



## **Violence against Women in Politics: Experiences and Ways Forward for Women Leaders**

*A Side-Event to the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women*

Organised by UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, and  
the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

**Venue:** Online. To participate, please [register here](#).

**Date/Time:** 17 March 2021, 07.00-08.30 EST (12.00-13.30 CET)

The year 2021 marks an important anniversary for reflecting on progress made towards the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment, including women's participation in political and public life. Adopted 26 years ago, the landmark [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) addresses women in power and decision making as a critical area of concern and last year's review of its implementation has brought renewed attention to the situation of women's participation in public life and gender-responsive institutions and to the need to accelerate the closing of gender gaps therein. The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and specifically Goal 5](#) commits and guides the world to achieving gender equality and women's rights. The [2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality](#) recognizes "equal rights of women and men and the protection of their human rights as essential to peace, sustainable democracy, economic development and therefore to security and stability in the OSCE region."

The sixty-fifth session of the [Commission on the Status of Women](#) will take place from 15 to 26 March 2021 under the priority theme of *Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls*. Over the past twenty-five years, women's participation and decision-making in public life has increased to the current 29 percent average in the ECA and OSCE regions, but has not yet reached near to gender parity for equal power-sharing between women and men. Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, women have increasingly emerged as powerful change agents demanding, influencing and leading transformative movements globally, nationally and locally through their involvement in elected political office, political activism, and through peaceful protest.

Violence and abuse of women as a result of political participation is a global issue which indicative studies suggest is pervasive. It affects women in all countries and at all levels; from Heads of State, Ministers, Members of Parliament, mayors, women in local government, and women political activists.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, studies point to a sharp rise in violence against women in politics and in elections around the world – online and offline. Violence against women in politics includes threats to life, dignity, and the right to equal participation and representation. It perpetuates the exclusion of women from public life and decision-making. Women politicians, rights defenders, leaders of women's organizations and feminist groups are targeted in person and online, with online abuse and cyberbullying becoming increasingly common. Women from underrepresented groups experience violence at disproportionate levels. Violence against women in political and public life is a distinct form of gender-based violence that is intended to stop women from

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women and UNDP, 2017; see also the Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics to the UN General Assembly (UN, 2018, A/73/301).

accessing power and silence their voices in decision-making. Furthermore, violence against known women leaders can have a symbolic effect which further suppresses other women from seeking to enter public discourse or politics for fear of becoming a target themselves. Any threat of, gender-based violence that prevents women from exercising their equal right to participate in public affairs, vote and be elected, assemble or access services, has detrimental impacts: it impedes the work of public institutions, weakens policy outcomes, and stalls and undermines peace and development; it is a violation of women's human rights, as has been [noted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women](#).

As is noted in the [UN Secretary General's report to CSW65](#), "women politicians have been killed in office, left their positions after receiving death threats or withdrawn from elections citing abuse."<sup>2</sup> Others that have spoken out against the violence targeting women and their political involvement have done so at a risk of experiencing additional personal backlash. The [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 4/18 on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women](#) emphasizes that women with public exposure are likely to experience specific forms of violence, threats, or harassment, in relation to their work. An essential part of the solution to violence against women in politics is increasing the ability of women leaders to safely speak out against their abusers, to remove the culture of silence around the abuse, change social norms around harassment and intimidation of women in the public sphere, and in turn, for legal frameworks to provide adequate complaint, protection and support mechanisms as well as effective remedy and recourse at all levels. Democratic institutions, parliaments and political parties, play a key role in ensuring a safe and violence-free political environment for all involved.

Broad awareness raising is key to addressing the culture of silence around violence against women in politics. An online advocacy campaign can provide a platform for exchange of experiences and good practices for addressing violence against women in politics, while also encouraging political leaders, both women and men, to speak up publically about the phenomenon and provide solutions. Recognizing the chilling impact of such violence on women aspiring for politics and particularly on marginalized groups of women, social media can ensure additional outreach particularly to those traditionally excluded from such debates.

### ***Aim of the Side Event***

This side-event will be an open panel discussion, creating a safe space for the panelists who are women politicians and women leaders from the OSCE/UN Women ECA region, who have been, and still are, involved and active in actions to end violence against women in politics and for peaceful change. Co-hosted by UN Women Europe and Central Asia Regional Office, and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) the side-event will provide a platform for panelists to individually and collectively discuss their experiences with harassment and violence in politics, solutions to address this violence, and methods to rise above to continue their important work in the public sphere. The event will be followed with a specifically designed online advocacy campaign, with a dedicated slogan and visuals to be used on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, encouraging an exchange of experiences and calling for strengthened efforts to addressing violence against women in politics. The event aligns with the priority theme of the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2021 "Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls" as well as with [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life](#).

### ***About the Organizers***

[UN Women](#) is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

The [OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights \(ODIHR\)](#) provides support, assistance, and expertise to participating States and civil society to promote democracy and human rights for all, including working to advance women's political participation.

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<sup>2</sup> Report of the Secretary General, Commission on the Status of Women 65<sup>th</sup> Session, E/CN.6/2021/3