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**Women's Participation in Politics  
And Decision Making  
in the Western Balkans**

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REPORT

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**Conservatives**



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## Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>6</b>
ABOUT THIS REPORT .....	7
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>7</b>
INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS .....	7
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE WESTERN BALKANS .....	9
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN WESTERN BALKANS .....	10
<b>LEGAL ANALYSIS</b> .....	<b>12</b>
ALBANIA .....	12
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA .....	14
KOSOVO .....	16
MONTENEGRO .....	17
NORTH MACEDONIA .....	18
SERBIA .....	19
<b>ANALYSIS OF STEREOTYPES ENDURED BY WOMEN POLITICIANS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND THEIR EFFECT ON SHAPING WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING</b> .....	<b>21</b>
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS (VAWP) – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....	21
SEXISM, HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT IN EUROPE .....	22
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS .....	23
TYPES OF VIOLENCE .....	24
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN WESTERN BALKANS .....	25
<b>PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES WITHIN POLITICAL PARTIES</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>VAWP – OPINION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS IN WB</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>WORKS CITED</b> .....	<b>38</b>
ANNEX .....	43



## Abbreviations

AGD	Aleanca e Grave Deputete (Alliance of Women Members of Parliament)
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEDAW	Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discriminating against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
DEMOS	Demo kratski s Avez (Democratic Alliance), Montenegro
DEVAW	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women
DOM	Demokratska obnova na Makedonija (Democratic Renewal of Macedonia)
DP	Democratic Party of Albania (Partia Demokratike)
EC	European Commission
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
GADC	Gender Alliance for Development Centre
GEL	Gender Equality Law
HDZ	Hrvatska demokratska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine (The Croatian Democratic Union of BiH)
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
ISP	Institute of Political Studies
LDK	Liga Demokratike e Kosovës (Democratic League of Kosovo)
LVV	Lëvizja Vetë Vendosija (Self-Determination Movement of Kosovo)
NOVA	The New Serbian Democracy
OSCE	Organization for security and Co-Operation in Europe
OSCE/ODIHR	The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)
DPK	Democratic Party of Kosovo
SDA	Strake Demokratske Akcije (Democratic Action Party), BiH
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSM	Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija (Social Democratic Union of North Macedonia)
SMI	Socialist Movement for Integration of Albania
SNS	Srpska napredna stranka (The Serbian Progressive Party)
SNSD	Stranka Nezavisnih Socijal-Demokrata (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats), BiH



SP	Socialist Party of Albania
SPS	Socijalistička partija Srbije (Socialist Party of Serbia)
DPS	Demokratska partija socijalista Crne Gore (The Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro)
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution, 1325
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWP	Violence against Women in Politics
VMRO DPMNE	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity.
WB	Western Balkans
WPN	Women’s Parliamentary Network



## Introduction

Over the past two decades, women's participation in politics has slowly but steadily increased both quantitatively and qualitatively. Since 1995, the number of women in national parliaments has almost doubled from 11 per cent in 1995 to 24 per cent in 2018 (UN Women, 2019). However, as of January 2019, only 11 women are serving as Heads of State and 10 are serving as Head of Government (UN Women, 2019). Only 24 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women as of November 2018 (UN Women, 2019).

In the Western Balkans, gender equality, and especially political representation, is “unfinished business”. Despite visible progress in ensuring equal rights between women and men, challenges remain, especially in addressing the conditions conducive to the high prevalence of violence against women, and their meaningful participation in the public life of their countries.

It should be noted that legislation on gender equality in the Western Balkans is broadly compliant with international and European Union (EU) standards. Their Constitutions guarantee a broad range of human rights and freedoms and there is a comprehensive legal framework that promotes gender equality and provides protection against discrimination. However, there is a joint challenge in the proper implementation of this legal framework, and low trust in public institutions and their ability to guarantee real equality between women and men. Thus, implementation, the key to good legislation, is insufficient (European Parliament, EP, 2018).

**Table 1: Alignment with EU and international commitments**

	<b>Albania</b>	<b>BiH</b>	<b>Kosovo</b>	<b>Montenegro</b>	<b>North Macedonia</b>	<b>Serbia</b>
<b>CEDAW</b>	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Optional protocol CEDAW</b>	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>The national legislation on GE transposes EU directives</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Gender equality law</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Gender Equality Action Plan/Strategy</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



Women's legitimacy and presence in legislative making bodies is often questioned by their colleagues and the public in general. Stereotypes related to women's roles in society, their perceived fragility and indivisibility with the life of the family, in the minds of people, fuels stereotyping and harassment when they become public figures. The ubiquity of violence against women, especially in intimate partner relationships, and in general, in the domestic context, has left violence against women in the political realm at the margins of discussions and measures against gender-based violence.

The Conservative Party, International Department, initiated the research on laws and policies around the participation of women in politics in the Western Balkans, covering the following countries: Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

This regional analysis sheds light on the situation in the targeted countries, with a special focus on the existence and types of violence against women in the political arena.

More specifically, this paper is aimed to answer the following:

- To find out if there is a scope of work on detrimental laws and policies in the Western Balkans region that confine the political progress of women.
- To find out the level of the Violence against Women in Politics (VAWP) in the Western Balkans and which countries have the biggest problems with laws and policies in the Western Balkans region that confines the political progress of women gender-based violence (including social media abuse).
- To find out how parties in the Western Balkans promote women and how far women can progress in a political party and country (politically).
- To find the correlation between positive discrimination (gender quotas) and the political participation of women in the Western Balkans: Solid Avenue for inclusion?
- To investigate the double standard and stereotypes endured by women politicians in the Western Balkans and their effect on shaping women's political campaigning.
- Decision-making positions as a male prerogative in the WB: Where do the current pre-election and post-election gender mainstreaming tools fail?
- The practice of perpetuating gender roles in the Western Balkans as a means of hampering the political participation (election) of women.

## **Methodology**

In order to answer the research questions listed above, the authors conducted their research from March to April 2019.

A literature review was conducted in each target country on documents such as Electoral Codes, Gender Equality Law and Strategies, studies from Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), European Union (EU) progress reports of the targeted countries, UNDP, UN Women, or Civil Society Organizations (CSOs),



reports on elections, Anti-discrimination Laws or acts, and statutes of the three largest political parties with representation in the legislative branch in each targeted country. Interviews with women politicians from political parties of the targeted countries were conducted by the experts involved from each target country. A collection existing cases of violence against women in politics and decision making in each country was reviewed as well.

## About this Report

This report first analyses the international standards for more women's participation in politics and decision making, and then continues with the political participation of women in politics in targeted countries. A legal analysis of the Electoral Codes and the statutes of 3 main political parties in each of the targeted countries was prepared to find out how parties in the Western Balkan countries promote women and how far women can progress in a political party and in their country. Some legal solutions for women's participation in politics and decision making are provided. It then examines the socio-economic status of women in Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The report then brings some examples to find out the level of the VAWP in the Western Balkans and which countries have the biggest problems with gender-based violence (including social media abuse). The report concludes with a wide range of recommendations on how to include more women in politics and decision making and how to protect them from violence.

## Literature Review

### International Standards

The quest for equal participation in public life has produced significant advancements at the international level. In numbers and substance, women are better represented, have a seat at the table, and have obtained more decision-making power. Countries in the Western Balkans have signed, become parties to and ratified a number of international instruments related to human rights, in general, and women's rights, specifically as it concerns their participation in the public life of their country and in the international arena.

At the most basic level, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), recognizes the equality between women and men and mandates equal access to public service and the principles of non-discrimination based on sex. The declaration has thus established a widespread set of principles that countries adhering to the United Nations ought to internalize (UDHR, Preamble and Article 21).

A few years after the approval of the UDHR, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), more specifically refers to political participation in its Article 3, whereby it requires state parties to "*ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights*" as they are detailed in the covenant. The Covenant further recognizes the right of every citizen to be elected through the



universal and equal suffrage and echoes the right to have access, on general terms of equality, and to public service, as emphasized by the UDHR (ICCPR, Article 25).

However, it wasn't until the emergence of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, that a bill of rights for women recognized the inherent power imbalances between women and men in the world. The convention set an agenda for governments' actions to end discrimination wherever it exists. The CEDAW brought to attention the fact that despite a stated commitment towards the UDHR, there is persistent and often blatant discrimination against women, which negatively affects their participation, on equal terms with men, in the political, social economic and cultural life of their countries. In addition, CEDAW calls upon state parties to take all necessary measures, legislative or otherwise, to advance women, especially in political, social, economic and cultural fields, emphasizing equality of men as a prerequisite for their full enjoyment of their human rights (United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, CEDAW, Article 7). However, it was not until the 1990s that violence against women, in all its forms, in public and private life, committed by individuals or the state, was recognized in the UN.

In addition, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), focused on changing, especially social norms that make violence acceptable in society. More specifically, it calls upon parties to:

*"Develop, in a comprehensive way, preventive approaches and all those measures of a legal, political, administrative and cultural nature that promote the protection of women against any form of violence."* The Declaration defines such violence as *"any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Such violence affects one of every three women in the world. It may be physical, sexual, psychological or economic in nature, and no society, culture or socioeconomic class is immune to it"* (UN, Beijing Declaration and Plan for Action, 1995).

The 1995 Beijing Declaration also requires the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. In its Action Plan, the declaration further details both violence against women and decision-making, and power, albeit in separate chapters. The Action plan dedicated extended attention to the lower status of women in the family, community and society in general, as caused by the perpetual violence against women.

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, from its first article, discusses the need to increase representation of women in all decision-making levels at the national, regional and international institutions. A merit of the resolution is the provision to ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary.



Relevant for post-conflict societies is a recognition from the resolution that there is a need to account for the *"differential needs of women and men at all stages of rebuilding of societies and the importance of concrete mechanisms to ensure that all people – women and men – enjoy the freedoms and participate equally in rehabilitation and reconstruction"* (UN Council Resolution 1325 On Women, Peace and Security, point 8, p. 167).

At the regional level, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, known also as the Istanbul Convention, is one of the most important and comprehensive instruments against gender-based violence. While it does not specifically focus on VAWP, its overarching purpose definitely includes protection of women from this type of violence. As it is written in its text, the purpose of the convention is to protect women against all forms of violence as well as prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention, 2011). While domestic violence in many countries is the main type of violence to which women are subjected, it is important to recognize that it is a far-reaching phenomenon which affects women in the public and private sphere. As such, the Istanbul Convention takes that into account to establish a wide array of types of violence committed against women, in different settings, and with different consequences.

Moreover, the 5<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the UN requires the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Specifically, one of its targets searches to *"eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation."*

### **Political Participation of Women in the Western Balkans**

The position of women in the political sphere in the Western Balkans has seen substantial improvements in the past decades, both in terms of their quantitative presence in politics, as well as meaningful participation in political processes.

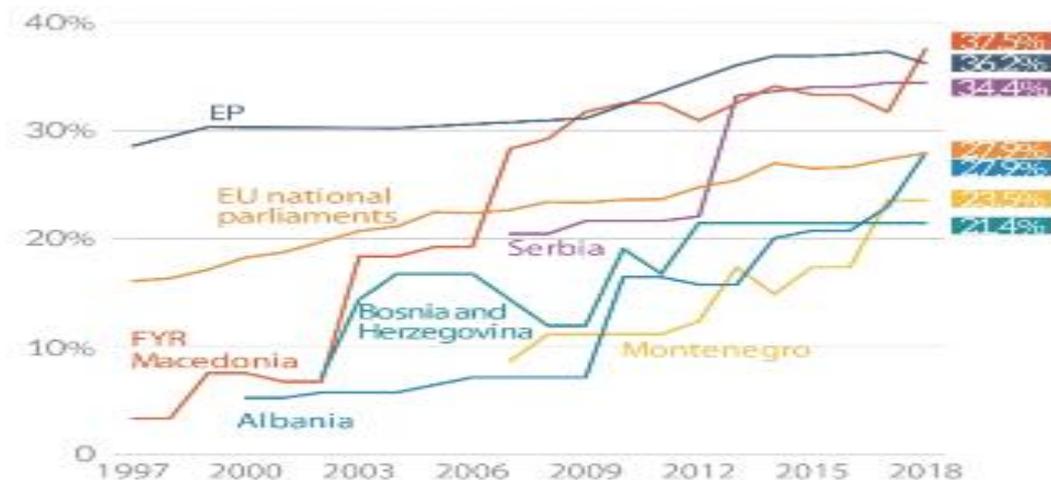
Throughout the Western Balkans gender quotas require political parties to include at least 30 % women in their lists of candidates (40 % in BiH and North Macedonia), but they are not always adhered to (European Parliament, 2018).

Parliaments in the region have seen an increase in the number of elected representatives. After the Parliamentary Elections of 2017 Albania had 41 women in parliament out of 140 members of the parliament, or 29%. The women in parliament in Albania established as well the Alliance of Women in Parliament which is not active actually due to DP and LSI boycott. Bosnia Herzegovina's parliament has 21% of its member's women, in Kosovo women make up 33% of the members of parliament, 38% in North Macedonia, 23% in Montenegro and 37% in Serbia (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2019).

However, according to Friedrich Ebert Foundation (2017) this does not automatically imply that gender equality and women's rights are promoted and defended.



**Figure 1. Political participation of women**



Source: Inter-parliamentary Union, EPRS, 2018.

**Source: European Parliament, 2018**

Women also hold other leadership positions; currently, two of the highest positions that of the Prime Minister and Speaker of Parliament are held by women in Serbia and the deputy speaker of parliament in Albania is also a woman. Furthermore, in Kosovo, until 2016, the position of president was held by a woman and until very recently, the presidency of two entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was occupied by women, which shows the inevitable involvement of women in the political sphere and to the highest levels of government and decision-making (UNDP, 2017).

At the local level, Albania achieved a breakthrough when the imposition of a 50% quota on the list of council members increased the representation of women in local councils from 12% to 35% in 2015 (UNDP, 2017). However, out of 61 municipalities, only 9 are headed by women in Albania (Gender Alliance for Development Centre, 2015). In addition in Albania women councilors are establishing Alliances of women’s councilors with the help of donors, mostly UN Women. According to the (European Parliament, 2019) in Bosnia & Herzegovina, councilwomen represent 19% of elected members of local councils, while in the election for mayor only 6% were women. In Montenegro, women's participation in local government stands at 27%; the situation appears to be more problematic in Kosovo, where only 4% of council members are women and there are no women mayors. In addition, a Women’s Parliamentary Network has been established. However, women are severely underrepresented in local administrations, with 9 out of 169 municipalities having women as mayors, as well as in Foreign Service, armed forces and in decision-making positions across all sectors (CEDAW, 2019).

**Socio-economic status of women in Western Balkans**

The socio-economic status of women, their ability to be economically independent, and position in society is an important predictor for women’s political participation in politics. The situation in the Western Balkans is fairly similar and highly reflective of the challenges that women face to enter the public sphere. As such, labor force participation is lower among women compared to men and unpaid work more prevalent. Compared to other EU countries, those in the Western Balkans have some of the lowest female labour force participation standing on average, at about 45%, or 7 percentage points lower than the average in the EU. The employment gap relative to the EU is mostly due to low participation of women in the labor force, but also partly due to higher unemployment in the Western Balkans that affects both men and women. Almost two-thirds of women in the WB are either outside the labor force or are unemployed (International Monetary Fund, IMF 2017). As shown in figure 2, the labour market trends show that women in the region have lower levels of activity compared to men (European Parliament, 2018).

**Figure 2. The labour Market in Western Balkan Countries**



\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Source: Eurostat, EPRS, 2018.

**Source: European Parliament, 2018.**

In all countries of the region men are the most active workforce. In Albania for instance, 50% of the women compared to 64% of the men were active in the labour market. In Northern Macedonia, only 39% of the total labour force are women and girls. In Montenegro, 44% of women versus 56% of men are active in the labour force. While data is not consistent across all countries in the region, there is a



significant gender pay gap in some countries and some sectors even higher (IMF, 2017).

According to the Law Institute in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2016), it is necessary to further encourage women to engage in all spheres of society's actions, since BiH is economically underdeveloped and politically very much unstable. In addition, this institution explains that the education of women and encouragement through specific programmes, scholarships, seminars and the like, especially in less developed areas, are crucial activities for women's empowerment. Most of the ruling parties in BiH are right-center parties that are strong, promote conservatism and patriarchal values, leaving a large space for manipulation regarding the position of women. In the framework of patriarchal conservatism, it always puts emphasis on the biological role of women, while neglecting its potential in the socio-economic one in the development of society (Law Institute in BiH, 2016).

## **Legal analysis**

### **Albania**

#### ***Legislation for women's participation***

*Constitution.* The principles of gender equality and representation of women in all spheres of public life are sanctioned in a number of documents, most prominently in the constitution, which adhere to international standards and treaties that take precedence over domestic legislation when the latter contradicts established international norms. Non-discrimination based on gender and the principle of equality before the law is sanctioned in the description of the fundamental human rights of Albanian citizens. The right of all citizens to participate in the political life of the country is also sanctioned in the constitution.

*"All are equal before the law. No one may be unjustly discriminated against for reasons such as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, language, political, religious or philosophical beliefs, economic condition, education, social status, or parentage. 3. No one may be discriminated against for the reasons mentioned in paragraph 2 without a reasonable and objective justification"* (Constitution of the Republic of Albania. Article 18).

*Law on Gender Equality in Society* foresees equal representation of women in public life, in different positions of decision-making powers, by foreseeing quotas to achieve this representation. It does not, however, focus on meaningful inclusion of women in politics, which is not all about their number as experience has shown. The law does make reference to principles of non-discrimination but fails to mention the measures to tackle violence against women as one of the main instruments by which equality between women and men is hindered.



*“Equal gender representation in all legislative, executive, and judicial organs, as well as in other public institutions, shall be achieved when: a) a representation of above 30 per cent of both genders, including their steering organs is ensured. b) equal observation of competition procedures and criteria for both genders for the assignment in these organs is ensured; c) a participation of above 30 percent of both genders in the list of candidates for local government is ensured; d) a participation of above 30 percent of each gender in the central and local elections processes administration organs is ensured. Political parties shall define methods and measures to comply with the requirements provided in item 1 of this article. Republic of Albania”.*

Law on Gender Equality in Society, Part III, Equal Participation in Decision-making Processes.

*Law on Protection from Discrimination* makes specific reference to participation in politics by prohibiting discrimination in the right to vote, be elected, and be appointed to public duty, among others, for reasons related to someone’s gender identity.

*The Electoral Code (EC)* serves the principle of gender equality in its quest to increase women’s participation in political processes. In article 67, points 6 & 7, the electoral code imposes two types of quotas, one for parliamentary elections and one for local election parties and candidate lists. Specifically, for each electoral zone, at least 30% of the multi-name list and one of the first three names on the multi-name list shall belong to each gender. For local government elections, 50% of party lists should belong to each gender with a zipped system (one man, one woman). To enforce compliance with the gender quota, article 175 of the Code foresees penalties for parties that fail to respect this provision, which is a refusal to accept the list of political parties if they fail the gender quota for local elections, and a fine of 1,000,000 Lek (8,000 Euro) financial sanction for parliamentary elections.

### ***Political parties and women in Albania***

Women representation in major political parties in Albania stands below the stated commitments of these political parties in their statutes.

*The Democratic Party* statute establishes a 30% quota of women’s representation in steering committees and the party’s National Council. There is also a women’s forum in charge of representing the interests of its members in all party structures, with a membership of about 20,000 women (ISP, 2017). According to the DP statute, the function of the women’s forum is to promote the participation of women in policy-making, decision-making structures of the party and their engagement in political functions (DP Statute, no date).

*The Socialist Party* statute articles 3, 23, 37, 43 and 63 contain a number of provisions to encourage women’s participation in its party structures. It imposes a 30% gender



quota on party structures and 50% quota for national party congresses and candidates running for local councils in local elections. With about 30,000 women members in their structures, the Socialist party has also established, since 2003, a Women's Forum (ISP, 2017). The Socialist Party of Albania Statute and Regulation foresees that the forum represents the interests of women, but also provides for the principles of women's rights in society, including gender equality in the labour market, political participation and representation in public life (SP Statute, no date).

*Socialist Movement for Integration (SMI)* statute in Chapter 17, provides a 50% gender quota for a special candidate list, drawn for all SMI forums at all levels, and makes gender equality obligatory for the party. The statute also establishes the women's forum of the party in charge of women's representation. Data is not available, however, to measure if these commitments are fulfilled in the party's structures.

## **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

### ***Legislation for women participation***

*Constitution.* The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina prescribes the general principle of non-discrimination regarding the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the catalogue of human rights and basic freedoms (Article II/4). Sex is highlighted as one of the prohibited grounds for discrimination. The Constitution is primarily restricted to civil and political rights and thereby limited in terms of economic, social and cultural rights, with the exception of education (Petric et.al, 2018).

*Law on gender equality.* Chapter 9 of the LGE in Bosnia foresees achievement of gender equality in public life. More specifically, it calls upon political parties, among others, to ensure and promote a balanced representation of men and women in the process of management and decision-making (LGE, Article 15). "In order to ensure equal representation of genders, percentage of women in government bodies shall not be lower than 50%, including the judiciary and the executive, as well as all other public offices, including participation in bodies representing the state internationally" (LGE, Article 15).

*Law on protection against discrimination.* While the law on protection from discrimination recognizes gender as a basis of discrimination, it makes little mention of discrimination in the political sphere. However, article 6 of the LPD makes reference to participation in public life as one of the areas where discrimination is prohibited.

*Electoral law.* BiH applies a 40% gender quota in its electoral code by requiring that every candidate list includes candidates of male and female gender who are equally represented. In this case there should be a minimum of 40% representation of each of the genders. The electoral law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Article 4.19, includes: the minority gender should be at least in the first two candidates, at least two in the first candidates, at least three among the first eight and so forth, thus applying a



zipped system. The Electoral Code of BiH goes a step further by ensuring gender representation in elected bodies. It makes specific mention of the law on gender equality by requiring that election commissions and polling station committees reflect gender representation in line with the law on gender equality, with the exception of cases when the commission has three members.

### ***Political parties and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina***

*SDA – Stranka Demokratske Akcije (Democratic Action Party)*. SDA contains a number of provisions in its statute that relate to women's roles within the party. Article 25 provides for the Presidency of the party to appoint delegates by ensuring, at the same time, representation, among others, of gender within the party structures. Furthermore, article 35 gives the right to the Association of Women to appoint 5 members of the General Board, which allow for a better representation of women's voices to these different structures. In electing and appointing all bodies within party levels, the statute of SDA mandates that there needs to be a balanced representation of all layers of membership, including on the basis of gender, among other (SDA Statute. Article 88).

*HDZ1990* – In the composition of HDZ 1990, the Community of Women HDZ 1990 was established as a separate organizational unit. The Community of Women HDZ 1990 has the name of the Community of Women HDZ 1990 based in Mostar. Article 57 of the statute of HDZ21990 foresees that the Community of Women ensures at least 30% of the representation in HDZ 1990 bodies. In addition, the same article foresees that the Community of Women HDZ 1990 can establish lower forms of its action. The Community of Women operates in accordance with the Ordinance, which must comply with this Statute.

*HDZ – Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (Croatian Democratic Union 1990)*. Article 51 of the party's statute establishes the Association of Women/Community of Women. As a novelty, compared to other party statutes, HDZ Statute, Article 52, also foresees a political academy whose goal is the "continuous, professional, political training and education, encouragement to the active political and public action of members of the HDZ B&H as well as the Community of Youth and Community of Women HDZ B&H and other interested individuals, in accordance with the decisions of the relevant bodies of the Political Academy." Article 57 also considers a gender representation component as it foresees that elections for different bodies contain the possibility of highlighting more candidates based on gender.

*SNSD – Stranka Nezavisnih Socijal-Demokrata (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats)*. SNSD Statute, Article 9, also contains as a requisite, the creation of a women's association at the municipal level. SNSD also contains specific gender quotas. Article 15 of its statutes foresees representation of youngsters and women in the



bodies of the party of at least 30%. However, if the quota is not achieved, they can choose to co-opt.

## **Kosovo**

### ***Legislation for women participation***

*Constitution.* Different from other countries, the constitution of Kosovo expressively includes gender equality in the principles underpinning the legislative branch. More specifically, Article 71 states that “The composition of the Assembly of Kosovo shall respect internationally recognized principles of gender equality.” The same provision is foreseen for a number of other institutions such as courts and prosecution.

*Law on gender equality.* Kosovo’s law on gender equality considers the unequal representation when in decision-making positions in political and public life there is less than 50% representation of one of the genders (LGE, article 1). The means of equal representation foreseen include the introduction of quotas for equal representation of men and women and support programs to increase women’s participation in decision-making and public life (LGE, article 6, point 2).

*Law on protection against discrimination.* Unequal participation of women in public affairs, including the right to vote and the right to be elected, constitute grounds for discrimination, according to Kosovo’s law on protection from discrimination. Therefore, mechanisms to address such discrimination cases are vested upon the Ombudsperson of the country.

*The Electoral Code* obliges all political entities and elected bodies to respect the gender quota set in the law. Specifically, the code requires that on each candidate list there should be at least 30% from each gender, with one candidate from each gender included at least once in each group of three candidates, counting from the first candidate in the list.

### ***Political parties and women in Kosovo***

Depending on the party, their statutes contain two different degrees provisions on women’s participation and promotion in politics.

In the statute of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), there is no provision for women participating in politics and decision-making, whereas in the party’s program, there is a provision called “Emancipation and women’s rights”, which consist of: *1) PDK is committed to emancipating society in general, and for women in particular; 2) PDK highlights the role and importance of Albanian women during the liberation war; 3) PDK will be committed to have equal pay for a job of equal value regardless of gender and to fight against any form of discrimination of women; 4) We will commit*

*ourselves to take all necessary measures including legal provisions to combat all forms of trafficking in women and women exploitation as deformities of modern society.*

*The Democratic League of Kosova (LDK) - In the party's statute, Article 18, paragraph 18.3 states: When selecting delegates for the Assembly, each branch shall provide representation of women and youth.*

*Self-determination movement LVV) – In the party's programme, in the section "Democracy", paragraph 16, there is a provision which states: Also, we are committed to strengthening and participation in the political processes of organizations' social categories such as workers' unions, women's associations, students, teachers, doctors, pensioners, former KLA fighters, intellectuals, people with disabilities, the unemployed, youth organizations, and so on. In the same section, paragraph 18, there is a provision which states: For us, the inseparable part of democracy or human rights, minority rights, freedom of the press, religious rights, gender equality and all rights and other democratic principles are foreseen by international and European conventions on human rights, human and minority rights.*

## **Montenegro**

### ***Legislation for women participation***

*Constitution.* Montenegro's constitution expressly mandates the right to be elected equally to its citizens above 18 years old. Specific provisions on gender are made to the electoral legislation and analyzed below.

*The right to elect and stand for elections shall be granted to the citizen of Montenegro who is 18 years of age or above and who has a minimum of two years of residence in Montenegro. The electoral right shall be exercised in elections. The electoral right shall be general and equal. Elections shall be free and direct, by secret ballot.* Constitution of the Republic of Montenegro. 2006. Article 45.

*Law on gender equality.* Article 10 of Montenegro's LGE calls upon the legislative and executive branch to apply principles of gender equality, especially gender balanced representation elections and nominations, the formation of working bodies and confirmation of the official delegations' structure. The legislation also establishes that political parties "in their regulations, select the methods and measures for the establishment of equal representation of women and men within the bodies of the party, on the candidate lists for the election of members of republic parliament and members of local parliament, in elected clubs of members of both local and republic parliament and the election of managing positions in all levels" (LGE, Article 12).

*Law on protection against discrimination.* The law on prohibition of discrimination foresees that discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation is strictly prohibited (law on prohibition of discrimination, Article 19).



*Electoral Code.* The electoral legislation in Montenegro foresees a 30% gender quota for the less represented sex, adding a provision that at least one of every four candidates should be from the underrepresented sex, in the Law on Election of Councilors and Members of Parliament, Article 39/a. It is to be noted that the other pieces of legislation on elections, such as the law on election of president and law on election of mayors do not contain specific gender provisions, while at the same time, stating the principle of equality in running for office, referring to the constitution.

### ***Political parties and women in Montenegro***

*The Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS).* DPS's statute, article 2, articulates gender equality as one of the basic principles upon which the party functions. There is no other mention in the statute of the party regarding women's participation in party structures or their promotion in decision-making processes.

*The New Serbian Democracy (NOVA).* NOVA maintains that solidarity between women and men are the basic principles that guide the existence of the party. No other provisions are foreseen in the statute of the party relating to women's political representation.

*DEMOS.* Similar to the other two parties analyzed, DEMOS foresees "affirmation of gender equality" as one of its key principles of operation. However, also similar to the other parties, there are no specific provisions on women's representation and empowerment in decision-making structures.

## **North Macedonia**

### ***Legislation for women's participation***

*Constitution.* The Republic of North Macedonia recognizes the equal rights and freedoms, regardless of sex, of all citizens, equal before the constitution and the law (Constitution, Article 9). The right to vote and be elected is enshrined in article 22 and 23 of the constitution. There is no mention, however, explicitly, of gender equality; instead, the constitution recognizes and abides by international norms and standards, including those pertaining to human rights and political representation.

*Law on gender equality.* The objective of the law on gender equality is, among others, to establish equal opportunities for women and men in the political sphere of social life (LGE, Article 2). Different from other countries, LGE in North Macedonia also includes political parties as entities establishing equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men. Other areas include legislative, executive and judicial bodies, local self-government units and organizations in the public and private sector (LGE, Article 3). LGE, in this regard, identifies three types of measures, positive encouragement and program measures that tackle gender quotas, incentives for



increasing women's empowerment and programs aimed at raising awareness and changing attitudes (LGE, Article 7).

*Law on protection against discrimination.* The principle of non-discrimination is applied to participating in political parties and other organizations, as foreseen by the law on protection from discrimination (Law on protection from discrimination, Article 4).

*Electoral Code.* The only provision to promote women's participation in politics in North Macedonia is found in article 64 of the Electoral Code that requires party lists to have at least 40% belonging to the less represented sex, which should be found at least once in every three places and at least one in every ten places.

### ***Political parties and women in North Macedonia***

*Social Democratic Union of North Macedonia (SDSSM).* Women's representation and promotion in the SDSSM is scarcely mentioned. There are only two provisions in the statute of the Social Democratic Union of North Macedonia, in Article 22 and 24 of the statute. The first relates to the general principle of promoting equal opportunities for men and women as a basic political principle of the party. The second provision relates to the creation of forums (for youth, women, and others) within the political party. The women's forum has a mission to promote the status and position of women within the party and in other spheres as defined in the Social Democratic Union of North Macedonia, statute, Article 24.

*VMRO DPMNE - The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity.* Beyond the existence of a women's forum within the party, there are no other direct provisions that guarantee the promotion and participation of women in party structures and decision making. The only reference made is that of party membership, in Article 24, whereby any person, regardless of sex (among other factors), can be a member of the party.

*Democratic Renewal of Macedonia – DOM.* There are no specific provisions in the party's statute relating to gender equality in general and promotion of women within the party's structure and decision-making processes. There is, however a women's forum, that should accept and implement the party's program, defined in DOM Statute, Article 59. It does not contain, however, provisions on the specific role of the forum in influencing the program, per se.

## **Serbia**

### ***Legislation for women's participation***

*Constitution.* While the constitution stipulates the equality of citizens to elect and be elected, it also specifically mentions the principles of gender equality in this area by stipulating that "In the National Assembly, equality and representation of different



genders and members of national minorities shall be provided, in accordance with Law" (Constitution, Article 100).

*Law on Gender Equality.* Serbia's LGE contains a section on equal opportunities in political and other activities. These include the right to join a political party, active participation in activities and participation in bodies of political parties which shall be achieved without gender-based discrimination (LGE, Article 35). LGE further demands from political parties to adopt a plan every four years that contains activities and special measures to encourage and promote equal representation of women and men in the bodies of a particular party and in the appointment of candidates for elections, both at the local and parliamentary level (LGE, article 35). In terms of elections, LGE stipulates "Gender equality shall be ensured on the occasion of appointment of candidates for the president of the Republic, members of parliament and councilors, in the manner and in accordance with the regulations governing elections" (LGE, Article 36).

*Law on Protection from Discrimination.* The law on protection from discrimination recognizes discrimination on the grounds of gender, and it occurs when freedoms and rights of women and men in the political, economic, cultural and other aspects of public, professional, private and family life are compromised (LPD, Article 20).

*Electoral Code.* Gender representation is ensured in the electoral code of Serbia through a provision that for every three candidates on the electoral list, at least one shall be from the less represented gender. The code further foresees that failure to comply with this requirement will cause an electoral list to be rejected and parties invited to review the list. Therefore, there are measures put in place to guarantee that gender quotas are respected (Electoral Code, Article 40/a). The code further mandates that if any person in an electoral campaign incites violence or encourages gender inequality, then procedures to address this issue should be started by the relevant authorities (Electoral Code, Article 100).

### ***Political parties and women in Serbia***

*SNS/ Srpska Napredna Stranka / Serbian Progressive Party* contains no special provisions on women's participation in politics either in the statute or the programme.

*SPS / Socijalistička partija Srbije / Socialist Party of Serbia.* The Statute of SPS foresees that in all party bodies there must be at least 20% women (SPS Statute, Article 69), a very low objective for increasing women's representation in the political sphere. In the party's programme, chapter 6 is dedicated to gender equality and in terms of political principles, it mentions that women should be more present in political organizations, institutions, and authorities (SPS Programme, Chapter 6).



## **Analysis of stereotypes endured by women politicians in the Western Balkans and their effect on shaping women's political campaigning**

### **Violence against Women in Politics (VAWP) – conceptual framework**

In general, violence against women is one of the main reasons for the high rate of morbidity among women. The advent of the #MeToo and #Timesup movements brought to the limelight the existence of violence against women, especially different forms of harassment, in almost all branches of government in the United States and around the world, such as the murder of MP Jo Cox in the UK in 2016, and several women MPs receiving rape and death threats on social media in 2017, to name a few (UN, 2018).

While efforts are ongoing to address VAWP, no single framework exists to understand and tackle the issue. Different definitions are employed based on which actor is producing them. For instance, UN Women consider violence against women in political life as:

*Any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in, physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member and or by the State UNDP, 2018. Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide.*

In addition, National democratic Institute (NDI) defines violence against women in politics as follows: *"It encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation against women as political actors simply because they are women. These acts – whether directed at women as civic leader, voters, and political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials – are designed to restrict the political participation of women as a group. This violence reinforces traditional stereotypes and roles given to women, using domination and control to exclude women from politics"* (NDI, 2017, page 12).

Bolivia was a pioneer in Latin America in documenting experiences of harassment and political violence, as a result of the efforts of the Association of Councilwomen (ACOBOL) to demonstrate a practice that was harmful to the political rights of Bolivian women during candidate selection in electoral campaigns and during the exercise of their elected office (NDI, 2017).

Bolivia's Electoral System Law (Law No. 26, 2010) recognizes political harassment as an electoral crime (article 238) and defines it as: *"The person harassing a female or male candidate during or after an electoral process, in order to force them to resign*



*their candidacy or office against his or her will, shall be punished with a prison sentence of two (2) to five (5) years.”*

The Bolivian Law against Harassment and Political Violence against Women (Law No. 243, 2012) has as its objective (article 2): “To establish mechanisms for the prevention, treatment, and punishment of individual and collective acts of harassment and/or political violence towards women, in order to guarantee the full exercise of their political rights.”

The main definitions used in the Bolivian Law against Harassment and Political Violence against Women (Law No. 243, 2012) are:

“Political harassment. Political harassment refers to the act or set of acts of pressure, persecution, harassment or threats committed by a person or group of people, either directly or through *third parties, against women candidates, elected women or women carrying out public political functions, or their family, for the purpose of preventing and/or inducing an action or omission against their will in the performance of their duties or in the exercise of their rights”.*

*“Political violence. Political violence is understood to be physical, psychological or sexual actions, behaviors and/or aggression committed by a person or groups of persons, directly or through third parties, against women candidates, elected or appointed women, women carrying out public political functions, or against their family, in order to shorten, suspend, prevent or restrict the exercise of their office, or to induce or force them to perform an action or omission against their will in the performance of their duties or the exercise of their rights.”*

## **Sexism, harassment and violence against women in Parliament in Europe**

A study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) shows that acts of sexism, abuse and violence against women are widespread in parliaments across Europe. According to the Parliamentary Assembly (2018) the findings of the study reveal that 85 per cent of women MPs have suffered from psychological violence in parliament; women MPs under 40 are more likely to be harassed; female parliamentary staff endure more sexual violence than female MPs; and that the majority of parliaments don’t have mechanisms to enable women to speak out<sup>1</sup>.

Findings from a previous survey shows that up to 81% of women have been subjected to psychological violence while they served as parliamentarians (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=7249&lang=2>



The media is one of the instruments that perpetuates violence against women and harassment (more often sexual) towards women. The way in which media become a party in such a phenomenon is through the use of rumors, sexist behavior, and misogynistic remarks that result in women being denied any political competence and belittled as “the weaker sex” that is not fit for the world of politics (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). Sexist remarks are also part of parliamentary proceedings and women are most likely to be subjected to them. The same study mentioned above shows that 65.5% of respondents report to having been subjected to sexist remarks, mostly by male colleagues of other parties.

### **Violence against Women in Elections**

Violence against women in an election setting revolves around discouraging women from voting, harassment, and threats during election periods for candidates and violence and threats while women are in office. Therefore, there is a multi-faceted problem that women face, which is little studied and even less addressed in national policies, including in the Western Balkans region.

Research from recent years has shown that violence against women tends to increase around the world close to election times. The deeply rooted stereotypes regarding women and their position in society, what they can and cannot do, transport to the realm of politics and elections. For instance, women in politics face considerable sexism, which tells them they are not fit for the male-dominated world of politics and elections and thus should not meddle with it. Thus, women are not only hindered from fulfilling their mandate as elected officials but often also completely discouraged from even trying (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016).

To address this type of violence, the UN Policy Directive on Preventing and Mitigating Election-related Violence (2016) considers election violence as a form of political violence “which is often designed to influence an electoral outcome and therefore the distribution of political power” (UNDP, 2018). Furthermore, the UNDP itself defines electoral violence as “acts or threats of coercion or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process, or that arise in the context of electoral competition. When perpetrated to affect an electoral process, violence may be employed to influence the process of election, such as efforts to delay, disrupt, or derail a poll, and to influence the outcomes, i.e., the determining of winners in competitive races for political office, or to secure approval or disapproval of referendum questions (UNDP, 2018).”

The impact of different forms of violence against women is long lasting and affects the participation of women in politics. In an environment where women are afraid of violence, the ability of a country to fairly represent the interests of its people is diminished when women’s voices are not part of the elected government. In turn, this creates a vicious circle whereby women are underrepresented in the public realm (Coulouris, 2018).



Democracy is not democratic without equality, and while women in politics experience violence and intimidation (Mlambo-Ngcuka, 2018). Women must be free to vote, campaign, hold political office and speak out on behalf of their constituents, free from violent or toxic retribution.

## Types of violence

### Psychological Violence

In a political context, psychological violence aims to instill fear and cause emotional harm, often to discourage women from participating in politics, or leaving politics altogether. The constituting elements of psychological violence try to “delegitimize women as political actors, undermining their confidence, competence and visibility in the political and public sphere, negatively affecting the way they are portrayed and therefore, how they are perceived” (Garcia, 2017).

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*“ Psychological violence in politics is the behaviour that is intended to intimidate and persecute, and takes the form of threats of abandonment or abuse, confinement to the home, surveillance, threats to take away custody of children, destruction of objects, isolation, verbal aggression and constant humiliation.*  
(UN Women, 2017)

As in other facets of life, psychological violence is the most common type of violence that women engaged in politics are subjected to and it often precedes physical violence. This type of violence can happen within the home, in the community, in public and most recently, online.

### Physical violence

In the context of political engagement, physical violence against women involves acts that cause them, or their relatives, bodily harm due to their participation in public life (Garcia, 2017). Types of physical violence include, but are not limited to “pushing, shoving, throwing, grabbing, choking, shaking, slapping, punching, hitting, burning, the use of restraints or one’s body size or strength against another person, and the use of or threat to use, a weapon or object” (UN Women, 2017).

While the most extreme form of physical violence against women is assassinations, there are many nuances of how, when and by whom, such violence against women is committed. In terms of politics and elections, physical violence happens at all levels, from within the home, to the public arena. Furthermore, it can also take place in institutional settings such as political party offices, electoral management bodies, in polling stations and other civic spaces, most often perpetrated by political opponents, but not exclusively (UN Women, 2017).



## Sexual violence

Sexual violence against women in politics includes acts or attempts by coercion, unwanted sexual comments or innuendos in order to force women to exchange sexual favors. An example of this could be to win a nomination for a political position, getting funding for a campaign, etc. (Garcia, 2017).

*"Sexual violence, in the context of politics and elections, as "any non-consensual sexual act, an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality, by any person, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (UN Women, 2017)."*

## Violence against Women in Politics in Western Balkans

### Albania

As the table below suggests, it is more often than not that the set quotas are not met by political parties. For instance, none of the major political parties meet its set quota for women's representation in all party forums.

**Figure 3. Women's representation in political parties in Albania**

Features of gender equality in the statutes of the political parties	Parliamentary Parties*			
	PS	PD	LSI	PDIU
Women representation in all party forums	≤30%	<30%	≤50%	<30%
Membership of women in all party organisations	≤30%	<30%	≈30%	<30%
Women representation in party's national assembly / congress	50%	<30%	>30%	<30%
Women representation as elected candidates in the party assembly / national council	50%	<30%	>30%	<30%
Women representation as candidates for the party assembly / national council	≤30%	≤30%	30%	<30%
Women representation as candidates for party's steering committees	30%	30%	>30%	<30%
Women representation in local councils	≤50%	≤30%	>30%	<30%
Women representation in steering committees of local branches	-	≤30%	30%	<30%
Membership of women's forums	30,000	20,000	No info	No info

\*The statutes of the Republican Party, Human Rights Union Party and PKD have no gender equality provisions.

**Source: Institute for Political Studies, 2017**

According to previous research, despite the existence of commitments to gender equality in political parties in Albania, the role and influence of these forums remain symbolic. For instance, there has been no case whereby a woman who did not fully share the viewpoints of the party leader has managed to be elected as a leader of



these forums, which is discernible in the situation of internal democracy in political parties in Albania. It should also be noted that there have been cases when the leaders of these forums were bullied or intimidated out of the political scene. One case was during the 2009 elections where both SP and DP refused to include the names of the chairs of their respective women forums in the proportional candidates' list, even though they included several other women (UN Women, 2017).

Stereotypes, gender norms, and perceptions of women's role in society create harmful practices that prevent women from enjoying their human rights as sanctioned in all important laws and policies in the country. As noted by the CEDAW report, while there have been attempts to combat such harmful practices, they remain prevalent, especially in rural communities (CEDAW, 2016).

The perceived role of women in society is that of mothers, caretakers, and in charge of chores around the house. As a recent survey problematically showed, more than 80% of its respondents believed that household chores are the responsibility of the woman (UN Albania, 2016). The position of woman vis a vis a man is seen as one of a subordinate. As the survey further demonstrates, respondents were more likely to agree with the statement "a good wife should obey her husband, preserving family peace and well-being," followed by the statement "it is better for the whole family if the husband has a job and the wife takes care of the family" (UN Albania, 2016). Such attitudes increase the chances that women are harassed when they become public figures, that they are attacked for being women by their male colleagues, or that media portrays them as over sexualized beings, instead of focusing on their contribution to solving society's problems.

These stereotypes and attitudes are even more emphasized at the local level, where the women's situation is even more precarious. As existing data shows, at the local level, there is a heightened need to address the patriarchal mentality that keeps women from being meaningfully engaged in politics (UN Albania, 2016).

The existence of the blood feud phenomenon, which could be considered a form of violence against women in the country, has hindered their right to vote, concerns raised by the Ombudsman, several times (UN Albania, 2016).

Even where political participation of women in politics and elections is visible and guaranteed, there are problems in the access that women have. One such problem identified in Albania is the presence of "strongmen" in the political spheres. In interviews with women leaders, it was identified as a problem that prevents women from even entering electoral races. As noted by a prominent woman leader, "strongmen in politics are without any doubt, an obstacle to women's participation in politics. They are one of the main reasons why political parties choose not to bring too many women at the forefront of the electoral race. Women are stereotyped as "not tough enough" (ISP, 2017). This was also accompanied by pressures on women to drop out of races, such as happened in two districts in Albania (UN Albania, 2016).



While media are expected to play an educative role in society, promote women in politics and support their participation in public life, it often goes counter to this role. Sexism in the media, both written and broadcast, is prevalent in all areas, also notably in politics. Women are often subject to attacks due to their personal life, which is much more scrutinized compared to men (ISP, 2017). They are analyzed more based on their appearance or the clothes they wear, rather than their political stances and ideas. This is mostly a reflection of societal norms that rarely view women as strong enough and deserving enough to be in the public sphere and makes decisions on their behalf, as long as they are perceived as belonging at home, not outside of it.

Sexism and denigrating remarks directed towards women are also a common occurrence in parliamentary sessions, mostly coming from male counterparts. As an example, in 2016, a group of women Member of the Parliament (MPs) from the opposition party protested against verbal abuse towards women perpetrated by the prime minister during a tense parliamentary session.<sup>2</sup>

During the last local election of 2015, candidates running for mayor, particularly K.B., G. D. and V. A., were the focus of attacks, especially on social media through media portals that attacked them frequently. Some of the attacks included posting photos and labels insinuating that the candidate running for office was a drug addict, etc. During the same elections, an incident against opposition candidate in Durres on Friday, 1 May 2015, around 18.30, took place at the time when the opposition coalition candidate "People's Alliance for Work and Dignity", G.D had been conducting meetings with citizens in the area of Shkozet when two young people moving with an SP-flagged car had been in conflict with one of the candidate's escorts. The candidate and her staff were violated and the case went under investigation by the prosecution for the criminal offense provided by Article 90 of the Criminal Code.

The legal framework for women's participation stipulates, in Article 67, paragraph 6 of the Electoral Code that "For each constituency, at least thirty per cent of the multi-name list and one in the first three names of the multi-name list shall belong to each gender". Meanwhile, according to Article 164, if a member of the least represented gender who has won the mandate under the above-mentioned Article 6 resigns, then she is replaced by the candidate of the same gender, regardless of where she is on the list. This provision resulted in the automatic addition of five more women to the parliamentary chamber by submitting the mandates of the deputies who received the ministerial posts. During this process, in the case of the replacement of women candidates in the districts of Lezha and Durrës, some of the women who were given the mandate of an MP from the Central Election Commission (CEC) rejected their mandates as a personal choice but also from pressure or political decision of the party forums in which they belonged. Their political parties did not make any comment on

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<sup>2</sup> Video available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E30A9P08Srg>



their rejection and did not promote the opportunity to have more women MPs for that district in Parliament.

In addition, time coverage of women in the media during elections was also an indicator that influenced public opinion. Even though the coverage of women in the media has been low, from report Board of Media Monitoring (BMM's) for the period 22 May to 21 June, it is concluded that "the time distributed among males and females is 287 minutes more for men."<sup>3</sup>

An incident happened, in the Parliament against A.V, MPs and President of the Women Forum of the Democratic Party.<sup>4</sup> The head of the government used offensive words against her. Women democrats' member of the Democratic Party of Albania reacted and protested against the language used.

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

As in other countries in the Western Balkans, stereotyping and naming calling is one of the most common forms of psychological violence against women in BiH. Ingrained gender stereotypes, existing cultural norms and corruption are visible in high political positions and hamper the equal representation of women in politics in BiH (Bjorkdahl, 2017). As also noted in CEDAW's report, the persistence of patriarchal attitude, so widespread in the region, often limits women to family roles and constitute significant barriers for women's participation in political and public life (CEDAW, 2013).

During the election period, OSCE/ODIHR noted, in the last general elections in 2018, that there were no incidences of violence during the voting day and the days preceding it. However, it did note that women candidates are not actively promoted in political party structures and in the media, which is common in all countries in the region. They also rarely campaign on their own, thus being overshadowed by their male colleagues (OSCE/ODIHR, 2018).

### **Kosovo**

In 2017, a woman member of the Democratic Party in Kosovo was physically assaulted shortly after she joined politics. While the police in Kosovo have not yet discovered the perpetrators and motives, the event coinciding with her engagement in politics is inherently linked to her status as a public figure (Radio Evropa e Lire, 2017). Only a few months after the event, another public figure, the wife of a minister at the time, was also physically assaulted, again without any convictions or identified perpetrators (Periskopi, 2017).

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<sup>3</sup> The Central Election Commission reports of the Media Monitoring Board. Monitoring Board Report 22.05.2015-19.06.2015. Retrieved from [http://www.cec.org.al/sq-al/Zgjedhjet/Raportet-e-Bordit-t%C3%ABMonitorimit%C3%AB-Mediave.\)](http://www.cec.org.al/sq-al/Zgjedhjet/Raportet-e-Bordit-t%C3%ABMonitorimit%C3%AB-Mediave.)

<sup>4</sup> <https://balkanweb.com/vokshi-grate-demokrate-te-marten-ne-proteste-per-fjalorin-banal-te-edi-rames/>



Media coverage of women in public positions and politically active is as problematic as in other countries in the region. While it does not happen with their counterparts, women are scrutinized based on their physical appearance, past, fashion choices, and family relations, instead of their political ideas and contributions.<sup>5</sup>

Despite strong legislation on gender equality, the situation on the ground is quite different. Politics is still a domain strongly dominated by men. In this regard, gender biases, misguided beliefs that men are better leaders, and lack of political support are causes that prevent or actively hinder the promotion of women in decision-making positions (Halili, 2019).

The appointment of a woman president, in 2011, brought with it both a positive impact, as well as emphasis on the inherent gender biases in Kosovar society. The positive impact was that her presidency contributed to proving that women do not lack leadership skills and it effectively increased women's participation in decision-making. On the other hand, the treatment of the president by the media and her male colleagues at the time, proved that the situation in the political and public realm was more concerning. The president has often been the subject of sexist comments and insults, including being subjected to objectification. On one such occasion, there was explicitly sexual graffiti drawn on some institutions' walls. Despite concerted reactions by women's CSOs there were no measures taken by the political elite, which goes to show that while laws are good on paper, they are rarely, if ever, properly enforced (Halili, 2019).

Sexist language, denigration of women and name calling is so prevalent that in 2017 a group of women's CSOs joined the global women's march to denounce the use of sexist language in parliament (Zeri, 2017). The cause was the use of sexist language towards a former minister of justice and the deputy head of parliament by their male counterparts.

Prejudices are so strong that they manifest themselves with the opinions of women politicians themselves. As one declared in an interview not long ago, "to be a woman in Kosovo politics you have to be three times tougher than a man" (Halili, 2019).

In terms of elections, even when women have a strong electoral base, political parties do not actively promote them in campaigns. For instance, one of the most voted women MPs in the assembly in 2017 was placed number 81 in the party's candidate list for the elections. Furthermore, women are significantly less exposed to the media compared to men. Parties are mostly represented by men in political debates (Arapi, 2017).

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<sup>5</sup> Conclusion made based on a number of articles in the media collected for this purpose.



Women who are active in politics in Kosovo identify a host of difficulties in their public engagements, including:

- Verbal abuse on social media. While there is no study on the prevalence of verbal abuse on social media and whether this affects women more than men, it is a fact that the widespread use of social media affects the political engagement of women, especially around elections.
- Excessive focus on physical traits. Due to the consideration of women being primarily based on their physical appearance, often more time is spent discussing their clothes, fashion style, physical features, etc., instead of their characters and political contributions (Arapi, 2017).

### **Montenegro**

Violence against women public figures/politicians more often than not originates from their male counterparts, usually from other political parties. There were two such cases (2017 and 2018), both directed from two male deputies of the opposition coalition to two women from the ruling party: the first one called one of the women in politics with a bloody name. The other case while in jail for attacking a policeman, posted in social media that he need permission from jail to pay an intimate visit to DPS Member of Parliament A.V.<sup>6</sup>

### **North Macedonia**

The 2004 UN Combined initial, second and third periodic reports on the State Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states the following regarding the Republic of North Macedonia:

“According to the present data, the lack of participation in the authorities and in the decision-making process is one of the main problems involving gender discrimination generally experienced by all women, with the exception of an insignificant minority. To overcome the democratic deficit resulting from the insufficient presence of women in all power structures, the relevant factors in the country should focus their efforts on resolving problems related to the contents and process of decision making, rather than on discrimination as an isolated factor” (CEDAW, 2004)

In North Macedonia, following the changes of the electoral system from majority to proportional, the representation of women in politics increased. However, the electoral system is not the only precondition that impacts the gender balance in politics, but also other electoral rules, in particular, those referring to the type of the candidate lists (open/ closed), have a strong impact. Some experts dealing with electoral policy

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.blic.rs/slobodno-vreme/vesti/kad-u-spuzu-kliznem-u-melanholiju-crnogorski-poslanik-iz-zatvora-isprovocirao-javnost/lq63vz4>



support the idea of an introduction of preferential voting or replacement of the closed candidate lists with open lists within the proportional system (Mitevaska, 2008).

According to the OSCE/ODIHR report of the Local elections 2017 in North Macedonia (Nikolov, 2015), "The promotion of women's participation in public life did not prominently feature in campaigns. During rallies, female candidates were often on the main stage but rarely spoke. On average, 23 per cent of attendees at 6 rallies observed were women; a lower women's participation rate was noted at rallies in ethnic Albanian areas. Within campaign management teams, women did not hold prominent leadership positions" (OSCE/ODIHR)

North Macedonia has completed a system of laws and strategic documents for gender equality and non-discrimination which is based on a National Gender Mechanism which, according to many estimates, is the most developed one in Southeastern Europe. Women in the country acquired the right to vote in 1945 and were first elected to Parliament in 1990. In 2000, the first female mayor was elected. Chronologically, North Macedonian's major efforts for greater inclusion of women in politics and decision-making process at the national and local level began with the introduction of affirmative action (quotas) in legislation or more specifically, the Law on Election of MPs (2002) and the Law on Local Self Government (2004) which include quotas of at least 30% participation of both sexes on the candidate lists for members of parliament and councilors (Nikolov, 2015)

In the last parliamentary term, 34% of the MPs were women (42 of 123 MPs) and the country was 23rd in the world with a higher percentage of women than the European average (24%). The representation in the executive branch is very small; there is only one female minister out of 23 ministers and North Macedonia is 76th in the world out of 140 countries. A key issue of qualitative participation of women in political and public life has its place and role at the local level. Although legal provisions for the quota system provided an increased proportion of councilors in local elections in 2009, the number of elected female mayors is still insufficient (Nikolov, 2015)

Despite national legislation (Electoral Code, Law on equal opportunities for women and men, Law on the prevention, combating and protection against domestic violence) addresses, to a limited extent, the issues around equal opportunities and gender equality; VAWP is not clearly defined and sanctioned. According to the report of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, "Despite the amendments to the legislative regulations, the Republic of Macedonia shows no visible progress or improvement in the prevention and protection of women who are victims of violence, nor there are appropriate prosecution and processing of perpetrators of violence" (Helsinki Committee on Human Rights). Moreover, and according to the civil society representatives, women do not take advantage of the existing legal mechanisms in the Macedonian legislative framework to enforce and protect their rights, which is



partly due to limited public outreach and partly due to the poor functioning of institutions and mechanisms intended to further women's rights.<sup>7</sup>

Women's participation in decision making remains limited. Any progress, such as the increased representation of women in the National Parliament and municipal councils, is due to electoral quotas. In executive bodies where quotas don't exist, women's representation is low; women hold only 10 per cent of ministerial posts and 4 per cent of mayoral posts.<sup>8</sup>

### **Violence against women in politics**

On March 15, 2018, unknown perpetrators burned a car after breaking the glass next to the passenger's front seat. The vehicle was the property of a female Member of the Parliament, S. Sh. M., representing the ruling party SDSM. There have been anticipation, never proven that this act was politically motivated (Bardall, 2017). There are certainly other cases of violence and discrimination of women that happen in private places, but unfortunately, are not properly documented and/or reported.

### **Serbia**

The most common form of gender-based discrimination occurred as verbal abuse in the media and online platforms. Political discussions between actual political leaders and opposition (in media) when involving women usually contains argumentum ad hominem referring to physical characteristics of women.<sup>9</sup>

A positive example from Serbia came during the 2017 elections whereby it was clear in several candidates' campaigns that women's issues were addressed, including through dedicated programs, campaign websites and special events (OSCE/ODIHR, 2017). However, there is a clear lack of possibility for Roma women to cast votes independently due to traditional family rules, and even more problematic is their representation in political circles.

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.zlostorstvaodomraza.mk/reports/view/452>

<sup>8</sup><http://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/north-macedonia>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.alo.rs/vesti/politika/sergej-trifunovic-najbrutalnije-izvredao-maju-gojkovic-foto/199800/vest>

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### **Participation in decision-making structures within political parties**

With the exception of one political party from the region, all other parties throughout the region have similar structures for women's participation in politics. There is a common feature of the women's forums, regardless of the ideology of political parties, which manifests itself in the form of women's forums, with well-established structures, both at the central and local level, sometimes even at the unit level (which is even lower than the local level). These forums and structures exist for a variety of purposes, first and foremost, to make women's voices within a political party heard. Secondly, their role is to recruit other women in different party structures and as voters and supporters.

The majority of women interviewed declare that women's forums within their party have a statute. However, a significant number also declares that either there is no statute or the forum is established based on provisions of the main party statute or that there are informal strategies and documents that guide the work of the women's forums.

One of the representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina noted that women constitute the majority of members in her political party and that there are specific measures in place to empower women politically, such as through workshops for political party members of gender action plans at the local level. In general, instituting gender quotas seems to be the preferred means for increasing women's participation in party structures and empowering them within political parties all over the region. The results of such policies and attempts to promote women in decision-making positions seem to bear fruit in the current composition of some of the political parties in the region, where women now hold positions of leadership, both at the central and local level, such as vice presidents and presidents of highest political structures within these parties. There is still room for improvement as not all parties have achieved gender quotas within party structures, especially in leadership positions.

### **VAWP – opinion of women in politics in WB**

Violence against women is a widespread phenomenon in the region, happening mostly within family units. However, violence against women in politics, while not widely discussed, is present but understudied. The majority of women interviewed for this study note that there is some form of discrimination and/or violence against women within their own political parties. There is some lack of clarity, nevertheless, when asked if such a topic is specifically addressed in political party platforms, statutes or other documents. Even those who say that it is addressed in different party platforms, are mostly referring to general principles of gender equality and violence against women, not specifically violence against women who are politically active. Therefore, it seems that the VAWP is little recognized as a separate phenomenon within political parties in the region, even though it is accepted that it exists.

Most concerning, is the fact that all women interviewed have experienced some form of violence/discrimination. The most common forms of violence against women in the



region seem to be verbal harassment and threats of violence, both in person, and online. These types of violence have come both, within the political system from rival politicians, or outside the system, especially those on social media. All interviewed women also agree that women are much more exposed than their male counterparts, to violence in politics, especially to psychological and sexual harassment. As one of the interviewees pointed out, "Women are more likely to break down and thus, they are often more targeted than men". Many agree that even though violence exists among men, it will never reach the scale that women themselves face.

As the interviewed women accept that violence has happened to them, some have also pointed out that there was no avenue for them to address these issues as there are no policies in place within political parties and other structures to report such cases. When asked whether the phenomenon was properly addressed, most women noted that it wasn't, with one of them saying that "if it was properly addressed, we wouldn't have the current picture of the VAWP" in the region.

## Conclusions

The issue of Violence against Women in Politics (VAWP) is almost completely missing from the public discourse in the countries of the Western Balkans. So it is Violence against Women in Elections (VAWE), which was not topic of this report. The phenomenon is unrecognized, not talked about and ignored in major policy documents and decision-making processes. While violence against women is well documented and paid attention to, the prevalence of such violence in the political realm seems to be at the bottom of the list of priorities in these countries. As a starting point, there is a lack of clear definitions of what constitutes violence against women in politics and decision making. Therefore, while violence against women is embedded in national legislations and is criminalized, there is no definition of VAWP and its different forms.

There are many definitions regarding WAWP from international organizations, but not a proper attention toward it. The definition of VAWP is missing in the political parties statutes or important documents that promote women.

Furthermore, the topic is not part of the public discourse data and information about the prevalence and types of violence against women in politics is not systematically studied, making the situation unknown. Therefore, there is a need for a more detailed baseline analysis in all countries. Taking into account existing conceptual frameworks at the international level, it is time for countries in the Western Balkans to step up their efforts to analyze the situation more carefully and to systematically obtain reliable data and understand what forms of violence against women exist in the political sphere.

Programming responses are neglected in political party processes. The legal analysis of political party statutes and policy documents shows that the issue of violence against women among their ranks is missing and not recognized as a phenomenon,



despite indications from this research that it exists and needs proper understanding and investigation. Media bias negatively contribute to societal attitudes about the roles of women, especially those that are part of the political realm. As with other types of violence against women, there is under-reporting of the phenomenon among women in political and public positions and limited visibility of women in political campaigns.

Gender stereotypes, traditional and patriarchal norms are all present in each of the countries studied. The advent of new forms of information technology, social media, and the internet, has added an additional concern to women's participation in politics. These prejudices have a debilitating effect on the decision of women to participate in the public life of their countries. Lack of support within party structures to promote women and denounce violence often leaves women alone in their efforts, relying mostly on networks of support from other women. Political parties need to do a better job in analyzing their own procedures and environments to assess whether they are enabling for women's meaningful participation in these structures and decision-making, in general. Violence against women, in all its forms, is present within political parties and recognized by almost all its members, but not widely discussed or covered by the media. There is a need to have more open discussions of the phenomenon and how to tackle it.

As candidates and elected officials, women experience threats and acts of violence from other political actors, as well as from within their own political parties. Political parties do not have a specific article for VAWP; they have articles for antidiscrimination focusing on quotas, but not specifically for all types of violence against women in politics. Women participants in the survey have mentioned the experience of violence while running for office or serving as MPs. It was mentioned from all participants in the survey that social media platforms are facilitating growing levels of psychological violence as well as physical threat. This VAWP can also intimidate women who seek to exercise their right to vote who may also find themselves the target of violence, and intimidation.

## **Recommendations**

Innovative prevention and response measures to counter violence against women in politics are needed globally, along with continued research to quantify the scale of the issue.

### ***The need to recognize that the problem exists***

- Data collection
- Regional and country-level mapping of violence against women in politics
- Create measurement tools
- Include it in SDG monitoring
- Conduct a comprehensive study to document instances of violence against women in politics, especially local politics, to create a database of such cases.

***Creating space for proper legislation where it's missing***

- Categorize and sanction violence against women in politics in a proportional way with the offense
- Develop legislation that defines and protects women against violence in politics
- Prepare advocacy actions based on empirical data collected, to influence policy and legal decision making.

***Define political violence against women***

During a discussion on violence against women in politics, a working group made up of different international institutions proposed the following definition for the phenomenon:

*"Political violence: physical, psychological or sexual actions, conduct and/or aggression committed by one person or a group of persons, directly or through third parties, against women who are candidates, elected, designated or exercising a public/political role, or against their families, to reduce, suspend, prevent or restrict the exercise of their position or to induce or oblige them to carry out, against their will, an act or omission in the performance of their functions or in the exercise of their rights."<sup>10</sup>*

***Countering violence in election periods***

- Include monitoring of violence against women during elections in election observations
- Integrate a gender perspective in existing electoral legislation to specifically refer to violence against women during elections
- Include gender sensitivity in observer training
- Use electoral campaign meetings as platforms to discuss gender-based violence, specifically violence in politics, wherever it is most appropriate

***Countering violence in the virtual space***

The role of political party structures – fostering an environment of safety and promotion.

- Creation of a 'Woman Against Violence' group in elections in the Western Balkans
- Develop Codes of Conduct for political party structures that specifically address violence against women in politics
- Sensitize party members on the negative impacts of the phenomenon
- Train women from political party structures and in leadership positions

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations. 2018. Violence against Women in Politics: Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations. 2-9 March 2018. New York, p. 26.



- Create networks with civil society organizations to jointly address violence against women in politics
- Strengthen cross-party solidarity on issues of gender, especially violence against women in the political context

***Changing political culture***

- Create more genuine avenues for women to be involved in politics both at the local and national level, so they can be more visible and have a substantial role in politics, rather as numbers.
- Codes of conduct need to be established by the political party level and concrete action taken to discipline members who are involved in acts of violence, whether against candidates and officials from other political parties or against their own party members.
- Codes of conduct need to be established in government and legislative levels.
- Codes of conduct need to be established in local governance as well.

***Raising awareness and changing norms***

- Train media representatives, especially journalists, on gender-sensitive reporting on women in politics to combat media biases in how women are portrayed
- Capacity building
- Awareness raising campaigns to showcase that political violence and harassment based on gender exists

***Men as promoters of gender equality in politics***

- Identify men that can serve as advocates, alongside women, to promote gender equality in politics and countering violence against women
- Male-led campaigns to educate citizens against gender-based violence in general, and specifically in politics



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## Annex

### *First part: Documents and references on the questions in the table below*

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Materials to bring in English (latest editions, from 2014 onwards)</b>
What are the legal provisions for women's participation in politics and decision making in your country?	Electoral Code Gender Equality strategy Study from UNDP, UN Women, OSCE, NGOs. OSCE/ODIHR report on the election EU progress report of the country NDI
Are there legal provisions that protect women from discrimination and gender-based violence in politics?	Anti-discrimination Law Strategy for Gender Equality Any other you might consider relevant
How are women involved in politics portrayed in the media?	If you find cases of discrimination, portrayals of women with sexual and/or physical connotations, share them in links in English or your country language and highlight the important parts to be revived.
Do you have cases of the gender-based violence and discrimination of women in politics and decision making?	Any severe case of violence that is becoming public and a link in the media.
What provisions for women participating in politics and decision making are in the statutes of the 3 (three) main political parties in your country?	This is important and we need your help here in preparing a short paragraph about these provisions in English or in your language. You can, as well, produce this information after concluding the second part above.
What is the ratio of women vs. men's participation in decision making positions within the political parties?	Any latest data from the Institute of Statistics?
Do you have any latest analyses from the CSOs on women's participation in decision making and politics?	Report of CSOs on CEDAW or any other report that talks about women in politics and decision making in your country. Any discussion of changes in the electoral code by the women's NGOs in your country.
Do you have any practical samples in your country that promote women's	Any sample about the Government composition or other public institution.



participation in politics and decision making?	
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***Second part: Interviews with at least 3 women in politics, representatives of the 3 most important political parties in your country.***

## Questions for women interviewed

### General information

- Name
- Position
- Political party
- How long have you been engaged in politics and in what positions?
- Are you a member of the party's women forum? If yes, since when and what is your position?

### Party information

- 1- Does the party have a women's forum? If yes, what are the structures and are they present at the local level as well?
- 2- Does the forum have a statute? If yes, are there provisions for protecting women from discrimination and violence?
- 3- Are there specific policies within the party to promote women? If yes, what are these policies?
- 4- How many women are in the highest leadership positions in the political party?
- 5- Are there local party leaders that are women?
- 6- Is violence against women and discrimination part of the party's discourse and internal documents?
- 7- Is there a specific mention of this topic in the party platform that you are aware of?

### Personal experience

- 8- Have you ever experienced the following:
  - Verbal harassment
  - Threats
  - Emotional blackmail
  - Sexual harassment
  - Being called demeaning names
  - Discrimination in promotion in your political career

If yes to any of the above, how did they happen (in person, social media, etc.).

- 9- Do you think violence against women in politics is present in your country?
- 10- If yes to the above, what are the forms it manifests, in your opinion?
- 11- Do you think violence against women in politics is properly addressed in your country?



12-Do you think women or men are more exposed to violence in politics?