

# ODIHR, Gender Equality & Women's Rights



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“...Full and true equality between men and women is a fundamental aspect of a just and democratic society.” (Moscow Document, 1991)

## What is Gender Equality?

Gender equality means equal rights and opportunities for women and men in laws and policies, and equal access to resources and services within families, communities and society. It refers to women and men being able to access and participate in all spheres of life on an equal footing, including in democratic governance, decision-making and the security sector. Gender equality

requires that women and men receive adequate and equitable protection of their human rights, including the right to live free of violence in safe and supportive homes and communities.

## Why is the OSCE involved?

While significant advances have been made in promoting gender equality in the OSCE region, inequalities persist in both the private and public spheres, based often on stereotypes and conventions

perpetuated at the state level and in society at large.

Despite the existence of national legal frameworks and specific OSCE commitments, full and true gender equality and gender balance remain only an aspiration in the majority of participating States. *De jure* declarations of equality have yet to be transformed into *de facto* reality across the OSCE region.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is mandated to assist OSCE participating States in promoting women's political participation, monitoring and reporting on women's participation in elections, and strengthening democratic institutions for advancing

gender equality, as described in the *2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality* and the Ministerial Council decision on *Women's Participation in Political and Public Life*. The OSCE has also acknowledged the particular situation of Roma and Sinti women since 2003, with its *Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area*. The Action Plan calls for systematic mainstreaming of Roma and Sinti women's issues, as well as supporting their access to employment, health care, education and political and social participation, with special attention paid to this support in crisis and post-crisis situations. In conformity with gender equality commitments, ODIHR has undertaken



An ODIHR organized seminar on boosting the reporting on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.



Participants discuss how women can strengthen their political campaigning capacities at a seminar co-organized by ODIHR on increasing women's participation in political parties in Georgia.



ODIHR supports women and youth, coalition building and gender equality through numerous events, publications and projects.

steps to ensure that the concerns and experiences of both women and men are integral components of its programmes and projects, as well as its organizational context, through a Gender Mainstreaming Roadmap.

Further, as mandated by Ministerial Council decisions on *Women in Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation* and on *Preventing and Combating Violence against Women*, ODIHR also supports participating States in focusing on the role of women in matters of peace and security at all levels, as well as in preventing and combating all forms of gender-based violence, including violence against women and domestic violence.

### How does ODIHR work on Gender Equality?

ODIHR assists participating States in advancing equality between women and men through capacity building, expert advice and awareness raising. ODIHR works to promote women's participation in politics, elections and the security sector; to strengthen national mechanisms for the advancement of women; to implement a gender perspective in lawmaking processes; and to prevent and combat gender-based violence.

ODIHR advocates for the provision of equal treatment and gender-sensitive assistance to men and women victims of all forms of trafficking in human beings.

Special attention is paid to advance the equality and rights of men and women from under-represented groups, such as Roma and Sinti communities, migrants and persons with disabilities.

ODIHR also looks at the different impact of bias-motivated violence on men and women, through annual hate crime reporting: [hatecrime.osce.org](http://hatecrime.osce.org) and capacity-building activities for criminal justice officials and civil society.

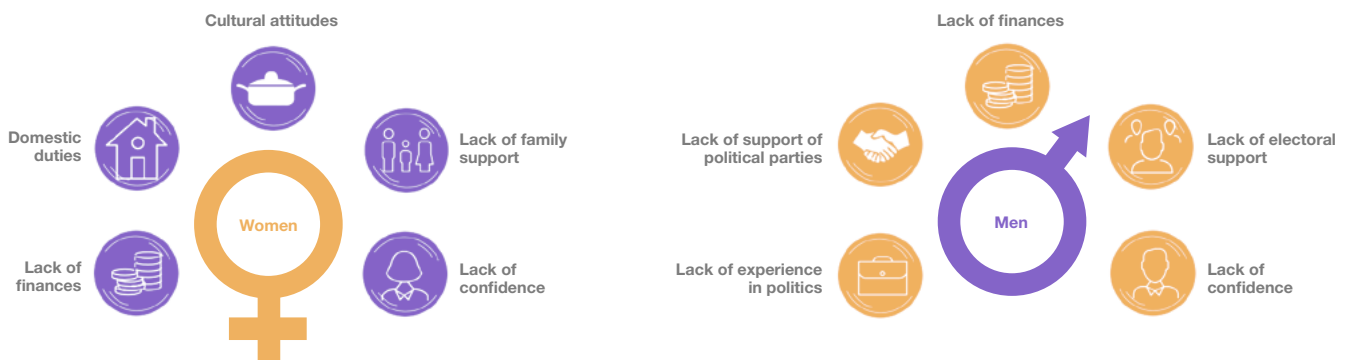
### Women's participation in politics

Women continue to be under-represented in governing structures across the OSCE region, and particularly in decision-making positions.

ODIHR facilitates and supports institutional change, knowledge sharing and capacity building for advancing women's representation, roles and influence in political and public life.

Good practices for enhancing women's participation in political parties, elections, local politics and parliaments are presented in ODIHR's *Compendium of Good Practices on Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region*.

### Top five barriers to entering politics for women and men



This visual is based on data from the Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region: [www.osce.org/odihhr/224206](http://www.osce.org/odihhr/224206)

ODIHR fosters women's participation in parliaments by sharing expertise on gender-sensitive parliaments and supporting structures that enable women to influence legislative agendas, as outlined in the *Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region*.

Using its methodology for gender auditing of political parties, ODIHR promotes gender equality in political parties and provides them with technical support to make party structures, policies and programmes gender-sensitive, as outlined in the *Handbook on Promoting Women's Participation in Political Parties*. Special attention is paid to fostering internal party democracy and mainstreaming gender aspects into political party regulation, as outlined in the OSCE/ODIHR-Venice Commission *Guidelines on Political Party Regulation*.

ODIHR also works to strengthen women's political leadership skills, through the establishment of regional networks for knowledge exchange and through the participation of young women leaders in ODIHR's policy advisers courses.

## Women's participation in elections

The low level of women's political participation is often particularly evident during elections. ODIHR's election observation missions assess the extent to which election processes meet OSCE commitments, by taking into account how they affect both women and men, and then making recommendations on how electoral legislation and practice can be improved. Election observation missions examine women's participation as voters, candidates and elected representatives; their involvement in leadership roles within state institutions, electoral commissions and political parties; and how the legal framework and media structures affect women, as well as men. The *Handbook for Monitoring Women's Participation in Elections* outlines practical steps to be taken by each election observation mission to better integrate a gender perspective into its work.

ODIHR supports countries in the follow-up of recommendations from its election observation reports by providing technical expertise and legal reviews related to women's electoral

participation. The *Handbook on the Follow-up of Electoral Recommendations* includes specific guidance on obligations and practical steps to include women in electoral reform processes.

## Women's participation in the security sector

Effective security institutions, policies and programmes should reflect the needs and interests of both men and women in order to be representative, accountable and inclusive. This can be achieved by ensuring that women are recruited and promoted within the ranks, providing for gender parity in decision-making and sensitizing all security providers on the differential impact of security policies and measures on men and women.

ODIHR trains law-enforcement, armed forces, border management and other security personnel, as well as ombuds institutions and National Human Rights Institutions, based on the *Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit* and *Guidance Notes on Gender in Security Sector Oversight*. The training topics range from gender skills building to properly responding

to security issues such as gender-based violence, including domestic violence and in human trafficking.

ODIHR supports the development of national action plans for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Targeted support is also provided to the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation on the Code of Conduct and voluntary reporting on the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

## Gender, diversity and justice

A justice system reflecting the composition of its society inspires greater trust in justice institutions. All individuals, regardless of their gender or other characteristic, should benefit from the same opportunities to access legal education and professions. ODIHR's programme on gender, diversity and justice identifies gaps and good practices in promoting diversity in justice systems and seeks to sensitize legal professionals, executive and justice administration bodies, and civil society to relevant legal and institutional improvements.



A training event on women's participation in the security sector.



A judge speaking at an event on diversity and the judiciary: promoting full and equal participation of women and minorities.

## National mechanisms for the advancement of women

National mechanisms for the advancement of women serve as protectors of women's rights and monitors of state compliance with national and international gender equality obligations. Such mechanisms have been established across the OSCE region, yet they demonstrate various degrees of capacity and effectiveness in ensuring that gender equality commitments are implemented in practice. Independent national human rights institutions (NHRIs) play an important role in promoting public awareness and understanding of women's rights and in protecting them. ODIHR works to strengthen the capacity of NHRIs to protect and promote women's rights and gender equality by sharing good practices and expertise across the OSCE region, as compiled in the *Handbook for National Human Rights Institutions on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*. One of ODIHR's annual flagship events is the NHRI Academy, where the representatives of these institutions are trained on gender equality and gender mainstreaming.

ODIHR also assists participating States with the development of non-discriminatory legal and policy frameworks for the advancement of women, including by supporting the creation of national action plans for gender equality or combating violence against women.

## A gender perspective in lawmaking

ODIHR supports participating States by reviewing, upon request, draft and existing laws to assess their compliance with OSCE human dimension commitments and international standards. In accordance with its mandate to review legislation to ensure appropriate legal guarantees for the promotion of gender equality as agreed in OSCE commitments, ODIHR conducts legal reviews using a mainstreamed gender perspective to analyse the potentially different impact of legislation on women and men. ODIHR also mainstreams gender and diversity in its democratic lawmaking activities, with a particular focus on the inclusiveness of public consultation processes and on mechanisms for reviewing draft legislation from a gender perspective.

## Preventing and combating sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence and violence against women and girls are extreme forms of discrimination that violate a number of human rights, including the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right to freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. These types of violent acts threaten the health, dignity, security and autonomy of the victims, but remain largely ignored.

ODIHR's efforts to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence focus on strengthening legal and policy frameworks for preventing and combating violence against women, including domestic violence; building the capacity of law-enforcement and judicial authorities to play an effective role in prevention and prosecution; and increasing the awareness of security-sector personnel, including in places of deprivation of liberty within the criminal justice system.

## Women from Roma and Sinti communities

Roma and Sinti women face multiple discrimination, based on both their ethnicity and gender. ODIHR, through its Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, assists participating States in the implementation of commitments targeting Roma and Sinti women through its programmatic activities on the particular issues they face. ODIHR also organizes consultation meetings with Roma and Sinti women civil society representatives and mainstreams gender, with a special focus on the equal and meaningful participation and representation of Roma and Sinti women, and placing issues affecting women on the agenda.



An ODIHR video features interviews of Roma women who have made significant contributions to policy development at the national and international levels.



ODIHR brings women and men together to discuss reforming political parties to support women's participation.



ODIHR supports networks of women parliamentarians.



An ODIHR workshop in Ukraine on mainstreaming gender into communications welcomed participants with childcare responsibilities.

## Partnerships

ODIHR works with a range of partners to foster gender equality and women's rights, including:

- Participating States, and their governmental structures for gender equality, national parliaments and political party regulators,

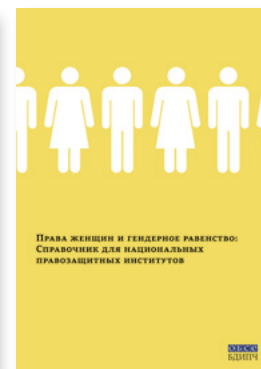
as well as relevant ministries and agencies responsible for areas such as migration or security

- Women's groups and civil society organizations working on human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment and disability rights, as well as political parties and women leaders;

- Law-enforcement, armed forces, border management and other security personnel;
- Independent national human rights institutions (NHRIs);
- *OSCE field operations* and institutions, the OSCE Secretariat's *Gender Section, the OSCE*

*Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA);* and

- International and regional organizations, such as United Nations agencies, the Council of Europe, the European Institute for Gender Equality and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as well as international political and research institutes.



### More information:

For detailed information about ODIHR's gender equality initiatives and to view its full range of resources and publications, please visit:

[www.osce.org/odihr/gender-equality](http://www.osce.org/odihr/gender-equality)

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