

Alexandra Oprea
Independent Consultant
Ao2162@columbia.edu
Columbia University
School of International & Public Affairs

**Improving the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality:
Adopting an Intersectional Framework**

I would like to comment on the question of how to improve the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. In doing so, it is important to reflect on international commitments such as those made at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban where multiple oppressions were recognized. It is therefore imperative to address gender marginalization not in isolation, but rather in a way that takes into account how gender oppression manifests itself differently when women are of a religious, ethnic or racial minority, migrants/ immigrants/ refugees and/or poor.

I think it's important to illustrate what we miss when we use a gender-only lens as opposed to an **intersectional lens** that takes into account multiple oppressions. The Action Plan calls for **gender mainstreaming**, for example, yet fails to call for any type of comparable approach in terms of minority mainstreaming where the impact of being a racial, ethnic or religious minority is taken into account. This ignores the experiences of millions of women whose daily lives are negatively impacted as a result of being at the bottom of the gender hierarchy and the racial/ethnic/religious hierarchy in the respective countries.

A uni-dimensional focus is bound to premise its understanding of gender oppression on the experiences of women who are marginalized solely based on their gender – in other words the experiences of women of majority communities form the basis of understanding – or I should say misunderstanding or partial understanding of gender oppression.

The Action Plan calls for the participating states to comply with **CEDAW** but neglects to mention ratification and compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (**CERD**). This is, in effect treating the **two as mutually exclusive categories** and leaving women of minority status, unrepresented unrepresented and unprotected.

This exclusive focus manifests itself both in the policies it supports in member countries and in its internal policies. In assisting with recruitment, for example, the Action Plan calls for statistics to show the distribution of men and women in various OSCE posts. But statistics that only take into account gender show the divisions only between majority men and **majority** women, as discussed in several articles. If we are told that 20% of management positions are occupied by women – it is impossible to ascertain, for example, how many of those women are from minority communities, say Roma or North African Muslim communities. Surely, you would agree that it is important to have within a balance of men and women, also representation of various groups of women and men. However, by failing to call for statistics disaggregated by race and gender

and recruitment conscious of gender and racial/ethnic differences, it is de facto calling for the increased representation of white women.

There are many other areas in which the action plan not only fails minority women by looking at issues in a **uni-dimensional** way, but by **completely missing** issues relevant to these women's daily existence. It should therefore rely on an approach where, either via consultants or internal structures, they **construct such action plans based on a bottom up approach, one whose analysis centers on those who are multiply burdened.**