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# MAPPING THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE ELECTIONS

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## Mapping the legal framework for gender-responsive elections



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# Mapping the legal framework for gender-responsive elections

February, 2026

Publisher: Reactor – Research in Action

About the Publisher: Tanja Ivanova

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This research has been funded by the European Union under the project “LOCAL VOICES FOR DEMOCRACY: POWER, INFLUENCE AND EQUALITY IN PRACTICE,” implemented by Reactor – Research in Action. This project is a sub-grant awarded under the “EU support to the Civil Society Resource Center – Phase 2,” funded by the European Union. The content of this document is the sole responsibility of the project implementer and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Civil Society Resource Center.

## Content

1.	Introduction and objective of the analysis	5
2.	Methodology	6
3.	Conceptual and normative framework	6
	<b>The concept and principles of gender-responsive elections</b>	6
	<b>International and European standards</b>	6
	<b>Constitutional framework</b>	7
4.	Electoral legislation	8
	<b>Electoral code</b>	8
	<b>Electoral campaign financing</b>	9
	<b>Electoral bodies</b>	10
	<b>Law on prevention and protection against violence against women and domestic violence</b>	
	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
	<b>Law on equal opportunities for women and men</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
	<b>Law on prevention and protection against discrimination</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
	<b>Applicability in the electoral context and protection and legal aid mechanisms</b>	12
	<b>Protection and legal aid mechanisms under these laws include:</b>	12
5.	Violence and hate speech in the electoral context	12
	<b>Criminal Code</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
	<b>Misdemeanor and Civil Protections</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
	<b>Online violence and digital space</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
	<b>Gaps in the legal framework related to violence against women in politics</b>	<b>Error!</b>
	<b>Bookmark not defined.</b>	
6.	Role of political parties	14
	<b>Law on political parties and internal party procedures</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
7.	Institutional mechanisms and oversight	14
	<b>Ombudsman</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
	<b>Commission for prevention and protection against discrimination</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
	<b>State commission for prevention of corruption</b>	15
	<b>Case law</b>	15
8.	Practical implementation and challenges	15

<b>The gap between the „de jure“ and the „de facto“ situation defined.</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>Implementation of quotas: formal compliance, limited transformative effect</b>	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
<b>Implementation of sanctions</b>	17
<b>Access to justice for female candidates</b>	17
9. <b>Conclusions, findings, weaknesses and potential</b>	18
<b>Conclusions</b>	18
<b>Key findings</b>	18
<b>Systemic weaknesses</b>	18
<b>Potentials within the existing framework</b>	19
10. <b>Recommendations</b>	19
<b>Legislative recommendations</b>	20
<b>Institutional recommendations</b>	20
<b>Recommendations to political parties</b>	21
<b>Recommendations for the election administration</b>	21
<b>Recommendations for training and capacity building</b>	21

# 1. Introduction and objective of the analysis

Gender equality is a fundamental principle of democratic governance and a key indicator of the quality of electoral processes. Democratic elections are not limited to the formal exercise of the right to vote; they also entail conditions in which all citizens have equal opportunities to participate in political life as voters, candidates, public officeholders, and actors in public debate.

In practice, electoral processes often take place in the context of existing structural inequalities, gender stereotypes, and unequal distribution of resources and power. Women, despite having formally equal rights, face specific barriers such as limited access to finance and media, underestimation of their political capacity, as well as various forms of pressure, intimidation, and discrediting. These factors directly affect their participation and representation in electoral processes.

Therefore, gender equality must be recognized as an essential element of fair, inclusive, and credible elections—not as a secondary or optional issue.

For the purposes of this analysis, the term “gender-responsive elections” serves as an analytical framework encompassing all phases of the electoral cycle and their impact on women and men.

For the purposes of this analysis, the term “gender-responsive elections” is used as a working definition, developed on the basis of relevant international standards and analytical frameworks on gender equality and democratic elections. Gender-responsive elections are electoral processes that:

- Ensure substantive rather than merely formal equality between women and men;
- Recognize and address gender-specific barriers to political participation;
- Include proactive legal and institutional measures to promote gender balance;
- Provide protection against discrimination, intimidation, and gender-based violence, particularly in the political and electoral context;
- Guarantee equal access to resources, institutions, and mechanisms for legal protection.

This definition goes beyond the idea of gender neutrality in electoral rules and insists on incorporating the gender perspective as an integral part of electoral legislation, institutional practices, and political culture.

The main objective of this analysis is to assess the existing legal and institutional framework’s capacity to ensure gender-responsive elections in North Macedonia.

More specifically, the analysis aims:

- To determine the extent to which the constitutional and legal framework incorporates the principles of gender equality in electoral processes;
- To identify strengths and gaps in electoral, anti-discrimination, and related criminal laws;
- To analyze the gap between normative solutions (de jure) and their practical implementation (de facto);
- To assess the roles of key institutions and political actors in ensuring gender-responsive elections;
- To formulate specific and actionable recommendations for improving the legal framework and institutional practice.

## 2. Methodology

To provide a comprehensive assessment, the analysis adopts a qualitative approach, combining multiple complementary methods.

These are as follows:

- Research, including a systematic review of relevant constitutional and legal provisions, by-laws, strategies, official reports, and analyses from national and international institutions, as well as relevant research and policy papers.
- Legal analysis assessing the content, consistency, and compliance of the Republic of North Macedonia's legal framework with international and European standards on gender equality and democratic elections, with a particular focus on electoral legislation, protection against discrimination, and sanctioning mechanisms.

Combining these methods allows for an analysis that is not limited to the formal legal framework, but rather considers its functionality and its effects on the actual political participation of women and men.

## 3. Conceptual and normative framework

### The concept and principles of gender-responsive elections

In North Macedonia, equal participation of women in electoral processes remains more of a normative obligation than a reality, especially at the local level, where political power is still heavily dominated by men. Although legal quotas ensure the presence of female politicians on candidate lists, they are rarely realized, indicating a substantive rather than merely formal inequality. Non-discrimination in the electoral context is often systematically undermined through informal practices, selective application of rules, and party structures reproducing gender stereotypes and marginalizing women's political autonomy. While legal quotas allow for a formal increase in their representation, women are often placed at lower positions on candidate lists, which limits their chances of being elected and their influence, while intra-party structures and cultural barriers continue to create unequal conditions for participation.<sup>1</sup> Violence against women in politics, which manifests verbally, online, psychologically, and institutionally, remains underestimated, underdocumented, and almost completely unsanctioned, creating a climate of fear, self-censorship, and withdrawal from public space.<sup>2</sup> This directly undermines the democratic character of elections and restricts women's freedom of political expression. At the same time, the electoral administration is formally gender-neutral but essentially gender-blind: what is missing are systematic training on gender sensitivity, management protocols for gender-based discrimination and violence, and clear accountability to ensure a safe and inclusive electoral environment. Without integrating a gender perspective into all phases of the electoral cycle, elections cannot be considered either fully democratic or gender-responsive.

### International and European standards

In the analysis of gender equality and electoral cycles in North Macedonia, international and European standards set specific obligations that go beyond formal equality and insist on women's substantive, safe, and influential participation. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) clearly states that "States

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<sup>1</sup> Women in Politics 2: Path to Public Office and Impact at the Local Level in North, 2023, Reactor – Research in Action: <https://reactor.org.mk/publication-all/zenitevopolitikata>

<sup>2</sup> Violence against women in political parties in North Macedonia, 2020, National Democratic Institute: <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/violence-against-women-in-political-parties-in-North-Macedonia-2020.pdf>

Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life.<sup>3</sup> The CEDAW Committee's general recommendations also call for practical measures: General Recommendation No. 23 emphasizes equality of participation; General Recommendation No. 25 supports the use of temporary special measures to accelerate gender equality<sup>4</sup>; and General Recommendation No. 35 explicitly defines gender-based violence as a form of discrimination that inhibits the enjoyment of human rights<sup>5</sup>.

The Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention links gender-based violence to unequal power relations that prevent women's full participation in public and political life, including in electoral processes: "violence against women...is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations" that significantly undermine equality<sup>6</sup>.

Fundamental human rights, as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, guarantee universal political participation: "every citizen has the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs and to be elected...without unreasonable restrictions"<sup>7</sup>.

The OSCE/ODIHR has translated these standards into practical guidelines and observations. Their report on the 2025 Local Elections in North Macedonia notes that, although legal quotas are being followed, women represent only 10.4% of mayoral candidates, and that both gender issues and protection from political violence remain sidelined in electoral practices<sup>8</sup>.

These international and European documents and recommendations make it clear that elections cannot be considered fully democratic or in compliance with international and European standards without gender-sensitive electoral administrations, systematic prevention of gender-based violence, and structural measures to ensure equal political participation.

Gender equality is an essential principle and a key criterion in the negotiation framework for the Republic of North Macedonia's EU accession and is integrated in the process of harmonization with European standards. The European Union regards gender equality as a fundamental European value and a key part of the political and democratic reforms that candidate countries must implement as part of the accession process, including in national laws, public policies, and institutional mechanisms for equality. In that regard, the EU Gender Action Plan III - National Implementation Plan of North Macedonia<sup>9</sup> includes gender equality within the framework of EU accession reforms and IPA programs, to promote equal access for women and men across all spheres, including democratic processes.

## Constitutional framework

The principle of equality and non-discrimination is set down in Article 9 of the Constitution<sup>10</sup>, clearly stipulating that "all citizens are equal in freedoms and rights regardless of sex..." and that "all citizens are equal before the Constitution and

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<sup>3</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Article 7: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

<sup>4</sup> UN General Recommendation No. 25, Article 4: <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/37855a>

<sup>5</sup> UN General Recommendation No. 35: <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/37855a>

<sup>6</sup> Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/about-the-convention>

<sup>7</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 25: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>

<sup>8</sup> ODIHR Interim Report on the 2025 Local Elections in North Macedonia: <https://odhr.osce.org/odhr/elections/north-macedonia/598489>

<sup>9</sup> EU Gender Action Plan III: Country-Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) for the Republic of North Macedonia [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/north-macedonia/eu-gender-action-plan-iii-country-level-implementation-plan-clip-republic-north-macedonia\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/north-macedonia/eu-gender-action-plan-iii-country-level-implementation-plan-clip-republic-north-macedonia_en)

<sup>10</sup> Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia: <https://www.sobranie.mk/ustav-na-rm.nspk>

the law.” This provision guarantees formal constitutional protection against discrimination on the basis of sex. However, the Constitution considers equality from a formal perspective and does not explicitly recognize either indirect discrimination or structural gender inequalities, which means that the real barriers to women's political participation remain constitutionally invisible.

In terms of political rights and freedoms, Article 22<sup>11</sup> establishes that “every citizen has the right to vote and to be elected”, whereas Articles 16 and 20<sup>12</sup> guarantee freedom of expression and association. These provisions are crucial for democratic elections and formally consider women and men equally. However, the Constitution does not establish any constitutional guarantees for participation equality, safety in the political arena, or protection against political and gender-based violence, which is a serious flaw considering the contemporary reality of political participation.

Regarding the state's obligation to promote gender equality, the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia does not contain an explicit positive obligation to actively promote gender equality, nor does it provide a constitutional basis for special measures. The sole indirect possibility arises from Article 8<sup>13</sup>, which defines the equality of citizens as a fundamental value but provides no specific guidance on active intervention.

The Constitution provides a minimal and rather formal basis for gender-responsive elections. It is positive that there is a clear prohibition of discrimination and a guarantee of political rights, but the absence of an explicit constitutional obligation to promote gender equality and to address gender-based political violence, as well as the lack of recognition of structural inequalities, is fundamentally problematic.

## 4. Electoral legislation

### Electoral Code

The Electoral Code<sup>14</sup> regulates the entire election procedure, from calling elections and submitting candidate lists to determining the final results. Article 1 clearly states that “this Code regulates the manner, conditions and procedure for election”, including the election of members of Parliament, council members, and mayors, which constitutes the basis for the application of gender equality norms.

Gender quotas on candidate lists are regulated by Article 64 of the Electoral Code, stipulating that “in the submitted list of candidates..., at least 40% of the candidates shall belong to the underrepresented sex, namely: in every third place at least one place shall belong to the underrepresented sex and, additionally, at least one place in every ten places.” (Electoral Code, Art. 64)<sup>15</sup>. This rule applies to candidate lists for Members of Parliament and Members of Council and aims to promote gender balance in candidate nominations.

The positioning of women on the lists (at least one in every third and at least one in ten places) is a crucial aspect of this norm, as it ensures not only quantitative participation but also visibility, which is essential for a real chance of election.

According to the Venice Commission, the most effective strategy to increase women's representation in parliaments is a combination of a proportional representation system with large constituencies and/or a nationwide district, with a legal threshold and closed candidate lists. In addition, mandatory gender quotas play a key role, providing not only for a high

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Electoral Code: <https://www.sec.mk/regulativa/>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

portion of female candidates, but also for strict rank-order rules (e.g., a zipper-system), and effective sanctions for noncompliance<sup>16</sup>.

In the sanctions section, the Electoral Code<sup>17</sup> permits the rejection of candidate lists that do not meet the legislated gender quotas upon submission to the relevant electoral authorities. If the State Election Commission requests corrections and they are not made by the deadline, the list may be rejected. Article 67 lists these administrative sanctions as procedural measures to ensure legal compliance.

Regarding gender-neutral language and concepts, analyses by the OSCE/ODIHR and UN Women election observation missions (2024–2025) indicate that election discourse and materials are often not gender-sensitive and fail to address specific barriers women face. As a result, even with formal quotas, the language and political messaging used during campaigns and in election programs often do not foster a gender-inclusive approach, as noted in OSCE/ODIHR observation reports<sup>18</sup>.

## Electoral campaign financing

The financing of election campaigns in the Republic of North Macedonia is regulated by the Electoral Code<sup>19</sup>, the Law on Financing of Political Parties<sup>20</sup>, and the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest<sup>21</sup>. These legal acts set out the basic rules for transparent financing, but do not contain explicit gender-sensitive provisions addressing women's access to financial resources or incentive measures aimed at gender equality.

According to the Electoral Code and electoral practices, campaigns may be financed from public and private sources, and the State, through the State Election Commission (SEC), covers media costs for political advertising, thus ensuring financial reimbursement, but this does not impose for specific requirements for gender-balanced use of these funds<sup>22</sup>.

The Law on Financing of Political Parties<sup>23</sup> (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia) regulates the public and transparent allocation of funds to political parties, specifying that 0.15% of the total state budget revenues are allocated to political parties, which are then distributed in part according to previously established criteria (Articles 9 and 10). While the law provides a framework for basic funding, it does not set provisions that directly link funding to the achievement of gender equality goals, including gender-specific activities or measures to motivate greater participation by women.

According to an analysis of legal norms and election reports, there are no legal or financial incentives that would ensure benefits to political entities that promote or advocate gender equality in campaign financing. As a result, female candidates do not have specific legal guarantees for access to financial resources beyond the general financing rules. Overall, these data show that men still hold the majority of positions of power in political parties, with a significant gender imbalance in leadership positions<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Venice Commission opinion: <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-PI%282019%29001-e>

<sup>17</sup> Electoral Code: <https://www.sec.mk/regulativa/>

<sup>18</sup> ODIHR Interim Report on the 2025 Local Elections in North Macedonia: <https://odih.osce.org/odih/elections/north-macedonia/598489>

<sup>19</sup> Electoral Code: <https://www.sec.mk/regulativa/>

<sup>20</sup> Law on Financing of Political Parties: <https://dejure.mk/zakon-izmena/zakon-za-finansiranje-na-politichkite-partii>

<sup>21</sup> Law on prevention of corruption and conflict of interests: <https://dksk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020>

<sup>22</sup> ODIHR Interim Report on the 2025 Local Elections in North Macedonia: <https://odih.osce.org/odih/elections/north-macedonia/598489>

<sup>23</sup> Law on Financing of Political Parties: <https://dejure.mk/zakon-izmena/zakon-za-finansiranje-na-politichkite-partii>

<sup>24</sup> Women in Politics 2: Path to Public Office and Impact at the Local Level in North, 2023, Reactor – Research in Action: <https://reactor.org.mk/publication-all/zenitevopolitikata>

Women's access to financial resources is closely linked to the structure of political parties and to their internal policies, i.e. whether parties have support mechanisms for female candidates within the party financing framework, but this is not separately regulated in the national campaign finance legislation.

In the current legal framework, there are no incentive measures, such as linking part of the State funding to the fulfillment of gender criteria (e.g., gender-specific public funding), although international analyses point to good examples from other countries where this has been applied as a support mechanism for equal gender participation. In this regard, it is worth noting that, according to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, several instruments contribute to increasing women's participation in political life. The following are particularly significant among them: Encouraging political parties to introduce affirmative measures aimed at greater representation of women among candidates; using public funding mechanisms to motivate parties to actively promote gender equality within their own structures; creating tailored training programs and promotional activities to encourage women to run for office; guaranteeing equal access to media space for candidates of both sexes and encouraging the media to ensure equal visibility of women and men, especially during election campaigns; as well as systematic education on gender equality, along with mentorship, support and encouragement for women who show interest in political engagement<sup>25</sup>.

There are specific incentive measures from other European countries that merit consideration for introduction, such as financial rewards for gender-balanced electoral lists and funding for gender-focused activities. Regarding the first aspect, several countries provide financial incentives to increase women's participation in politics. Georgia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Romania, and Ireland allocate additional public funding to parties that nominate or elect female candidates. These measures include a percentage increase in budget allocations based on women's representation. Practice shows, particularly in Ireland, that there is a significant increase in the number of elected women MPs, indicating the effectiveness of such mechanisms<sup>26</sup>.

In terms of funding for gender-focused activities, there are rules in certain countries obliging political parties to allocate a portion of their public funding to training, mentoring and support for women's participation in politics. The funds may also be used to support women's party wings or childcare services. For example, in Finland, 12% of funding must be allocated to women's branches since 1975, 5% in Italy, and Ireland has made the use of funds conditional on the promotion of women and young people since 2009<sup>27</sup>.

## Electoral bodies

The analysis of the composition of the electoral administration reveals varying levels of gender representation across the State Election Commission (SEC), Municipal Election Committees (MECs), and Electoral Boards (EBs). In the SEC, men comprise the majority (5 men and 2 women), indicating a notable gender imbalance in the highest electoral body. In contrast, the MECs demonstrate an almost balanced gender representation: of 798 members, 410 are men (51%) and 388 are women (49%), reflecting approximately equal participation. As for electoral boards, among 33,732 members, 15,286 are women (45.26%), with a total of 4,561 members<sup>28</sup>. Although the Electoral Code lacks specific provisions on gender representation in electoral bodies, Article 6 of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men<sup>29</sup> requires that each sex must be represented by at least 40% in state and public bodies. The absence of harmonization between these laws creates a normative gap, limiting the implementation of equal representation principles in the electoral process.

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<sup>25</sup> Recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=17259&lang=en>

<sup>26</sup> Gender-targeted public funding for political parties, analysis of the Parliamentary Institute: <https://www.sobranie.mk/content/2020.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Information about SEC and MEC members was found at the SEC website on January 3, 2026, and information about EB was obtained from the SEC on January 8, 2026.

<sup>29</sup> Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men: <https://www.slvesnik.com.mk/Issues/66a918f670d84cab9a2ae3a0c2d02b61.pdf>

Legal requirements for gender representation in electoral bodies derive from the Electoral Code, which sets out the conditions for the appointment and structure of electoral bodies, and from the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Although there is a general obligation to respect the principles of equality and non-discrimination, in practice there are no precise and binding quotas for gender balance, especially within the SEC.

To build gender sensitivity, SEC, MECs, and EBs members are required to attend training organized by the SEC<sup>30</sup>, often with the support of international organizations. These training sessions cover topics such as gender equality in the electoral process, the prevention of gender-based discrimination, the equal treatment of voters and candidates, and the recognition and action in cases of gender-based violence and hate speech during elections. Gender sensitivity is included in activities for implementing the State Election Commission's Strategic Plan 2021-2024<sup>31</sup>, which foresees "gender sensitization and training to improve awareness of gender issues".

## Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

The Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence<sup>32</sup> (Articles 1 to 4) establishes a comprehensive legal framework for the prevention, protection, and institutional response to gender-based violence against women and domestic violence, in line with international standards, particularly the Istanbul Convention. The law explicitly recognizes violence against women as a form of gender-based discrimination and a violation of human rights, rooted in unequal power relations between women and men.

Under the law, the State is obligated to take measures for prevention, early intervention, effective protection, and support for survivors, as well as for the prosecution of perpetrators. The law expands the definitions of violence (psychological, physical, economic, sexual, harassment, stalking, and digital violence), mandates inter-institutional coordination, and requires risk assessment and urgent protective measures.

The law is particularly relevant in the context of public and political life, as it provides a basis for recognizing and addressing violence against women in politics and electoral processes, including psychological violence, threats, public discrediting, and harassment. In doing so, the law helps create a safer and more inclusive environment for women's participation in politics, public office, and decision-making processes.

## Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (Articles 1 to 3)<sup>33</sup> aims to establish and promote the principles of gender equality and equal opportunities in the political, economic, and social life of the Republic of North Macedonia. Specifically, the law seeks "to establish equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life, including political participation and participation in decision-making". In alignment with this aim, the law prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of sex and defines measures to prevent and promote equal opportunities. Elections-wise, this means that state and public institutions must act to eliminate structural barriers that limit women's participation in elections and public office.

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<sup>30</sup> Trainings on gender aspects of the electoral process: <https://www.sec.mk/obuki-za-rodovite-aspekti-na-izborniot-proces/>

<sup>31</sup> Action Plan for Promoting Gender Sensitivity within the State Electoral Commission 2021-2024: <https://eregistar.sec.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/1.akciskiplan>

<sup>32</sup> Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: <https://portal.mdt.gov.mk/post-body-files/zakoni-mstp-file-FPoG.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination

The Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination<sup>34</sup> expands this framework by prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, family status, political affiliation, and other grounds in the enjoyment of human rights guaranteed by the Constitution and laws. The Law introduces concepts such as direct and indirect discrimination and sexual harassment that may occur during the electoral process, for example, through conduct, policy, or practice that restricts women's right to vote or participate.

### Applicability in the electoral context and protection and legal aid mechanisms

In an electoral context, these three laws mean that:

- All political entities, electoral administrations and public authorities should ensure neutral treatment of candidates and voters, without gender-based discrimination<sup>35</sup>.
- Practices that indirectly limit women's political participation (e.g., unequal conditions of registration, access to media, or party financing) may be subject to complaint before the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination or the Ombudsman.
- Violence, threats, harassment, public discrediting and other forms of gender-based violence directed against female candidates, public officeholders or activists during the electoral process constitute grounds for the application of protection and intervention measures established by the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, including emergency protective measures, risk assessment and institutional coordination.

### Protection and legal aid mechanisms under these laws include:

- Complaints to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the purpose of establishing discrimination in electoral procedures;
- Competences of the Ombudsperson to initiate procedures on the grounds of rights violations of gender-discriminated persons;
- Access to protection measures, free legal aid, and multidisciplinary support (social, psychological, and legal) for survivors of gender-based violence related to political or electoral participation;
- Provision of legal aid and exemption from court costs in order to enable access to justice for persons who assert discrimination based on gender or sex in the electoral process.

## 5. Violence and hate speech in the electoral context

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<sup>34</sup> Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination  
<https://www.slvesnik.com.mk/issues/d1cad95799fb48d19825ab843deefe09.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, Article 9 and Article 110: <https://www.sobranie.mk/ustav-na-rm.nspix>

## Criminal Code

Within the legal system of the Republic of North Macedonia, electoral processes are subject to specific criminal charges for violence or obstruction of the right to free elections. The Criminal Code<sup>36</sup> sets out preventive and penal provisions for acts against elections, including the use of force, serious threats, and other forms of obstruction of voting or election results. For example, Article 158 of the Criminal Code, "Obstruction of Elections and Voting," provides that the use of force or threats to obstruct voting is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.

Regarding hate speech, the Criminal Code contains provisions that penalize incitement to hatred, intolerance, or discrimination on various grounds, including sex/gender and political affiliation. Article 319 provides sanctions for "supporting, inciting or creating hatred, discrimination or violence on the basis of gender (sex) or other characteristics," including a sentence of one to five years in prison, whereas Article 394 provides sanctions for "distributing such materials through computer systems (online hate speech)."

## Misdemeanor and Civil Protections

Under misdemeanor and civil law, the explicit criminal law is the primary means. However, the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and other legal instruments may enable the filing of lawsuits or complaints with the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination regarding election-related hate speech or discrimination<sup>37</sup>.

## Online Violence and Digital Space

In the digital space, online hate speech and digital violence pose significant challenges to candidates' integrity. Although there is a criminal provision countering the spread of hatred through computer systems (Article 394), the institutional response to reports and prosecutions remains limited. Reports indicate that hate speech is increasing significantly, yet such cases are rarely subject to criminal proceedings, highlighting gaps in the practical application of the law and the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms<sup>38</sup>.

## Gaps in the legal framework related to violence against women in politics

There are significant gaps in the legal framework, especially regarding violence against women in politics during elections. While the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence establishes a comprehensive framework for the recognition, prevention, and protection against gender-based violence, it does not explicitly address gender-motivated violence related to women's political participation, nor does it outline specific punitive or protective measures tailored to the specific risks faced by women candidates, public officeholders, and political activists in an electoral context.

The absence of a precise definition of violence against women in politics as a distinct form of gender-based violence within electoral processes creates legal ambiguity. This ambiguity affects how the law is applied in practice, especially regarding responsibilities, the need for prompt action, and collaboration between electoral and protective institutions. As a result, access to justice and effective protection for women candidates who are victims of politically motivated violence, threats, hate speech, or public discrediting remain limited and fragmented, thereby negatively affecting their participation in electoral processes and public political life.

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<sup>36</sup> Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://jorm.gov.mk/>

<sup>37</sup> Analysis on the legal framework in North Macedonia on regulating hate speech, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, [https://mhc.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/analizanazakonramka\\_eng-1.pdf](https://mhc.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/analizanazakonramka_eng-1.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> The Situation with Hate Speech in North Macedonia in 2024, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, <https://mhc.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/polisi-brif-7-eng.pdf>

## 6. Role of Political Parties

### Law on political parties and internal party procedures

The Law on Political Parties regulates the activities of political parties in the Republic of North Macedonia, including their organization, registration, rights, and obligations. According to Article 1, the Law “regulates the manner, conditions and procedure for the establishment, registration and termination of political parties”<sup>39</sup>.

Although this Law does not contain extensive provisions on gender equality, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's analysis<sup>40</sup> indicates that political parties are obliged to adhere to the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination in their structures, in accordance with the Constitution's general principles and international standards. The legal framework for gender equality is also integrated into other laws (e.g., the Law on Equal Opportunities and the Electoral Code), which indirectly affect party rules.

Intra-party democratic procedures are not detailed in the Law on Political Parties, so parties generally set the rules for electing bodies and candidates, as well as other procedures, in their statutes and rulebooks. This leaves room for varied practices, with some parties establishing formal deadlines and procedures for electing bodies, while others operate centrally. The lack of clear legal standards for intra-party democracy can limit opportunities for gender-inclusive participation, as party elites most often determine the distribution of functions and leadership positions without binding criteria for gender balance<sup>41</sup>.

Many parties formally include provisions on gender equality in their statutes and rulebooks, or establish special bodies (such as women's forums or gender committees) to promote a gender-inclusive approach and ensure the equitable distribution of opportunities for women within party structures. For example, some parties provide for women's forums or boards that participate in party bodies and influence decisions. However, these arrangements are voluntary and not directly regulated by law, resulting in inconsistent implementation across parties and no unified legal obligation that binds all political entities to adopt gender-homogeneous internal procedures.

The legal framework (Law on Political Parties) sets minimum requirements for functioning but does not mandate specific mechanisms for gender equality in internal party life, which is most often governed by internal party decisions, statutes, or codes of conduct. This creates gaps that can weaken gender inclusiveness, as legally regulated criteria for women's internal party participation are absent unless introduced through internal statutory mechanisms or further legal amendments.

## 7. Institutional mechanisms and oversight

The institutional mechanisms for oversight and protection of gender equality and human rights in the Republic of North Macedonia have been established through several independent state bodies, whose roles are crucial to preventing and sanctioning discrimination and abuse in the electoral process.

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<sup>39</sup> The Law on Political Parties: <https://www.slvesnik.com.mk/Issues/c4ef6c06718f4fe18ff615a5877f73f4.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Analysis on the political parties' commitments towards greater political participation of women, 2024, Westminster Foundation for Democracy: <https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/increased-political-participation-women-north-macedonia>

<sup>41</sup> A gender-sensitive Assembly and gender equality on the political stage: An overview of the current situation in North Macedonia: <https://idscs.org.mk/mk/2023>

## Ombudsman

The Ombudsman is an independent institution established by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia (Art. 112)<sup>42</sup> and further detailed in the Law on the Ombudsman<sup>43</sup>. Its competence includes protecting against violations of citizens' rights and freedoms under the Constitution and laws, including discrimination based on sex and gender in the electoral process. Individuals and groups may file complaints, and the institution issues recommendations to the competent authorities.

## Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination

The Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) is an independent body established under the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. It has a mandate to address complaints of all forms of discrimination, including gender-based discrimination in the electoral process, such as hate speech, restrictions on political participation, and unequal treatment of female candidates and voter groups<sup>44</sup>.

## State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption<sup>45</sup>

The State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) has the authority to prevent and detect corruption, including in the electoral process. Although the SCPC's mandate is not specifically aimed at gender equality, corrupt practices often have gender-specific implications because women candidates and marginalized groups are particularly vulnerable to pressure and irregularities<sup>46</sup>.

## Case Law

In case law, issues of discrimination and hate speech in the electoral context are addressed by applying provisions of the Criminal Code (e.g., Art. 158 and Art. 319) and the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. Although specific judgments with explicit gender reasoning are limited, case law helps expand institutional protection.<sup>47</sup>

# 8. Practical implementation and challenges

## The gap between the „de jure“ and the „de facto“ situation

Although the legal framework in North Macedonia formally recognizes the principles of equality and non-discrimination and provides mechanisms for gender inclusion (notably through quotas), in practice, there remains a clear gap between normative guarantees and the actual conditions for participation. This gap arises because electoral rules are largely

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<sup>42</sup> Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://www.sobranie.mk/ustav-na-rsm.nspix>

<sup>43</sup> Law on the Ombudsman, <https://www.sobranie.mk/content/zakoni/2014/0170-2014.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination: <https://kzd.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Zakon-za-spreciuvanje-i-zastita-od-diskriminacija.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest: <https://www.dksk.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Zakon-za-spruvanje-na-korupcija-i-konflikt-na-interesi.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Gender Audit of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 2024, OSCE/SCPC: [https://dksk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/REPORT\\_Gender-Audit-of-the-SCPC\\_MKD.pdf](https://dksk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/REPORT_Gender-Audit-of-the-SCPC_MKD.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Final Report on the 2024 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/9/579415.pdf>

“gender neutral,” yet the political and institutional context in which they are applied is not neutral: it is shaped by gender stereotypes, uneven distribution of resources, party hierarchy, and informal centers of power.

In practice, female candidates often face:

- an unequal starting position in access to finance, logistics, and party infrastructure<sup>48</sup>;
- lower media visibility and biased treatment in public discourse (focus on appearance, private life, and “suitability” rather than on program and competencies)<sup>49</sup>;
- increased exposure to online attacks, belittling, and discrediting, which are rarely documented and even less often sanctioned<sup>50</sup>;
- party pressures and silent sanctions (marginalization, exclusion from key election events, restrictions on speech and public appearances)<sup>51</sup>.

These factors are not necessarily visible in legal texts, but they directly affect whether quotas and legal guarantees translate into meaningful and secure participation by women in political life.

## Implementation of quotas: formal compliance, limited transformative effect

Gender quotas in the Electoral Code are among the strongest normative tools for increasing women’s presence on candidate lists. Most often, quotas are respected in a formal sense, i.e., they comply with the percentage and distribution rules. However, their substantive implementation faces several limitations:

Quotas ensure candidacies but do not guarantee political power. Even when women appear on the lists, they are often positioned so that their likelihood of election or their role in the campaign is secondary, especially in intra-party relations and resource allocation.

This suggests that increased representation of women does not always translate into substantive participation. Analyses of representative bodies show that even when women are represented in greater numbers in councils or parliament, their political action is often constrained by strong party discipline. In practice, women councilors and MPs most often vote in accordance with the official party position, which is articulated and controlled largely by male party elites, rather than initiating or supporting policies that directly and systematically advance gender equality. Thus, quantitative representation does not automatically translate into qualitative, transformative impact.<sup>52</sup> The local level remains the most vulnerable. In local elections, patterns of “symbolic inclusion” are visible: women are present on council lists, but they run for (or are supported in) executive positions, such as mayor, significantly less often. This indicates that quotas are not accompanied by policies that advance women’s leadership. In addition, women at the local level are more often positioned in roles with collective or shared responsibility, while men dominate positions with centralized, individual responsibility and greater

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<sup>48</sup> Analysis of the adoption and implementation of political party commitments for greater political representation of women, 2024, Westminster Foundation for Democracy: <https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/AnalysisonthepoliticalpartiescommitmentstowardsgreaterpoliticalparticipationofwomenMKD.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Bridging the Gender Gap: Strengthening Women’s Representation in Political Advertising and Coverage on Internet Portals in North Macedonia, 2024, Metamorphosis Foundation: [https://metamorphosis.org.mk/izdanija\\_arhiva/premostuvanje-na-rodoviot-jaz-zajaknuvanje-na-zastapenosta-na-zhenite-vo-politichkoto-reklamiranje-i-vo-pokrivanjeto-na-internet-portalite-vo-severna-makedonija/](https://metamorphosis.org.mk/izdanija_arhiva/premostuvanje-na-rodoviot-jaz-zajaknuvanje-na-zastapenosta-na-zhenite-vo-politichkoto-reklamiranje-i-vo-pokrivanjeto-na-internet-portalite-vo-severna-makedonija/)

<sup>50</sup> Analysis of the legislation related to Technology Facilitated Gender Based Violence, 2024, UNDP: <https://www.undp.org/north-macedonia/publications/analysis-technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence>

<sup>51</sup> Participation of Community Women in Political and Public Life in North Macedonia, 2024, OSCE: <https://skopje.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/3/6/581575.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Women in Politics 2: Path to Public Office and Impact at the Local Level in North, 2023, Reactor – Research in Action: <https://reactor.org.mk/en/publication-all/zenitevopolitikata>

political power. As a result, despite the increased presence of women in councils, their influence on key decisions remains limited, often due to strong party discipline and the dominance of male party structures. Thus, quantitative representation does not automatically translate into substantive and transformative participation at the local level<sup>53</sup>.

Complementary measures are lacking. Without additional measures, such as incentive funding, intra-party rules for equal opportunity, mentoring, and protective mechanisms, quotas remain an "entry ticket" rather than a guarantee of a fair race.

## Implementation of sanctions

Regarding sanctions, the system shows selective effectiveness. Where violations are clearly measurable and formal (e.g., non-compliance with a quota when submitting a list), there is an administrative mechanism – correction or rejection. However, a large share of real violations in the electoral context is not captured by formal figures, but by:

- discriminatory practices in party nominations;
- hate speech and online harassment;
- intimidation and psychological pressure;
- misuse of resources and media bias with gender implications.

In these segments, sanctions are rare, and the institutional response is often slow, fragmented, or insufficiently specialized, creating an impression of impunity. A key challenge is that existing institutions have mandates but lack a "bridge" between mandate and practice: protocols, standards of proof, clear competencies, and coordination.

## Access to justice for female candidates

Although the legal system offers multiple channels for protection (the Office for the Protection of Personal Data, the Ombudsman, courts, and criminal charges), in practice, female candidates and elected women face systemic barriers that significantly undermine the effectiveness of these mechanisms. These include a high burden of proof, especially in cases of online violence, psychological pressure, and organized discrediting, as well as ambiguities about where and to which authority a complaint should be filed, which often result in "circular referrals" among institutions. In addition, long action deadlines and a lack of urgency are inappropriate for the electoral process, which is, by its nature, time-limited.

These obstacles are compounded by the risk of secondary victimization, including belittling, the relativization of experiences, and fear of repercussions within the party or local community. In this context, the Women in Politics 2 survey indicates that, unlike their male counterparts, who most often report conflicts with members of opposing parties, women in local politics often face unpleasant and even dangerous situations with members of their own party. This suggests that women are not only exposed to a wider range of risks but also often lack institutional or party support when facing threats to their safety and well-being<sup>54</sup>.

Of particular concern is the perception among some female councilors that they have a personal responsibility to protect themselves, with no realistic expectation of help from party leadership or other relevant actors. This points to a deep-rooted power imbalance within party structures and further explains why many cases of violence, pressure, or intimidation remain unreported. In such conditions, formal protection mechanisms exist, but their use is constrained by political, institutional, and cultural factors that particularly affect women in the electoral and political process.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Women in Politics 2: Path to Public Office and Impact at the Local Level in North, 2023, Reactor – Research in Action: <https://reactor.org.mk/en/publication-all/zenitevopolitikata>

# 9. Conclusions, findings, weaknesses, and potential

## Conclusions

The analysis shows that the electoral framework in the Republic of North Macedonia formally incorporates the principles of equality and non-discrimination, but in practice, it does not provide conditions for substantive and equal political participation. Gender equality is recognized as a legal obligation, but it is not systematically integrated as a guiding principle that shapes electoral processes, political competition, and the institutional protection of candidates, especially in local elections and in contexts with strongly expressed informal centers of power.

The key challenge is not the absence of rules but their limited implementation and insufficient transformative ambition. Measures such as gender quotas provide formal access, but without complementary policies on funding, security, intra-party accountability, and the sanctioning of gender-based political violence, they do not translate into real equality. Hence, the issue of gender-responsive elections is a core issue of democratic legitimacy, not a side issue, and it calls for a more detailed analysis of the existing framework's weaknesses and its potential.

## Key findings

The analysis indicates that the Republic of North Macedonia has established a relatively stable constitutional, legal, and institutional framework that formally recognizes gender equality as part of democratic electoral standards. The prohibition of discrimination, the guaranteed right to vote, and the introduction of gender quotas in the Electoral Code provide minimal legal prerequisites for women's participation in electoral processes. The quota mechanism, particularly regarding the placement of female candidates on the lists, ensures the continued presence of women in electoral competition and represents a significant step toward overcoming historical exclusion from the political arena.

However, the main finding is that this framework largely operates at the level of formal equality and lacks sufficiently effective mechanisms to achieve substantive equality. There are clear differences between normatively guaranteed rights and the real conditions of political competition, especially regarding access to financial resources, media visibility, security, and intra-party support. Women, although formally included, remain structurally underrepresented in executive functions and leadership positions, indicating that the electoral system does not yet ensure an equal distribution of political power.

Additionally, the analysis shows that violence and hate speech in political and electoral contexts are serious and insufficiently addressed problems. Although relevant criminal and anti-discrimination provisions exist, they are rarely applied through a gender lens and do not recognize the specific nature of violence against women in politics. As a result, such phenomena remain underestimated, underreported, and rarely sanctioned, directly undermining women's willingness to actively participate in electoral processes.

## Systemic weaknesses

Key systemic weaknesses stem from insufficient integration of a gender perspective throughout the electoral cycle. Although there are isolated measures, such as quotas only for participatory political roles (MPs and councilors) but not for executive decision-making positions (members of the government and mayors), they are not complemented by policies and instruments that would enable their truly transformative effect. While the existing legal framework, including the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, allows for the recognition and sanctioning of various forms of gender-based violence, its application in the context of politics and elections is still insufficiently specified and not fully operationalized. In particular, there is no clear legal qualification of gender-based violence in politics. Specialized, rapid, and coordinated procedures for acting during the election period are lacking. In practice, this limits timely responses and effective protection for female candidates and public officeholders.

Financing of political parties and election campaigns is a particularly pronounced weakness. The existing framework is gender-neutral, yet this neutrality reproduces existing inequalities because it does not account for structural differences

in access to resources. The absence of incentives or conditionality related to gender equality means the system offers no corrective measures for the unequal starting position of women candidates.

Another serious weakness is the limited regulation of intra-party processes. The Law on Political Parties does not set standards for gender balance, transparency, and democratic participation in nominations and within party bodies, leaving the key filter for access to power outside public and legal oversight. When combined with insufficiently standardized institutional protocols and weak coordination among competent bodies, this creates an environment in which discrimination and pressure are difficult to detect and even harder to sanction.

## Potentials within the current framework

The analysis shows that the Republic of North Macedonia has a relatively well-developed constitutional, legal, and institutional framework for gender equality in the electoral process, which provides a solid basis for promoting substantive equality but remains largely formal and insufficiently operationalized. The Constitution and electoral legislation establish a clear prohibition on discrimination and set quotas for underrepresented genders on candidate lists for MPs and councilors, thereby creating a legal minimum for the inclusion of women in electoral competition. However, while the legal framework provides a basis for addressing gender-based violence, its practical application still does not provide consistent, explicit, and systemic protection against gender-based political violence, nor does it fully overcome existing structural gender inequalities in the political and electoral context.

The quotas for underrepresented genders in the Electoral Code have significant potential to expand women's access to the political process and to ensure their continued presence on candidate lists. However, their effect on the actual distribution of power, especially in executive and leadership positions, remains limited due to the lack of additional measures, such as quotas for underrepresented genders, strict ranking rules, financial incentives, and intra-party promotion mechanisms.

Although the financing of political parties and election campaigns is formally gender-neutral, it presents opportunities for reform through targeted financial measures and conditionality linked to gender equality. Such interventions could reduce structural inequality among candidates and create fairer conditions for political competition.

The electoral administration presents a mixed picture: the approximate gender balance at the local level is a positive indicator, suggesting practical potential for expanding this model to the central level. However, the lack of legally binding quotas and systematic protocols for addressing gender-based discrimination and violence limits the transformative role of electoral authorities.

The existing protection mechanisms through the Ombudsman, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, and the courts constitute important institutional capital that could be used more effectively through better coordination, specialization, and a proactive approach. Without targeted interventions to strengthen these mechanisms and integrate a gender perspective, elections can hardly be considered fully gender-responsive.

## 10. Recommendations

The following recommendations are grouped by area and focus on concrete, actionable, and measurable measures. They are not intended as isolated measures but as an interconnected package of interventions whose impact is greatest when applied together. Legal changes alone, without appropriate institutional mechanisms for implementation, cannot lead to substantive change, just as capacity building without a clear legal framework and political accountability remains limited in its impact. Only through such an integrated approach, which creates synergy among law, institutions, and political culture, can lasting and transformative change toward gender-responsive elections be achieved.

## Legislative recommendations

To bridge the gap between formal equality and actual political participation, the legislative framework must more clearly and explicitly address the gender dimension of electoral processes. For example, the Electoral Code ought to be aligned with other relevant laws, such as the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, to set targets for the representation of underrepresented genders in state and elected bodies, including electoral bodies. A crucial step is to further develop and operationalize the existing legal framework, especially within the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, by introducing a clear and explicit legal definition of gender-based violence in politics and elections. Such a definition would enable clearer recognition of the specific political context and gender motives behind attacks, threats, online harassment, sexualized insults, and organized discrediting of women candidates and officeholders, thereby reinforcing the consistent application of protective mechanisms. Additionally, this clarification would improve clarity around responsibilities, prioritize action, and enhance coordination among institutions during the election period by creating bylaws, protocols, and guidelines for authorities, and integrating them into election rules, codes of conduct, and administrative practices.

Such a definition should be accompanied by appropriate sanctions and procedural mechanisms to ensure timely and effective protection, especially during the election period, when the consequences of such actions are most pronounced.

Furthermore, gender-sensitive provisions need to be integrated into laws governing the financing of political parties and election campaigns. Rather than formal gender neutrality, legislation should recognize that unequal access to resources creates structural discrimination and introduce corrective measures. This can be achieved through incentive measures that reward political entities that provide meaningful representation and support for women candidates, as well as by making a portion of public funding conditional on implementing activities that promote gender equality in party structures and campaigns.

Additionally, the legal framework should give special attention to the digital space, which is becoming increasingly central to election campaigns. It is necessary to specify procedures for rapid action in the event of online threats, hate speech, and digital harassment, and to facilitate both the evidentiary process and the protection of victims, in order to prevent the "chilling effect" these phenomena have on women's participation in politics.

## Institutional recommendations

The institutional framework addressing gender-based discrimination and violence in the electoral context needs to be strengthened through consistent, coordinated implementation of the existing national legal and strategic framework. The Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence plays a particularly important role, providing a solid normative basis for recognizing and protecting against gender-based violence. However, its potential in the electoral context has not yet been fully realized. Therefore, the competent institutions—such as the election administration, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, the Ombudsman, law enforcement agencies, and courts—should develop unified, standardized protocols for conduct during elections. These protocols should clearly define responsibilities, timelines, emergency response procedures, and mechanisms for victim protection.

Strengthening inter-institutional coordination is crucial to overcoming the current fragmented approach and the risk of shifting responsibility among institutions. This can be achieved by establishing a formal coordination mechanism or clearly designated contact points for the election period, ensuring timely information sharing, follow-up on reported cases, and coordinated action. This approach also aligns with national strategic documents, including the National Strategy for Gender Equality and the National Action Plan, which envision strengthening institutional mechanisms, improving coordination, and adopting evidence-based policies.

In the context of harmonization with EU standards, the role of the KLIP (Commission for Lobbying and Policy Integration) should be more clearly defined as a link between national gender equality policies and the obligations arising from the European approximation process. This implies not only formal harmonization but also the practical application of the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and protection from gender-based violence in electoral processes.

Additionally, failing to adopt the Law on Gender Equality represents a missed opportunity to further strengthen and upgrade the framework established by the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, particularly in institutional mechanisms, inter-institutional coordination, and monitoring implementation. Adopting such a law would enable a more systematic approach and better integration of a gender perspective into electoral policies and practices, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of existing protection mechanisms.

## Recommendations to political parties

As key actors in the electoral process, political parties play a central role in transforming formal inclusion into real political equality. Therefore, parties should adopt binding, transparent internal rules on gender balance within their organizations and in selecting and supporting candidates. These rules should go beyond symbolic declarations and establish clear criteria for nominations, promotions, and the distribution of responsibilities, with built-in accountability mechanisms and an internal appeals procedure.

In addition, parties should actively provide financial, logistical, and political support to women candidates to mitigate structural inequalities in campaigns. This includes equal access to campaign funds, media support, professional teams, and legal protection in cases of attacks or defamation. Adopting and consistently enforcing internal party codes that prohibit gender-based violence and hate speech, with clear disciplinary consequences, is another step toward creating a safe and supportive political environment.

## Recommendations to the electoral administration

The election administration should strengthen its role not only as a technical administrator of elections but also as an active guarantor of the inclusiveness and security of the electoral process. To this end, minimum standards or quotas for gender balance should be established within the State Election Commission and other electoral bodies to ensure representativeness and foster trust in the institutions.

Furthermore, a gender perspective should be systematically integrated throughout the electoral cycle, from election preparation and public communication to complaint and appeal handling. This includes developing gender-sensitive election materials, clear guidelines for recognizing and responding to discrimination and violence, and transparent reporting on the gender dimensions of the electoral process.

## Recommendations for training and capacity building

Continuous capacity building is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of gender-responsive policies. Regular, mandatory, and specialized training on gender equality and violence against women in politics should be introduced for members of electoral bodies, relevant institutions, and, where possible, political parties. Training should be practical and focused on recognizing real situations, handling complaints, communicating with victims, and inter-institutional cooperation.

In addition, developing practical tools and guidelines, such as checklists, protocols, evidence-collection guides, and clear reporting pathways, can significantly improve institutions' and actors' preparedness for the electoral process. These tools should be publicly available, regularly updated, and integrated into daily practice to make gender equality an integral, rather than an ad hoc, element of electoral governance.