



Women's Entrepreneurship in the OSCE Region: Trends and good practices

An international conference for experts, women entrepreneurs, associations of women's businesses and practitioners on women's economic empowerment

Vilnius, Lithuania
March 3-4, 2011

A growing body of evidence indicates that gender equality contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable growth. Women's increased education and participation in the labour force have been associated with improved economic performance.

Women entrepreneurs can be a powerful source for economic growth and development worldwide. They comprise about a third of global business ventures and contribute significantly to employment generation and development. Nonetheless, their potential is underutilized, and women's under-representation as leaders in both business and the development of policy remains a concern. In many countries, women are not only less likely to turn to entrepreneurship, but their businesses are more likely to be informal, generate less revenue and employ fewer staff. Reasons for this are varied and include unfavourable business regulations, continued cultural barriers, women's double burden of home and work responsibilities, as well as unequal access to resources such as collateral necessary for access to bank credit.

In the OSCE, gender equality is part of the Organization's comprehensive security approach. The Organization operates under the belief that a healthy economy, where men and women have equal access to and benefit equally from economic opportunities, could be a driving force in eradicating the root causes of conflict and instability. The Organization thus supports women's equal economic opportunities as a strategy to promote stability and sustainable development throughout the OSCE region. MC. Decision 14/04 on the OSCE Gender Action Plan requires participating States to undertake initiatives to increase awareness of women's rights in the economic sphere, analyze obstacles to women reaching their economic potential and promote projects to strengthen women's entrepreneurial and other work-related skills.

While much information on good practices and networking experiences with regards to women's entrepreneurship exists in some OSCE participating States, there is hardly any for Afghanistan, Central Asia and the South Caucasus. To remedy this situation and in line with OSCE Ministerial Council Decision 07/09 on Women's Participation in Political and Public Life, the OSCE Gender Section launched a project aiming at collecting and disseminating data and good practices on women's entrepreneurship in the OSCE, with particular attention given to these two sub-regions.

Within this framework, the OSCE Gender Section, in co-operation with the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, and the University of Vilnius / Gender Studies Centre, is organizing a conference, funded by Andorra, Germany and the United States of America, which will take place in Vilnius, Lithuania on 03 and 04 March 2011.



The conference is a stocktaking exercise addressing the impacts on security of continued gender inequalities in the business sector within the OSCE area. The conference will present an overview of key issues facing women entrepreneurs and business associations in sub-regions of the OSCE, in particular in Afghanistan, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, as well as highlighting good practices, and suggesting potential areas for intervention.

The conference will offer an opportunity for women entrepreneurs from the OSCE area to establish partnerships, to learn from each other and, together with policy makers and experts, discuss how to successfully address the major challenges to women's entrepreneurship. The conference will be participatory and practice-oriented in order to facilitate an environment for open communication and collaborative work. The conference themes will be explored through a series of presentations, panels and working group sessions. Conference will be held in English Language. Translation into Russian Language will be provided.

Call for Participation

The Gender Section is seeking proposals to join the conference programme from experts, medium and large business female owners and heads of women's business associations. Proposals for presentations are welcome for the following topics:

1. Women Entrepreneurs in Afghanistan, Central Asia and in South Caucasus: Current trends
2. Barriers hindering women's entrepreneurship in Afghanistan, Central Asia and South Caucasus
3. Good practices to promoting successful women-run businesses in the OSCE area
4. Innovative approaches to introducing growth to small companies led by women in the OSCE area
5. Role and potential of women's business associations and networks in promoting women's entrepreneurship development
6. Policy and government support for women's entrepreneurship

Proposals submitted by practitioners from both the private and public sectors are welcome. Proposals should be prepared in English and composed of an abstract (700 to 900 words) and a brief biography of the contributor.

Those whose proposals are selected will be contacted within three weeks of the submission date. A limited number of scholarships to cover the participation expenses will be offered to selected experts.

To participate in the conference, please send your proposal to equality@osce.org by 07 February 2011; Ref.: Vilnius March 2011

Additional information and registration forms can be found at <http://www.osce.org/item/47791.html>