



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

What is ODIHR?

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is one of the world's principal regional human rights bodies.

Based in Warsaw, Poland, ODIHR is active throughout Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and North America.

It promotes democratic elections, respect for human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and the rule of law.

ODIHR is the human rights institution of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), an intergovernmental body working for stability, prosperity and democracy in its 56 participating States.

Spanning a region from Vancouver to Vladivostok, the OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization.

Human rights and democracy are a cornerstone of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security.

All OSCE States have agreed that lasting security cannot be achieved without respect for human rights and functioning democratic institutions.

They have committed themselves to a comprehensive catalogue of human rights and

democracy norms. These form the basis of what the OSCE calls the *human dimension* of security.

ODIHR is tasked with assisting governments in meeting their commitments in the field of human rights and democracy.

To this effect, ODIHR observes elections, promotes and monitors respect for human rights, and runs democracy assistance projects throughout the OSCE region.

The Office works closely with the OSCE's other institutions and field operations, as well as a large number of partners among governments, international organizations and civil society.

ODIHR was established in 1991. It employs nearly 150 staff from some 30 countries. ODIHR's activities are funded through a core budget, which is approved annually by participating States, as well as through voluntary contributions. Matteo Mecacci (Italy) has been the Director of ODIHR since December 2020.

ODIHR mandate

ODIHR is mandated to assist OSCE participating States to "ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and ... to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance throughout society." (Helsinki Document, 1992)



The basis for ODIHR's work

All 57 OSCE participating States have made political commitments to uphold certain principles. The catalogue of commitments made by participating States in the area of the human dimension constitutes the basis for ODIHR's work.

Key OSCE principles relating to the human dimension:

The participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. They will promote the effective exercise of civil, political, economic, cultural and other rights and freedoms. (Helsinki, 1975)

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings, are inalienable and are guaranteed by law. Their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of government. (Paris, 1990)

Democratic government is based on the will of the people, expressed regularly through free and fair elections. Democracy has as its foundation respect for the human person and the rule of law. (Paris, 1990)

[The participating States] undertake to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations. (Paris, 1990)

The participating States categorically and irrevocably declare that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the OSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the state concerned. (Moscow, 1991)

Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law is at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. (Istanbul, 1999)

We further reaffirm that all OSCE principles and commitments, without exception, apply equally to each participating State, and we emphasize that we are accountable to our citizens and responsible to each other for their full implementation. (Astana, 2010)

What does ODIHR do?

ODIHR is the OSCE's principal institution tasked with assisting participating States in implementing their human dimension commitments and thereby enhancing security in the region.

It works in five broad areas: elections, democratization, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and Roma and Sinti issues.

ODIHR activities in these areas include:

- observing **elections** to assess compliance with the OSCE's election-related commitments, often together with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly



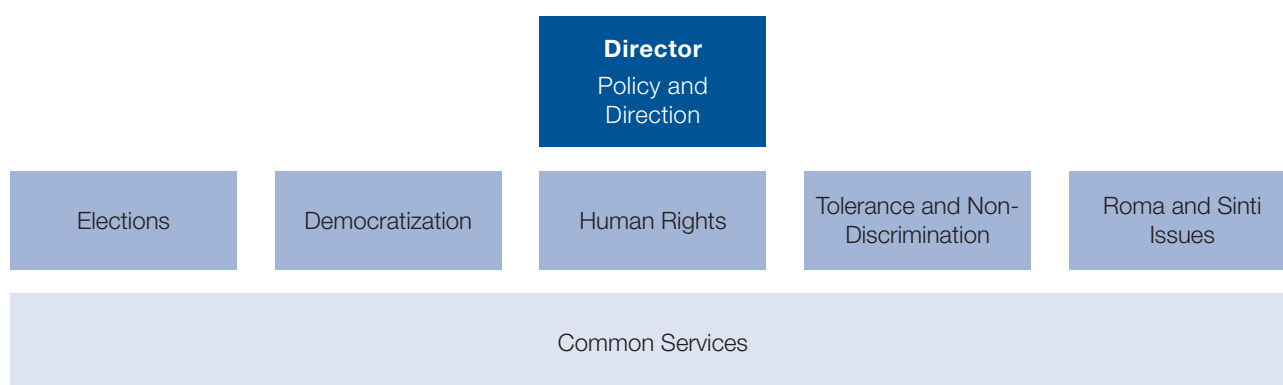
and other parliamentary groups, and providing assistance with improving electoral processes;

- strengthening the **rule of law** – for example, through assistance in achieving compliance with the OSCE's commitments regarding judicial independence, access to the legal profession and justice, and criminal justice in general;
- assisting participating States in bringing their laws into line with OSCE commitments by **reviewing legislation** and supporting domestic initiatives aimed at improving the efficiency and transparency of legislative systems, often together with the Council of Europe's Venice Commission;
- promoting **freedom of movement** and respect for the rights of migrants – for example, by assisting governments to introduce population registration systems that are in line with international standards;
- fostering **democratic governance** by providing support to governments in strengthening democratic practices, with a focus on the legal frameworks of political parties and the **participation of women** in public affairs;
- strengthening the capacity of **human rights defenders** and increasing cooperation between defenders, state authorities and national human rights institutions;
- assisting governments to strengthen their capacity to identify, protect and assist victims of **trafficking in human beings**;

- providing training on **combating terrorism**, in line with international **human rights** commitments;
- implementing **human rights training and education** activities aimed at raising human rights awareness and enhancing the capacity of civil society to monitor human rights issues, including in areas such as **freedom of assembly**;
- supporting the integration of a **gender** perspective in security sector reform;
- helping governments to combat **hate crimes** and other violent manifestations of intolerance; for example, through training for law enforcement personnel and strengthening the capacity of civil society to monitor and report on hate crimes;
- promoting **freedom of religion** or belief through legal reviews and other activities of ODIHR's Panel of Experts;
- advancing the rights of **Roma and Sinti** through ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues;
- organizing the yearly OSCE **Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**, which reviews governments' progress in putting their commitments into practice and gives NGOs a platform to freely voice their concerns.



ODIHR's structure



More information

For detailed information about ODIHR's activities, or to read any of ODIHR's publications and reports, please visit www.osce.org/odihr

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