

**FORUM
ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO DECISION
MAKING PROCESSES
Bishkek
12 December 2017**

Meeting Report



**Warsaw
February 2018**

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MEETING SUMMARY

On 12 December 2017, ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) together with the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, the International Republican Institute (IRI), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), and the Legal Prosperity Foundation held the Forum *Ensuring equal access to decision-making processes*. The event was organized as part of ODIHR's project, "*Our right to participate – Promoting the participation of Persons with Disabilities in political and public life (Phase II)*", which aims to raise awareness and promote more inclusive and participatory societies across the OSCE region.

The event constituted an integral part of ODIHR's efforts to promote the political participation of under-represented groups, such as women, youth and persons with disabilities in the OSCE region. The event sought to share experiences and good practices and served as a platform for developing recommendations in this field for Kyrgyzstan.

The meeting gathered 55 participants (30 women and 25 men), including members of political party youth wings and women's networks, representatives of civil society and disabled people's organizations, parliamentarians and experts from international organizations.

Throughout the event the participants raised a number of issues related to effective participation of various under-represented groups in Kyrgyzstan, noting the limited accessibility of polling stations, prevailing stereotypes, poor civic education for young people and persons with disabilities, the decreasing number of women in the national parliament and limited representation of women in leading decision-making positions at the municipal and regional level. It was agreed that the issue of diverse political participation is not sufficiently discussed in Kyrgyzstan, and the initiative was appreciated and welcomed by the participants.

The opening remarks were delivered by Ms. Anete Erdmane, Associate Democratic Governance Officer at ODIHR, Mr. Kakhramon Sanginov, Acting Senior Human Dimension Officer from the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, Ms. Renata Levovski, Director of IFES in the Kyrgyz Republic and Mr. John DiPirro, Director of IRI in the Kyrgyz Republic. The speakers noted the benefits and importance of equal participation of all in decision-making processes.

The event’s **three panel discussions** focused on more effective participation of the following under-represented groups:

- 1) Access of persons with disabilities to political participation;
- 2) Youth in political parties: opportunities and limitations;
- 3) Women’s participation in decision-making processes.

During the **first panel** discussion, Mr. Aleksandr Orekhov from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) emphasised the importance of Kyrgyzstan’s ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). He shared information on IFES’s previous initiatives supporting the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in elections, as well as some of the more recent activities on promoting and implementing electoral rights of persons with disabilities during the latest presidential elections. IFES, in partnership with the Central Election Commission (CEC) of Kyrgyzstan and the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, established a working group, approved by the CEC Regulation #88 on 14 April 2017, to draft and implement the 2017-2021 Action Plan on strengthening the electoral rights of persons with disabilities. Mr. Orekhov noted that the Constitutional Law on Elections of the President and Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic foresees quotas for persons with disabilities on political party lists but not in the composition of the parliament. Noting that such regulation does not result in meaningful representation of persons with disabilities, he also highlighted the existing gap between accessibility legislation and its implementation. Mr. Orekhov also referred to successful examples from other countries in addressing challenges related to accessibility. Finally, he noted that while legal provisions require all polling stations to be accessible to persons with disabilities, currently only around 30 per cent comply with the required legal standards in the said Constitutional Law on Elections.

The second speaker, Mr. Urmat Kanybekov from the Central Election Commission’s (CEC) Training Centre, discussed the political participation of persons with disabilities from the perspective of active and passive right to vote.

He informed participants that ahead of the presidential elections in 2017, the Commission issued a request to various public offices, trying to identify the number of persons with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan who would require assistance when voting. He stressed that it is not always clear how to define a person with a disability. This creates difficulties in planning and providing the necessary assistance to voters. He expressed a commitment of the CEC to ensure that persons with disabilities can participate in elections on an equal basis with others. In this regard, in 2017, the CEC adopted a regulation on ensuring the electoral rights of persons with disabilities, which was developed with the support of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek.

The last speaker, Mr. Dastan Bekeshev, a Member of Parliament in Kyrgyzstan, shared his personal experience as a politician with a disability and emphasized the need to provide more opportunities for all members of the society. Persons with disabilities should not be seen only as service receivers but as equal citizens. He noted the lack of quality accessible education for persons with various types of disabilities as one of the main barriers to their effective participation in political and public affairs.

During the discussion, participants noted the need for quotas for persons with disabilities, expressing an opinion that such measures should be temporary. Physical accessibility of polling stations and buildings in general is very limited and not in compliance with national laws. Some participants noted that while there is a possibility to vote from home, such measures are isolating and do not contribute to more inclusive societies. Quality education, including civic education, was emphasized as a crucial pre-condition to have more politicians with disabilities represented in the parliament and other leading positions. Overall, in the context of discussing the challenges that Kyrgyzstan is facing with respect to political participation of persons with disabilities, participants highlighted the need to:

- Ratify the UNCRPD;
- Reconsider the legal provisions which foresee quotas for persons with disabilities in political party lists but not in the actual composition of the Parliament;
- Discuss further the definition of persons with disabilities in light of the UNCRPD;
- Ensure better collection of data with respect to persons with disabilities;
- Make all polling stations accessible to persons with disabilities;

- Monitor the implementation of legal provisions on accessibility, especially in relation to accessibility of polling stations;
- Encourage the participation of persons with disabilities in schools of leadership, especially youth, to build their capacities to take part in political and public life;
- Undertake public awareness campaigns to educate society about disability and participation of persons with disabilities; and
- Ensure co-operation among various groups, such as youth, women and persons with disabilities, when discussing diverse political participation.

The **second panel** was dedicated to the issue of youth participation in decision-making processes. The first speaker, Mr. Kanat Midin uulu, the leading specialist of the parliamentary faction “Republic-Ata Zhurt” shared his own experience of participating in election processes. He noted that political parties do not, and are not interested in conducting systematic work with young people, whom they do not see as relevant to long-term political party strategies. He also emphasized that youth wings are often formed during the pre-election period and focus on pursuing short-term goals. In his opinion, only young people with good connections and stable finances have a genuine opportunity to take part in decision-making processes, however, he also noted that by engaging in coordinated efforts young people can influence decision-making processes. In closing, Mr. Midin uulu shared the idea of creating a single online National Active Youth Registry to include all active young people regardless of location and enhance collective action.

The next panel speaker, Mr. Medet Tuilegenov, Chair of the Division of Politics and International Studies of the American University of Central Asia, presented data showing that the average age of a deputy in Kyrgyzstan has not changed between 1990 and 2015. Drawing on the report titled “*Youth participation in decision-making processes: the Parliament and civic society*”, he noted that, unlike gender and ethnic quotas, the quota for youth representatives has not brought intended results. In relation to influencing the work of political parties with young people, Mr. Tuilegenov argued that it is necessary to change attitudes towards young people as citizens who can leverage their right to vote. He also shared information on typical career paths of young deputies, most of whom were employed in public and international organizations, commercial enterprises and government bodies prior to becoming deputies. He added that according to his research data for 2011-2012, young deputies under the age of 30 are actively involved in the development and legislative work of the parliament.

The third speaker, Ms. Augusta Featherston, Associate Democratic Governance Officer from the ODIHR, shared information on ODIHR experiences in the field of youth engagement internationally. She shared examples of good practices in supporting the political participation of young people in the OSCE region, analyzing the adaptation of state institutions to new forms of youth participation, as well as the experiences of working with young people from under-represented groups. Past ODIHR activities range from large-scale advisory forums that resulted in the development of OSCE recommendations for youth participation, to building the capacity of young political advisers through interactive training courses, as well as specific projects targeting young people from marginalized groups and other initiatives aimed at working with young people. Ms. Featherston specifically noted that the most successful youth initiatives offer young people the opportunity to make meaningful contributions by vesting decision-making power, either programmatic or budget-related, in young people themselves.

The second session’s speakers developed the following recommendations for Kyrgyz stakeholders:

- Advocate for amendments to the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic on political parties, on elections of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh (The Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic, and on the principles of national Youth Policy, to ensure greater participation of young people in decision-making processes;
- Increase the age category of youth up to 30 or 35 years, amending the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic On the Fundamentals of State Youth Policy (which currently defines youth as those aged between 14-28 years);
- Develop a strategy for personnel policies that encourage the participation of young people, tailored for political parties;
- Create training programmes or “political schools” targeting young party members.

The **third, interactive panel** on women’s participation in decision-making processes was facilitated by the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, IFES and Women’s Democracy Network, and featured the following speakers:

- Ms. Begayim Adzhikeeva, Women’s Democracy Network Programme Manager and Women's School of Leadership trainer;

- Ms. Gulnara Ibraeva, Director of the research company "PIL", assistant professor of sociology at the American University in Central Asia, expert on gender, media, and monitoring and evaluation;
- Ms. Bibigul Bupebaeva, active member of Women’s Democracy Network, regional co-ordinator for Issyk-Kul *oblast* (region), *ayil kenesh* (village council) representative for three convocations, head of the “Rural Life” NGO; and
- Ms. Perizat Suranova, active member of ZDS, political council member for “*Zamandash*” political party, and a known public personality.

The speakers highlighted the importance of participation and promotion of various under-represented groups in decision-making processes, proposing not to separate different groups from one another precisely because of the continued intersection of interests of women, youth and persons with disabilities. They also shared experiences of successful projects with gender components, as well as personal experiences in public life. Lastly, they emphasized that Kyrgyzstan still does not have a clear definition of ‘young politician’, noting divergent standards, including the Law On Presidential and Parliamentary Elections of the Kyrgyz Republic, which recognizes youth as below the age of 44, and the Constitution, which defines youth as under 28 years of age.

In addition to the main speakers, two *Jogorku Kenesh* MPs contributed to the discussion and presented their experiences and views. Ms. Ainura Toichievna Altybaeva (Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan) outlined the recent history of women leaders in the decision-making process in Kyrgyzstan, from zero representation to 21 per cent in the current Parliament. She also discussed the current draft laws for preserving and strengthening the Kyrgyz gender quota, and the current work and draft legislation initiated by women MPs, namely a bill against family violence that promotes other women’s social initiatives. Ms. Aisuluu Mamasheva (*Ata-Meken* party and a young MP) spoke about the social status of women, including the representation of women in all branches of power, and how local attitudes have hampered women’s self-realization.

Speakers and contributors recommended that decision-makers and initiatives in Kyrgyzstan:

- Avoid dividing groups into the separate categories of youth, women and persons with disabilities, and rather to unite them to identify joint solutions to social problems;
- Hold discussions on the topic of political participation of under-represented groups not only in central cities, but also in regional

centres, so that people in the regions can see and hear the opinions of women, youth and persons with disabilities;

- Strengthen joint efforts to increase women's access to decision-making and opportunities for women's political participation through changes to legislation and support for women's initiatives and organizations;
- Strengthen interaction between women MPs and women deputies of local councils; and,
- That Parliament ratifies the gender quota and makes efforts to ensure that the number of women deputies does not fall due to individual departures.

ANNEX 1: AGENDA

Forum Agenda “Equal access to decision-making processes”

December 12, 2017 Bishkek – Hyatt Regency Bishkek, Shayr A Room

09:00-09:30	Participants’ registration. Welcome coffee.
09:30-10:00	<p>Official opening of the Forum</p> <p>Moderator: Ms Nadira Eshmatova, Director, Legal Prosperity Foundation</p> <p>Welcome remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Anete Erdmane, Associate Democratic Governance Officer, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) • Mr Kakhramon Sanginov, Acting Senior Human Dimension Officer, OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek • Ms Renata Levovski, Director, Representation of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in the Kyrgyz Republic (IFES) • Mr John DiPirro, Director, International Republican Institute (IRI)
10:00-11:30	<p>Session I. Access of persons with disabilities to political participation</p> <p>Moderator: Ms Anete Erdmane, Associate Democratic Governance Officer, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)</p> <p>Speeches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Dastan Bekeshev, MP of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic • Ms Ashley Graczyk, Councillor at Edinburgh Council (Scotland) • Mr Aleksandr Orekhov, Program Manager, Representation of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in the Kyrgyz Republic (IFES) • Mr Urmat Kanybekov, Leading Specialist, Central Election

	<p>Commission Training Center of the Kyrgyz Republic</p> <p>General discussion</p>
11:30- 11:45	Coffee break
11:45- 13:15	<p>Session II. Youth in political parties: opportunities and limitations</p> <p>Moderator: Ms Adelfia Amankulova, Program Coordinator, Legal Prosperity Foundation</p> <p>Speeches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Kanat Midin uulu, Member of “Republic-Ata Zhurt” youth wing • Ms Augusta Featherston, Youth Focal Point / Associate Democratic Governance Officer, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) • Mr Medet Tiulegenov, Chair, Division of Politics and International Studies of the American University of Central Asia <p>General discussion</p>
13:15- 14:15	Lunch (restaurant)
14:15- 15:30	<p>Session III. Women’s participation in decision-making processes</p> <p>Moderator: Ms Gulzhan Baibetova, Women’s Democracy Network</p> <p>Speeches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Elvira Surabaldieva, MP of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic • Ms Ainuru Altybaeva, MP of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic • Ms Aisuluu Mamasheva, MP of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic • Ms Begaiym Adjikeeva, Women’s Democracy Network • Ms Gulnara Ibraeva, Director, Research Company “Opinion Research Laboratory”

	General discussion
15:30- 16:00	Closing remarks: Ms Anete Erdmane , Associate Democratic Governance Officer, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

ABOUT THE ODIHR

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is the OSCE’s principal institution to assist 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” (1992 Helsinki Summit Document). This is referred to as the OSCE human dimension.

The ODIHR, based in Warsaw (Poland) was created as the Office for Free Elections at the 1990 Paris Summit and started operating in May 1991. One year later, the name of the Office was changed to reflect an expanded mandate to include human rights and democratization. Today it employs over 130 staff.

The ODIHR is the lead agency in Europe in the field of **election observation**. Every year, it co-ordinates and organizes the deployment of thousands of observers to assess whether elections in the OSCE region are conducted in line with OSCE Commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections and with national legislation. Its unique methodology provides an in-depth insight into the electoral process in its entirety. Through assistance projects, the ODIHR helps participating States to improve their electoral framework.

The Office’s **democratization** activities include: rule of law, legislative support, democratic governance, migration and freedom of movement, and gender equality. The ODIHR implements a number of targeted assistance programs annually, seeking to develop democratic structures.

The ODIHR also assists participating States’ in fulfilling their obligations to promote and protect **human rights** and fundamental freedoms consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments. This is achieved by working with a variety of partners to foster collaboration, build capacity and provide expertise in thematic areas including human rights in the fight against terrorism, enhancing the human rights protection of trafficked persons, human rights education and training, human rights monitoring and reporting, and women’s human rights and security.

Within the field of **tolerance** and **non-discrimination**, the ODIHR provides support to the participating States in strengthening their response to hate crimes and incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. The ODIHR's activities related to tolerance and non-discrimination are focused on the following areas: legislation; law enforcement training; monitoring, reporting on, and following up on responses to hate-motivated crimes and incidents; as well as educational activities to promote tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding.

The ODIHR provides advice to participating States on their policies on **Roma and Sinti**. It promotes capacity-building and networking among Roma and Sinti communities, and encourages the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives in policy-making bodies.

All ODIHR activities are carried out in close co-ordination and co-operation with OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations, as well as with other international organizations.

More information is available on the ODIHR website (www.osce.org/odihhr).