both my personal life and my professional life, because ever since then, whenever I walk into a room and someone looks at me, I always wonder if they're looking at me with the intention of attacking me, or if they simply want to show support, or if they're just looking (...) I see the negative effects on my career more as a kind of withdrawal resulting from all this; I've asked myself many times where the line is, how long it still makes sense and how long I can endure it, and I have these phases where I simply feel immense anxiety just thinking about entering parliament—so yes, to some extent I've limited my media appearances, and TV debates, because they automatically always bring another wave of attacks, and since for me it just keeps bringing back that horror I went through back then, I definitely avoid it to some extent."

The interviews reveal that female lawmakers largely have to cope with gender-based violence on their own. Although they have the support of their families, colleagues, and teams of assistants, and in rare cases seek therapeutic help, they lack systematic tools that provide coordinated and targeted support in addressing these situations.

Effectiveness of Available Tools for Addressing Cases of Gender-Based Violence

The research findings highlight the ineffectiveness and inadequacy of existing mechanisms for detecting, investigating, and prosecuting attacks against women in the public sphere.

Chart no. 5: Are there sufficient mechanisms and tools in Slovakia to identify, investigate, and prosecute gender-based violence against female politicians?



More than two-thirds of the respondents (67 %) believe that these mechanisms are totally insufficient and ineffective, and another 30 % consider them to be somewhat insufficient and ineffective. Only 4 % of the respondents (one person) consider them somewhat sufficient and effective.

Female MPs have tools available to them on three levels: they can turn to law enforcement agencies or the Office for the Protection of Constitutional Figures, utilize the mechanisms of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, or rely on the support of their parliamentary group or political party. Support mechanisms provided by the parliamentary caucus, political party, or the National Council of the Slovak Republic are cited by 67 % of respondents. It should be noted, however, that perceptions and awareness of the availability of these mechanisms vary by individual and may not reflect their actual scope.

At the parliamentary level, members of parliament may file a complaint with the Committee on Mandate and Parliamentary Privilege. However, their experiences with investigations and the sanctions imposed for insults vary, and the committee can only act in cases involving incidents between members of the Parliament.

In January 2026, the National Council of the Slovak Republic amended its Rules of Procedure, which now include a new Code of Ethics for Members of the National Council. Among other things, the Code sets standards of conduct and prohibits personal insults, vulgar language, and statements that undermine human dignity.[10] However, neither the Rules of Procedure nor the code of ethics are gender-sensitive; they do not contain provisions addressing the specific situation of female members or female parliamentary staff, nor do they mention or prohibit sexual harassment. Respondents assess the National Council of the Slovak Republic's tools for the prevention, investigation, and punishment of gender-based violence as insufficient, and in some cases practically nonexistent.

> *"In my opinion, the National Council as an institution is absolutely nothing—a complete zero; it's still stuck in the last century in every possible way, I'd say."*

> *"First of all, of course, we had a fantastic opportunity to include a section in the code of ethics, and I communicated this to them repeatedly, including in the working group (...) part of it specifically addressed the fight against sexual harassment and other forms of sexualized violence, not only against male and female members of parliament, but also against staff and employees, because they, unfortunately, experience it as well, so this, of course, was not reflected in the final result. This is certainly one of the tools that would serve as a signal to both Parliament and society, and it would also be enforceable, meaning it would have both a preventive and a deterrent effect."*

Parliamentary caucuses and political parties offer various forms of support that can be used in cases of gender-based violence. Most commonly, these include legal and advisory services through which female lawmakers can seek guidance on how to proceed in addressing specific cases.

Only one political party has adopted a more comprehensive approach—it has organized joint safety training, provided training for staff members on the safe management of social media, and offers lawmakers an online tool for blocking inappropriate content. This party also coordinates incident reporting and a unified response to violence and threats: reports are sent to a centralized address, where a specialized team assesses them for risk and proposes next steps, referring some cases to law enforcement authorities.

Nevertheless, none of these instruments specifically addresses gender-based violence against female politicians or offers gender-sensitive mechanisms or procedures. Furthermore, according to some respondents, cases of gender-based violence in the National Council of the Slovak Republic are not sufficiently condemned in public by members of the Parliament and other constitutional officials.

> *"I also simply miss seeing any condemnation of such behavior from the country's top officials; on the contrary, we tend to see them either supporting it or being part of it, because that, too, shapes society—and there are also some softer tools we could use."*

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10 Amended Rules of Procedure of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. See here: 34/2026 Z. z. - Zákon, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky č. 350/1996 Z. z. o rokovacom poriadku Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky v znení neskorších predpisov a ktorým sa mení zákon Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky č. 120/1993 Z. z. o platových pomeroch niektorých ústavných činiteľov Slovenskej republiky v znení neskorších predpisov
Code of Ethics of a Member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic: nrsr.sk/web/Dynamic/DocumentPreview.aspx?DocID=583451

"The first thing is that society simply doesn't place enough emphasis on any form of violence, especially against women; there's so little attention paid to it, yet we can't even get the Istanbul Convention ratified (...)"

"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."

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conducted research and analysis confirmed that violence against female politicians represents a grave social and structural problem in Slovakia. It fundamentally influences and shapes the lives of female politicians and their loved ones and has broader consequences for society as a whole. It contributes to women leaving politics prematurely, prevents them from exercising their right to participate in the governance of public affairs, and threatens democracy itself. Low female participation in politics results in us living "in a democracy with a male face"—an incomplete and distorted form of democracy.

It is important that we do not tolerate gender-based violence and do not support a culture of silence surrounding it. Female politicians must be able to carry out their duties without violence or coercion. They must have access to protection, the ability to speak out, and the means to report incidents of violence. Further, society must be capable of stopping it and holding those who commit gender-based violence accountable. Such systemic change requires a combination of tools, including support for equality not only in politics but in all areas of life. As part of the next phases of the project ***Recognize, Resist, Rise Up: Tackling Gender-Based Violence Against Women in Politics***, we will develop a set of detailed measures to change the situation; for now, we present a summary of the most important ones.

- For effective prevention, it is crucial to adopt comprehensive measures, including amendment of legislative standards, the establishment of clear rules and sanctions for violence, the creation of new and the revision of existing codes of ethics (particularly the Code of Ethics for Members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic), educating politicians about gender-based violence and its prevention, including education and training on sexual harassment.

- Parliament, the government, and individual political parties must adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward violence and sexual harassment. It is essential that men be involved in solutions and prevention programs. Media involvement is also necessary.

- It is necessary that all institutions and agencies, as well as other helping professions involved in addressing violence, have sufficient knowledge about this type of violence and are able to address it effectively and without prejudice. In addition to establishing mechanisms and rules, education and awareness raising can be particularly helpful in this regard.

- At the level of parliament and political parties, it is necessary to establish an independent mechanism for reporting and investigating violence and harassment that preserves confidentiality and anonymity. Female politicians experiencing violence must be provided with protection, professional support, and counseling.

- Alarming data on online violence should draw attention to the need to regulate social media content and call for technology companies to take responsibility for stopping online violence, or for their coordinated involvement in the development and implementation of related measures. In this context, it is crucial to successfully implement *Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence,* which comprehensively addresses the issue of online violence, defines specific criminal offenses in the digital space, and establishes rules for their effective prosecution.

An indispensable (sine qua non) condition for ending violence against women politicians is the elimination of its root causes, which are gender inequality and the discrimination associated with it, persistent gender stereotypes, and the gender bias of institutions, including political parties and parliament. Women and men must be guaranteed the right to participate jointly and equally in decision-making, as well as in the governance and development of our country. And to enjoy the fruits of development and life in a democracy equally. Gender equality is precisely the prerequisite for a life free from discrimination, doubts, exclusion, and fear of violence.

About the Organization

Since 2001, Možnosť voľby has been protecting and promoting reproductive rights and gender equality in the Slovak Republic. It is known as one of the most active feminist advocacy organizations and the only one that systematically focuses on the right to safe abortion. We are also active in the prevention of gender-based violence and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into public policies. We comment and provide feedback on legislation, inform and engage the public, participate in consultative bodies, and collaborate with independent media, political parties, and public institutions. We are the organization with the most extensive experience in implementing gender equality education and training for adults in Slovakia. We educate various target groups, including female and male politicians. We further operate a support helpline on safe abortions and reproductive health.

About the Authors

Kristína Gotthardová is a researcher focusing on gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence against women in politics and female journalists. She worked at the Central European Labor Studies Institute (CELSI), where she covered topics of gender equality, sexual harassment in the workplace, and collective bargaining, and completed an internship at the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). She received Master's degree from Public policy at the Central European University (CEU) in Vienna and from European-American relations at the University of Regensburg in Germany.

Adriana Mesochoritisová is a political scientist, gender equality trainer, and statutory representative of the non-profit organization Možnosť voľby. She studied political science and journalism at the Faculty of Philosophy of Comenius University. Her master's thesis on violence against women was awarded the Comenius University Rector's Prize. She has been actively involved in the NGO sector since 1999, with the exception of 2003–2004, when she served as director of the Department of Equal Opportunities at the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic. She is an appointed expert of the Slovak Government Council for Human Rights and Gender Equality and a member of the Committee for Gender Equality. In 2015, she was named a laureate of the Fifth Woman award in the ACTIVISM category. She focuses on the prevention of gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and the integration of a gender perspective into public policies.

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Attachment: Interview Guide Slovakia

Recognize, Resist, Rise-up:
Tackling Gender-based Violence against Women in Politics

Background information:

- *What is your age?*
- *What is your highest level of attained education?*
- *Do you have children? If so, how many?*
- *How many years have you served as Member of Parliament?*

Psychological violence:

1. **Have you ever encountered sexist remarks or comments with sexual undertones made about you?**

   (a) Yes. Please provide examples. In what form? Online or in person, from whom did you encounter such remarks most often?

   (b) No

2. **Have you ever been the target of harassing behaviour, been subjected to unpleasant or intimidating behaviour, such as unwanted attention or verbal attacks, or any other interaction that made you feel uncomfortable or scared?**

   (a) Yes. What specifically did this involve? Was it part of a personal interaction or online? Who behaved like this?

   (b) No

3. **Have you ever received threats directed at you, your family, your partner, or your loved ones?**

   (a) Yes. Can you describe the incident in more detail? Did it happen in response to a specific event? Was it in person or online?

   (b) No.

4. **Have you ever been followed or stalked in person or online? (For example, somebody repeatedly following or appearing at your home, at work, or other places you visit; informing you of your whereabouts; monitoring your online activity; hacking into your accounts, e.g., email, social networks; impersonating you on the internet. Other repeated behaviour that caused you fear.)**

   (a) Yes. Can you describe the incident in more detail?

   (b) No.

5. **Have you ever experienced that the media, news outlets, or tabloids published photos of you that were derogatory, inappropriate, or had sexual undertones?**

   (a) Yes. Please describe the incident.

   (b) No.

6. **Did you report any of the above incidents through official channels, such as reporting to the police or other official body or reporting channel/institution?**

   (a) Yes. How specifically? Who did you contact and what was the outcome?

   (b) No. Did you deal with the situation in any other way? What steps did you take?

Online violence:

7. **What profiles do you have on social media? Are they private or public? How do you manage them? Do you use any apps or tools to control content?**

8. Have you ever had photos or videos of yourself, real or created with AI, posted or shared on social media that were humiliating or had sexual undertones?

(a) Yes. What specifically did this involve?

(b) No.

9. Do you encounter hateful comments or threats under your posts on social media?

(a) Yes. On which platforms does it happen most often?
Who is commonly the author, are they more often men or women?

(b) No.

10. Do you receive hateful comments or threats in the form of private messages, letters, or emails?

(a) Yes. What is their most common form and content? Who is the most frequent author? Are they more often women or men?

(b) No.

11. Has someone published your private information, such as your phone number or address, on the internet?

(a) Yes. Please describe the circumstances in more detail.

(b) No.

12. Have you reported any of the mentioned incidents to official body/institution or other mechanism?

(a) Yes. To who exactly and with what outcome?

(b) No.

Sexualized violence:

13. Have you ever experienced sexual harassment? For example, sexualized comments or jokes, sexual advances, unwanted invitations to go on a date, or unwanted touching.

(a) Yes. Please describe in more detail. Who committed this behaviour?

(b) No.

Note: Mention sensitive character of the next question and remind the respondent that they have the choice to refuse to answer the question, take a break or contact support and to only disclose such information they feel comfortable sharing.

14. Have you ever experienced sexual assault or been forced to perform sexual activities? For example, coercion into sexual practices, attempted rape, rape or other?

(a) Yes.

(b) No.

15. If you have experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault have you reported it?

(a) Yes. To who and with what outcome?

(b) No.

Physical violence:

16. Have you ever been physically assaulted? For example, has someone slapped you, hit you, pushed you, or thrown something at you that could have hurt you?

(a) Yes. Could you please describe the incident in more detail?

(b) No

17. Has somebody threatened you with using a weapon or a knife against you, or attacked you with a weapon or knife?

(a) Yes. Please describe the incident in more detail.

(b) No

18. Have you ever been detained against your will, had your movement restricted or limited (e.g., you were unable to leave a building), or been kidnapped?

(a) Yes. Can you please describe the incident in more detail?

(b) No.

19. Have you reported any of the mentioned incidents to official body/institution or other mechanism?

(a) Yes. To who and with what outcome?

(b) No.

Economic violence:

20. Have you ever been denied financial resources to which you were entitled? For example, parliamentary allowances, sponsorship donations, campaign contributions?

(a) Yes. Please describe the situation in more detail.

(b) No.

21. Have you ever been denied parliamentary resources to which you were entitled (premises, office, computers, staff, security)?

(a) Yes. Please describe the situation in more detail.

(b) No.

22. Has your property ever been destroyed or damaged? (car, house/apartment, office premises, burglary, etc.)

(a) Yes, please describe the incident.

(b) No.

23. Have you reported any of the mentioned incidents to official body/institution or other mechanism?

(a) Yes. To who exactly and with what outcome?

(b) No.

Concluding questions

24. Have you ever encountered discriminatory behaviour that put you at a disadvantage compared to other colleagues? For example, your position on the candidate list, space in political campaigns or discussions, power in internal decision making?

(a) Yes. Please provide more details.

(b) No.

25. What do the attacks and insults directed at you most commonly target?

(a) Gender

(b) Appearance

(c) Age

(d) Personal or sexual life

(e) Competence or lack thereof

(f) Values

(g) Other. What?

26. Do you think the attacks and insults are partly motivated by some characteristic of yours or your belonging to a particular minority or group? (e.g. ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, other).

(a) Yes. What exactly?

(b) No.

27. Approximately how often do you experience attacks (in personal encounters and online)?

(a) Every day

(b) Once a week to several times a week

(c) 1-3 times a month

(d) Once every few months

28. Do you avoid certain topics or otherwise limit your political activity in order to limit potential attacks directed at you?

(a) Definitely yes.

(b) Rather yes.

(c) Rather no.

(d) Absolutely not.

(e) I don't know/ I am unable to answer that.

29. Have you taken any steps to protect yourself from attacks directed at you? (E.g., leaving social media, taking a break, transferring their management to other people, visiting a therapist, acquiring security, etc.)

(a) Yes. Please describe what steps you have taken.

(b) No.

30. What impact do attacks have on your professional and personal life?

31. Do you think that there are sufficient mechanisms and tools to detect, investigate, and punish hateful, harassing, and sexualized attacks against women who are active in public life, primarily female politicians in Slovakia?

(a) Yes.

(b) Rather yes. What could be improved?

(c) Rather no. What specifically should be improved or is currently lacking?

(d) Definitely no. What specifically should be improved or put into practice?

(e) I don't know, I am unable to answer the question.

32. Do you have access to any support mechanisms from your political party or institutions of the National Council of the Slovak Republic? (reporting and investigation mechanism or commission, legal or psychological counselling, funding for social media management, etc.)

(a) Yes. What specifically?

(b) No.

33. Would you like to add anything else on this topic, or do you feel that you have not addressed an important aspect or what would like to provide more information about a specific incident?