

**A How-to Note on Preparing
a Shadow Report to the
CEDAW Committee
on Violence Against Women
in Politics**



This document, prepared by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), is intended to accompany NDI's *CEDAW Shadow Reporting Methodology for Violence Against Women in Politics*. This how-to note provides guidance for civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on implementing NDI's methodology for shadow reporting to the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on Violence Against Women in Politics (VAW-P). It provides practical guidance on preparing and planning for shadow reporting and subsequent communications and advocacy efforts, collecting and analyzing data, and writing, submitting and presenting a CEDAW shadow report on VAW-P.

Violence Against Women in Politics: Developing and Using Global Reporting

Violence against women in politics (VAW-P) is pervasive, with harassment, violence and abuse – in person and online – becoming ubiquitous for women who are politically active. This phenomenon has the corrosive effect of discouraging women's participation in political and public life, thereby violating women's civil and political rights. VAW-P is a human rights abuse and it undermines the integrity of democratic processes. It is increasingly an indicator of democratic backsliding and an intentional tool of authoritarian regimes.

VAW-P is chronically underreported and consistently treated with impunity around the globe, as there is little accountability for perpetrators of VAW-P and limited justice for its targets. Without consistent, routine and global monitoring, reporting and data collection on VAW-P, it is difficult for practitioners and policymakers to design effective approaches to prevent and mitigate against it. NDI seeks to help to fill this crucial gap of routine global reporting on VAW-P by providing guidance to CSOs at the national level on how to submit shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee. CSOs' shadow reporting on this issue will help to build both the domestic and global evidence base around VAW-P, including collecting data on: in-person and online incidents of VAW-P; the social and cultural attitudes and gender norms that enable VAW-P; the types and prevalence of VAW-P; the motivations and tactics of VAW-P perpetrators; the impact of VAW-P on its targets (and communities and democracies more broadly); and actions (and inaction) taken by governments to prevent, mitigate and respond to VAW-P.

States that have ratified CEDAW are required to submit quadrennial reports to the CEDAW Committee detailing the steps the government has taken to implement the rights defined under CEDAW and to address recommendations from the CEDAW Committee. The CEDAW convention provides a framework for addressing VAW-P under Articles 7 and 8. This reporting mechanism is an important tool to gather data on and monitor in-person and online VAW-P in a given country, as well as to monitor the government's response or actions (and inactions) to address VAW-P. CSOs and NGOs can strengthen the monitoring and reporting process by formally reviewing a government's CEDAW report and submitting a shadow report to the CEDAW Committee. Shadow reports can add important context, provide additional evidence-based data, and critically assess the government's actions or inactions to implement CEDAW and address the CEDAW Committee's previous recommendations.

CSOs and NGOs can use shadow reporting for government accountability, providing an alternative narrative to the government's CEDAW report and highlighting commitments the government has made on the international stage. Shadow reports can also be used as an awareness-raising and advocacy tool. In countries where relationships between civil society and government allow for safely engaging on these issues, civil society's advocacy efforts need not be limited to engagement with partner or allied organizations and the public. Rather, CSOs and NGOs can also work with neutral and supportive government or political stakeholders to provide sensitization and training, further research, public outreach, policy briefs and draft legislation, or other support as the government and policymakers set out to address recommendations presented by the CEDAW Committee and by civil society through shadow reporting.

Practical Guidance for CSOs on CEDAW Shadow Reporting on VAW-P

The sections below outline practical steps to take and considerations to make throughout the shadow reporting process, from the initial preparation stages through submitting your report and using the findings for advocacy initiatives. NDI has compiled this guidance based, in large part, on feedback from CSO partners across four regions of the world who piloted NDI's CEDAW Shadow Reporting Methodology for Violence Against Women in Politics in 2023 and 2024, as well as on NDI's global experience and established good practices in shadow reporting previously published by NDI and peer organizations. Throughout, you will find links to additional NDI resources that provide more detail on a particular topic, such as how to conduct specific data collection methods.

Preparation/Setting the Stage

Once you've decided to participate in the CEDAW shadow reporting process, there are a couple of crucial steps to take as you begin your preparations in order to set the stage for this process.

✓ Identify allies or partners

If you wish to collaborate with partners to submit your report, you must think about what organizations or experts would want to collaborate or sign-on to the report once you have completed it. Try to find allies in relevant networks or resource institutions for up-to-date information. Remember, a single shadow report supported by a large alliance, or a broader collection of shadow reports submitted by a broader network, is more powerful than scattered submissions.

There is robust guidance in NDI's CEDAW Shadow Reporting Methodology for Violence Against Women in Politics regarding identifying allies or partners. Below are some additional tips shared with NDI by CSOs who piloted the methodology:

- ▶ **Engage experts and other CSOs early:** Invite experts and organizations to participate in the report writing process from the beginning. Their input and collaboration can enrich the report and increase its credibility and impact.
- ▶ **Utilize existing relationships and networks:** Build on existing relationships and networks to identify potential allies and supporters. Leverage these connections to expand the reach and influence of your advocacy efforts.
- ▶ **Collaborate with key women representatives:** Identify and collaborate with key women representatives in political parties. Their involvement can help amplify the message and mobilize broader support within their networks and beyond.
- ▶ **Connect with human rights defenders and activists:** Engage human rights defenders and activists, as well as journalists, in your research and advocacy efforts. Human rights defenders and activists are often skilled in awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns, and may have a deep bench of contacts in media and government, all of which can be leveraged during your communications and advocacy campaign.

✓ Review the process

Understanding and planning your shadow reporting process according to the relevant reporting deadlines and review dates for your country's CEDAW submission and presentation is crucial to maximizing the impact of your shadow report. In order to leverage the momentum generated by the national reporting process, you should aim to submit the shadow report around the time of the country's official report submission to CEDAW. In addition to reviewing the relevant CEDAW reporting and presentation schedules to determine the timeframe for submitting your report and presenting your findings to the CEDAW Committee, it is important for you to orient yourself by reviewing what has happened so far in the review process, reviewing past and recent government CEDAW reports, other CSO or NGO shadow reports, outcomes of the previous review, and the CEDAW Committee's list of issues and government response.

For additional guidance on preparation/setting the stage, visit the "Shadow Reporting" section of [NDI's Political Process Monitoring Guidebook](#).

For deadlines pertaining to your country's shadow report submission, visit the UN OHCHR Treaty Body Database [deadlines for the submission of documentation for CEDAW](#). You can then filter by year, region, country or document type.

For deadlines pertaining to when your country is scheduled for review by CEDAW, visit the UN OHCHR Treaty Body Database [expected date of consideration](#). You can then filter by year, region, country or document type.

Planning for Shadow Reporting

Planning effectively and in collaboration with your partners can help to ground the team with clearly established roles and to ensure that you are well-prepared for the complex data collection, analysis and report writing processes.

✓ Develop a work plan

You will need to develop a thorough work plan with a timeline that is synchronized to the CEDAW Committee's calendar for your country's next quadrennial report. As part of the work planning process, you should review the shadow reporting methodology and adapt the questionnaire template to your country context and your organization's or coalition's selected areas of focus for the CEDAW shadow reporting on VAW-P. Your work planning process should also include: adapting the methodology to your country context and your areas of focus related to VAW-P in the country; identifying appropriate data sources and data collection methods; identifying intended research participants for your selected data collection methods (e.g., key informants for interviews and focus group discussions); designing your data collection tools (e.g., questionnaires for public officials, focus group discussion guides) and accompanying materials or plans (e.g., a secure and anonymized data storage process); and developing a broader communications and advocacy plan for which the shadow report will provide the necessary evidence-based data for awareness-raising and advocacy initiatives.

Additional tips for planning for shadow reporting, shared by CSOs who piloted the methodology:

Early Start: Initiate the planning process as early as possible to accommodate any challenges related to data collection.

Contingency Planning: Develop backup plans for data collection in case of limited availability or limited transparency from official institutions.

Alignment with State Actions: Review response times from states regarding CEDAW recommendations and align the timing of the shadow report to correspond with state actions, ensuring relevance and impact.

Routine Monitoring: Implement a routine monitoring on gender and CEDAW issues, including VAW-P, to stay current with developments and facilitate timely reporting.

Staffing Needs and Level of Effort: After developing a work plan, consider how your organization or coalition intends to staff the project, whether additional team members need to be recruited and hired, and whether additional financial resources will be necessary in order to secure the appropriate staffing.

For additional guidance on developing your work plan, including designing assessments on VAW-P specifically and creating your research design generally, visit the "Program Guidance" section of NDI's #NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics Program Guidance.

✓ Consider staffing needs and anticipated levels of effort

If you have joined in coalition with other organizations, after developing a work plan with your partner organizations, you should discuss how each organization intends to staff the project, whether additional team members need to be recruited and hired, and whether additional financial resources will be necessary in order to secure the appropriate staffing.

Gathering Information: Data collection

Once you have completed the preparation and planning for your CEDAW shadow reporting exercise, including creating your assessment design, developing your work plan and the division of labor for data collection across your organization or coalition and designing your data collection tools based on the methodology provided in NDI's *CEDAW Shadow Reporting Methodology for Violence Against Women in Politics*, you should begin the data collection process. Gathering thorough and accurate information is a time-intensive process and it is important to leave plenty of time for collecting and validating data from different sources, including those that might take more time to obtain (e.g., scheduling meetings with government officials or political party representatives, requesting information from government bodies through freedom of information requests).

Data Collection Challenges: CSO partners that piloted this methodology indicated that challenges accessing information and completing data collection were common. While access to information may be guaranteed in your country, not all public institutions or political parties share or update information online, which can make it difficult for organizations to gather necessary data. CSO partners also noted that organizations lacking diverse expertise and experiences in women's political participation, as well as those without an already-established routine documentation process for VAW-P, faced challenges in the data collection process. For these reasons, it is helpful to have one or more organizations in your coalition that are experienced with conducting assessments of this type, that have experience with and expertise in women's political participation, and that are familiar and networked with government and civil society stakeholders to help secure meetings and request information from these stakeholders. Ideally, one or more coalition members should also have a routine documentation process for VAW-P violations, which can provide a structure for your approach to data collection and allow you to use information from previous gender monitoring and analysis reports to inform the VAW-P shadow report. If your coalition has gaps in these areas of expertise or experience, it can be helpful to bring on an experienced consultant to support or lead the process.

✓ Secondary data sources

Secondary data sources refer to data that has already been collected in previous research, and secondary data collection is typically done through desk research. Because this data is often available in existing reports, you can begin collecting secondary data early on in your information gathering process. Your desk review can also help inform your primary data collection, highlighting areas where additional research or context is needed in order to obtain more complete data or a better understanding of an issue.

An illustrative, but not exhaustive, list of secondary data sources includes: government reports, international and domestic NGO reports, statistics databases, and news reports

or other media. Some data from the government may not be readily publicly available, but may be subject to freedom of information requirements. To access such data, you may need to submit a freedom of information request. Note that these requests are not always successful. Remember that an inability or unwillingness of the government to furnish data related to women's political participation and VAW-P constitutes an important finding for your shadow report.

✓ **Primary data sources**

Primary data sources refer to data that you collect yourself through direct observation, questionnaires and interviews. Illustrative primary data collection methods include: surveys, focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

For specific guidance on different types of primary and secondary data sources, developing data collection tools for various methods and best practices in data collection, visit the “Program Guidance” section of NDI’s #NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics Program Guidance and the “Data Collection and Analysis Stage” section of NDI’s Political Process Monitoring Guidebook.

For specific guidance and tips on conducting research related to online and technology-facilitated VAW-P, visit the CEPPS Online Violence Against Women Diagnostic Toolkit.

✓ **Lack of data/lack of disaggregated data**

Remember that the absence of data, or the government's unwillingness to provide certain data, is in itself a notable finding when conducting your CEDAW shadow reporting on VAW-P. Similarly, it is important for relevant government stakeholders to collect and make available sex-disaggregated data, as States should be able to report, for example, not just how many instances of attacks against politicians have occurred, but what percentage of those attacks were against women versus men. Additional disaggregates are also important, e.g., age, race/ethnicity/caste/religion, disability status, sexual orientation. Women politicians who have multiple marginalized identities (e.g., a woman politician from an ethnic minority background) are more likely to experience VAW-P, and some women who experience VAW-P may have greater access to recourse and redress. Without collecting and making available this disaggregated data, a State cannot fully fulfill its obligations under CEDAW to address the different forms of VAW-P that women from different backgrounds face. Similarly, CSOs and NGOs can make more tailored recommendations in their advocacy efforts if they have the more nuanced understanding of the issue that disaggregated data provides.

✓ **Informed consent, confidentiality, safety and security guidelines, and ethical data collection**

It is imperative to obtain informed consent from research participants, to ensure a plan is in place to assure participants' confidentiality and the safety and security of research participants and researchers alike, and to establish a protocol for anonymizing data and storing it safely without risk of exposing research participants' identities or connecting the data they provided with identifiable details of their identity. When conducting research related to gender-based violence (GBV), there are additional considerations to take into account regarding ethical data collection practices.

In addition to the already noted elements of confidentiality, safety and security, and data security, it is crucial to consider that your research participants may have experienced past incidents of violence or harm, or they may currently be experiencing violence or harm, and the questions you ask could elicit trauma. It is important that team members conducting research on these topics are familiar with trauma-informed and survivor-centered research methods. It is also possible that your research participants may disclose an incident of GBV or VAW-P specifically that they have experienced in the past or are currently experiencing. There are established best practices from the international community for receiving disclosures of GBV (including guidance oriented to researchers and practitioners who do not specialize in GBV). Among these include validating the survivor's experience, assuring them of the confidentiality of their disclosure, refraining from asking questions that may retraumatize the survivor, having appropriate referrals on-hand and asking the survivor if they would like to be connected with any services, e.g., for psychosocial or medical/health support, safety services or police reporting and legal remedy.

For more detailed guidance on informed consent, confidentiality and safety and security guidelines, visit the “Program Guidance” section of NDI’s #NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics Program Guidance and the “Data Collection and Analysis Stage” section of NDI’s Political Process Monitoring Guidebook.

For more detailed guidance on ethical research and safe data collection when researching GBV, visit the “Guidance on Safely Interviewing Survivors of Violence and Trauma” section of CEPPS’s Online Violence Against Women Diagnostic Toolkit and the “Protecting Confidentiality” section of NDI’s #NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics Program Guidance. You may also wish to review the list of resources on best practices and international guidelines for researching GBV on page 52 of the same guide.

Implementation

After you have completed your data collection, it is time to analyze your data, write and submit your report, and present your shadow report to CEDAW and advocate for your recommended actions based on the findings in your shadow report.

✓ Analyzing Data, Writing and Submitting the Report

Just as it is important for the success of your shadow reporting process to have coalition members with relevant subject matter expertise involved in the data collection process, this is also important for conducting data analysis and interpreting your data to identify findings and appropriate recommendations. The written CEDAW shadow report will also benefit significantly if coalition members are familiar with this type of reporting and have relevant technical expertise in women's political participation and VAW-P.

For detailed guidance on conducting data analysis, visit the “Program Guidance” section of NDI’s *#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics Program Guidance* and the “Data Collection and Analysis Stage” section of NDI’s *Political Process Monitoring Guidebook*.

To strengthen your analysis and findings related to online and technology-facilitated VAW-P, the following additional resources may be useful: NDI’s *How-To Guide on Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation*, the Demos report *Engendering Hate: The Contours of State-Aligned Gendered Disinformation Online*, NDI’s *Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics*, NDI’s *Interventions for Ending Online Violence Against Women in Politics*, and the CEPPS *Online Violence Against Women Diagnostic Toolkit*.

There is robust guidance in NDI’s *CEDAW Shadow Reporting Methodology for Violence Against Women in Politics* regarding writing and submitting your CEDAW shadow report. Below are some additional tips on writing your CEDAW shadow report that were shared with NDI by the CSOs who piloted the methodology:

- ▶ **Utilize Narrowed Questions:** Focus on the narrowed questions and research areas provided in the methodology, as they offer a more manageable approach. Larger, broad questions should be addressed with concise background information.
- ▶ **Balance Broad and Specific Topics:** Find a balance between discussing broader topics like economics and social norms and the specific issue of VAW-P, keeping the focus on articles 7 and 8 of the Convention.
- ▶ **Evaluate Impact and Consider Legislation:** Evaluate both the immediate impact of VAW-P and the broader social norms that contribute to it. Consider legislative solutions and their potential impact on addressing the issue.
- ▶ **Use Milestones for Progress:** Use specific milestones to illustrate progress or the lack thereof in addressing VAW-P. This can help track political and social developments over time.
- ▶ **Adopt Varied Reporting Formats:** Consider adopting different reporting formats, such as abridged versions, infographics, and longer, more thorough reports, to cater to different audiences and their needs.

For additional guidance on writing your CEDAW shadow report on VAW-P, visit NDI’s “How to Structure a Shadow Report” document.

For additional guidance on submitting your CEDAW shadow report on VAW-P, refer to the detailed instructions provided on page four of NDI’s *CEDAW Shadow Reporting Methodology for Violence Against Women in Politics*.

✓ Using the Shadow Report as Part of Broader Advocacy Efforts

Your CEDAW shadow report on VAW-P serves not only as a research endeavor on VAW-P in your country, but also as an important tool for advocacy. While the report is primarily for the CEDAW committee, you can leverage it to reach broader audiences at the national level (such as parliament, government and media) and utilize other regional mechanisms like the African Union, as well as global events such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women, for wider reach presenting your findings and calling for change. The shadow report can form part of a broader advocacy plan to demand accountability from the government on its commitments under CEDAW and agitate for change, including e.g., using the findings to inform education and outreach campaigns to raise awareness on the issue of VAW-P; calling on government stakeholders and political leaders to make needed reforms based on your findings and recommendations; and working with allied policymakers on drafting legislation. You can use your shadow report to build an advocacy network, provide sensitization and training, further research, public outreach, policy briefs and draft legislation, or other support to address recommendations outlined in the shadow report.

Even in the event that your coalition is unable to present your findings to the CEDAW Committee, which can sometimes happen because of scheduling challenges or limited financial resources to participate in the review meetings, the CEDAW shadow reporting process can still serve to build the evidence base on VAW-P in order to strengthen data and recommendations on this pressing issue.

Below are some additional tips received from the CSOs that piloted the methodology to help you use your shadow report as part of broader advocacy efforts to end VAW-P.

► **Utilize Multi-Channel Communications:**

Employ a mix of communication channels, including social media, press releases and direct outreach to organizations and the public to educate and engage stakeholders about the report. This approach ensures a broader reach and increased visibility. You may also find some political women who are ready to champion the campaign and tell their own experiences of VAW-P publicly.

- **Engage Key Stakeholders Early:** Engage with key stakeholders, including politically active women, political parties and representatives of women's rights organizations, from the early stages of the report to ensure buy-in and support. Building relationships and alliances early can lead to greater impact and dissemination of the report findings.

Overcoming financial resource constraints and visa challenges to engage with the CEDAW Committee:

CSO partners that piloted this methodology discovered that they can engage with the CEDAW committee even without the resources to travel to Geneva, with one team having presented their report to the Committee by video conference while it was in session. They also learned that they could reach out to CEDAW experts via email, keeping them informed about the state of VAW-P in their respective countries. This insight opens up new avenues for dialogue and collaboration with international bodies, whether financial resources are limited or you face challenges securing a visa in the necessary timeframe to travel to present your report in person.

- ▶ **Tailor Messages to Different Audiences:** Develop tailored messages for different audiences, such as policymakers, the media and the public to ensure that findings are effectively communicated and understood by diverse groups.
- ▶ **Leverage International Conventions and Mechanisms:** Engage with national, regional and international conventions and mechanisms, such as the Inter-American Commission, African Union (Maputo Protocol) and the Istanbul Convention to amplify the impact of the report. These platforms can provide additional avenues for advocacy and dissemination of the report's findings at the regional and global levels.
- ▶ **Implement Long-Term Advocacy Strategies:** Develop and implement long-term advocacy strategies beyond the submission of the report to sustain momentum and achieve lasting impact. This may include ongoing engagement with policymakers, media outreach and partnerships with other organizations working on VAW-P.