

TOOLKIT ON ESTABLISHING ASSOCIATIONS OF WOMEN IN JUSTICE:

GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS





**Prepared by Dr. Sabina Garahan with contributions from
Dr. Anna Dolidze**

This Toolkit has been developed within the framework of the project "Improving the Effectiveness of the Justice System in Kazakhstan", implemented by the OSCE Programme Office in Astana with the support of the Governments of the Norway, Poland and United States.

The authors are responsible for the contents of the publication, which do not necessarily reflect the official position of the OSCE or the Governments of the Norway, Poland and United States. This Toolkit may not be reproduced in whole or in part, in whatever form or for whatever purpose, without the express permission of the copyright holder and acknowledgement of the source.

Table of Contents

Prerequisites and introduction.....	4
1 Actions to be taken during the establishment phase.....	7
A Strategic priorities.....	7
B Legal regulation.	12
C Membership.....	15
2 Actions to be taken after the establishment of the association.....	17
A Maintaining an active membership.....	17
B Activities.....	18
C Funding.....	21
D Cooperation with other associations.....	22
Final recommendations.....	25

Toolkit on Establishing Associations of Women in Justice: Good Practices and Recommendations

Prepared by Dr. Sabina Garahan¹ with the participation of Dr. Anna Dolidze²

Prerequisites and introduction

This Toolkit is based on a comparative study of associations of women judges in the OSCE region³ commissioned by ODIHR and prepared by Dr. Sabina Garahan in May 2021. The ideas and recommendations outlined in this toolkit were further developed through an ODIHR webinar on women judges' associations in Central Asia⁴ in 2021 and a seminar held in Astana on 14-15 March 2024, where women judges from Kazakhstan and around the world gathered for a two-day hybrid workshop entitled "Women Judges: Professional Exchange of Experience and International Co-operation"⁵. The aim of the seminar was to promote gender equality, empower women in the judiciary and enhance the effectiveness of the judiciary through the exchange of knowledge and good practices among associations of women in justice.

The Toolkit outlines good practices and practical recommendations for establishing associations of women in justice, both at the establishment stage (Section I) and for ensuring the successful development and management of the association (Section II). It brings together the experiences gained from the research and interviews conducted as part of the comparative study, as well as suggestions made by the judges who attended the two-day workshop. The author sincerely thanks the judges interviewed and those who participated for the free exchange of ideas, both about the benefits of women's judicial associations and the challenges that may arise in establishing them. This Toolkit seeks to address both of these issues in the key recommendations and action steps it offers.

Throughout this Toolkit, the terms "women judges" and "women in justice" are used interchangeably. Both refer broadly to women working within the judiciary and the wider justice sector, and are intended to carry the same meaning within this context.

¹ Dr. Sabina Garahan is a British lawyer and academic who is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) at the University of Essex Law School and Human Rights Centre. Dr. Garahan is the author of a comparative study of associations of women judges in the OSCE region.

² Dr. Anna Dolidze is an internationally recognized human rights scholar and practitioner with over 20 years of experience in academia and government.

³ Comparative study on women judges' associations across the OSCE region, May 2021, OSCE/ODIHR Study, [487633.pdf](https://www.osce.org/odihr/487633.pdf) (osce.org).

⁴ ODIHR, 'Associations of Women Judges in Central Asia – Gender, Diversity and Justice', online event, April 21–22, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/482894>.

⁵ OSCE Programme Office in Astana, 'Empowering Women Judges in Kazakhstan through International Exchange', hybrid workshop, Astana, March 15, 2024, <https://www.osce.org/programme-office-in-astana/564830>.



Two-day hybrid workshop entitled “Women judges: professional exchange of experience and international co-operation” on 14-15 March 2024, Astana.

The Toolkit is based on the following key steps, both during and after the creation process:

- 1 In the establishment phase:
 - A Strategic Priorities;
 - B Legal Regulation;
 - C Membership Rules.
- 2 In the post-establishment phase:
 - A Maintaining an active membership;
 - B Activity;
 - C Funding;
 - D Cooperation with other associations.

At each stage, the Toolkit sets out both basic recommendations and additional steps that can be taken depending on the specifics and needs of each association. The recommendations at the establishment stage (section I) are intended to lay a solid and effective foundation for the work of the association. The recommendations for the post-establishment phase (section II) are intended to ensure the effective functioning and ongoing development of the association.

The purpose of this Toolkit and the comparative study is to incorporate gender mainstreaming into the recommendations. One of the key achievements of existing associations of women judges, and a key goal



of future associations, is to promote the representation of women in the judiciary, with the ultimate goal of achieving gender parity. This is in line with OSCE participating States' commitments to achieve the goal of gender balance and non-discrimination in justice systems.⁶

⁶ OSCE Ministerial Council, Decision No. 7/09, "Women's Participation in Political and Public Life", Athens, December 2, 2009, para.1, <https://www.osce.org/mc/67621>.

1 Actions to be taken during the establishment phase

The following key recommendations are aimed at providing a solid and effective foundation for the work of the association. Recommendations for promoting and strengthening the association in the post-establishment phase are presented in section II.

A Strategic priorities

Why is it important to identify the strategic priorities and goals of a future association?

- » Identifying strategic priorities and the scope of planned activities is not only essential to drafting constituent documents that properly reflect the goals and values of your operation, but will also help ensure the longevity and effectiveness of the association.
- » The founding documents should explain the association's strategic priorities and the activities envisaged to achieve these objectives.
- » In addition to being important to members, clearly identifying the strategic priorities and scope of planned activities in the association's founding document(s) helps to clarify it for external audiences. This confirms that the work is focused on research and awareness-raising in specific areas of concern, rather than on lobbying on individual issues. This prevents possible accusations of bias being made against member association judges. It is worth noting that no such cases were reported in any of the discussions with women members of existing associations conducted as part of the research for this Toolkit.
- » Clearly identifying strategic priorities will provide other organizations with an accurate picture of whether co-operation with the association will be mutually beneficial and productive (recommendations for cooperation with other associations are outlined in Section II.D).
- » Clearly identifying strategic priorities will allow external potential donors who may be interested in funding the association's plans to familiarize themselves with its activities and decide whether it is worth funding.

» Examples of strategic prioritization in association statutes

The Charter of the Kyrgyz Association of Women Judges includes both the goals and objectives of the Association. Objectives of the Association:

- *creating a professional community that promotes judicial and legal reform to improve access to justice for women, minor children and other vulnerable populations;*
- *promotion, defence and representation of the rights and interests of the members of the Association;*
- *assistance in strengthening the rule of law and enhancing the status of judges of the Kyrgyz Republic;*
- *continuous assistance in building the rule of law and participation in creating conditions for full respect for human rights.*

The objectives of the Association are also described in the Articles of Association, as follows:

- co-operation with state bodies, public organizations, international organizations;*
- developing full cooperation among judges, prosecutors, lawyers and other legal professionals, promoting the link between legal science, education and practice;*
- independent or joint congresses, conferences, seminars, round tables, discussions and other events with state bodies and public associations on the law and law enforcement practice of the courts, especially on family issues, protection of the rights of minors, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, other groups of the population and improvement of their access to justice;*
- consideration, analysis and preparation of proposals on adoption, amendment, addition or repeal of legislative and other regulatory legal acts;*
- elaboration of scientifically substantiated recommendations on problematic issues of ensuring the protection of the rights, freedoms and interests of citizens and their access to justice;*
- providing information, advisory and organizational assistance to the members of the Association;*
- participation in legal reforms, improvement of the lawmaking process;*
- assistance in improving professional knowledge and skills of the Association members;*
- establishment and development of professional relations with similar associations, including those of other countries;*
- publication of bulletins, newspapers, legal magazines and other informational materials, as well as cooperation with the media;*
- assistance in strengthening the legal basis for the activity of judges and their social and legal protection;*
- assisting the process of formation of the rule of law in the Kyrgyz Republic;*
- promoting the prestige of the legal profession in the Kyrgyz Republic.*

*It is also possible to describe the scope of activities in less detail. For example, the **Association of Women Judges of the United Kingdom** explains in its Constitution that, in order to further its aims, the Association may:*

- conduct, organize or assist in meetings, judicial exchanges, conferences or seminars;*
- promote or organize mentoring programs for judges and members of the judiciary;*
- promote, sponsor or participate in research;*
- publish or assist in the publication of educational materials for judges, lawyers, politicians and members of the public;*
- do whatever is necessary and/or right to accomplish these and similar goals.*

Objectives of the Association of Women Judges of the United Kingdom:

- promote cooperation and collaboration among women judges;*
- promote understanding and resolution of legal issues faced by women;*

- increase understanding of the diverse social, economic, psychological and cultural factors affecting women facing the judicial system;
- raise awareness of women judges, their numbers, recruitment procedures and barriers to their appointment, with a view to creating a judiciary that objectively reflects the population it serves;
- increase understanding of human rights standards and the role of the judiciary in upholding them in order to promote and protect women's rights on an equal basis.

Key Recommendations:

- ✓ The strategic priorities of the association should be clearly defined, based on the following findings. Associations of women judges generally have two main objectives: 1) to create a supportive community for women judges so that problems can be addressed and solutions advocated for as a group rather than individually, and 2) to have a positive impact on the ability of national courts to provide justice for all. Thus, the association's strategic priorities do not necessarily need to address only those issues faced by women judges themselves; rather, they can address gender and other pressing societal issues according to what the association's members feel is most in need of attention.
- ✓ A stakeholder analysis should be conducted: organizational leaders can conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify potential allies and key decision-makers in the association. Create a visual diagram of the people who can influence the success of the association, noting whether they are sceptics or allies. The leaders of the prospective association can then assign to each other a strategy for communicating with these individuals to convince them of the association's prospects. Arguments for each person should be developed in advance to explain why the association is useful and beneficial to each particular decision-maker.
- ✓ The specific challenge of enlisting the support of high-ranking male colleagues: Often, high-ranking positions are held by men who may have some influence over the association process. For example, they can ensure that women judges leading the association process have free time to work on the association, reducing their judicial workload by issuing permits to participate in events (if such permits are required by law). It is important to convince such leaders at a very early stage of the benefits of the association.
- ✓ A constituent meeting should be organized for women judges interested in establishing an association of women judges, one of the objectives of which should be to develop a strategic plan.
- ✓ Groups of people should be identified who will be responsible for various aspects of organizing the constituent assembly, including: disseminating information prior to the assembly, taking minutes at the assembly, counting votes, drafting constituent documents and/or resolutions following the event and publishing them on the association's website and/or social media pages.

Nota bene: People who will be actively involved in the first phase should be aware in advance of the role they play in the leadership structure of the organization. Various internal bodies can be used for this: a board, an advisory

board, an academic council, various committees in the organization. This will help all active members to realize that they have a role to play.

✓ Disseminate information about the constituent meeting by:

- ↳ disseminating information about the assembly via a court intranet or e-mail network;
- ↳ disseminating information about the assembly on social media, in particular through the public relations departments of the judiciary;
- ↳ tell your colleagues about the meeting - the more people who know about the possible formation of an association, the better!

Nota bene: *The best way to engage people is through personal communication, which is the most powerful tool for influence. Therefore, women leaders of the future Association can personally invite their colleagues and managers to events and generally involve them in the organization. This can be done in various dialog platforms and through joint events, trainings and workshops.*

✓ Agree a set of priorities at the founding meeting. It is important that all potential members feel empowered and motivated to participate in the proposed plans. While the nature and scope of your activities may change over time, clearly defining the core objectives will ensure that members share a common vision and that any significant changes take into account the key underlying principles of the organization.

✓ Clearly and concisely state your objectives and strategic priorities in your founding documents (e.g. constitution or bylaws), all of which should be easily accessible on your website.



Participants of the "SGBV Survivor-Centred Procedures and Communications in Courts" workshop on 22-23 May 2025, Astana.

Additional steps to consider:

- ✓ You may find it helpful to adopt a resolution or similar document at the founding meeting that will lay the groundwork for subsequent formal articles of incorporation and put in writing the members' desire to form an association.

Nota bene: if only a resolution is passed at the constituent meeting, a follow-up meeting will need to be organized at which the constituent documents are drafted and passed.

- ✓ Consider whether a series of regional constituent meetings is necessary depending on the geographic makeup of your jurisdiction.
- ✓ You may want to focus on your specific role in the court system when determining your priorities.

Nota bene: it is possible to focus on training and other activities (see section II.B on activities below) aimed at improving the effectiveness of the judiciary in providing justice to certain categories of persons, such as women, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

B Legal regulation

Key Recommendations:

The constituent assembly provides an opportunity to take a few key steps in setting up an association. At the meeting you should:

- ✓ Vote to formally establish the organization. Establish the association as a non-profit organization governed by founding documents such as an internal constitution or bylaws.
- ✓ Discuss and adopt the association's founding documents, which should define the governance structure, strategic priorities, activities and membership rules. To facilitate this process, you can develop and distribute a model document before the meeting.
- ✓ Provide for the possibility of amending the constituent documents in the future. The documents should clearly state that any amendments can only be made democratically, for example, if a quorum is present at a general meeting (which consists of all active members) or similar body of the organization.

◆ Examples of constituent meeting agendas

*The main objective of the founding meeting of the **Canadian Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges** was to formalize the structure of the Chapter. A draft constitution was presented, followed by a discussion and the following consensus was reached:*

- *the executive board will consist of five members;*
 - *a Board of Directors will be established. It will consist of at least one director from each province and territory of Canada, up to a maximum of 24 directors, including members of the Executive Board;*
 - *the term of office of directors will be three years, a director may be elected for a maximum of two terms, and the composition of the Board will be replaced gradually;*
 - *directors and Executive Board members will be elected at the Annual General meeting;*
 - *the Nomination Committee will propose a slate of candidates for election to the Board of Directors and the Executive Board. The list will be presented at the Annual General Meeting, and other nominations may be proposed from the floor.*
- ✓ Determine the structure, composition, decision-making, election and term of office of the governing bodies.

◆ Examples of the structure and decision-making procedures in existing associations:

*The **Kyrgyz Association of Women Judges** decides all issues at the Annual General Meeting. The management bodies of the Association include a nine-member Supervisory Board. Its tasks include general management of the organization's activities. The Supervisory Board is headed by the Chairman.*

The members of the Supervisory Board are elected at the Annual General Meeting for a period of three years. The Executive Director is appointed by the Supervisory Board for three years. There is also a control and audit body.

The Portuguese Association of Women Judges is governed by a General Meeting of Members, a Management Board and a Finance Council. The term of office of the members of the governing bodies is three years. The General Assembly is composed of all full members of the Association. The powers of the General Assembly and its working procedures are defined in the Civil Code.

The Association of Women Judges of Spain also relies on the General Assembly of Members as well as the Board of Directors for its activities. The General Assembly is the supreme body of the Association and is composed of all its members, who take decisions either by majority rule or by the internal democracy of the full members. The General Meeting is convened at least once a year to review and approve the annual calculations and budget. An extraordinary session shall be convened by decision of the Board of Directors or at the request of half plus one of the full members. The President of the Association shall have the following duties: legal representation of the Association, convening and presiding over meetings of the Board of Directors and the General Meeting, and soliciting, attracting and utilizing support, subsidies or sponsorship from public organizations and individuals.

The management structure of the **Italian Association of Women Judges** consists of the General Assembly, the President and the Board of Directors, the Treasurer and the local delegates. The Members' Meeting decides on the future activities of the Association and gives precise instructions to the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors, consisting of seven full members, elects the President of the Association. The tasks of the Board of Directors are to carry out the decisions of the shareholders and to organize and promote the activities of the Association. The Treasurer handles the accounting activities and the local delegates liaise with the judges of the judicial districts.

- ✓ Identify the group of people who will lead the process of establishing the association. In particular, consider who will represent the association in carrying out registration and other regulatory and administrative duties.
- ✓ Identify the issues to be addressed
 - ↳ the annual general meeting
 - ↳ an extraordinary general meeting.
- ✓ Reach out to existing organizations in the region and beyond for advice and support on the formal aspects of forming an association.
- ✓ Contact for guidance on the procedure and templates for official documents from the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ).⁷

⁷ Contact IAWJ here: https://www.iawj.org/content.aspx?page_id=4&club_id=882224

Additional steps to consider:

- ✓ The success of the association will depend on the participation of motivated leaders in the process. Women judges who strongly believe in equal opportunities for men and women and the need for gender mainstreaming will actively participate in the association and carry out related tasks with enthusiasm. Such leaders are key to the establishment and further development of the association. They will emerge as the association's development process continues.
- ✓ The geographic makeup of your jurisdiction will determine the need for a regional director or steering committee.
- ✓ The best way to involve stakeholders and future leaders in the work of the association is to show them in advance that they will be involved in one way or another. Advisory Councils are a useful tool for this purpose, where high-ranking officials or influential academics can be involved in the work of the association through their participation.
- ✓ Those who are not in favour of establishing an association of women judges can be reached and engaged through direct outreach, emphasizing the benefits of the association from the outset. This can take the form of a statement, letter or e-mail sent to all women judges via an intranet or e-mail network. This is recommended where there is doubt about the establishment of an association, as it will help to ensure a good membership from the outset. Any such communication should be posted on the association's website, social media pages and/or newsletters to increase visibility among the target audience.

◆ Example

All Canadian women judges were invited to a meeting of the Canadian Bar Association to discuss the creation of a Canadian chapter of the International Association of Women Judges. In anticipation of the meeting, some responded that "they do not support an association of women judges." In a letter indicating the date and place of the meeting, Madam Justice L'Heureux-Dubé wrote the following in response to those who "do not support the association of women judges":

"I am simply emphasizing that the establishment of a Canadian chapter of the International Association of Women Judges does not impose any obligation on the part of Canadian women judges to join the chapter. For those of us who wish to have some contact with women judges around the world, this can be a useful channel, perhaps even an important one, for exchanging ideas and information and making some contribution to the leadership of the International Association. It should be clear, however, that Canadian women judges as a group are not creating a separate entity from our male colleagues simply because they belong to the Canadian chapter of the International Association. That is neither the purpose nor the intention."

The meeting decided to establish a Canadian chapter of the International Association of Women Judges.

- ✓ Hire a qualified professional, preferably a lawyer, to assist with the formal and regulatory aspects of establishing an association. This will help ensure compliance with the often strict and numerous requirements for establishing an association, reporting, and other administrative, regulatory and legal requirements under national law.
- ✓ Hire an accountant and/or other staff with specialized knowledge, such as a project assistant with experience in similar organizations.

© Membership

Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Decide whether applications for membership will be automatically accepted for women judges or whether a review of such applications is required, and if so, which governing body will conduct the review.
- ✓ Open membership to male and female judges. In general, involving male judges in the organization is important to support and advance your plans.

***Nota bene:** you can stipulate certain conditions, such as granting membership of the governing structure to women judges only, or requiring that applications from male judges be considered, while applications from women are automatically accepted.*

- ✓ Open membership to ex-judges, either as full or honorary members. Former judges have a wealth of experience to share with younger judges and can play a crucial role in guiding and promoting the activities of the association. Retired judges will also have more time to participate in the work of the association and thus contribute to its development.
- ✓ In some jurisdictions, judicial assistants are active in the legal system and eventually become judges. In this case, they (and any other judicial professionals in a similar position) should be allowed to join an association, as this may encourage them to apply and prepare for a career as a judge.
- ✓ The grounds for terminating membership should be clearly spelled out in writing, including the procedures to be followed and which governing body oversees the process.

Additional steps to consider:

- ✓ Consider non-voting honorary membership for others who share your association's goals, such as those who are particularly active in promoting the rights of women and girls in society.



Two-day hybrid workshop entitled “Women judges: professional exchange of experience and international co-operation” on 14-15 March 2024, Astana

2 Actions to be taken after the establishment of the association

The following key recommendations are aimed at ensuring the effective functioning and further development of the association once it is established.

A Maintaining an active membership

Section I.C above provided basic Guidelines for determining membership rules. The purpose of this section is to outline basic Guidelines for maintaining an active membership once the association is established.

Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Maintaining a significant number of engaged members is critical to the functioning and funding of the association. Members should be surveyed periodically to ensure that their interests and needs in the association are being met.
- ✓ Contact newly appointed women judges and women in the justice system to encourage them to join the association and tell them about past and current events and other benefits of membership.
- ✓ Write to individuals whose membership has lapsed to try to re-engage them in the association. During this process, you should identify any key factors leading to withdrawal from the association, such as high membership fees or lack of regional representation. Addressing these issues early on will help prevent further withdrawal of membership.
- ✓ Communicate the benefits of joining the association to both new and current members. Regularly update websites and social media pages to reflect your association's current achievements and activities.
- ✓ Maintain an open line of communication through websites, social media and email so that members or potential members can provide feedback or share ideas for further strategic planning for the association. Identify a group of people to accomplish this task on a permanent or rotating basis.

Additional steps to consider:

- ✓ Keep abreast of planned legal reforms and current developments to build a reputation as an organization that responds quickly and perceptively to critical developments. Establish thematic working groups on identified priority areas. Identify a group of people who will ensure that emails and other communications from members urging participation on certain

topics are read and acted upon promptly. An active presence on social media will especially help in this area.

- ✓ Create a news feed on social media or via email to keep both current and potential members informed and interested in current and future activities.

B Activities

Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Establish a clear plan for program development, focusing on both the short and medium term (from next year to the following 2-5 years). This is particularly important in the first few years of the association's existence to generate interest and support among judges and to emphasize the scope and vital nature of the association's activities to the public.
- ✓ Identify a group of people who will monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategic plan in both the short and medium term (starting next year and over the next 2-5 years). Objective evaluation of the association's performance will ensure the continued success of its programs.
***Nota bene:** This group should be separate from those involved in implementing the plan.*
- ✓ Members should be actively involved in the development of the association's programs. Ensure that all members feel empowered to make suggestions, regardless of whether their ideas will be implemented.
- ✓ Transparently explain decisions made as part of strategic planning. There is not always time or financial capacity to carry out all activities proposed by members. If some proposals cannot be implemented due to legal, financial or time constraints, explain this directly to all members.
***Nota bene:** all suggestions should be given maximum consideration and the impossibility of implementation should be justified. This will ensure an engaged membership that will not withdraw from the association or feel unable to share ideas.*
- ✓ Identify a theme for the first annual conference (and for all subsequent annual conferences) that will help frame the discussion of relevant events and priorities for the association going forward. This will help focus discussions and ensure that all members have the opportunity to actively participate. Conference topics can be selected by the board of directors or by surveying association members via email or online to gain insight into key areas of common interest.
- ✓ There are natural limitations to the work of any association of judges due to judicial ethics and judicial independence. Clarify these limitations in your founding documents to ensure that any cooperation offered by other organizations and/or funding bodies does not exceed the limits of professional ethics.

Nota bene: it is also important that association members are aware of the internal boundaries of their work and are cautious about the level of political activity allowed under national law.

- ✓ Publicize your work through active public relations. This raises awareness of the association's goals among your possible future members, thereby contributing to the long-term sustainability of the organization. Consider the following options to accomplish this goal:
 - Issue a newsletter or provide regular updates on the association's activities and accomplishments on the website.
 - Keep active social media pages. If your courts have outreach coordinators, ask them to help with this task.
 - Participate in seminars and workshops with various organizations aimed at enhancing members' skills and discussing various topics of interest. This will contribute to the professional development of members and provide ample opportunities for networking and cooperation.
 - Participate in national, regional and international events. This will broaden the scope of the association's activities.
 - Collaborate with law schools and universities. This will give female students the opportunity to meet judges and to really consider the future of the judicial profession. Clear role models are crucial to ensure women's representation in the judiciary.
 - Organize events open to both non-members and members to reinforce and raise awareness of the importance of the association's programs.

Additional steps to consider:

- ✓ Conduct a survey or questionnaire on the association's website, via email or social media to identify areas of priority and interest to members. This will help the association actively engage as many members as possible in implementing the strategic plan. The results of the survey, as well as ideas gathered in other ways (e-mails to the association or posts on the website or social media pages), can form the basis of strategic plans.
- ✓ Focus on raising the status of women judges through education and outreach programs. This will not only help the growth and professional development of current women judges, but will also help attract future generations of women to the profession.
- ✓ Hold webinars and other events that focus on areas of law that are under reform or public discussion and are accessible to members and non-members alike. This will promote the association's programs as well as increase awareness of the organization among prospective members.
- ✓ Organize discussions and activities with institutions where judges used to study, such as law schools and law schools.

- ✓ Monitor and analyse changes in legislation affecting vulnerable groups that you have explicitly identified in your founding documents, such as women, children, persons with disabilities and migrants. Create easily disseminated and publicly accessible information materials, such as social media posts and YouTube videos on these issues.
- ✓ Establish one or more working groups within the association to address specific areas of possible or ongoing law reform, identify gaps, prepare proposals for legislative change or publish reports. These can be prepared in collaboration with like-minded organizations.
- ✓ Conduct trainings on strategic priority areas and other relevant issues aimed at improving the effectiveness of the judiciary in delivering justice in general and, where applicable, to categories of persons identified in your fundamental objectives, such as women, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
- ✓ Create engaging court education materials based on your strategic priorities. These can include interactive teaching tools that are easier to distribute through your online networks.
- ✓ Develop short modules that can be incorporated into existing judicial training programs. For example, you could offer guidance on working with witnesses (including children) in domestic or sexual violence cases, if one of your main goals is to increase access to justice for vulnerable groups.
- ✓ Participation in the association provides women judges with an opportunity to demonstrate and practice leadership skills. This is vital not only for their personal development, but also for gaining the experience necessary to advance to senior and higher positions in the judiciary.
- ✓ One of the association's primary goals is to create a support network for women in the judiciary that provides a forum for open discussion of the unique challenges faced by women judges. To accomplish this goal, consider the following options:
 - ➡ Gather members' views on effective ways to create a mutual support system.
 - ➡ Organize social or other informal activities (grouped around an area of outside work interests or hobbies) under the auspices of the annual conference and other regular events. This will allow judges to informally share experiences and problem-solving tips in a relaxed and supportive environment.
 - ➡ Organize activities to build resilience and improve the mental health of members of the judiciary. These can be organized according to areas of judicial competence, e.g. for judges presiding over sexual violence cases. Mental health professionals or counsellors can be invited to these events to provide expertise and further guidance.
 - ➡ Create a membership badge or badge to help build a sense of community. Officially award these to new judge members. Establish an award system and organize formal award ceremonies for member judges, for example, for particularly active cooperation with the association or successful establishment of a regional network. This will help to create a favourable and inspiring atmosphere for participation in the association.

- ↳ Develop a mentoring program between senior or retired judges and women new to the profession. This will help the professional and personal development of new women judges. Prioritize support for women judges working in areas where women judges remain underrepresented, as other support networks may not be available to them.
- ↳ One way to gain visibility as well as to contribute is to hold courses in an association. In this regard, the first step is to familiarize oneself with the legislation of the particular country. If this activity is allowed, women judges will conduct specialized courses, paid or free of charge, for a wider audience, for example, on social benefits legislation, family law and children's rights. Certificates would be issued as a result of these courses.

C Funding

Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Consider the sources of funding for the association: whether your funding will come solely from membership and conference fees, or whether external funding will also be sought. Document this policy in your founding document(s), conflict of interest policy or a separate document available on the association's website.
- ✓ Make a clear plan for external funding. Decide whether you will actively seek funding or whether external funding will only be considered if a potential donor makes a direct offer or request to the association. Identify a group of people who can oversee these activities and make decisions.
- ✓ If external funding is allowed, clarify the limits of that funding, both in terms of the amounts accepted and the types of institutions from which funding can be accepted.

Nota bene: Limiting funding to organizations that share your goals will minimize the likelihood of ethical problems that can arise in the operation of any judges' association.
- ✓ Clarify whether external funding will be accepted for all program activities or only for those that are more administrative in nature, such as the cost of maintaining a website, regular newsletters, or renting a conference venue.
- ✓ If you have decided that funding will come only from membership and conference fees, determine the number of dues based on the salary level of judges in the country. Dues may be adjusted according to the salary level of the member judge to ensure that the association is accessible to all women judges.

Additional steps to consider:

- ✓ Consider the possibility of differentiating membership fees for full members and honorary members, retirees, assistant judges and students (if such categories are already established).

- ✓ Consider charging a higher one-time fee to join the company initially and then charging a lower annual fee thereafter.
- ✓ In addition to annual dues, consider paying a one-time, larger fee for lifetime membership. Alternatively, you may prefer to review the financial viability of the association on an annual basis and adjust dues accordingly.

D Cooperation with other associations

Key Recommendations:

- ✓ Network with like-minded associations that share your goals. These include existing associations of women judges in your region, other national associations, the International Association of Women Judges, other associations of women legal professionals, such as groups of women lawyers or prosecutors, and broader professional associations.
- ✓ Collaborate with local and international NGOs working on similar issues. This is useful for the mutual exchange of ideas, sharing funding opportunities, and increasing visibility and public awareness of the association's work.
- ✓ Collaborate on seminars and workshops, research and reports on common issues, such as women's and girls' rights. This helps in the practical implementation of activities, as the partner organization (university or law firm) can minimize running costs, for example by offering its own premises. This form of collaboration also facilitates the dissemination of research findings and proposals.
- ✓ Establish links with law schools and faculties, as well as with institutions where members of the association have studied. Universities can help support your association's research activities and offer fruitful opportunities for funding schemes. Holding talks and events in former schools helps to attract girls to the legal profession from an early age, and spreads awareness of the association's aims from an early stage of education. It is also a rewarding activity for association members.



Women judges from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan at the 10th Annual Conference of Kyrgyz Association of Women Judges, Aral village, Kyrgyzstan, 6-7 December 2024.

Next steps to consider:

- ✓ Gather members' views on possible productive areas of collaboration and possible partner organizations.
- ✓ Incorporate collaboration with other organizations into your governance structure. For example, consider appointing a delegate to the board of another bar association.
- ✓ Formalize cooperation through documents such as memoranda of understanding and/or cooperation. They help cement and concretize long-term ties between organizations.

Nota bene: Use memoranda of understanding as a tool to reach out to other organizations: memoranda can be signed with various institutions, including universities, to establish cooperation. Memoranda are then posted on websites to attract attention.

- ✓ Internships, legal clinics, and playful litigation can be great tools to promote the association's values, and law schools can be allies.

◆◆ Example of engagement with academic institutions

Law schools may be interested in hiring women judges as lecturers for events and seminars. The association can announce an essay contest or a game trial among law students to attract attention, once the association opens an office, the best law students can be invited for internships and can assist the association in administrative tasks. To this end, the association can establish relationships with law school deans and invite them to participate in the association in some role.

- ✓ One way to involve the community in the association is through free lectures and seminars given by women judges. These can focus on various legal topics or personalized know-how, such as balancing personal life and work. Women judges tend to be highly respected but unknown to the general public. For example, free lectures on law could be an interesting way to attract law students to the association and familiarize them with the association.

Final recommendations

It is hoped that these Guidelines will serve as an effective starting point for women judges interested in establishing an association of women judges. The following are key recommendations on steps to be taken both at the stage of establishing an association and in the post-establishment phase.

Basic steps in the creation phase

Areas of focus for the constituent assembly:

Before the meeting:

- Identify groups of people who will be responsible for various key elements of the constituent assembly, such as taking minutes and drafting foundational documents.
- Spread the word about the meeting in advance by posting on the court intranet or email network, social media, and talking to colleagues.
- Organize meetings and discuss the goals of the association with the most important decision-makers: for example, the Ministry of Justice, a prominent university, the most influential judges and court presidents. Inform them in advance about the association and convince them how it will benefit them specifically. This should be done to ensure that influential people are involved and on the side of the organization from the very beginning.

During the meeting:

- Develop a strategic plan by gathering input from those present and agreeing on a set of priorities.
- Vote to formalize the organization as a nonprofit governed by internal articles of incorporation.
- Planning and election of committee and board of directors, including deciding on terms of office.

Preparation of constituent documents:

- During the meeting, you will need to adopt foundational documents, such as a constitution or bylaws, based on the discussions and agreements reached during the meeting. You can draft a template and distribute it before the meeting and work on finalizing it during the meeting.
- The underlying documents should include the following key aspects, further guidance on which can be found in the Guidelines.
- Publish the finalized and voted upon constituent documents on the association's website.

Strategic priorities (section I.A).

- State your goals and strategic priorities clearly and concisely.

- » The list of strategic priorities may make explicit reference to the particular challenges faced by women judges, as well as indicate a broader commitment to human rights and justice for all members of society, including vulnerable groups.

Legal regulation (section I.B).

- » To establish the association as a non-profit organization, the activities of which are regulated by internal constituent documents.
- » Explain the association's governance structure.
- » Provide for the possibility of amending the constituent documents in the future.

Membership Rules (Section I.C).

- » Decide whether applications by women judges to join the association will be subject to review and, if so, which body of the association will conduct such review.
- » Clarify whether male judges are eligible for membership.
- » Clarify whether former judges and associate judges are eligible for membership.
- » Explain the grounds on which membership may be terminated.

Nota bene: A resolution is not necessary. If it is adopted, it should simply record the desire of those present at the first meeting to form an association. If only a resolution is passed, a follow-up meeting should be organized to prepare the founding documents, such as a constitution or bylaws.

Basic steps after creation

Once an association is established, its activities become visible among its members and beyond, which is crucial to achieving its objectives. Therefore, the following steps should be taken:

Maintaining an active membership (Section II.A).

- » Create and maintain information about the benefits of joining the association. Websites and social media pages highlighting the work and accomplishments of the association should be updated regularly. Newsletters and short email newsletters help to inform and interest current and potential members about current and future events.
- » It is important to develop links with other organizations, universities, law clinics, community organizations, women's and children's NGOs and initially invite them to events in order to subsequently attract the attention of the leaders of the Association of Women Judges and increase the Association's visibility. This kind of reciprocity is very important for the Association to spread horizontally.
- » An open line of communication should be maintained so that members can express their ideas and share comments on current and future strategic planning for the association. Be open to comments and suggestions and follow up regularly.

If some suggestions cannot be implemented due to legal, financial or time constraints, explain the reason in an open and transparent manner. Create an atmosphere that encourages input from all members of the association.

Public outreach and visibility (Section II.B).

- » Prioritize community engagement - it engages the constituencies that are vital to the association's goals and should be a key part of your operations.
- » Public outreach, including social media outreach, aims to highlight the role and impact of women judges and is therefore an important part of the association's program.

Nota bene: formal and informal communication mechanisms are helpful - if you are keen to form an association, let your colleagues know. Judges will have to combine association work with a significant professional workload. The more members there are and the more enthusiastic they are about the work of the association, the more likely your organization will be able to achieve its invaluable goals of advancing women's rights both in the judiciary and in society.

Further information and recommendations are available in a comparative study of associations of women judges in the OSCE region⁸.

Good luck in establishing and maintaining an effective Women Judges Association!

⁸ Comparative study on women judges' associations across the OSCE region, May 2021, OSCE/ODIHR Study, [487633.pdf](#) (osce.org).

