

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE OSCE AND ITS PARTICIPATING STATES

Independent Evaluation of the Implementation of the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (2018-2022)

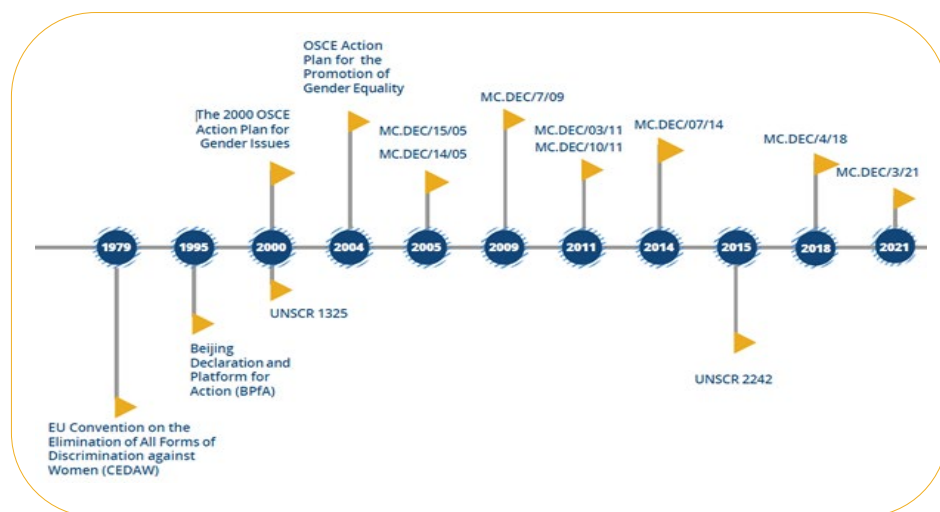
This report provides an assessment of progress made in the implementation of OSCE's 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (hereinafter referred to as the "GAP"). The GAP is a strategic policy document adopted by the OSCE participating States and has guided the organization's efforts to advance gender equality for the last 20 years.

> The OSCE GAP

OSCE's 2004 GAP emphasizes the right of women to fully exercise their human rights, as well as the link between gender equality and comprehensive security. It also calls on the Secretary General (SG), Heads of Institutions and Heads of Missions of the OSCE to develop plans for the implementation of commitments made in the Action Plan. Following the GAP, the OSCE has adopted a number of other decisions that further reiterate its gender-related commitments and guide its programmatic work. A number of international declarations have provided further context for promoting gender equality and

gender mainstreaming in the OSCE, including the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and related UN Security Council Resolutions (see timeline below).

Timeline of OSCE's commitments and international declarations



The OSCE channelled most of its gender related work through flagship programmes and projects, including the Secretariat's project "Women and Men Innovating and Networking for Gender Equality" (WIN) and the ODIHR's project "Capitalizing on the Human Dimension Mandate to Advance Gender Equality" (CHANGE).

> About the evaluation

This is the fourth Independent Evaluation of OSCE's GAP. It covers progress made between 2018 - 2022 on gender mainstreaming in the structures and working environment of the organization (pillar 1), gender mainstreaming into OSCE's projects and programs (pillar 2), and promoting gender equality in the participating States (pillar 3). The evaluation assessed the efforts made by the OSCE since 2018 to improve its internal practices in line with the first two pillars. It also assessed activities aimed at assisting participating States to improve their normative frameworks related to gender equality, establish national gender equality mechanisms, combat violence against women and girls, ensure women's political participation and their role in peace and security fields, and support women's economic development.

The evaluation was guided by the following evaluation criteria: relevance and added value, effectiveness and coherence, and results sustainability and plausibility of impact. The evaluation team triangulated data from internal and external documents, interviews, focus group discussions, direct observations, an all-staff survey, and third-party data to arrive at conclusions and recommendations.

- 1 SURVEY: SENT TO 2083 OSCE EMPLOYEES, 514 RESPONSES
- 2 FIELD VISITS: TAJIKISTAN AND NORTH MACEDONIA
- 135 PERSONS TAKING PART IN INTERVIEWS/FOCUS GROUPS (115 WOMEN, 21 MEN)



KEY FINDINGS

While the GAP may be considered outdated in comparison with the action plans of other International Organisations and international developments, it remains a relevant guiding document for the OSCE to date. The evaluation revealed a general consensus that the GAP in its current form presents a good foundation for the organization's gender-related work and strategies and that updating it is not desirable, because of diverging views on the topic among the OSCE participating States.

The OSCE commitments to promote gender equality enshrined in the GAP have been operationalized by the different Executive Structures in gender-action roadmaps. By 2022, all OSCE Executive Structures developed such roadmaps, which represents a significant increase compared to the situation in 2018. The evaluation found that the quality of the roadmaps varied, and implementation across the organization has been uneven.

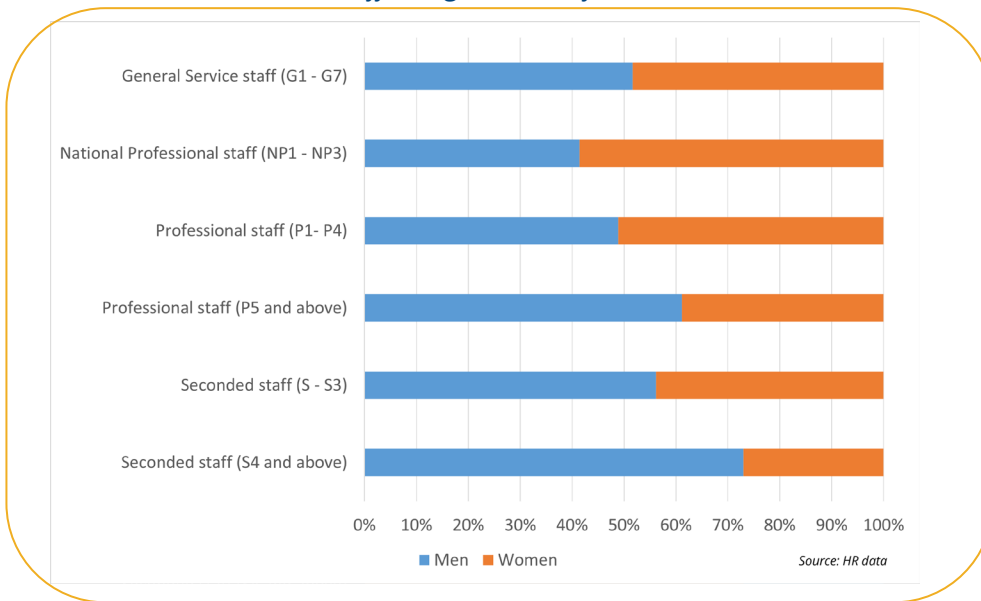
The Secretary General reports yearly on the GAP to the participating States, but internal accountability mechanisms for reporting progress at the level of Executive Structures and Secretariat departments were found to be largely missing. In addition, the evaluation highlights a mismatch between the ambitious goals set in the roadmaps, and the human and financial resources dedicated to promoting gender equality.

> **Pillar 1: Mainstreaming gender in the structures and working environment of the organization**

The GAP is increasingly recognized by staff as highly relevant across all three security dimensions, with gender equality and mainstreaming being integral to the organization's work. This recognition is supported by the Secretariat's efforts, particularly the Gender Issues Programme (GIP) and the Programming and Evaluation Unit (PESU), as well as the leadership of the current Secretary General and various Chairpersonships in promoting gender equality through various initiatives and communications. The GIP further manages a network of Gender Focal Points and several Executive Structures have dedicated Gender Advisors. The evaluation found that although the GIP, the GFP's and Gender Advisors are delivering an essential service, they are under-resourced and under-used, and their effectiveness depends on the level of support and priority assigned by management.

Over the period of the evaluation, the OSCE also achieved progress in gender balance across all staff categories, including in senior management roles.

Gender balance across all staff categories (As of 31 December 2022).



In spite of this progress and the priority given to the issue, equitable representation of women in some positions and/or locations and in particular for seconded staff remains a challenge and achievements may be fragile. Efforts to attract female talent are ongoing, but employment conditions, especially for seconded staff and mission members, pose significant challenges. In terms of the integration of gender responsive objectives in performance management, the evaluation found that while OSCE managers have obligatory gender-responsive objectives, this is not the case for other staff, and practices differ across the organization.

Orientation and training on gender equality and gender mainstreaming have achieved wide outreach during the period of evaluation, but could be further fine-tuned and targeted. The evaluation found gradual progress among OSCE staff in embracing gender equality as part of their mission, but several factors within the organization warrant constant reiteration, including some that are related to organizational culture. Although several Staff Instructions have been developed over the period of the evaluation aimed at preventing gender discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as preventing sexual exploitation and abuse, the evaluation found that there is a need for better awareness and understanding of these instructions.

> Pillar 2: Mainstreaming gender into OSCE activities, policies, programmes and projects

The evaluation found that the GAP roadmaps are increasingly integrated into key programmatic documents, reflecting a positive shift from broad considerations to specific, actionable commitments

related to gender equality. However, the application of these roadmaps is inconsistent across Executive Structures, with some offices effectively leveraging them while others are lagging behind. It requires gender-champion middle managers to optimize results and solidify the field operations' gender portfolios.

The gender marker system, used in the OSCE since 2020, shows a consistent increase in gender-mainstreamed projects overall, though there was a rebound of non-mainstreamed projects in 2021 and a decrease in gender-targeted projects in 2022. Current practices of reviewing gender markers at later stages of project development limit the potential for incorporating a robust gender perspective early on. Furthermore, many OSCE's interventions are gender-responsive rather than transformative, which could be a missed opportunity in terms of addressing the root causes of gender inequalities.

Although the OSCE achieved tangible results with gender mainstreaming in its projects, progress is often hindered by differences in the understanding and the level of priority placed on gender-equality considerations by managers, as well as by some shortfalls in the gender-specific knowledge among staff. The resources in the specialized units (i.e., the Gender Issues Programme and the Programming and Evaluation Support Unit - PESU) and the governance systems for the implementation of the Action Plan commitments are also not always used to their full potential, which impedes more sustainable changes.

> Pillar 3: Promoting Gender Equality in participating States

The evaluation found the OSCE is well-positioned to support participating States with gender equality commitments, thanks to its specialized mandate, political neutrality, extensive expertise, and responsive approach. It possesses significant assets and a comparative advantage in promoting gender equality, especially as a convener for gender equality actors. Over the period of evaluation, the OSCE has helped participating States and their civil society organizations with pioneering programming approaches to meet their gender equality-related commitments. However, the low enthusiasm of donors to fund such gender-related projects limits the full utilization of OSCE's potential.

The OSCE has pioneered a vast number of innovative programmes and initiatives to support participating States in the implementation of their commitments, but these initiatives often lack visibility, coherence, and the scale necessary for a sustainable impact. The OSCE's gender equality projects generate high value-added outputs, but lack the capacity to offer substantial incentives due to their reliance on extra-budgetary, often modest-sized project funding, which impacts their sustainability and potential for more systemic change. Projects like the Women Resource Centres and the WIN initiative

have also faced significant funding gaps, limiting their reach and efficacy. Another complicating factor relates to the different views and priority given to the topic by the participating States, for instance when it comes to work related to the prevention and combatting of violence against women or the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

To further improve the implementation of the 2004 Gender Action Plan, it is recommended that the Secretary General encourages Heads of Institutions and Field Operations to establish a mechanism for regular updates and follow-ups on the implementation of the gender roadmaps/action plans of their respective departments and units. The PESU is recommended to advise executive structures, in line with their specific mandates, to develop procedures to integrate gender analysis in program design at an early stage to ensure further mainstreaming of gender in OSCE's work. The GIP as well as the ODIHR are recommended to step up the development of knowledge products and good practices related to gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the OSCE specific areas of expertise in collaboration with relevant thematic departments, and to better promote these internally. The GIP, supported by Human Resources, is also recommended to strengthen the existing gender equality training courses and modules tailored to the specific needs of OSCE's employees. Priority should be given to systematic training of the Gender Focal Points. A good practice was found in South-Eastern Europe, where a regional network of GFPs and Gender Advisers was established, facilitating mutual support, knowledge sharing, and motivation.

The Department of Human Resources (DHR) is recommended to develop more effective strategies for achieving gender balance in the positions and levels currently lagging behind, coupled with incentives to attract more female candidates. A good practice was found in re-issuing vacancy notices to ensure sufficient female applicants for certain positions. Further efforts to enhance the secondment system and conditions of employment would be important to overcome challenges for gender parity, particularly affecting women in mid-career levels. The gender-equality questions for the hiring process are also recommended to be periodically updated and aligned with the specificity of the post. DHR, with support from relevant units, is further recommended to strengthen training on the Staff Instruction on the Professional Working Environment (SI21) and conduct periodic surveys to monitor staff understanding of relevant Staff Instructions aimed at preventing gender discrimination, sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation.