



ANNEX 4
PROMOTING WOMEN'S
PARTICIPATION IN
POLITICAL AND PUBLIC LIFE

DISCUSSION PAPER
For the 2020 Gender
Equality Review Conference

OSCE commitments related to the promotion of women's participation in political and public life

This paper was prepared by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), providing a brief snapshot of key OSCE commitments related to women's political participation, major achievements and challenges, examples of good practice, and recommendations towards achieving gender equality in political and public life. It is based on country reports to the Beijing Platform for Action+25, data contained in various ODIHR Key Resources on Gender Equality and Women's Political Participation¹ as well as additional secondary sources. It is part of a series of four papers prepared ahead of the OSCE Third Gender Equality Review Conference, to take place on 27 and 28 October 2020.

In Moscow in 1991, the participating States recognized gender equality as a cornerstone of security and democracy in the OSCE region. Equal and meaningful political participation of women and men in decision-making is key to effective democratic institutions, good laws and policies, as well as long-term peace, stability, and the prosperity of OSCE participating States. Despite progress in improving equal rights, opportunities and outcomes for women and men, much remains to be done towards achieving gender equality in politics and decision-making in the OSCE region.

OSCE commitments call for gender balance among elected public officials at all levels of decision-making and across all branches of

government, as well as for women's equal participation in political parties and electoral processes.² They also call on States to consider adopting legislative measures to improve gender balance, and to encourage shared work and parental responsibilities between women and men in order to facilitate women's political participation.³

The 2004 OSCE Gender Action Plan tasks ODIHR specifically to “assist participating States in developing effective measures to bring about the equal participation of women in democratic processes, [...] developing best practices for their implementation, [...] and monitor(ing) and report(ing) on women's participation in elections as part of its Election Observation Missions.”⁴ The 2003 Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti recommends that OSCE participating States “[t]ake into account in all measures and programmes, the situation of Roma and Sinti women, who are often victims of discrimination on the basis of both ethnicity and sex. Roma women should be able to participate on an equal basis with men in consultative and other mechanisms designed to increase access to all areas of public and political life”.⁵ The 2018 Ministerial Council Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women acknowledges that “women engaged in professional activities with public exposure [...] are likely to be exposed to specific forms of violence or abuse, threats, and harassment, in relation to their work”.⁶

¹ ODIHR, Key Resources on Gender Equality and Women's Political Participation.

² OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, paras 1-3.

³ Ibid, para 9.

⁴ OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 14/04 - 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, para 44(d).

⁵ OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 3/03 - 2003 Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, paras 19 and 98.

As described in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, “women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women ... a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account”.⁷ The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further call for “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels,” as well as the social, economic and political inclusion of all.⁸

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Progress has been observed in women’s political participation across the OSCE region, particularly in legislative bodies. Women’s representation in national parliaments increased to the current average of 29 percent in the OSCE region, up from around 11 percent when the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women took place in 1995.⁹ Almost half of the OSCE participating States (24 out of 57) have reached the 30 percent target established by the Beijing Platform for Action and the SDGs.¹⁰ The Council of Europe (CoE) recommends a minimum of 40 percent representation of either women or men in decision-making and only 10 OSCE participating States have reached this target.¹¹

There is a wide variation in women’s representation in legislative bodies among the participating States, ranging from 47 percent to only 12 percent women parliamentarians in a few states. The Nordic countries lead the way in gender equality in politics with an average of 42 percent women parliamentarians. The achievements among the remaining sub-regions of the OSCE are fairly similar with 31 percent women

parliamentarians in South Eastern Europe and in the European Union, 26 percent in North America, 25 percent in Eastern Europe, 24 percent in Central Asia, and 18 percent in the South Caucasus. Looking at parliamentary leadership, only 19 out of 78 parliaments (22 of which are bi-cameral) in the OSCE region are led by women spetakers. With a few exceptions, women chair parliamentary committees mainly on topics that are traditionally perceived as women’s issues, such as family, education, social affairs, and culture.¹³ Women from ethnic minorities and Roma and Sinti women in particular, remain severely under-represented in the European, national and regional parliaments, regional and municipal councils, governments and posts of responsibility in political parties.

Despite the existence of legal frameworks that ensure equality between women and men in most participating States, the political reality across the OSCE region differs. Caring responsibilities, unequal access to finance and a persistent pay gap, stereotypes and violence against women, lack of confidence and opportunity to experience formal politics, and male-dominated political structures all impede women’s abilities to enter, stay and lead in political and public life. The actual and perceived barriers to politics vary between women and men, influenced by cultural and political realities in societies, as shown below. These barriers are even more difficult to overcome for women from traditionally under-represented groups, such as women belonging to minorities, especially Roma and Sinti, young women, migrant women or women with disabilities.¹⁴

⁶ OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women (MC.DEC/4/18), Preamble.

⁷ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, para 181.

⁸ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, target 10.2 and target 16.7.

⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, Percentage of Women in National Parliaments and archived data.

¹⁰ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, para 182.

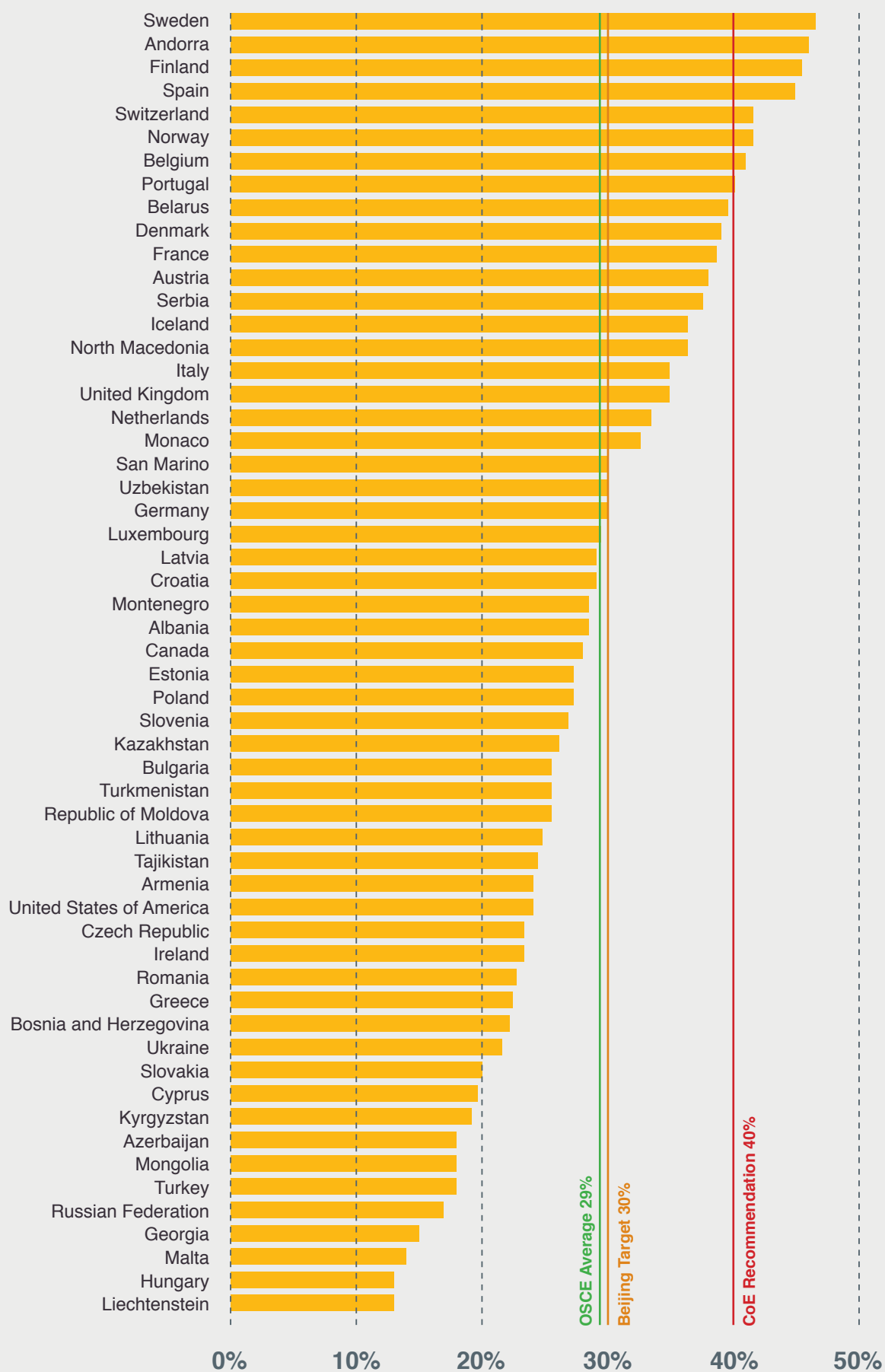
¹¹ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation 2003(3) on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making.

¹² Inter-Parliamentary Union, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, data as of 1 August 2020.

¹³ ODIHR data as of March 2020 and ODIHR Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, 2013.

¹⁴ ODIHR, Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women’s Political Participation in the OSCE Region, 2016.

Percentage of Women in OSCE Parliaments (lower chambers/unicameral)¹²



Top five barriers to entering politics for women and men



Participants in sub-regional consultations of the Beijing +25 Regional Review identified political parties as an important target for overcoming the persistent barriers to women’s political advancement.¹⁵ ODIHR’s gender audits of political parties demonstrate that candidacy selection procedures in political parties across the OSCE region remain largely non-transparent to the detriment of aspiring women candidates.¹⁶

As noted in ODIHR’s “Third Status Report - Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area - For Roma, With Roma”, Roma and Sinti women “remain under-represented in politics, and mainstream political parties are still resistant to fielding Roma and Sinti candidates”.¹⁷ Parliaments are increasingly aware of the need to integrate gender equality and diversity aspects in their institutions, both in

terms of their representative, legislative and oversight functions as well as in terms of their role as public employers. Gender-sensitive legislation, for example, can ensure that laws work and deliver for women and men, boys and girls, in all their diversity.¹⁸

The implementation of temporary special measures has had a positive impact on women’s political participation in the OSCE region, in particular legislative gender quotas designed to fast-track women’s nomination and election to political office. To address inequalities, almost 40 percent of OSCE participating States (22 out of 57) have introduced some form of legislative gender quotas in the last two decades. In the OSCE region, the quotas address national or local elected office, and in some cases both, with the prescribed percentage of women’s representation ranging between 20 and 50 percent.¹⁹ Quotas also differ in terms of

¹⁵ OSCE Internal Report Mapping Beijing +25 Implementation and OSCE Commitments.

¹⁶ ODIHR, Handbook on Promoting Women’s Participation in Political Parties, Warsaw, 2014.

¹⁷ ODIHR, Third Status Report - Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area - For Roma, With Roma, Warsaw, 2018, p. 9.

¹⁸ ODIHR, Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation, Warsaw, 2017.

¹⁹ International IDEA, Gender Quotas Database.

whether they specify placement provisions for candidate lists, which is the case in about half of the OSCE states that have introduced quotas. The sanctions for non-compliance with quota provisions vary and can result in non-registration of candidate lists or financial penalties. Other participating States have opted for the introduction of financial incentives to encourage adherence with quota provisions.²⁰ In terms of overall impact, the proportion of women elected to national parliament rose at a faster pace in those OSCE participating States that have legislative gender quotas compared with those without such measures.²¹ Still, the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms undermines the impact of legislative gender quotas. Furthermore, gains should not be attributed to quotas only, since many other policy initiatives and cultural trends, such as voluntary party measures or measures to ensure good work/life balance, can also be effective in advancing gender equality in elected office.

With the #MeToo movement gaining traction in recent years, growing attention has been paid to violence committed against women in the public sphere.²² Female politicians, artists, journalists and women's human rights defenders across the OSCE region are exposed to violence, reflecting the possible confluence of increased political polarity across the region with the ongoing pervasiveness of misogyny. A recent study by the Council of Europe and the Inter-Parliamentary Union found that 85.2 percent of the surveyed women parliamentarians

suffered psychological violence while in office, with 46.9 percent receiving death threats or threats of rape or beating. Additionally, 58.2 percent were the target of online sexist attacks on social networks, and 24.7 percent were subjected to sexual violence.²³ Younger members of parliament and those working on gender equality issues reported they were often singled out. Many of the surveyed women underscored the absence of a mechanism or service to which they could direct their complaints and seek support. This topic is addressed more broadly in the Briefing Paper on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women in the OSCE Region.

The current Covid-19 pandemic demonstrates the continued under-representation of women in decision-making that affects them. A significant gender disparity is found in the composition of Covid-19 taskforces in the OSCE region.²⁴ While women may be better represented in public health and advisory groups, their representation is particularly low in roles of political decision-making.²⁵ Failure to integrate gender perspectives in crisis planning and response to Covid-19 is likely to exacerbate existing gender inequalities and result in policies that may not adequately respond to the needs of diverse groups of women and men. In this context, it is concerning that only a few participating States have reported to be conducting gender impact assessments to guide more gender sensitive Covid-19 policies.²⁶

²⁰ ODIHR, *Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan*, Warsaw, 2011, p. 8 and International IDEA, *Gender Quotas Database*.

²¹ ODIHR, *Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan*, Warsaw, 2011, p. 54.

²² According to the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, "violence against women" is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life,' Istanbul, 2011, art 3.a.

²³ Council of Europe and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe*, 2018.

²⁴ ODIHR, *OSCE Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic*, 2020.

²⁵ For instance, the Covid-19 taskforce of the United States and Italy did not initially include any women. Hungary's taskforce included one woman out of 15 task force members. For an overview of different countries' task forces, see here.

²⁶ Based on the information published by the Council of Europe, only Serbia and Sweden initially reported to be conducting gender impact assessments.

Good practices and OSCE work

ODIHR has been leading the OSCE's efforts to advance women's political participation by supporting institutional change, awareness-raising, capacity-building and knowledge-sharing. Over the last decade, ODIHR has implemented projects and activities, provided and facilitated expert support, and supported the production of knowledge tools related to improving women's political participation in 40 OSCE participating States across the various sub-regions. Much focus was placed on gender equality in parliaments and political parties and support to political participation, as well as capacity building of women, including those from marginalized groups such as Roma and Sinti, young women and women with disabilities.²⁷ The ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI) has consistently addressed this topic, by engaging politicians, Roma and Sinti civil society activists, experts, women and youth in various activities and ensuring their active involvement and participation in OSCE human dimension meetings, side events and debates. Since the low level of women's representation in elected office is often a consequence of an uneven playing field during elections, ODIHR's election observation missions also examine women's participation as voters, candidates and elected representatives, making recommendations on how electoral laws and practices can be improved.²⁸ Following elections, national authorities benefit from tailor-made technical assistance to implement those recommendations.

Out of 16 OSCE field operations, 13 have been implementing programmes, projects, or activities that advance gender equality in politics. Other OSCE structures, including the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and its Special Representative on Gender Issues, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media, have also addressed gender issues in parliaments, the political participation of national minorities, and the online safety of female journalists, respectively. The OSCE Chairs-in-Office and their Special Representative on Gender actively support the OSCE's work on women in politics through joint events, country visits and dedicated reports. This section provides a snapshot illustration of how OSCE executive structures contribute to efforts to promote the participation of women in political and public life.

²⁷ ODIHR, *Guidelines on Promoting the Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities*, Warsaw, 2019.

²⁸ ODIHR, *ODIHR, Gender Equality, and Women's Rights: A Factsheet*, Warsaw, 2017.

Institutional change: Promoting gender-sensitive and inclusive

Across the OSCE region, the legitimacy of representative democracy is facing challenges that are fuelled by a growing public perception of parliaments as being corrupt, elitist, and male-dominated.²⁹ ODIHR and OSCE field Operations, working together, supported the parliaments of Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia in their efforts to become more gender-sensitive and enact laws that recognize the different needs and priorities and are therefore effective for both women and men. Consultations and assessments of the current level of gender sensitivity in parliamentary and legislative

processes were followed by workshops for parliamentarians, based on ODIHR's publication "Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation".³⁰ This has resulted in three state-of-the-art gender action plans developed for these legislatures. Upon request by participating States, ODIHR also reviews draft and existing legislation to assess its compliance with OSCE commitments, gender equality standards and international good practice and publishes its legal opinions on Legislationline.org.

GOOD PRACTICE: GENDER ACTION PLANS FOR PARLIAMENTS

Gender action plans for parliaments represent a new era in democratic governance and parliamentary processes. These strategic documents aim to foster institutional change towards gender equality, inclusion and efficiency in parliaments' representative, legislative and oversight roles and in leadership processes, as well as parliaments as gender-sensitive public employers. In the long run, such plans can lead to inclusive and efficient parliaments, delivering good laws, policies, services, and jobs for women and men in all their diversity.

KNOWLEDGE TOOL: GENDER-SENSITIVE LEGISLATION

ODIHR's publication *Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation* provides a step-by-step guide for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff on how to implement gender-sensitive legislation, explaining what it is, why it is important, and how it can be integrated into routine parliamentary work.

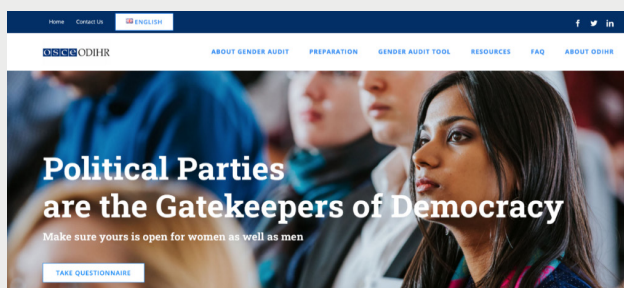
²⁹ Transparency International, *People and Corruption: Citizen's Voices From Around The World*, 2017; Pew Research Center, *Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy*, 2017; and Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Parliament*.

³⁰ ODIHR, *Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation*, Warsaw, 2017.

While gender parity has not yet been achieved in most parliaments in the OSCE region, women do manage to have a significant impact on political landscapes and decision-making. Women's caucuses in parliaments are initiated by women parliamentarians across the OSCE region, to promote solidarity, strengthen capacities in parliaments, and advance women's policy interests.³¹ Over the last decade, ODIHR and OSCE field operations have supported the establishment and work of

parliamentary women's caucuses in a dozen States, including Albania, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia and Ukraine. Targeted and collaborative efforts between women inside and outside parliament, often under the leadership of parliamentary women's caucuses, have resulted in several laws and policies on gender equality, domestic violence, family or social affairs and similar issues.

Collective awareness-raising: Engaging with political parties on gender equality



Political parties are considered to be gatekeepers of democracy. OSCE commitments “encourage all political actors to promote equal participation of women and men in political parties...to achieve better gender-balanced representation in elected public offices at all levels of decision-making.”³² Engaging with political parties on concrete measures to advance gender issues facilitates access of women to candidate nominations and elected office, but also benefits the parties themselves. By diversifying the composition of a political party, it is possible to widen its support base and outreach to voters and potential candidates. In turn, gender mainstreaming in political parties can be a win-win situation.

ODIHR has developed the Gender Audit for Political Parties -an online self-assessment tool- for political parties to identify gaps and opportunities in their approach to gender equality.

To date, ODIHR and OSCE field operations have supported gender audits of 48 political parties in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan. The resulting reports and 400 recommendations issues are used by political parties to develop party gender action plans, important strategic documents to increase women's participation and sensitize internal policies and procedures. Examples of implementation of gender action plans include the establishment of local women's councils or advocating for the introduction of voluntary party quotas for women candidates.

³¹ ODIHR, Comparative Study of Structures for Women MPs in the OSCE Region, 2013, p. 6.

³² OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, Art 3.

GOOD PRACTICE:

GENDER AUDIT OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The Gender Audit of Political Party is a self-assessment tool that enables a party to identify both strengths and shortcomings in its gender equality approach. The audit findings will point to the activities that a party can undertake to mainstream gender equality in party structures, programmes, and documents. This process can be used by party leaders and activists for the development of gender action plans, to outline measures for institutionalizing gender equality and women's empowerment in the party and beyond.

Individual capacity-building: Supporting women leaders and gender equality advocates

Women's political participation is fostered by the support of women leaders and gender equality advocates in developing their skills and capacities and facilitating access to knowledge and networking opportunities.

ODIHR and OSCE field operations across the OSCE region engage in various programmes and activities to build capacities of women

leaders, aspiring candidates, young activists, and gender advocates. For example, in 2019 the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek delivered trainings on women's political participation in four regions of Kyrgyzstan, contributing to a record number of 43 percent local councils seats going to women.³³

GOOD PRACTICE:

DIALOGUE ACADEMY FOR YOUNG WOMEN

What started as the "Follow Us" initiative - bringing together prominent women from Prishtinë/Priština and Belgrade - has evolved into the OSCE Dialogue Academy empowering young women through education and dialogue. Organized annually, the Academy gathers young women from both societies to learn about mediation, negotiation, and women in politics. Engaging young women provides for an alternative form of dialogue, capacity-building and outreach on gender equality and women's leadership, which is particularly useful in politically sensitive environments. The OSCE Dialogue Academy is present on Facebook, reflecting its target audience and providing alumni and current participants with an opportunity for continued exchange.

³³ The Project received the OSCE Gender Champions Award in 2019.

Supporting progress by knowledge-sharing

Over the last decade, OSCE executive structures have organized and supported national, regional and international conferences and events on women's political participation, providing platforms for knowledge exchange and networking among women leaders and activists, international, nationally, or sub-regionally. For example, the OSCE Secretariat, ODIHR, and the OSCE Chair-in-Office organize regular Gender Equality Review Conferences, gathering government representatives and civil society activists.

The conferences include a dedicated session on women's political participation. Supported by ODIHR and OSCE field operations in Central Asia, international forums of women leaders have been held regularly in Belarus since 2016, providing women leaders and activists from Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the South Caucasus with a platform for knowledge exchange and networking.

OSCE field operations in South Eastern Europe host, on a rotational basis, an Annual Meeting of Women Parliamentarians from the

region, with a different thematic focus every year. Supported by ODIHR, national forums of women leaders have been organized in Hungary, Poland, and Ukraine in recent years. ODIHR is currently implementing a project to support participating States in South Eastern Europe in their efforts to follow up on election observation recommendations in areas related to election administration, voter registration and media coverage during election campaigns, including from a gender perspective.

ODIHR also hosts an annual workshop for OSCE staff on women's political participation, engaging in joint strategic planning and building capacity for future OSCE work in that area. Women's power breakfasts and lunches have been organized by various OSCE executive structures on the margins of large OSCE events, providing a dedicated platform for women's voices to be heard.

Recommendations

Gender equality in political and public life is not only required to improve the representative nature, accountability and quality of democracies, but it also has a profound impact on the way politics is done

in terms of policy-making agendas and political content.³⁴ To achieve gender equality in political and public life, the following actions are needed:



Identify and remedy discriminatory laws and policies to reinforce participation of diverse and under-represented groups of women

OSCE participating States should strengthen women's political participation by identifying and remedying discriminatory laws and policies, ensuring that all laws and policies are gender-sensitive and sharing good practices for women's engagement in democratic processes. Consideration should be given to introducing and improving legislative measures or financial incentives to achieve gender parity in politics. Political participation of diverse and under-represented groups of women should be promoted, including national minorities, especially Roma and Sinti, as well as young women, migrant women and women with disabilities.



Promote institutional change- mainstream gender aspects at all levels

OSCE participating States should promote institutional change towards democratic institutions that are inclusive, representative, and gender-sensitive at all levels. Parliaments, for example, should mainstream gender aspects in their representative, legislative and oversight functions and in leadership processes, as well as ensure that they are gender-sensitive public employers. Structures and initiatives that enable women to influence policy and legislative agendas, such as parliamentary women's caucuses or women's organizations, should be strengthened.



Ensure equal participation of women and men in political parties

OSCE participating States should encourage all relevant political actors to "promote equal participation of women and men in political parties, to achieving gender-balanced representation in elected public offices at all levels of decision-making."³⁵ As gatekeepers of democracy, political parties should conduct self-assessments on gender equality within their structures and programmes, to strengthen internal party democracy, institutionalize gender equality, and facilitate women's empowerment in the party and politics more broadly.



Create support mechanism for aspiring women politicians

OSCE participating States should create support mechanisms for (aspiring) women politicians to reduce the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, in order to foster their participation. Efforts should be made to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women, including in political and public life as well as online, by creating adequate complaint and support mechanisms.



Invest in human capital-support women leaders

OSCE participating States and OSCE executive structures should support women leaders in strengthening their skills, capacities, and confidence for politics, facilitating their access to knowledge and networking. Raising the awareness of men leaders and engaging men in advancing gender equality is crucial for future progress.



Strengthen women's organizations

OSCE participating States and OSCE executive structures should actively support women's organizations, women human rights defenders, and gender equality advocates in their important work as they play a key role in ensuring that women's needs, priorities, and voices are heard and considered in policy-making processes that affect them the most.

³⁴ ODIHR, Compendium of Good Practices for Advancing Women's Political Participation in the OSCE Region, 2016, p. 82.

³⁵ OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 7/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, Art. 3.