



Joint OSCE PA-OSCE/ODIHR Web Dialogue on “Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: Transforming Institutions, Delivering for All Women and Men”

Wednesday, 30 March 2022, 10:00 – 12:00 CEST, Zoom

Highlights¹

Background:

This Joint Web Dialogue by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) was organized on 30 March 2022 (10:00 – 12:00 CEST). It provided an opportunity to discuss innovative approaches on gender sensitive parliaments and transformation of these institutions to better deliver for all women and men. More specifically, the event provided a platform to exchange good practices, lessons learned and innovations on how national parliaments could mainstream gender in their composition, structures, operations, working methods, and day-to-day work. The key role of parliamentarians as drivers of change towards gender parity was emphasized, noting the importance of enabling participation of women in politics, lawmaking, conflict prevention and resolution, as prescribed in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action² as well as in the OSCE and OSCE PA acquis. The event also aimed to raise awareness among parliamentarians of OSCE participating States (pS) of OSCE tools and resources in this field, including the ODIHR’s new guide on “*Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region*”. It was held online, via Zoom conferencing platform, in English/Russian/English and International Sign Language.

¹ DISCLAIMER: The Highlights from the OSCE PA Web Dialogue are not intended to be official conclusions, nor an exhaustive list of all issues raised during the discussion, but rather a collection of interesting points noted by the International Secretariat for possible future reference. As such, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly makes no claims nor warranties of any kind, expressed or implied, about their completeness and reliability.

² United Nations (UN), Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 15 September 1995. Available at https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf.

Key findings:

- Gender equality benefits everybody and can be achieved only through **concerted and continuous efforts by relevant institutional mechanisms and policies, and a whole-of-society approach.**
- **The struggle for gender equality should be everyone’s priority,** and more synergies are needed to tackle respective challenges. As such, achieving gender equality remains a key priority for the OSCE PA and the OSCE/ODIHR.
- **Parliaments play a fundamental role in promoting gender-equality in politics and across society in general.** Through the efficient use of the main parliamentary functions – representation, legislation-making and oversight – parliaments have a institutional role in **adapting the existing and formulating new policy frameworks, as well as monitoring their implementation** with the aim to streamline gender-sensible policies as a cross-cutting priority.
- **Making parliaments gender-sensitive is a complex and continuous process.** In this regard, ODIHR’s *“Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region”*³, based on responses received from 52 chambers in 46 States of parliaments in the OSCE region, **offers pS a unified definition of gender-sensitive parliaments**⁴.
- Some of the **main findings** outlined in the Guide find that: men continue to hold senior roles while women continue to hold deputy roles; women tend to constitute majorities on the soft portfolio committees, few parliaments monitor presence and participation; there is less financial support for supporting family-friendly parliaments; new inquiries are being established for violence-free parliaments; in-house gender expertise was considered as “not applicable”; the purpose of gender mainstreaming to many parliaments was unclear.
- **The Guide outlines important tools to enhance parliamentary sensitivity on gender issues,** including: by condemning discriminatory and sexist behavior within parliaments at the strongest possible terms; by adopting and implementing codes of conduct and of their provisions in this respect; by meaningfully addressing suspected and open cases of sexism, discrimination, harassment and violence of all forms against women in politics through an independent grievance mechanism; by allowing members of parliament with caring responsibilities to better balance work and private life through the provision of flexible work arrangements; by ensuring that positions of parliamentary and party leadership are equally and meaningfully shared between women and men; by prioritizing and institutionalizing debates on gender in plenary sessions.

³ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, “Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament: A Guide for Parliaments in the OSCE Region”, 6 December 2021. Available at <https://www.osce.org/odihr/506885>.

⁴ As outlined in the Guide, a gender-sensitive parliament values and prioritizes gender equality as a social, economic and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament’s institutional culture, processes and practices and outputs towards these objectives.

- Four important actions to be taken by parliaments to become gender-sensitive include **assessing, implementing, resourcing and reviewing** internal procedures.
- **National parliaments have not made significant progress** as it was expected after adoption of the Beijing declaration in 1995. More concrete steps need to be taken to achieve substantive results through gender budgeting, adoption of codes of conduct, gender auditing, gender-based analysis of decision-making and equal representation.
- The **2021 Appeal to Act by the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues called** on all parliaments in the OSCE region **to strive towards becoming gender-sensitive parliaments.**
Merit-based principles have to be respected irrespective of gender and throughout relevant mechanisms in parliaments, as such an approach ensures equal chances for all. In this regard, recognition of non-binary gender and intersectionality remains an important part of the discussions on gender-equality in parliaments.
- **Political will is paramount for achieving gender-sensitive parliaments** and it should be forged on the basis of broad party convergence in addressing existing challenges. The statistics show that better women representation in political parties leads to more chances to be elected and represented in the parliament.

Key recommendations:

1. **Forging political will and leadership commitment:** It is essential that speakers of parliament, heads of parliamentary administration and leaders of parties commit to the transformation process by being open to learn and critically review their achievements and shortcomings. Parliaments need to be ready not to do things “the way they were always done”.
2. **Commitment for conducting systematic and participatory gender assessments or audits:** MPs and parliament leadership might be aware of some of the gender-related challenges and shortcomings, but there are many more underneath the surface. If the openness and transparency are created by leadership, the parliament can establish an independent baseline and adopt action-oriented recommendations that can be further considered.
3. **The implementation of the recommendations in the form of a parliament-specific gender action plan or strategy:** The majority of OSCE participating states have a national gender equality strategy or action plan in place, however these should be adequately implemented, frequently reviewed and tailor-made to address the issues which relate to the parliament internally. The implementation of a parliamentary gender action plan demands full commitment of the leadership of the parliament and of the parties, including commitment to allocate funding, potentially hire new people in the administration or establish new working bodies.
4. **Capacity building of MPs and staff:** A gender-sensitive transformation of parliaments is possible through raising awareness on existing biases and developing technical capacities of its members. Synergies in that respect should be explored and advanced, both in co-

operation with governmental structures as well as with the civil society, academia and international organizations such as the OSCE and its institutions. In case the parliament doesn't have internal resources to building the capacities, it might be useful to reach out to government institutional mechanisms for the advancement of gender equality, academia and international partners like ODIHR.

5. **Introduction of new structures and mechanisms:** Gender auditing might identify the need to set up a women's network within parliament, to appoint a full-time gender adviser in the parliamentary support units, or to develop clear protocols for gender sensitive oversight.