

PART I

Creating strong democratic institutions based on rule of law to increase public trust

Amid growing challenges to democracy and the rule of law, increasing resistance to gender equality and inclusion, and an ongoing erosion of public confidence in democratic institutions across much of the OSCE region, ODIHR has continued to support participating States in fulfilling their commitments to ethical and effective parliamentary governance, judicial independence and genuinely democratic elections.

The impact stories in this section demonstrate the diverse ways in which ODIHR supports governments, parliaments, judiciaries and institutions in becoming more democratic, representative and accountable, helping to boost public trust. Collectively, these efforts help strengthen resilience against democratic backsliding and foster more stable and secure societies.



1.1

Demand for ODIHR’s legal expertise rises, helping strengthen democratic resilience and civic space

Pressures on democratic institutions, judicial independence and civic space continue to increase in the OSCE region. Legislation impacting fundamental freedoms and the checks and balances essential to democratic governance is often drafted and adopted at an expedited pace or under emergency measures, leaving little opportunity for thorough, inclusive and participatory consultation or robust parliamentary scrutiny.

At the request of national authorities, parliaments, ombudspersons, courts and OSCE field offices, ODIHR reviews draft and existing legislation and provides legal opinions, guidelines and advice. In 2025, ODIHR published 38 legislative reviews, an unprecedented number compared to previous years and over 50 per cent more than in 2024. (See [Annexe — Legislative Reviews and Assessments](#))

This continued demand for legislative support underscores the confidence of participating States in ODIHR’s ability to provide timely, impartial and implementable guidance. Timing matters, and where requests were urgent, ODIHR delivered within days, ensuring that rights-based analysis was available to inform public and parliamentary debate when required. Topics included safeguarding judicial independence, strengthening the integrity and accountability of public institutions and revising draft laws that risked unduly restricting freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression.

In this way, ODIHR’s assistance also contributed to institutional stability and long-term security grounded in democratic legitimacy.



A member of ODIHR’s Legislative Support Unit reviews a piece of legislation following a request from an OSCE participating State.

ODIHR recommendations lead to draft amendments to Cyprus assembly law

Following the adoption of the Law on Public Gatherings and Parades to regulate the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in Cyprus in July 2025, the Chair of the Parliament’s Human Rights Committee asked ODIHR for an urgent legal opinion to assess the law’s compliance with international human rights standards and OSCE commitments.

The Urgent Opinion received widespread public and media attention, triggering parliamentary debate and amendment proposals based on ODIHR’s findings, which have been submitted to the Parliament for discussion and are pending immediate adoption [at the time of publication]. Among the positive changes introduced by the draft amendments are the removal of the ban on face coverings during peaceful assemblies, the elimination of the requirement to designate a specific organizer responsible for the event, and the establishment of more stringent rules governing the dispersal of assemblies [Em dash] now framed as a measure of last resort, all of which reflect the recommendations made by ODIHR.



NEARCHOS KYPRIANOU

Politis online news service, 7 October 2025

... the intervention of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, reflecting its strong criticism just a few days after the adoption of the law [...] today forces the State, the executive and legislative power to come back with serious corrective moves to change important points of the law”

2025 ODIHR Legal Reviews

34 requests for legislative assistance

39 legal reviews published

Legislative Assistance provided to **15** OSCE participating States

Armenia	Freedom of expression
Bulgaria	Non-discrimination Freedom of association
Cyprus	Freedom of assembly
Estonia	Internet voting
Georgia	Freedom of assembly (2)
Kyrgyzstan	Election
Moldova	Electoral corruption Parliamentary reform (4) Parliamentary oversight Lawmaking Judiciary
Mongolia	Political parties (3) Freedom of the media
Montenegro	Political parties Election (2)
North Macedonia	Election
Poland	Political parties Judicial reform (2)
Serbia	Election (5)
Slovakia	Freedom of association
Ukraine	Judicial integrity (2) Protection of lawyers Counter-terrorism
Uzbekistan	Protection of online users
All	Freedom of association



1.2

ODIHR marks 25 years of electoral legal assistance

In 2025, ODIHR marked an important milestone: twenty-five years of legal assistance to strengthen the integrity and transparency of elections across the OSCE region. During this period, ODIHR's work has supported numerous reforms, helping ensure that participating States have electoral laws that foster transparency and public confidence in their democratic systems.

Since 1999, ODIHR has published some 200 legal opinions on the electoral frameworks of 30 OSCE participating States, ranging from the first assessments in Tajikistan and Belarus in 1999 to ongoing work in Mongolia, Croatia and Ukraine,



Piotr Dziubak

25 years at the forefront of electoral legal assistance: ODIHR's election legal assistance as a part of its follow-up work, Warsaw, Poland, 7 October 2025



NIKOLA MUGOŠA
former Chairperson of Montenegro's
Central Election Commission

Working with ODIHR has helped our election administration build skills, spot areas for improvement and apply best practices to make our elections stronger and more transparent.”

including 16 opinions published in 2025. These legal reviews and other assistance have played a vital role in identifying areas for reform, guiding legislative amendments and promoting adherence to international standards.

The Office has contributed significantly to the development of improved electoral frameworks in many countries, with ODIHR opinions often leading to positive reforms. These include the better composition and functioning of election commissions, ensuring universal suffrage rights, increasing the accuracy of voter registers and strengthening oversight of campaign finance and administrative resources. These opinions, particularly when read together with the recommendations from ODIHR's election observation reports, have provided clear, actionable pathways to help bring national legislation into alignment with OSCE commitments and international standards.

2025 Election observation and follow-up

13

pre-election needs assessment visits

13

election observations in 13 OSCE participating States

1,113

observers deployed from

50

participating States including

539 women

41 election reports

318 recommendations

11 follow-up visits

1.3

Strengthening election observation in the digital age

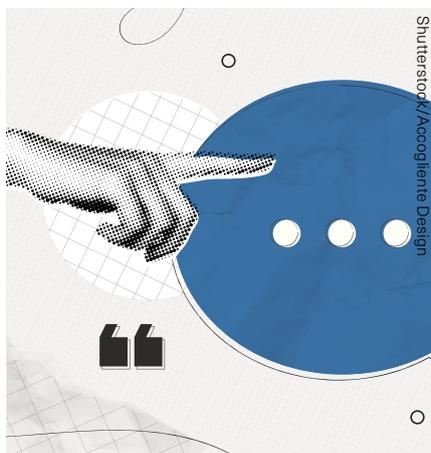
Social media has fundamentally reshaped how election campaigns are conducted across the OSCE region. Online platforms enable political contestants to reach voters directly, mobilize supporters and engage in debate at unprecedented scale and speed. At the same time, they have become a space where disinformation, illicit campaigning practices and foreign interference can flourish, often faster than regulatory and institutional responses.

There is a growing awareness among participating States of the risks associated with the online campaign environment. Elections observed by ODIHR in 2024 and 2025 demonstrated that digital campaigning is no longer a peripheral issue but a core element of electoral integrity, with direct implications for transparency, equal opportunity and voter trust, which underpin the stability and security of democracies.

Building on its mandate and long-standing methodology, ODIHR further strengthened its comprehensive approach to observing online campaigning and the role of social media in elections. Rather than treating digital campaigning as a standalone phenomenon, ODIHR assesses it through multiple, interconnected lenses. These include the legal and regulatory framework governing online campaigning, the broader digital environment and media landscape, campaign finance and data protection rules, cooperation between authorities and social media platforms, and the level of digital and media literacy among voters and stakeholders.

This multidimensional approach has allowed ODIHR to assess not only how campaigns unfolded online, but

also to what extent states were prepared to detect, prevent and respond to manipulative practices when they arose. ODIHR observation findings highlighted recurring patterns across countries, offering lessons that extended well beyond individual elections.



In several elections, ODIHR observed extensive use of social media by all political contestants, often in environments characterized by low levels of digital and media literacy. This created vulnerabilities to disinformation and harmful content, particularly during the final stages of campaigns. Observation missions also documented widespread attempts to manipulate online visibility through inauthentic behaviour that included coordinated networks, automated accounts and, increasingly, AI-generated content. Such practices were used both to promote preferred candidates and to discredit opponents.

Many political parties, civil society organizations and media representatives lacked the resources and expertise to respond effectively to sustained online attacks. ODIHR noted limited awareness among stakeholders of applicable legal frameworks and of the respective roles of

election authorities, regulators and law enforcement bodies. The decentralized and often extraterritorial nature of social media platforms further complicated accountability, leaving uncertainty over which institutions had jurisdiction or enforcement powers.

However, ODIHR's observations also revealed positive practices. Where authorities engaged in early awareness-raising on cyber threats and established mechanisms for coordination with civil society and other stakeholders, risks were better mitigated. Conversely, ODIHR noted that delayed publication of risk assessments by social media platforms limited their usefulness and reduced opportunities for timely, independent scrutiny.

The impact of this work goes far beyond documenting specific challenges. By refining its methodology and consistently integrating online campaigning into election observation, ODIHR has helped participating States better understand the scale and complexity of digital threats to elections. The findings and recommendations generated through this work support better informed policy debates, highlight the need for earlier and clearer institutional responses, and underline the importance of comprehensive digital media literacy programmes.

As election campaigns continue to migrate online, ODIHR's experience demonstrates that credible election observation must evolve accordingly. Strengthening preparedness, transparency and resilience in the digital campaign environment is now an essential part of safeguarding democratic elections across the OSCE region.

1.4

Advancing judicial independence to strengthen democracy across the OSCE region



Judicial independence, which is the basis of fair trials, respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law, and an anchor of economic stability and predictability, is coming under sustained pressure across the OSCE region. Political interference, weak judicial self-governance, and declining public trust have become common challenges in some established democracies as well as numerous countries undergoing justice reform. Weak judicial independence, fragile institutions and incomplete reforms not only undermine the rule of law, but also pose risks to institutional stability and public trust, with broader implications for democratic resilience and comprehensive security. To address these concerns and support participating States

in fulfilling their commitments on the rule of law, ODIHR organized a conference entitled Rule of Law and Independence of Administrative Justice. The two-day event brought together more than 50 judges, civil society representatives, judicial council members, academics, and international experts from Eastern Partnership states,* EU Member States, and other OSCE participating States. High-level panel discussions explored how administrative, civil, and criminal courts are affected by increasing political pressure and weakening institutional safeguards.

* The EU's Eastern Partnership Countries are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. However, the EU is currently not engaging with representatives of Belarus public bodies and state-owned enterprises.

Judges described the concrete risks they face, from politically motivated disciplinary proceedings to opaque appointment processes. Civil society participants described the increasingly shrinking civic space and how attacks on activists undermine accountability and public oversight. Despite differences between countries, participants recognized that these trends threaten democratic resilience across the region.

Participants concluded that judicial independence cannot be protected without meaningful accountability and transparency, that reforms must involve civil society from the outset to maintain public trust and legitimacy, and that international standards can be enforced most effectively when they are translated into practical tools.



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VARAZDAT MIKAELYAN

Judge of the Administrative Court
of the Republic of Armenia

The event helped highlight the specific challenges administrative courts face and the importance of working together to improve the safeguards that protect judicial independence.”

The conference further increased cooperation between judges and civil society. As several participants noted, aspiring autocrats often target both groups simultaneously, using state power to silence critics and undermine institutional checks. By building trust between these communities, the conference helped reinforce a shared understanding that judicial independence and civic activism are mutually reinforcing goals.

The discussions also resulted in the development of the framework for a new ODIHR tool to strengthen judicial independence in administrative justice. Participants identified safeguards for administrative courts, as well as the need for integrity mechanisms that are trusted by both the judiciary and the public.

For many judges, this was a rare opportunity to discuss openly the challenges they face. Civil society organizations emphasized that hearing similar concerns from

across the region validated their own work and showed that threats to judicial independence occur in both developed and transitional democracies. **Participants also stressed that international organizations like ODIHR play a critical role not only in offering expert advice, but in creating platforms where people from diverse (and even adversarial) backgrounds can collaborate safely and constructively.**

ODIHR will continue this work as it develops the new tool and supports participating States in strengthening administrative justice systems across this region. The conference was funded by two ODIHR projects: Stronger Democratic Institutions in Eastern Partnership Countries, an ODIHR project supported and funded by the EU and co-financed by France, Italy, Norway, and Switzerland, and Strengthening Inclusive and Accountable Democratic Institutions in the OSCE Region.



Piotr Dziubak

Conference on rule of law and the independence of administrative justice, Warsaw, Poland, 29–30 October 2025

1.5

Supporting trial monitoring to strengthen the rule of law across the OSCE region

Trial monitoring is a valuable tool for strengthening the rule of law and promoting transparency, both key elements of robust democracies. Respect for fair trial rights is enshrined in the commitments made by all OSCE participating States and ODIHR's mandate. Trial monitoring can be particularly useful for assessing the judicial response to extraordinary events, such as trials of those arrested during mass protests or demonstrations.

Publication of the *Trial Monitoring Report, Kazakhstan* in 2025 marked the completion of a two-and-a-half-year trial monitoring project, and contributes to a better understanding of how these cases were handled by the authorities. At the invitation of the Supreme Court of the Republic

of Kazakhstan, ODIHR monitored 39 cases related to the so-called January 2022 protests for their fairness and respect for fair trial rights. The cases involved 139 defendants and more than 400 court hearings.

The monitoring, conducted in line with ODIHR's trial monitoring methodology and following well-established principles of impartiality and objectivity, offered an objective assessment of Kazakhstan's response to the January 2022 protests. This included an analysis of how the cases were processed by the judiciary, with a particular focus on the defendants' fair trial rights and the rights of victims if violations took place. The recommendations contained in the report aim to support national stakeholders in further strengthening

fair trial rights and can also be used by civil society and activists in Kazakhstan when advocating for judicial reforms and respect for fair trial rights.

ODIHR also hosted the 2025 annual trial monitoring meeting in Warsaw, which, as each year, offered a platform for practitioners from across the OSCE region involved in trial monitoring to share experiences and perspectives on trial monitoring activities. The meeting also covered other areas of monitoring, such as the work of judicial councils and judicial appointments.

Since the publication of *Trial Monitoring: A Reference Manual for Practitioners* in 2012, a number of OSCE field operations have requested training on trial monitoring



Panelists at the ODHR Warsaw Human Dimension Conference side event, 'Trial monitoring — an effective tool for supporting justice reform and judicial accountability', Warsaw, Poland, 10 October 2025



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DARKO AVRAMOVSKI

Executive Director of the All for Fair Trials Coalition

The event was exceptionally well designed, and the exchange of experiences was both insightful and very much needed for practitioners working on trial monitoring in challenging environments. I particularly appreciated the constructive atmosphere and the openness of all participants.”



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ELENI SIRRI

Legal and Criminalization Coordinator at the Greek NGO, Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN). The organization uses trial monitoring as a tool to stop the criminalization of migration.

Attending the annual trial monitoring meeting was important to us, since we are looking at ways to expand our project to other locations. It has been a valuable experience to be able to engage in discussions and learn from experienced monitors.”

methodology. In 2025, ODIHR supported a two-day advanced training for experienced trial monitors from the OSCE Mission in Kosovo.*

The training covered best practices in trial monitoring and updates on specific trial monitoring focus areas for the Mission, including war crimes, domestic violence, corruption and property cases.

On the margins of the 2025 Warsaw Human Dimension Conference, an ODIHR side event highlighted how trial monitoring contributes to respect for fair trial rights and accountability. Discussions underscored the vital role of civil society, particularly in documenting and monitoring war crimes cases, and enhanced participants’ understanding of ODIHR’s trial monitoring methodology.

* There is no consensus among OSCE participating States on the status of Kosovo and, as such, the Organization does not have a position on this issue. All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text should be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244.



Participants of the Annual Trial Monitoring Meeting 2025, Warsaw, Poland, 25–26 November 2025

1.6

Supporting Ukraine's democratic readiness

Future elections in Ukraine will take place in a highly complex and challenging context in the OSCE region. Years of war have profoundly affected the country's institutions, infrastructure and society, while, at the same time, reinforcing Ukraine's commitment to democratic governance and European integration. Preparing for credible, inclusive and secure elections in this environment is not just a technical task, but a central element of sustainable recovery for the future.

Over 2025, ODIHR significantly deepened its engagement with Ukrainian counterparts to support this process. This work was grounded in OSCE commitments and ODIHR's mandate to assist participating States in bringing their electoral legislation and practice into line with international standards, while fully respecting Ukraine's sovereignty and decision-making authority.

ODIHR's approach focused on sustained, structured cooperation. Building on past observation missions and recommendations, the Office worked closely with the Central Election Commission (CEC), legislators, civil society and international partners to facilitate informed dialogue on the conditions necessary for elections.

A milestone in this engagement was a conference organized by ODIHR and the Central Election Commission in Kyiv in December, in partnership with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and International IDEA, dedicated to reviewing the implementation of ODIHR electoral recommendations. The event brought together election administrators, parliamentarians, civil society organizations and international experts, creating a rare space for open, technically-grounded discussion at a critical moment of reform planning.



OLEH DIDENKO
Chair of the Central Election Commission of Ukraine

The recommendations of ODIHR are an important reference point for us as we prepare for Ukraine's future elections. This cooperation allows us to look honestly at existing challenges, learn from international experience and ensure that our preparations are aligned with democratic standards, even under extremely difficult circumstances."



Panel discussion at the expert dialogue 'On the Path to the EU: Overview of OSCE/ODIHR Recommendations on Elections in Ukraine', Kyiv, Ukraine, 15 December 2025



International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)



International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

Panel discussion at the expert dialogue 'On the Path to the EU: Overview of OSCE/ODIHR Recommendations on Elections in Ukraine', Kyiv, Ukraine, 15 December 2025

ODIHR complemented this dialogue with legal analysis and advisory support, helping Ukrainian stakeholders assess which elements of the electoral framework may require adjustment, including displacement, accessibility, security constraints and the use of technology. Importantly, this work acknowledged that not all challenges can be addressed through legislation alone, highlighting the need

for institutional capacity building and realistic implementation timelines.

Lessons from this work underscore the importance of early engagement, transparency and inclusive dialogue in post-conflict settings. Elections held under extraordinary conditions require not lower standards, but greater clarity about what is feasible, how to manage risk and how to maintain public trust.

ODIHR plans to expand its technical cooperation with Ukraine in 2026, through legislative reviews, expert consultations and continued support to the CEC and other stakeholders. By investing in preparedness now, ODIHR and its Ukrainian partners are laying the groundwork for elections that can be a credible milestone in Ukraine's democratic recovery, security and European future.

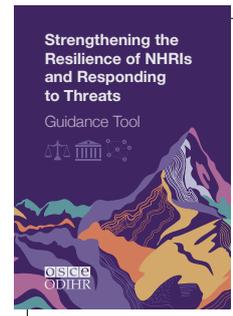
1.7

Supporting NHRIs to adapt and respond effectively to challenges

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) work to promote and protect the human rights of everyone in their countries and play a vital role in ensuring security and building trust in our democratic societies.

However, growing numbers of NHRIs across the OSCE region are facing challenges and threats from the ever-shrinking civic space and pressures on human rights, hindering their ability to perform effectively. NHRIs therefore need to adapt rapidly, maintain service delivery under pressure and recover their operational capacity while safeguarding staff well-being and institutional integrity.

ODIHR's *Strengthening the Resilience of NHRIs and Responding to Threats – Guidance Tool* guides NHRIs on how to build and maintain long-term resilience and prepare themselves to respond to threats. It identifies NHRIs strengths and provides actionable recommendations for both NHRI leaders and staff to build and maintain long-term resilience. It includes guidance on crisis and risk management, as well as checklists for developing resilience strategies and action plans. Using this publication as a basis, ODIHR has developed dedicated workshops on resilience building and risk management, and a training course on crisis management for NHRIs.



ODIHR Training on Crisis Management for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), Warsaw, Poland, 14–15 October 2025



REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NHRI OF MONTENEGRO

Although we cannot predict crises, with successful management we can reduce the negative impact on human rights. The training was highly informative and interesting, and provided theoretical and practical insights, strategic understanding and engagement with a lot of colleagues from different backgrounds.”



REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GREEK NHRI

This was high-quality training with modern training methods that helped my understanding and ability to digest the knowledge shared, and it was very insightful for delivering our NHRI’s mandate.”



ODIHR Training on Crisis Management for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), Warsaw, Poland, 14–15 October 2025

Effective crisis management reduces the harm caused by disruptive events, safeguards beneficiaries and stakeholders, enables faster recovery and helps to preserve institutional reputation, public trust and operational continuity. It is essential for NHRIs to anticipate potential threats, build up institutional resilience and be better prepared to handle any crisis while continuing their work.

In this context, in October, ODIHR organized a training course for NHRIs on crisis management, to equip them with the knowledge, tools and strategies to learn from past experiences and better respond to future crises. A new initiative for ODIHR, this course was targeted at

senior- and management-level NHRI staff. Twenty-two representatives of 17 different NHRIs from across the OSCE region and a representative of the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) took part. The training was designed to help participants understand how to navigate crises while continuing to fulfil their human rights mandate. Through group exercises, interactive discussions and exploration of real scenarios, participants learnt about identifying their vulnerabilities and the crises that could arise, how to distinguish between types of crises and the core elements of a crisis and its phases.

The course demonstrated gaps in NHRI crisis management planning and the need for more training and support for NHRIs from ODIHR in this area. Participants noted both the absence of crisis management plans in their institution and their ad hoc, reactive responses when a crisis occurs. This event built on the ODIHR’s previous work to improve the institutional resilience of NHRIs, which has become increasingly important in recent years. Participants reported that the course greatly improved their understanding of crisis management and committed to implement what they had learned within their NHRIs.

1.8

Strengthening electoral processes through targeted follow-up to advance inclusion and gender equality

In 2025, ODIHR's election follow-up activities continued to bridge the gap between recommendations and reform, assisting participating States in translating commitments into measurable improvements in their electoral processes. Building on decades of observation experience, ODIHR continues to refine its approach to post-election engagement, ensuring that follow-up is not just a procedural step but becomes a catalyst for sustainable institutional change.

At the heart of ODIHR's follow-up work are consultations with national authorities, election administrators, parliaments, civil society organizations and oversight institutions. These dialogues provide a platform to jointly assess progress on recommendations

and identify practical entry points for reform. In 2025, ODIHR conducted 11 follow-up visits to assist countries in implementing ODIHR recommendations and provided 12 legal reviews in 7 countries on different aspects of election-related legislation.

Throughout the year, particular focus was placed on enhancing women's political participation and integrating a stronger gender perspective into all aspects of electoral reform. ODIHR's election final reports include gender-related recommendations, which address the persistent barriers faced by women voters and candidates, including unequal financing, online harassment and under-representation in decision-making bodies.



ZOFIA LUTKIEWICZ
President, Political Accountability Foundation

Having a dedicated follow-up meeting on gender, alongside the traditional civil society roundtable, was an important opportunity to discuss a topic that is often overlooked among all the issues plaguing electoral integrity in Poland. The variety of stakeholders present allowed for frank conversation, which resulted in practical solutions on how to increase the participation of women in the election administration, as well as in public life in general."



Prof. Dziubak

Consultation meeting on gender-related ODIHR electoral recommendations, Warsaw, Poland, 27 November 2025



Piotr Dziubak



Piotr Dziubak



Piotr Dziubak

Consultation meeting on gender-related ODIHR electoral recommendations, Warsaw, Poland, 27 November 2025

Organizations advocating for greater women's participation use ODIHR recommendations as advocacy tools, strengthening their ability to monitor reforms and contribute to public debate.

ODIHR also organizes multi-stakeholder roundtables dedicated to promoting gender-responsive electoral frameworks. They bring together civil society organizations, election management bodies, academics and parliamentary partners. The

discussions often lead to meaningful commitments, such as improved collection of gender-disaggregated data, gender audits of election management bodies or political parties, or the inclusion of provisions that ensure equitable access to the campaign for women candidates.

Several lessons emerge from this work. First, achieving meaningful reform requires sustained engagement throughout the entire electoral cycle; short-term actions

are most effective when anchored in long-term institutional partnerships. Second, integrating a gender angle cannot be treated as a parallel track; mainstreaming gender across all follow-up discussions and technical advice increases both the quality and inclusivity of outcomes. Finally, the reforms are most successful where authorities embrace an inclusive approach, recognizing the value of ODIHR's impartial expertise and the essential contributions of civil society.

1.9

Mobilizing male politicians to empower women in politics

Across the OSCE region, men remain significantly over-represented in parliaments, governments and party leaderships. At the same time, gender equality in politics is still too often seen as a 'women's issue'. At a time of stagnation and organized backlash against gender equality, achieving gender-responsive, inclusive institutions depends in large measure on whether male politicians use their power and privilege to drive change rather than preserve the status quo.

Recognizing these challenges, in 2025 ODIHR published the *Sarajevo Tool for Engaging Male Politicians in Achieving Gender Equality in Politics*. Building on an expert meeting held the previous year in Sarajevo, this tool explains the fundamental importance of men's engagement and offers practical recommendations for male politicians as individual leaders, party actors, parliamentary leaders and members of government. It is designed as

a hands-on resource that can be used in national strategies, party reforms, parliamentary initiatives and leadership training. The tool has been translated into Bosnian and promoted by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina to support its use across South-Eastern Europe.

ODIHR then used the global platform of the 69th Commission on the Status of Women to promote the use of this new tool. A side event, jointly organized by ODIHR, the European Union, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Finland and Germany, brought together politicians, gender equality institutions and civil society to present the *Sarajevo Tool* and exchange good practices. ODIHR also contributed to the OSCE Chairpersonship Conference on Gender Equality in May, including a dedicated session on engaging men and boys for gender equality.



DR. DAG SCHÖLPER
Executive Director, Bundesforum Männer/Federal Forum Men, Berlin, Germany

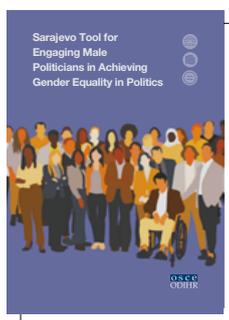
When men take on care work, foster healthy relationships and commit themselves to non-violence, they help build communities where everyone can thrive, with dignity, balance and genuine opportunity.

Sarajevo Tool for Engaging Male Politicians in Achieving Gender Equality in Politics — at a glance

Why? To inspire male politicians from being passive supporters to accountable, transformative leaders for gender equality in politics.

Who? This tool is for both male and female politicians, party strategists, parliamentary leaders and gender equality institutions.

How? Concise explanations, questions for reflection, checklists and action-oriented recommendations tailored to different political roles.





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JOVANA DRAGOVIĆ

President of the Women's Association of the Europe Now Movement in Montenegro

Getting men into the arena of the struggle for gender equality is absolutely crucial, and this workshop showed how to do it. I'm leaving with concrete tools to challenge stereotypes, and I'm genuinely grateful for that.”



Workshop for parliamentarians, party representatives and municipal councillors, Budva, Montenegro, 18–19 November 2025

At the same time, ODIHR worked to turn these ideas into concrete commitments. In November 2025, together with the OSCE Mission to Montenegro and the Parliament of Montenegro, ODIHR organized a two-day workshop for parliamentarians, party representatives and municipal councillors. Structured around the *Sarajevo Tool*, the workshop supported participants in analysing barriers to women's political participation, reflecting on male

power and privilege in politics and formulating personal and institutional commitments to advance gender equality in politics. Male political leaders committed to conducting gender audits of political parties, developing party policies on gender equality, advancing party self-regulation such as gender-sensitive Codes of Conduct and supporting party quotas and representation targets within party bodies.



Workshop for parliamentarians, party representatives and municipal councillors, Budva, Montenegro, 18–19 November 2025

1.10

Improving parliamentary oversight to strengthen democracy in the OSCE region

Parliamentary oversight is a cornerstone of democratic governance and a long-standing commitment of OSCE participating States. Oversight stands alongside representation and lawmaking as one of the three core functions of parliament, essential for ensuring that the executive remains accountable, transparent and responsive. ODIHR supports participating States in strengthening the institutional conditions that enable effective oversight, including through comparative analysis, guidance and peer exchange.

In 2025, ODIHR released *Parliamentary Oversight of the Executive in the OSCE Region*, an extensive mapping of oversight mechanisms. Drawing on input from parliaments across the OSCE region, the publication provides a clear, accessible overview of existing rules, practices and institutional challenges, serving as a practical resource for legislators and parliamentary staff seeking to improve oversight procedures.

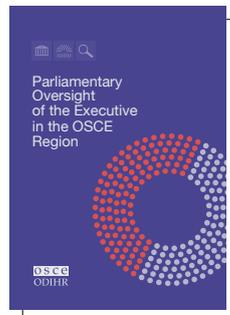
To accompany the launch, ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly hosted a webinar entitled Checks and Balances in Action: Strengthening Accountability through Parliamentary Oversight in the OSCE Region. Members of parliament Ulrik Nilsson and Marina Pendeš as well as Jorum Duri from Transparency International shared their experiences and challenges, while ODIHR presented the publication's key findings. The webinar underlined ODIHR's role as a knowledge hub, and set the stage for deeper regional cooperation on the topic and follow-up with parliaments across the OSCE region.



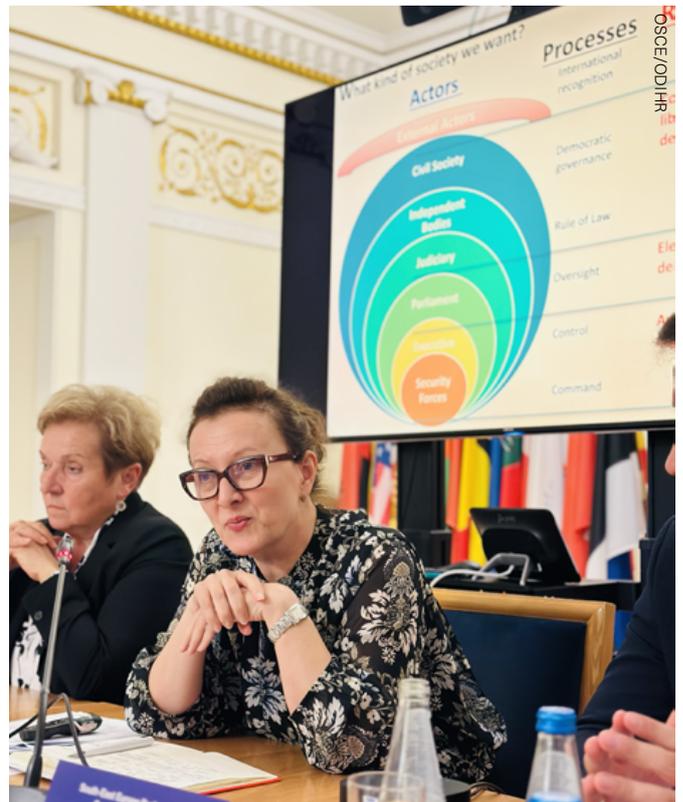
ULRIK NILSSON

Member of the Swedish Parliament

Democracy needs good losers and decent winners; parties that respect each other. The fundamental thing is that, next time, the situation may be reversed. Then you will be treated in the same way you treated your opponents. To learn from this, it is vital to research the core of a situation and not dwell too much on the political conclusions. Only by finding the root cause [of an ethical/oversight situation] will it be possible to learn from what's happened and to avoid it in the future."



Shutterstock/7th Son Studio



Parliamentary Oversight conference, Warsaw, Poland, 3–4 November 2025

Building on this, in November, ODIHR and OSCE Field Operations jointly organized a conference that brought together members of parliament, senior parliamentary staff and representatives of OSCE Field Operations to strengthen regional cooperation on effective and inclusive parliamentary oversight. The event aimed to reaffirm oversight as a core parliamentary function, facilitate peer exchange on practical

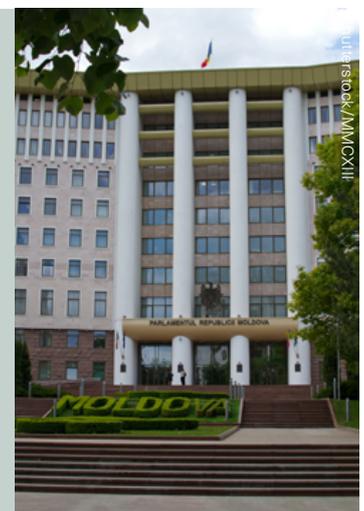
tools and innovations, and promote gender-sensitive and integrity-based approaches to accountability. The conference culminated in a visit to the Polish parliament, providing a hands-on perspective on committee-based accountability. Tangible outcomes included the identification of practical challenges by participants and development of concrete proposals for enhancing the effectiveness of parliamentary

oversight in their countries. ODIHR now intends to develop a dedicated line of support to strengthen parliamentary oversight systems across the OSCE region.

These activities demonstrate the readiness of participating States to engage in constructive peer learning and demonstrated ODIHR's valued role in supporting accountable, transparent and inclusive legislatures.

Improving Moldova's parliamentary oversight framework

In 2025, ODIHR reviewed the Moldovan parliament's Draft Code on the Organization and Functioning of Parliament, focusing on strengthening parliamentary oversight. The [Opinion](#) offers concrete and practical recommendations to reinforce oversight tools, ensure timely executive cooperation and enhance the role of the opposition. It also encourages stronger engagement with independent oversight bodies and civil society, along with more robust oversight over budgets, human rights, the security sector and emergency powers. This assistance aims to help Moldova strengthen democratic accountability by establishing a more effective, transparent, gender-sensitive, inclusive and participatory oversight framework in line with international good practice.



Boosting parliamentary integrity in practice

ODIHR helps national parliaments across the OSCE region to strengthen their integrity systems and foster public trust in democratic institutions. The Office has been providing tailored assistance to the National Assembly of Armenia, the Assembly of North Macedonia, the *Verkhovna Rada* of Ukraine and the State Great Khural of Mongolia, to support the development of parliamentary Codes of Ethics and reform existing integrity frameworks, ensuring the changes consider the different experiences of women and men.

ODIHR's comprehensive, practical support to parliamentary committees includes legal opinions, facilitating cross-party dialogue within parliaments and presenting comparative analysis and good practices from across the OSCE region. ODIHR has also developed innovative tools to assist parliaments, and in 2025 organized a study visit for parliamentary working groups from Armenia, North Macedonia, and Ukraine to the parliament of the United Kingdom to discuss international good practice in strengthening the integrity of parliamentary work.

Subsequently, in 2025 the National Assembly of Armenia drafted a Code of Ethics, the Assembly of North Macedonia is amending its existing Code and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is introducing legislative changes while developing detailed guidelines to support the implementation of its Code. ODIHR will continue its cooperation with the State Great Hural of Mongolia to further improve the parliamentary integrity system.



MILE LEFKOV

Chairperson of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Mandatory-Immunity Issues of the Assembly of North Macedonia

The Assembly of North Macedonia is strengthening its integrity framework and has established a cross-party working group, recognizing that the Code of Ethics applies to all MPs and that broad ownership is essential to increasing citizens' trust in public institutions. The working group is currently amending the Code of Ethics and its accompanying guidelines. The study visit to the UK parliament was extremely valuable, as it allowed us to engage with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and discuss well-established practices that can be meaningfully adapted to our national context.



Study visit of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the National Assembly of North Macedonia to Westminster, United Kingdom, 9 September 2025

1.11

Strengthening electoral reforms in the Western Balkans

In 2025, ODIHR continued to assist institutions and civil society in the Western Balkans in implementing election recommendations through its Support to Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans project. The 2021-2025 cycle of the project, initially funded by the EU and the Austrian Development Agency, was extended with support from Germany, Norway and France. The project addressed key areas of the electoral process, including election administration, voter registration, the role and work of the media during election campaigns, the ability of parties and candidates to freely campaign, and the capacity and independence of electoral dispute-resolution bodies.

Assistance was delivered through targeted legal and technical support, topical regional workshops and structured exchanges of good practice and comparative experience at both the regional and sub-regional level. Activities were designed to reinforce existing reform mechanisms and strengthen cooperation among institutions, civil society and other stakeholders, with a particular focus on the participation of women, national minorities and people with disabilities. In January 2026, ODIHR will launch the third phase of the project, which will run until the end of 2028 and is currently funded by the EU and Norway.

From 2021 to date:

Over

90

expert papers

14

national workshops

10

regional conferences

571 participants

45% women

834

expert working days

supporting project

beneficiaries

65% women

164

institutions and civil society

organizations collaborating

with the project

3

ODIHR election handbooks

translated into

6 languages

Publication of *Election Administration Gender Audits — a toolkit*



Maida Bahto-Kastendzic, Project Coordinator, Press and Online Media Council, Bosnia and Herzegovina, participant in the regional conference Experience of the 2024 Romanian Elections: Strengthening Electoral Integrity in the Western Balkans in Bucharest, 11–12 March 2025



Juljana Bilbilaj, Project Coordinator, Institute for Political Studies, Albania, speaker at the regional conference Safeguarding Electoral Integrity in the Western Balkans: Strengthening Oversight and Trust in Warsaw, 16–17 September 2025

1.12

Promoting gender parity as a democratic standard

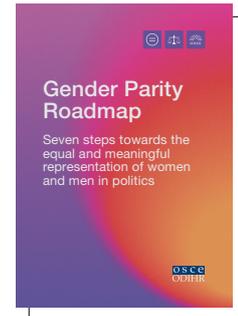


Advanced course on gender equality in politics for staff of institutional mechanisms for gender equality from across Europe and Central Asia, Stockholm, Sweden, September–November 2025

Women’s representation in national parliaments across the OSCE region has nearly tripled since 1995. Yet, in 2025, only one participating State — Andorra — had reached gender parity. On average, women’s representation in the OSCE region is stagnating at 36.9% according to data from November 2025 from IPU Parline. Not only is progress towards parity slowing, but in some participating States, hard-won gains are being rolled back. In line with CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40, which defines the equal

representation of women and men as a human rights obligation rather than a long-term aspiration, ODIHR worked in 2025 to support parliaments, governments and political parties in translating parity commitments into concrete institutional reforms.

At the centre of this effort was ODIHR’s new *Gender Parity Roadmap*, launched at the 2025 Warsaw Human Dimension Conference. The roadmap sets out the seven practical steps that states can take to advance parity in political representation.



Gender Parity Roadmap

1. Conduct national assessments and adopt action plans.
2. Anchor gender equality in politics in constitutional and legal frameworks.
3. Introduce or strengthen gender-targeted measures such as quotas and parity laws.
4. Hold political parties accountable for candidate selection and internal culture.
5. Transform parliaments into gender-sensitive institutions.
6. Frame gender equality in politics as the shared responsibility of women and men.
7. Monitor, review, revise and innovate to sustain progress over time.



YURIKO BACKES

Minister for Gender Equality and Diversity, Luxembourg

Gender audits go beyond the question of gender parity within political bodies. They also look at how parties approach gender equality as a fundamental principle of governance and policymaking. Political parties are vital for a functioning democracy, and gender equality is vital to democracy itself.”

To support parliaments in applying the roadmap, ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly organized a webinar for members of parliament, parliamentary staff and civil society from across the OSCE region. The webinar presented the seven-step approach, highlighted the link to CEDAW General Recommendation 40 and showcased concrete reforms already under way in several OSCE countries, including parity laws and party funding incentives to parliamentary gender action plans and data-driven monitoring.

To strengthen the institutions that drive national policy towards gender parity, ODIHR, UN Women and the Government Offices of Sweden delivered a dedicated course for staff of institutional mechanisms for gender equality from across Europe and Central Asia. Three months of online learning culminated in a four-day intensive workshop in Stockholm and covered international standards, barriers to women's

political participation, policy tools and strategies for making gender equality in politics a national policy priority. A visit to the Swedish Parliament highlighted how long-term reforms and political have made the *Riksdag* a global benchmark for gender-balanced representation. Participants were therefore able to develop concrete ideas on how to integrate gender parity into their national strategies.

Recognizing the role of political parties as gatekeepers to elected office, ODIHR also engaged with party leaderships in Luxembourg, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Tajikistan.

All these activities demonstrated that sustainable change depends on the alignment of political commitment, technical guidance and institutional capacity. In this context, ODIHR's *Gender Parity Roadmap* provides both a framework for action and practical steps to reach the goal of gender parity.



UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina



UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina



Bosnia and Herzegovina



UN Women Bosnia and Herzegovina

Conference on gender audits for political parties, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 15 December 2025

1.13

Advancing democratic lawmaking in the OSCE region to strengthen democracy and the rule of law

Across the OSCE region, there is mounting pressure to legislate effectively, inclusively and transparently in response to complex, new policy challenges. ODIHR supports OSCE participating States in strengthening the quality of their lawmaking processes by promoting greater openness, transparency and inclusivity at every stage.

In 2025, ODIHR helped lawmakers translate democratic lawmaking principles into practice, drawing on the 2024 *Guidelines on Democratic Lawmaking for Better Laws*, which distil ODIHR's extensive experience into actionable recommendations. Their rapid uptake in the OSCE region and beyond demonstrates not only the global relevance of the standards they set but also their high quality. In the OSCE region, ODIHR has used the *Guidelines* to promote change in how legislators initiate, develop, consult, draft, adopt, scrutinize and evaluate laws. Three countries with which ODIHR worked closely in 2025 — North Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkmenistan — illustrate the growing impact of ODIHR's activities in this field.



In North Macedonia, in collaboration with ODIHR's CHANGE project and the OSCE Mission to Skopje, members of parliament (MPs) and parliamentary staff learned how to embed gender considerations at every stage of the legislative cycle. In a shift from awareness to application, lawmakers practised incorporating gender analysis into draft laws and evaluating the real-life impact of legislation on women and men. The training was closely linked to the parliament's Action Plan on Advancing the Equality of Women and Men (2025–2027), enabling participants to assess progress so far, identify implementation challenges and define immediate priorities. This hands-on training with the *Guidelines* led to deeper commitment among MPs to implement gender-responsive scrutiny.

In Montenegro, ODIHR supported implementation of the recommendations from their 2024 *Comprehensive Assessment of the Lawmaking Process in Montenegro*. This focused on incorporating post-legislative scrutiny (PLS) into democratic oversight as an important means of assessing whether laws work as intended. ODIHR trained parliamentary staff on integrating PLS into their oversight work, helping them to hone their skills in identifying which laws require review and in evidence gathering and analysis, running consultations with affected communities and translating findings into meaningful recommendations.



MP JOVANA TRENCEVSKA
North Macedonia workshop participant

This is one of the best training courses of the many (...) I have attended.



Eva Jovanova



Eva Jovanova

Participants in the training course 'From Lawmaking to Action: Advancing gender sensitivity in the Parliament of North Macedonia', Skopje, North Macedonia, 12-13 November 2025

This practical support reflects ODIHR's approach of combining legal analysis with hands-on capacity building. This assistance is already influencing ongoing institutional reform, with the Montenegrin Parliament now actively considering how to embed PLS mechanisms into legislation.

By promoting the more systematic integration of gender equality and inclusiveness into the legislative process as standard considerations, ODIHR helped governments and parliaments to develop practical skills to conduct evidence-based decision-making, strengthening respect for democratic principles across the

region. ODIHR will continue to use the *Guidelines* as a benchmark for assessments, a foundation for training and a practical tool that participating States can use to build legislative systems that deliver better laws and better outcomes for their citizens.