

ODIHR: three decades and ready for the future Democracy, human rights and security

**14-15 October 2021
(Warsaw and Online)**

ANNOTATED AGENDA

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE

Since its establishment thirty years ago, ODIHR has assumed a leading role, as the main institution of the OSCE's human dimension, in supporting the participating States in implementation of their commitments on the protection and promotion of human rights and strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, as well as creating space for civil society to interact with national authorities, ensuring their voices are heard.

On its thirtieth anniversary, ODIHR is convening a two-day conference to mark the many achievements of the last three decades, consider current challenges and opportunities, and discuss the Office's role in continuing to promote democracy and human rights in the future. It will also allow participants to exchange newly found good practices during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected every person in every country across the region, and ensure that recovery is in line with the human dimension commitments.

The event, co-organized by ODIHR and the 2021 Swedish OSCE Chairpersonship and Poland as the host country, will be held on **14-15 October 2021 in Warsaw**.

AGENDA

Day 1

10.00 – 10.30

OPENING SESSION

11.00 – 13.00

HIGH-LEVEL PANEL

Human rights and democracy: advancing the OSCE's unique vision of security

Three decades ago, in a time of profound changes, the Governments of the OSCE participating States embodied aspirations of their nations in OSCE commitments for democracy, peace and unity. These commitments shaped a unique OSCE vision of comprehensive security with human rights, democracy and the rule of law at its core. The challenges of the 20th century highlighted the need multilateral mechanisms and civil society to act together to garner the aspirations and receptiveness of the States to benefit fully from the implementation of their human dimension commitments. The session will take stock of the three decades of advancing this vision of security and will discuss the role of ODIHR and the OSCE at large in a forward-looking perspective. The session will also reflect on ways to enhance States' efforts to strengthening democracy in line with their OSCE commitments as they emerge from the global pandemic.

13:00 – 13:30

Break

13.30 – 14.30

SPECIAL FOCUS SESSION

Levelling up: inclusive participation in public and political life

Women's political participation in the OSCE region has increased over the last 25 years, with women currently making up an average of 29 percent of parliamentarians, in comparison to only 11 percent in 1995.¹ Legislation and policies on gender equality or equal rights and opportunities were put in place. However, effective and even implementation of these frameworks is often lagging, exacerbated by systemic and institutional discrimination, particularly in traditionally male-dominated sectors, such as politics and security. These

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Percentage of Women in National Parliaments, and archived data, as of April 2021.

barriers are even more harmful to women in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations, who may be subject to multiple forms of discrimination. Violence against women and girls in all its forms is one of the most common and serious impediments to their full enjoyment of human rights and to their equal and effective participation in political and public life. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate negative impact on women and girls' full enjoyment of human rights. The session will draw examples from the OSCE region to empower women and girls for sustainable change.

14:30 – 15:00 Break

15.00 – 17.30 **SESSION I**
Democracy as the only legitimate system of government in the OSCE region

Democracy is a process that intrinsically connects respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms with the rule of law. Equality, participation and accountability are all important aspects of a functioning democracy. The session will offer reflections on main challenges and opportunities in ensuring respect for the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and the universal and equal right to vote, allowing wider participation in public and political life. Since the Office's establishment, ODIHR's election observation activities and the support provided to participating States to follow up on ODIHR election-related recommendations have contributed to tangible improvements in democratic processes across the OSCE region. Freedom of association is one of the fundamental elements of any vibrant, pluralistic and participatory democracy and enables the full and effective exercise of a broad range of other rights. While highlighting the general importance of this right, the session will address the negative effect of the erosion of democratic and rule of law principles over the past decade on this fundamental freedom. It will overview the achievements and challenges in ensuring the independence of institutions, effective checks and balances.

18:00 Reception

Day 2

9.30 – 12.00

SESSION II

Promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms together

The session examines how ensuring the human rights of the individual is crucial to achieving comprehensive security. The human dimension lies at the core of OSCE concept of comprehensive security. Participating States carry primary responsibility to protect and promote human rights in accordance with their international obligations. This session will look in particular at the importance of public scrutiny as well as independent and effective oversight, which is often severely limited. Special attention will be given to discussing the vibrant role of civil society in promoting and protecting human rights as well as the need to support and enable the work of human rights defenders in order to hold governments to account. The session will also reflect on the current and future challenges and opportunities presented by digital technologies for the protection of human rights.

12:00 – 13:00

Break

13.30 – 16.00

SESSION III

Addressing all forms of intolerance and discrimination and building equal and inclusive societies

The session will review achievements and challenges in addressing intolerance, discrimination and marginalization in the OSCE region. In focusing on hate crimes, victim support and protection, the discussion will address security needs of various communities, education, civil society coalition building and hate crime reporting. The session will incorporate a discussion on ODIHR's work on the issue of building tolerance, non-discrimination and countering negative rhetoric and capacity building in participating states on the integration of minority and vulnerable communities in order to build equal and inclusive societies.

15:30 – 16:00

Break

16.30 – 18.00

CLOSING SESSION