



## CONCEPT NOTE

### **Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls: Institutional Mechanisms at the Centre of Solutions**

*A side event of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights to  
the 66<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.*

Online // Thursday, 17 March 2022  
13:00-14:30 CET (Warsaw)/08:00-09:30 EST (New York)

#### **BACKGROUND**

National mechanisms (or machineries) for the advancement of women have been established in nearly every country around the world, also in the OSCE region from North America to Europe and Central Asia. They include offices, commissions, agencies, and ministries, with diverse structures, competences, resources – but all with the same goal: to further promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Approaches for achieving these goals, however, have evolved over time. Initially, most machineries focused on policies ensuring equal treatment, seeking to gain for women the same rights that were already enjoyed by men. This strategy was later criticized for simply assimilating women to a male standard. A second approach then emerged, addressing women's needs as women, through such measures as affirmative action, recognizing that distinct policies for women and men in all their diversity may be required to ensure gender equality. Dissatisfaction with this strategy led to a third approach, known as gender mainstreaming, popularized around the globe through the Beijing Platform for Action. The mainstreaming approach involves evaluating every prospective policy (1) with a gendered lens and (2) with the goal of promoting equality between women and men. As such, it differs from prior strategies in seeking to apply a gender perspective across all policy areas, including those where a gender dimension is not readily apparent.

The widespread presence of women's policy machineries, however, belies important variations in the strength and status of these agencies, whose resources are often vulnerable to changes in government and donor funding priorities. The result is that these offices diverge greatly in terms of their budgets and staff, the scope or length of their mandate, their closeness to the executive, the backgrounds of their agency heads, and their policy priorities. In some countries, for example, agencies have ministerial rank, while in others they are housed in the office of the president or under the auspices of another ministry, such as ministries of justice or social development. In some countries, inter-ministerial councils have been established, mandated to co-ordinate gender mainstreaming efforts by the

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government. Few machineries have the power to negotiate their own budgets, and many have only a handful of staff members. In addition, their existence and status may depend closely upon the will of the president or prime minister, who may fundamentally reorganize their mandate, for example by adding a focus on family and children or by combining the unit with other anti-discrimination offices focused on race, age, or disability. An ongoing concern is therefore whether these agencies are endowed with effective power to advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Ministerial Council decision 14/04 on the OSCE 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality sets very clear obligations for OSCE participating States (pSs) and OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), when it comes to the set up and functioning of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and of gender equality. According to the paragraph 41 of the 2004 Action Plan, participating States are recommended to "establish or strengthen existing mechanisms for ensuring gender equality (...)".

Building national mechanisms for the advancement of women is also one of the six sectoral priority areas as per the 2004 Action Plan on the Promotion of Gender Equality, and paragraph 44 contains the following specific tasks for ODIHR:

1. "The ODIHR will continue to provide know-how and support for the building-up of democratic institutions for advancing gender equality, such as Ombudsman's offices at local and national levels, as appropriate;
2. The ODIHR will facilitate dialogue and co-operation between civil society, media and government in promoting gender-mainstreaming."

As the only OSCE executive structure directly tasked to support institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and gender equality, ODIHR conducted in November and December 2021 an OSCE-wide mapping on the status, activities, achievements, lessons learned and good practices of governmental institutional mechanisms in the OSCE pSs. More than 40 OSCE pSs contributed to the process, which in 2022 will continue with qualitative research with a selected group of institutional mechanisms from different sub-regions of North America, Europe and Central Asia. At the end of 2022, ODIHR plans to present the results in form of its new knowledge resource: "Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women and of Gender Equality: A Practical Guide".

The OSCE-wide mapping on the status, activities, achievements, lessons learned and good practices of governmental institutional mechanisms and its results are the occasion for organizing this side event.

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## **OBJECTIVES OF THE EVENT**

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is organizing this side event to

- present initial findings from the OSCE-wide mapping on the on the status, activities, achievements, lessons learned and good practices of governmental institutional mechanisms on the advancement of women and of gender equality; and
- discuss selected examples of good practices, lessons learned and innovations that governmental institutional mechanisms on the advancement of women and of gender equality can bring to policy making and institutional transformation.

## **TARGET AUDIENCE**

- Representatives of governmental institutional mechanisms on the advancement of women and of gender equality from all around the world, with a focus on OSCE pSs from North America, Europe and Central Europe;
- Representatives of international and national women's organizations and other civil society initiatives working on gender equality;
- Representatives of international organizations working on issues of gender equality;
- Representatives of OSCE executive structures and delegations/missions of OSCE pSs;

## **REGISTRATION**

All interested participants need to register their participation at the following [LINK](#). Once registered, participants will receive a zoom link to their e-mail address.

## **TECHNICAL INFORMATION**

The event will be held online, via Zoom conferencing platform. Working language will be English. Translation to Russian will be provided.

## **CONTACT**

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Saša Gavrić, ODIHR's Associate Gender Officer, [sasa.gavric@odihhr.pl](mailto:sasa.gavric@odihhr.pl)

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## AGENDA

### Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of all Women and Girls: Institutional Mechanisms at the Centre of Solutions

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Online // Thursday, 17 March 2022  
13:00-14:30 CET (Warsaw)/08:00-09:30 EST (New York)

08:00- 08:10 EST  13:00- 13:10 CET	<p><b>Opening remarks</b> Dr. Yulia Netesova, Chief, Democratic Governance and Gender Unit, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)</p>
08:10- 08:30 EST  13:10- 13:30 EST	<p><b>Presentation of the initial findings on the OSCE-wide mapping</b> Governmental Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women and of Gender Equality: Critical Actors at the Centre of Solutions</p> <p>Prof. Amy Mazur, ODIHR's International Expert Washington State University</p>
08:30- 09:25 EST  13:30- 14:25 EST	<p><b>Expert discussion</b> Maruša Gortnar, Head of Operations, European Institute for Gender Equality Prof. Kateryna Levchenko, Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy, Ukraine Dr. Lenita Freidenvall, Head of the Gender Equality Division, Ministry of Employment, Sweden</p> <p>Moderator: Saša Gavrić, Gender Officer, ODIHR</p>
09:25- 09:30 EST  14:25- 14:30 CET	<p><b>Closing remarks</b> Representative of Sweden to the UN, TBC</p>