

Parliamentary Web Dialogue explores gender impacts of COVID-19, offers recommendations



The OSCE PA held its sixth COVID-related thematic Parliamentary Web Dialogue on Monday, dealing with the gender aspects of the pandemic. Parliamentarians described the impacts seen in their countries on issues related to gender-based violence, economic security, and access to women's health services, as well as measures being taken by national legislatures. Support must be given to victims of gender-based violence, including by fully prosecuting the perpetrators, it was stressed, as well as providing financial assistance to families.

Participants said that policymakers should utilize women's civil society organizations' wealth of experience, which is important not only in the immediate response to COVID-19 but also to achieve gender equality in the long term. To address the impacts of COVID-19 on women's health, speakers said that attention must be paid to the needs of women health care workers, including through the provision of PPE and the continuation of standard health services for women.

Nearly 100 people participated in the webinar including some 35 parliamentarians, as well as representatives of a number of OSCE institutions. It featured remarks from OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues Hedy Fry, OSCE PA President George Tsereteli, OSCE PA Secretary General Roberto Montella, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, Inter-Parliamentary Union President Gabriela Cuevas Barron, and Françoise Girard, President of the International Women's Health Coalition. It was moderated by OSCE PA Senior Advisor Marc Carillet.

Special Representative Fry presented her new report, "The

Gendered Impacts of COVID-19," which details the ways in which the pandemic is affecting a range of gender issues and offers recommendations on best practices.

"Together throughout the OSCE region, and in our own countries, we can ensure that our responses to this pandemic incorporate the voices and perspectives of women from all different groups," Fry said.

President Tsereteli noted that gender equality must remain high on the agenda across the OSCE region. "Although COVID-19 has changed many things in our daily lives, providing equal opportunities remains an essential step to foster peace, sustainable democracy, and economic development," he said.

IPU President Cuevas called attention to the problem of gender-based violence, noting that parliaments can play a role in combating this trend. Director Gísladóttir said that equal and meaningful participation of women and men in decision-making is essential for effective functioning of democratic institutions and policies. The COVID-19 crisis makes clear the urgent need to reconsider approaches to health care, said Girard, urging policies that improve access to critical services.

Previous Parliamentary Web Dialogues have been held on the economic fallout of the pandemic, maintaining democratic control during states of emergency, COVID-19's impact on conflicts in the OSCE region, environmental aspects of the crisis, and protecting refugees and migrants during the pandemic.

The next one will be held on 22 June on the topic of "COVID-19 response in diverse societies: challenges and opportunities for stability and social cohesion."

ICYMI: Watch videos of recent OSCE PA events on Facebook and YouTube

The full video of the OSCE PA's webinar on gender and COVID-19, as well as other recent events, are available on the OSCE PA's Facebook and YouTube channels: www.facebook.com/oscepa and www.youtube.com/oscepa

PA participates in OSCE Human Dimension Committee session on alternative voting methods

OSCE PA Head of Elections Andreas Baker gave a presentation to the OSCE's Human Dimension Committee on 9 June on the topic of alternative voting methods such as postal voting, proxy voting, homebound voting, prison and hospital voting, and multi-day voting. He discussed some of the political issues related to implementing alternative voting methods through electoral reform and noted that implementation of alternative voting methods is not simply a technical matter, but can have real political consequences. In the process of making changes, Baker stressed the importance of timeliness, inclusivity and transparency.

Alexander Shlyk of ODIHR discussed some of the details including pros and cons of different approaches, while

Brenda Santamaria from the Organization of American States discussed their recent observation within a COVID situation in Suriname. Manjola Veizi from Roma Women's Rights Center, Albania, addressed some of the particular issues of Roma and vulnerable populations.

In the subsequent discussion, issues mainly focused on building confidence in electoral processes, and risks of particular approaches. Several delegations shared short presentations about how alternative voting methods are already being applied in their countries, and noted that a number of OSCE participating States are giving serious consideration to introducing or extending alternative voting methods and arrangements.