



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities**

**PROMOTING COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY, STABILITY AND
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE OSCE AREA THROUGH
WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT”**

Statement by
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to the
29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

**Session I: “Promoting women’s economic empowerment in the post-pandemic period
for sustainable development and economic recovery”**

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Dear participants and guests,

It is an honour for me to participate in the forum today, to exchange views and discuss practical solutions to the topic at hand with distinguished speakers.

The topic of today's discussion is broad and far-reaching and I would like to address it from the point of my mandate by focusing on the role of minorities including women and girls. In particular, the importance of their economic empowerment and the effect of this on sustainable development and the economic recovery of a society as a whole.

The economic empowerment of women positively contributes to creating and maintaining sustainable development and economic recovery. A meaningful level of representation and the participation of all social groups in all fields of public life is vital to ensure well-functioning institutions and governments. This helps to empower and increase the participation of all members of society, which in turn positively affects social cohesion and development as a whole.

In my capacity as the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, I promote integrated and inclusive societies by developing and offering policy advice in a number of sectorial fields, mainly through issuing guidelines and recommendations. In this regard, I want to highlight that the *Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* which celebrates its 10-year anniversary next year and the *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*, both of which were published by my office, are especially relevant to the discussion today. Promoting women's economic empowerment in the post-pandemic period for sustainable development and economic recovery is central and critical to the discussions taking place on international platforms.

Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, women continue to face multiple barriers to full and meaningful participation in public life. While women lag behind in most spheres of public life, in the case of minority women, the gender issue intersects with other issues such as ethnicity and language. This often exposes minority women to multiple crosscutting forms of discrimination.

The lack of gender-disaggregated data, combined with shortcomings in ethnicity-based data, is a challenge when analyzing the barriers that minority women face. My institution recently embarked on a comprehensive study of this topic, which we hope will help inform policies in this field. I look forward to sharing some of the key findings with the participating States once the research is completed by mid-2022.

To seek practical solutions to the topic of socio-economic participation and the empowerment of minorities, I am convening two events this year, in co-operation with the UN, on the 21st of October and the 13th of November. These events will be dedicated to the socio-economic participation of minorities in public life as a strategy for conflict prevention. We will discuss the challenges and share best practices related to the inclusion of minorities in public life and will also address issues related to the economic empowerment of women and girls as a means to achieve sustainable security.

Meanwhile, I would like to share some of my observations on the root causes of marginalization and discrimination against women, and propose possible solutions to them.

First, there is the cultural factor which may play a significant role in gender imbalance. More often than not, minority women are first excluded and discriminated against in their own communities.

Another barrier to women's full participation and empowerment is language. Minority women may have fewer opportunities to acquire proficiency in the State language. Without that, they may encounter difficulties securing a job, applying for a public post or registering as candidates in local or national elections.

My approach to language aims to ensure that minority communities are equipped with all the necessary tools to access the same opportunities in society that members of the majority can benefit from, while protecting their respective mother tongues.

Maintaining the delicate balance between protecting minority identities and their integration into larger society is the key to building successful inclusive policies. Sometimes, measures and arrangements to promote the participation of marginalized groups, including minorities, in public fora are indeed in place, but do not actively encourage the participation and representation of women. Indeed, they may end up contributing to further gender divides and patterns of double discrimination. A key challenge therefore is to ensure that the goal of minority participation does not come at the expense of women and their economic empowerment.

When designing policies and legislation that affect minorities, there is a need for an active effort to identify and address the specific needs of minority women. I apply this lens to my own work as well. For example, my office systematically mainstreams gender in all of the HCNM policy recommendations.

Today's global pandemic has highlighted many vulnerabilities in our society, and it is clear that minorities, especially minority women, were significantly affected. In this light, I want to emphasize the importance of gender-sensitive social protection systems and investments into public health systems. The full and effective engagement of women in policy and decision-making as part of the pandemic response and post-pandemic development is crucial, and engaging with women's rights organizations in this regard is vital.

I want to also highlight **HCNM's recommendations on *Streamlining Diversity: COVID-19 Measures that Support Social Cohesion*** in which my predecessor and myself have systematically advocated that measures to alleviate the impact of the pandemic must take into consideration not only the needs of all ethnic groups, but also pay specific attention to the needs of women and girls.

Dear participants,

Economic empowerment of women is key to achieving gender equality, inclusive social development and prosperity in the OSCE area and beyond. Women's empowerment is vital in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am pleased to be discussing this important issue today and look forward to seeking practical solutions with you in the hope that the thematic discussions of this year's Forum process will feed into successful Ministerial Council decisions in the Economic and Environmental Dimension.

I thank you for your attention.

Possible Question

Ambassador Abdrakhamanov, given your long and unparalleled OSCE experience can you please briefly tell us how our organization can support the participating States to ensure the full and effective engagement of women in policy and decision-making processes in a post-pandemic scenario?

As the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, I promote integrated and inclusive societies by developing and offering policy advice in a number of sectorial fields mainly through issuing guidelines and recommendations.

As I highlighted earlier, both the *Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies* and the *Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*, which are published by my office, are especially relevant to the discussion today.

In addition, HCNM's recommendations on *Streamlining Diversity: COVID-19 Measures that Support Social Cohesion* is another guideline that would be useful in devising inclusive policies for a post-pandemic scenario. It emphasizes that women, including women belonging to national minorities, often bear additional responsibilities in their households, and therefore might be disproportionately affected by the social and economic consequences of the crisis. It also underscored that women might face additional barriers in accessing the labour market for numerous reasons, including due to the shut down or lack of public infrastructure or due to difficulties accessing childcare. My office encouraged the participating States to consider facilitating, including through social campaigns and other incentives, minority women's participation in the labour market. These recommendations were welcomed by a good number of OSCE participating States and I took it as a positive and promising sign.

What is also important is that international events, much like the one we are in today, where practical solutions are presented and commitments are made, must be followed up with specific actions and yield tangible results. Because promoting economic empowerment, especially of women, in the post-pandemic period is central to the economic recovery, stability and security of the OSCE region and beyond, we must display unity and commitment when taking decisions.