

A toolkit for gender audits of election administration based on the ODIHR audits in the Western Balkans

Activity Brief



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The ODIHR **Support to Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans** project, funded by the European Union and the Austrian Development Agency, helps institutions and civil society follow up on election observation recommendations, including those related to the representation and equal participation of women in electoral processes. Election management bodies (EMBs) play a key role in this process and should incorporate the equal participation of women into all electoral processes, starting with their internal organization, practices and management policies.

A gender audit supports an EMB's commitment to gender equality by assessing the extent to which gender equality is institutionalized from two main perspectives: firstly, the 'external' aspect, namely the activities performed by the EMB while administering an election, and, secondly, the 'internal' aspect, namely the EMB organization itself. The audit assesses how gender aspects are integrated into the EMB's programmes, projects and services, as well as into its policies, structure and budget.

These audits are a new element of ODIHR's election-related activities. Between 2020 and 2022, the Office conducted pioneering gender assessments of the activities of the election administrations in North Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Skopje, the OSCE Presence in Albania and the OSCE Mission to Montenegro.

An audit includes desk research, interviews, surveys and focus groups. It sets the baseline for current practices and gender related indicators, raises the EMB's awareness of the issues and identifies ways to mainstream gender. It also gives the EMB a framework for developing gender equality action plans for gender-responsive institutional and electoral management. ODIHR has committed to monitoring the changes resulting from these assessments and supporting their implementation, working with election management bodies, civil society organizations and international organizations.

In April 2023, the Office published its second edition of the ***Handbook on Observing and Promoting Women's Electoral Participation***, which further elaborates ODIHR's methodology for assessing and issuing recommendations on women's participation in elections. In December 2023, the Support to Electoral Reforms in the Western Balkans project translated the handbook into Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Montenegrin and Serbian.

GENDER AUDIT TOOLKIT

To support other EMBs in implementing gender audits, as well as civil society organizations who want to be the EMB partner in such audits, ODIHR has developed a gender audit toolkit (the toolkit) drawing on its audit experience in the Western Balkans. Based on OSCE commitments and other international standards, the methodology of previous gender audits and recognized good practices, the toolkit guides election administrations towards understanding, assessing and incorporating gender aspects in their election activities and internal organization. It offers hands-on guidance to election administrations and the auditors on how best to prepare for a gender audit, what can be assessed thematically, and how the audit can be conducted in practice. The toolkit is intended to be constructive and forward-looking, offering a benchmark for future gender-sensitive practices and solutions in election administrations and election processes more broadly.

FIVE-STEP APPROACH FOR CONDUCTING A GENDER AUDIT

1. PREPARATION

This covers defining the objectives and the scope of the audit and conducting the public selection procedure of the auditors. It also guides the preparations for the auditors.

2. SELECTING THE METHODOLOGY

The toolkit identifies possible methodologies, instruments and research tools, including preliminary desk research and a review of relevant documentation. It also outlines which groups and individuals the methodology should target.

3. RUNNING THE AUDIT

- Gender assessment of election activities: this covers the gender aspects of how the election administration provides information to electoral stakeholders and its work on voter education, voter registration, candidate registration, election campaign and materials, election day voting access and vote counting and reporting.
- Gender assessment of the election administration's internal organization: this focuses on gender aspects in the institutional arrangements, management practices and staffing, knowledge and capacity of election officials and staff, and working environment and culture.

4. REPORTING

The key deliverable of the audit is the gender audit report. The toolkit explains what the report should include, how it can best be structured and how the contents and recommendations can be verified and presented to stakeholders before publishing to ensure their accuracy, relevance, and practicality.

5. GENDER AUDIT FOLLOW-UP

The final step looks at the potential follow-up to the audit findings. Emphasis is placed on the need for regular monitoring and re-assessment of the gaps identified and recommendations made by the audit, so the election administration can continue to work towards greater gender sensitivity.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The toolkit is primarily aimed at election administration bodies and recognizes the wide range of election administration models and structures in place across the OSCE region. The active participation of the election administration in an audit is mandatory and a prerequisite for a successful process. There can be no gender audit of election administration, without their request, provision of data, facilitation of access to election officials and staff, and information-sharing on the administrations' policies, practices, and activities.

The process must be conducted objectively and impartially. To ensure this, an EMB may choose to be audited by an independent entity or organization, or by international and/or national experts selected, as necessary, through public competition. Although there is no standard approach, a gender audit of an EMB is best done in a participatory manner — a process that both assesses and encourages consultation among electoral stakeholders and one that promotes continuous development and confidence-building towards practical gender mainstreaming.

Auditors could include civil society organizations, independent international or national experts, ODIHR or other election assistance providers. Therefore, the toolkit is also aimed at potential auditors.

The toolkit is available here:

Election Administration Gender Audits – a toolkit.

To learn more on the Support to Electoral Reforms
in the Western Balkans project visit: www.osce.org/odihr/wb.

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