



DATA AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

Expert Group Meeting Report & Recommendations

4-5 December 2019 | New York, NY



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ABOUT THE MEETING

UN Women organized an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Data & Violence against Women in Politics (VAWP) from 4-5 December 2019, in New York, as a part of its ongoing efforts to tackle this issue.

As one of the key deterrents to women's political participation, VAWP has captured global attention. However, comparative data remains unavailable. Internationally agreed indicators and data collection methods to measure incidence or prevalence do not yet exist.

More than 40 experts attended the meeting, including academics, gender equality advocates, Members of Parliament (MPs), representatives of Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and International Organizations (IOs), as well as UN agencies. The EGM helped map existing

knowledge tools, databases, and surveys as sources of data on VAWP, and facilitated the exchange of lessons learned, experiences, and good practices in data collection.

A follow-up EGM on data was a recommendation of the Violence against Women in Politics Expert Group Meeting in March 2018, organized by UN Women, the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, in collaboration with partners.

This report provides an overview of the 2019 EGM discussions and the priority actions identified in each session. It also provides an overview of key discussion points to inform future efforts to collect data on VAWP.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SESSION 1:	Welcome and programme overview	6
SESSION 2:	Measuring violence against women in politics	7
SESSION 3:	Tracking violence against women candidates	10
SESSION 4:	Monitoring violence against women in elections through election observation	14
SESSION 5:	Monitoring violence against women in politics through political violence mapping and data visualization	17
SESSION 6:	Data collection through state actors and national institutions	20
SESSION 7:	Tracking violence against women officeholders and officials	23
SESSION 8:	Areas of measurement for possible indicators	26
SESSION 9:	Priorities, partnerships and next steps	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY		31
EXPERT GROUP MEETING PARTICIPANTS		32

ABBREVIATIONS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CEC	Central Election Commission, Bosnia and Herzegovina
CSO	Civil society organization
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DOP	Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation
EGM	Expert Group Meeting
EMB	Electoral Management Body
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IFES	International Foundation for Electoral Systems
INE	National Electoral Institute, Mexico
INMUJERES	National Institute for Women, Mexico
IO	International Organization
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MP	Member of Parliament
NDI	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
NSO	National statistical offices
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAWE	Violence Against Women in Elections
VAWP	Violence Against Women in Politics

SESSION 1:

Welcome and programme overview

Dr. Sabine Freizer, Chief of Leadership and Governance Section, UN Women, opened the meeting by underscoring that the issue of violence against women in politics (VAWP) is a priority for UN Women. The organization has focused on increasing awareness and understanding of VAWP, as well as providing support to UN Member States to take actions that enable women to participate safely and freely in political life. Dr. Freizer cited VAWP as a top deterrent to equal participation in political life. In addition to structural barriers or lack of political will, harmful norms and stereotypes often fuel violence against women (VAW), including hateful speech, sexist comments or physical assault, all of which have a direct impact on women's level of participation in politics. Dr. Freizer observed that VAWP is used not only to intimidate the victim but also to send a message to other women: "you are not wanted here." Collecting reliable data and legislating acts of VAWP are critical to efforts to end VAW. Building strong partnerships and a community of practice on addressing VAWP in general, and data collection in particular, are necessary for achieving progress.

Ms. Julie Ballington, Global Policy Advisor on Political Participation, UN Women, provided an overview of the agenda and the content of each session.

As public debate on VAWP is relatively recent, only a few Member States have taken measures to address this phenomenon.¹ Such actions have included strengthening laws against domestic and gender-based violence (GBV), the introduction of legislation to prevent, prosecute and eradicate VAW, and providing assistance services to victims of GBV. However, these actions have not always addressed VAWP explicitly. A few States have adopted special laws defining the acts that constitute political violence and GBV, including actions that force women elected officials to resign.² Ms. Ballington noted that current challenges in tackling VAWP include the absence of commonly agreed definitions and measurement methodologies, which poses a barrier to the collection of statistically reliable and comparable data and, therefore, to the advancement of solutions through research, monitoring and policy and programming responses. Nonetheless, current measurement and data collection practices, such as surveys, hold potential for developing methodologies for monitoring VAWP, and there are also informative lessons learned from the development of VAW measurements and indicators. An integrated approach, strengthened through partnerships and common priorities that holistically measure VAWP through agreed standards and indicators may, therefore, be a compelling way forward.

“Data is a necessary game-changer in terms of identifying ways to prevent, protect, prosecute, and develop policies combatting violence against women, including in politics.”

—Dr. Sabine Freizer, Chief of Leadership and Governance Section, UN Women

¹ United Nations (UN), 2013a.

² Ibid.

SESSION 2:

Measuring violence against women in politics

SESSION OVERVIEW:

Violence against women in politics is a human rights violation that curtails women's participation in politics and electoral processes, yet global, regional, and national data on its prevalence or incidence is unavailable. The session provided an insight into current approaches to analyze and measure VAWP, explored commonalities between VAWP data collection and standard, global data collection methods on VAW more broadly, and identified gaps and opportunities to advance standardized data collection on VAWP.

MODERATOR:

Ms. Julie Ballington, Global Policy Advisor on Political Participation, UN Women

INTERVENTIONS BY PANELISTS:

Dr. Mona Lena Krook, Professor of Political Science, Rutgers University, noted how a public discussion on VAWP emerged organically out of women's experiences in different parts of the world. This led to a growing volume of evidence on VAWP over the years. The Human Rights Council Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and practice drew attention to VAWP in its 2013 report. The

report observed that “evidence-based knowledge” was weak on the “extent of violence against women in political and public life.” The report also recognized the impact that VAWP has on “women's capacity to exercise their right to political participation.”³

Through her research, Dr. Krook has identified four approaches used by scholars and practitioners to generate and analyze data on VAWP: 1) gendering existing datasets;⁴ 2) conducting original surveys;⁵ 3) collecting women's testimonies;⁶ and 4) analyzing social media.⁷ She found three main issues that stand in the way of measuring VAWP: 1) definition of violence (whether used in the context of electoral

“ There have been four approaches used by scholars and practitioners to generate and analyze data on VAWP: 1) gendering existing datasets, 2) conducting original surveys, 3) collecting women's testimonies and 4) analyzing social media. ”

—Dr. Mona Lena Krook, Professor of Political Science, Rutgers University

³ United Nations, 2013b.

⁴ See, for example: ACLED, 2019; IFES, 2011; NDI, 2016.

⁵ See, for example: Dalton, 2017; IPU, 2016; Smith, 2018.

⁶ See, for example: Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, 2012.

⁷ See, for example: Amnesty International, 2019; IFES, 2018b; Lucharodas, 2018; NDI, 2019; Rheault et al., 2019.

and political violence or in VAW discussions); 2) population covered (whether the focus is on women's experiences only or on women's experiences in comparison to men's); and 3) 'generalizability' (whether the aim is to generate broad conclusions or to capture women's experiences).

Dr. Krook argued that the phenomenon of political violence is issue-based because it aims at silencing a competing political perspective. VAWP, on the other hand, specifically seeks to silence women in politics and impede their right to participate in political life. Although there are some common elements between these two phenomena, according to Dr. Krook, it is essential to keep in mind that women may experience both political violence and VAWP, and often at the same time. Under such circumstances, it might be challenging to identify appropriate data sources and conduct an analysis of incidents/ experiences/ prevalence of VAWP separately from other political violence.

Dr. Juncal Plazaola Castaño, Policy Specialist on Violence against Women and Data, UN Women, shared knowledge on and experiences with data collection and measurement of VAW, particularly intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, and sexual harassment. Dr. Plazaola Castaño noted the availability of globally agreed data collection methods and indicators for measuring VAW, including safety and ethical standards, and the opportunity to use lessons learned from VAW measurement to identify potential data sources and develop data collection tools for VAWP. For instance, current international statistical standards on VAW mainly capture the prevalence of the phenomenon (the proportion of women who experienced violence) through population-based surveys. The forms of violence for which international standards exist are physical and sexual. Psychological and economic violence are measured with some degree of variability across contexts, as different definitions are used, and there are no globally agreed measurement standards for sexual harassment yet. The VAW questionnaires

violence and those protecting women from it; and the actions taken by survivors to cope with the violence, e.g., seeking help from the police or other support services.

In terms of the process for developing standards for VAW measurement, Dr. Plazaola Castaño highlighted the multi-country study undertaken by WHO⁸ that set the methodological and ethical standards⁹ for research in this field, the United Nations Statistics Division Guidelines for producing VAW statistics through surveys,¹⁰ and the set of globally agreed VAW indicators currently in use.¹¹ Dr. Plazaola Castaño highlighted that administrative records, particularly from services providing support to violence survivors, i.e., health, police, justice, and social services, are also an important data source to help understand the phenomenon, who seeks help, who does not, the characteristics of the incidents reported, state and non-state responses and their impact. However, globally agreed indicators and standards for the collection, analysis and sharing of these data across relevant sectors are not available.

Moving towards a standardized measurement of VAWP, a definition of VAWP needs to be decided on, as well as which information should be collected as a priority (such as forms of VAWP), what would be the best sources (e.g., surveys, incidents recording, etc.), and how the necessary ethical and safety standards can be ensured.

Ms. Ionica Berevoescu, Policy Specialist on Women's Political Participation and Data, UN Women, underlined the need to ensure consistency between data collection on VAWP and existing international statistical guidelines. Namely, data collection on VAWP needs to have a clear, user-focused objective, apply a human rights-based approach, respect ethical standards, enable bias-free data, ensure cost-effectiveness of data sources, and engage national statistical systems.

Ms. Berevoescu offered three potential areas of measurement for consideration: 1) person-focused (e.g., members of political

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