

Resolution 2274 (2019)¹

Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Gender-based violence affects women in all aspects of life. The world of politics is no exception. Sustained by the wave created by the #MeToo movement, many women politicians have started to speak up. Their individual testimonies and experiences are not isolated cases, but indicate the existence of a pattern of widespread and systematic gender-based violence against women in politics worldwide, as confirmed by the 2018 report “Violence against women in politics” by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly expresses its deepest concern at the findings of the regional study “Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe”, which it jointly conducted with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2018. Based on confidential individual interviews with women parliamentarians and staff of national parliaments, this study reveals alarming levels of sexism, sexual harassment and gender-based violence in national parliaments, widespread under-reporting of such incidents and a lack of adequate mechanisms to report violence, protect victims and sanction perpetrators.
3. The Assembly reiterates its firm condemnation of all forms of gender-based violence against women as a human rights violation and a major obstacle to the achievement of gender equality. It confirms its unfaltering support to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS. No. 210, “Istanbul Convention”) as the most comprehensive international binding legal instrument in this field.
4. Sexism and violence against women in politics affect the foundations of democracy: they interfere with women’s right to fully and equally participate in political life and express their views, limit their right to vote and to run for public office, and ultimately undermine the representativeness and the legitimacy of elected institutions. Sexism and violence against women in parliament hold back women’s access to leadership positions and impair their ability to fulfil their elected mandate.
5. Despite its impact on victims, respect for fundamental rights and the good functioning of democracy, violence against women in politics as a specific phenomenon has so far received little attention. At societal level, sexism and sexual harassment are often dismissed as the price women must pay to be in politics. Both sexism and sexual harassment are so trivialised and ingrained that many women politicians are not even aware of being victims of a gender-specific form of violence. Others choose not to report acts of sexism and sexual harassment because this would undermine their political standing or harm their political parties. Overall, a culture of impunity for sexism prevails among parliamentarians.
6. To redress this state of affairs, it is crucial to raise public awareness of sexism and violence against women in politics and to bring about a change of mindsets. In this context, the Assembly recalls the #NotInMyParliament initiative, which was launched by its President, Liliane Maury Pasquier, as a follow-up to the joint regional study conducted with the IPU, and gives the initiative its full support.

1. *Assembly debate* on 9 April 2019 (13th Sitting) (see [Doc. 14843](#), report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Thorhildur Sunna Ævarsdóttir). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 9 April 2019 (13th Sitting).

See also [Recommendation 2152 \(2019\)](#).



7. At the same time, to turn greater awareness into tangible change, the Assembly believes that a number of players in the political arena should strengthen their policies, legislation and other measures aimed at putting an end to sexism and violence against women in politics, and that data collection, monitoring and research in this area should be stepped up, at national and international level.

8. In the light of the above considerations, the Assembly calls on the parliaments of Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as on the parliaments who enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly to:

8.1. draft, if they do not already exist, or revise the codes of conduct for their members with a view to setting out the explicit prohibition of sexist speech, sexist acts and sexual harassment and introducing sanctions for breaches of this obligation;

8.2. consider reviewing immunity rules which afford immunity from prosecution to members of parliament for sexual harassment and violence against women, unless this has already been done;

8.3. introduce complaint mechanisms to prevent and sanction sexual harassment, sexual violence and misconduct, ensuring that:

8.3.1. they cover members of parliament and parliamentary staff;

8.3.2. victims can report incidents in full safety and confidentiality and have fair consideration given to their case as expeditiously as possible;

8.3.3. full independence of the complaint mechanism is guaranteed, free of party allegiances;

8.3.4. the decisions of such complaint mechanisms can be followed by effective sanctions which are proportional to the gravity of the case;

8.3.5. information about the terms of reference of complaint mechanisms, their powers and how to seize them is regularly disseminated through appropriate means to all members of parliament and parliamentary staff;

8.3.6. statistics on the activities of such mechanisms are regularly published, guaranteeing confidentiality and including information on the number of cases submitted, the number of pending cases, the number of decided cases and the outcome of such cases;

8.4. introduce a mechanism providing confidential counselling for victims of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct, and disseminate information about it;

8.5. support the #NotInMyParliament initiative and replicate it at national level;

8.6. conduct surveys and public debates periodically to raise awareness of the issue of violence against women, including in politics;

8.7. organise training on the issue of sexism and violence against women for members of parliament and parliamentary staff;

8.8. disseminate the 2018 IPU-Parliamentary Assembly regional study "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe" among members of parliament and parliamentary staff through appropriate means, and consider translating it and carrying out a similar national study;

8.9. ensure that men and women parliamentarians alike are involved in efforts to prevent and respond to sexism and violence against women in politics and female parliamentary staff.

9. Furthermore, the Assembly invites the parliaments of the States Parties to the Istanbul Convention to provide the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) with information concerning violence against women in politics, including in political parties, in parliaments and in the context of the electoral process, in light of the overarching general obligations in the area of preventing violence against women set out in Article 12 of the Istanbul Convention.

10. The Assembly calls on Council of Europe member and observer States and States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly to:

10.1. provide the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women with information on violence against women in politics, including in political parties, in parliaments and in the context of elections;

10.2. support research on the links between sexism, violence against women in politics and the political representation of women;

- 10.3. support activities, projects and observatories aimed at collecting data on sexism and violence against women in politics, including in parliaments and in the context of elections;
 - 10.4. consider introducing specific legislation on sexism and violence against women in politics.
11. The Assembly calls on political parties at national level and its political groups to commit to rejecting all forms of violence against women in politics, enshrine this commitment in their codes of conduct/statutes and set up effective disciplinary procedures against members who act in breach of this commitment.
12. As regards its own work and functioning, the Assembly recalls the applicability to its members of Rule No. 1292 of 3 September 2010 on the protection of human dignity at the Council of Europe and the relevance of the Code of conduct for members of the Parliamentary Assembly, which sets out the obligation to “respect the values of the Council of Europe and the general principles of behaviour of the Assembly and not take any action which would cause damage to the reputation and integrity of the Assembly or its members”.
13. With this consideration in mind, the Assembly:
- 13.1. asks the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly to:
 - 13.1.1. regularly bring to the attention of the members of the Assembly the Council of Europe rules on the protection of dignity which are applicable to them, in writing and by organising training;
 - 13.1.2. provide additional training on the issue of sexism and violence against women for Parliamentary Assembly delegates, following the example of the European Parliament;
 - 13.2. calls on its Committee on Rules of Procedure, Immunities and Institutional Affairs to modify the Code of conduct for members of the Assembly with a view to:
 - 13.2.1. introducing the explicit prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence and misconduct, as well as the obligation to take account of the Council of Europe rules on the protection of dignity and to co-operate with the relevant mechanisms and take account of the decisions that might be taken as a result of a harassment procedure;
 - 13.2.2. ensuring that the recommendations of the Commission against Harassment and/or decisions of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe resulting from the application of Rule No. 1292 can be followed up by the Assembly in the context of its Code of conduct;
 - 13.3. asks the Bureau of the Assembly to ensure that, in the context of election observation by the Assembly, the issue of violence against women, and notably sexism and sexual harassment, is systematically taken into account and is included in future revisions of the Guidelines for the observation of elections by the Parliamentary Assembly.
14. The Assembly takes note of the planned revision of Rule No. 1292 with a view to enhancing its effectiveness and recalls the need for a coherent application of this rule and of the Code of conduct for members of the Assembly.