

What is ODIHR?



ODIHR's Mandate

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

(Helsinki Document, 1992)

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is one of the key human rights bodies worldwide.

Based in Warsaw, Poland, ODIHR is the human rights institution of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the world's largest regional security organization.

All OSCE States have recognized that lasting security can only be achieved through respect for human rights and strong democratic institutions. That's why they have committed to a comprehensive catalogue of human rights and democracy

standards, which form the basis of what the OSCE calls the human dimension of security.

ODIHR works to assist the 57 participating States of the OSCE in strengthening their democratic institutions, upholding the rule of law, and increasing respect for human rights throughout the diverse societies of the region.

The Office observes elections, monitors respect for human rights, and provides expert advice and support throughout the OSCE area on issues ranging from strengthening gender equality to improving judicial processes.

ODIHR works closely with the OSCE's other institutions and field operations, as well as numerous partners from governments, international organizations and civil society. Working in close partnership and supporting governments to genuinely engage with civil society, the Office helps to increase respect for human rights and thus strengthen the security of the entire region.

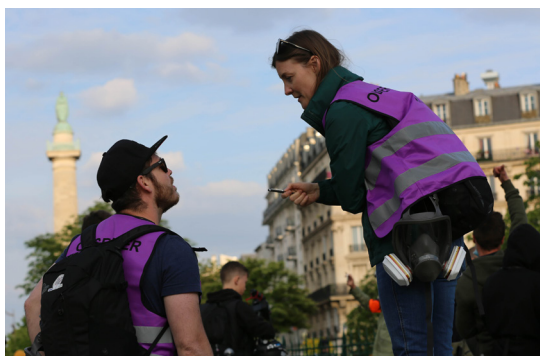
ODIHR was established in 1991 and now employs around 150 staff from approx. 35 countries. Maria Telalian (Greece) became Director of ODIHR in December 2024.

How does ODIHR work?

ODIHR works in five broad areas that cover its entire mandate: **democratization, elections, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and Roma and Sinti issues.**

The Office's key activities include:

- observing **elections** to assess compliance with the OSCE's election-related commitments, often together with parliamentary partners from the OSCE as well as the Council of Europe, European Union and NATO, as well as providing assistance to improve the electoral process;
- strengthening the **rule of law**, for example, through assistance in achieving compliance with the OSCE's commitments on judicial independence, access to the legal profession and justice, and criminal justice in general;
- monitoring **fundamental freedoms** and providing **human rights training** and education to raise awareness and increase the ability of civil society to monitor human rights issues, including in areas such as **freedom of assembly**;
- advancing the rights and inclusion of **Roma and Sinti** through ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues;
- helping governments to combat **hate crimes** and other forms of intolerance, through training for law enforcement personnel as well as civil society, and collecting up-to-date hate crime data from across the region;
- assisting participating States in bringing their laws into line with OSCE commitments by **reviewing legislation** and supporting domestic initiatives aimed at improving the efficiency and transparency of legislative systems, often together with the Council of Europe's Venice Commission;
- fostering **democratic governance** by providing support to governments in strengthening democratic practices, with a focus on the legal frameworks of political parties and the **participation of women** in public life;
- supporting the integration of a **gender perspective** in the security sector;
- supporting **human rights defenders** and increasing co-operation between defenders, state authorities and national human rights institutions;
- promoting **freedom of movement** and respect for the rights of migrants in line with international standards, as well as supporting States to develop long-term migrant integration policies;
- assisting governments in preventing and **combating human trafficking**, protecting victims, and prosecuting perpetrators;
- providing training on **combating terrorism** in line with international **human rights** commitments;
- promoting **freedom of religion or belief** through awareness raising, training and dialogue;
- using **public outreach** to communicate the principle of human rights as the birthright of all people and democracy as the foundation of these rights; and
- convening the OSCE **human dimension meetings** regularly, as an opportunity to review governments' progress in putting their commitments into practice and give NGOs a platform to freely voice their views.



Left image: ODIHR monitors assemblies to support governments in protecting the right to gather and protest peacefully.

Right image: ODIHR brings together diverse communities from across the OSCE region to work on increasing tolerance and strengthening democratic governance.



OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

Ul. Miodowa 10
00-251 Warsaw
Poland

Office: +48 22 520 06 00
Fax: +48 22 520 06 05
office@odihhr.pl
www.osce.org/odihhr

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