

A Security Sector Governance Approach to Women, Peace and Security

This Policy Brief explains how applying the principles of *good security sector governance* and engaging with *security sector reform* (SSR) can help to achieve the goals of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda.

Over the last decade the UN system and many states and international actors have recognized that SSR should be gender responsive, identifying and addressing the different security and justice needs of women and men, girls and boys, across different parts of the community. In some SSR programmes, priorities have been set to promote the participation of women in the security sector. At the same time there is a need to step up the engagement of the WPS community with issues of security sector governance. This Policy Brief argues that applying a security sector governance lens to WPS helps to reveal the key barriers to and drivers of change.

This Policy Brief:

- ◆ explains the principles of good security sector governance
- ◆ examines how security sector governance and SSR are addressed in the WPS Agenda
- ◆ outlines how a security sector governance approach can catalyse the transformative and sustained change needed to realize the WPS Agenda.

What is good security sector governance?

The term “security sector governance” describes the formal and informal influences of all the structures, institutions and actors involved in provision, management and oversight of security and justice, at both national and local levels. Governance may be good or bad in quality. *Good* security sector governance is attained when the following principles of good governance apply to a state’s security and justice sector.¹

- ◆ *Accountability*: There are clear expectations for provision of security. Independent authorities oversee whether these expectations are met, and impose sanctions if they are not. The security and justice sector is held accountable for meeting the diverse needs of all parts of the population.
- ◆ *Transparency*: Information is freely available and accessible to those who will be affected by decisions and their implementation.
- ◆ *Rule of law*: All persons and institutions, including the state, are subject to laws that are known publicly, enforced impartially and consistent with international and national human rights norms and standards. Rule of law requires equality in access to justice for all: women, men, boys, girls and people of different gender identities.

- ◆ *Participation*: All persons of all backgrounds, regardless of differences in sex, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation, have the opportunity to participate in decision-making as it concerns security and justice (either directly or through representative institutions) and in security and justice sector institutions.
- ◆ *Responsiveness*: Security and justice sector institutions respond to the diverse security needs of all parts of the population, with due regard to (but not adverse discrimination on the basis of) sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.
- ◆ *Effectiveness*: Security and justice sector institutions fulfil their roles, responsibilities and missions to a high professional standard, including as regards meeting the diverse needs of all parts of the population.
- ◆ *Efficiency*: Security and justice sector institutions make the best possible use of public resources in fulfilling their roles, responsibilities and missions.

Satisfying each of these principles requires consideration of social power and inequalities. In particular, achieving *responsiveness*, *effectiveness*, *participation* and the impartiality and compliance with human rights standards implied by *rule of law* requires that the security and justice sector actively applies a gender perspective and promotes gender equality.

Where good security sector governance is the goal, SSR, or security sector transformation, is a way of getting there. SSR describes a *political and technical process* of change by applying the principles of good governance to the security and justice sector.² This process involves improving state and human security by making the provision, management and oversight of security more effective and more accountable, within a framework of democratic civilian control, rule of law and promotion of human rights, including gender equality. SSR concerns all state and non-state actors involved in providing, managing and overseeing security, and emphasizes the links between their roles, responsibilities and actions in improving accountability and governance. SSR also involves aspects of the provision, management and oversight of the justice system.

SSR can include a wide range of different reform activities covering all political and technical aspects of security and justice, including legislative initiatives, policy-making, awareness-raising and public information campaigns, and management and administrative capacity building. Although SSR processes might involve a variety of national and international actors, they are above all national processes and need to be nationally owned for them to be successful and sustainable. Institutional-level SSR activities can include developing policies and procedures and capacity building to improve security and justice provision, and internal and external oversight of the security and justice sector.

While there are often SSR priorities in donor support to post-conflict or fragile states, the quality of security sector governance is relevant in *any* context, including developed states and stable democracies. Like the WPS Agenda, SSR is not exclusively a set of priorities for countries experiencing or emerging from conflict.

Good security sector governance and SSR are explained in more detail in the DCAF Backgrounder Series.

As discussed further below, many of the challenges in realizing the commitments of the WPS Agenda, documented through global reviews and stocktaking, can be overcome only through pursuing good security sector governance. Thus, achieving good security sector governance and the full realization of the WPS Agenda should be understood as mutually reinforcing processes. Good practices derived from the principles of good security sector governance will support the achievement of the WPS Agenda, laying the foundations needed for meaningful change to occur.

How does the WPS Agenda recognize SSR and good security sector governance?

Five of the nine UN Security Council resolutions on WPS explicitly refer to SSR (see Figure 1). Four of these resolutions link SSR with preventing and responding to sexual violence in conflict. They direct that SSR include actions to strengthen women's and girls' protection from sexual violence, to improve how the security and justice sector prevents and responds to sexual violence, and to address impunity. Including more women in the security sector is identified as a priority for SSR that addresses sexual violence, as is vetting of current and potential members of the security sector. More holistically, the UN Security Council resolutions on WPS recognize that SSR should help to achieve women's protection from violence, women's participation and women's access to justice.

Likewise, when the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2151 on SSR in 2014, it emphasized the importance of women's equal and effective participation and involvement in SSR processes, of including more women in the security sector, and of vetting processes to exclude perpetrators of sexual violence.

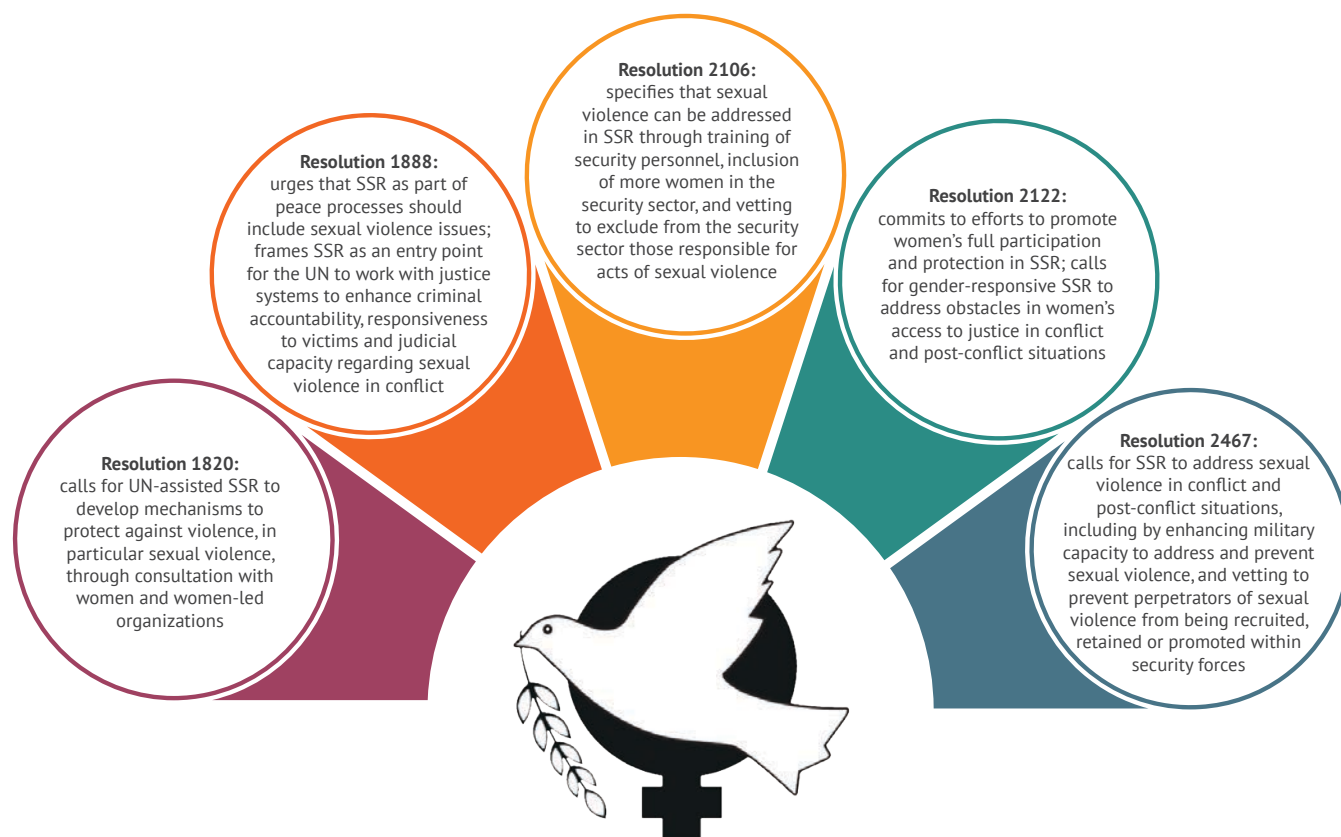


Figure 1: References to SSR in the UN Security Council resolutions on WPS

Beyond these specific references to SSR, the security and justice sector is identified throughout the UN Security Council resolutions on WPS as being of critical importance to peace and security from a gender perspective. Although the WPS resolutions do not use the term “security sector governance”, they underscore the key principles. *Participation* is a foundational principle of both the WPS Agenda and good security sector governance. The *protection* pillar that runs through the WPS Agenda is mirrored in the principles of *responsiveness* and *effectiveness*: only a security sector that effectively responds to the needs of women and girls, as well as men and boys, can be described as well governed. The following section demonstrates how, beyond these obvious commonalities, the WPS Agenda and security sector governance are mutually dependent.

National action plans on WPS (WPS NAPs) have likewise made explicit links between SSR and WPS. Nations emerging from conflict often focus on the security and justice sector in their WPS NAPs; “donor-nation” WPS NAPs often commit to supporting SSR in conflict and post-conflict situations. Table 1 gives examples of language related to SSR in WPS NAPs.

Table 1: Examples of commitments as regards SSR in WPS NAPs

Country (period WPS NAP applicable)	Commitments as regards SSR
Afghanistan (2015–2022)	Objectives include “Gender-related reforms in the security and justice sector” as a way to prevent violence against women and effectively ensure women’s rights and political participation.
Brazil (2017–2019)	Activities include “Support local institutions in security sector reform processes and in the reestablishment of the rule of law for the promotion and protection of women’s and girls’ human rights.” (<i>DCAF translation from Portuguese</i>)
Liberia (2009–2013)	“Security policy frameworks are assessed and reformed to ensure women’s full participation in the security sector and the implementation of the national security strategy to protect women’s rights and ensure their security”/ “sensitization and advocacy to raise awareness among the population and increase recruitment of women to the security sector”/ “coordinate gender and SSR programmes”.
North Macedonia (2013–2015)	Expected results include “Incorporation of a gender-sensitive approach in the creation of a security policy ... particularly through reforms in the security sector; police; defense; crisis management; civil protection; integrated border management.”
South Sudan (2015–2020)	Strategic Goal 2 is to “Support security sector reforms and professionalize security sector institutions to enable them to implement UNSCR 1325.”
Switzerland (2018–2022)	“... continues to support security sector reforms that take account of different security needs, such as protection against gang violence, domestic violence and human trafficking”
United Kingdom (2018–2022)	“... support the improved provision of defence, security and justice for girls and women, particularly in relation to GBV [gender-based violence]; increased recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the security sector; and the building of institutions that are able and willing to identify and formulate responses to gender-specific gaps and inequality in security provision.”

Drawn from the WPS NAPs on the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) PeaceWomen website, <http://peacewomen.org>, April 2019.

How does a good governance approach to the security sector help to achieve the goals of the WPS Agenda?

After some 20 years of work by civil society, governments, international organizations and others to realize the ambitions of the WPS Agenda, local and global studies attest to a range of challenges.³ This section discusses how a security sector governance approach can facilitate progress around three key areas: protecting women’s and girls’ rights, increasing women’s participation in the security sector, and accountability for implementing WPS commitments.

Understanding the WPS Agenda as a commitment to legal, social and economic rights

Protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence in conflict is a prominent priority within the WPS Agenda. As described above, the UN Security Council resolutions on WPS rightly outline a range of roles for the security and justice sector and for SSR in preventing and responding to sexual violence. The strong political advocacy around addressing sexual violence in conflict, while bringing welcome visibility and resources to the problem, has had the unintended consequence in some contexts of narrowing the focus of WPS efforts.

Many WPS advocates argue that to address the structural causes of conflict, political, security and economic structures must be transformed.⁴ Efforts must be intensified to overcome gender inequality and gendered power imbalances which contribute to and are exacerbated by conflict.⁵

Applying a security sector governance lens to the commitments within the WPS Agenda underscores that “protection” means not only from sexual violence, and indeed not only from violence. The security and justice sector is mandated to *ensure equality before the law* for women, men, girls and boys. “Protection” must thus include protection from discrimination in matters such as land ownership, employment, inheritance, education and healthcare. Realization of women’s economic and social rights is needed to protect women and girls from violence, and to attain the broader vision of the WPS Agenda of achieving peace and security.

Creating spaces for women to access and contribute to peace processes – an important aspect of the participation pillar of the WPS Agenda – also requires as preconditions, among other rights, equality before the law, security and protection from violence, access to education, freedom of movement and access to information.

Transforming institutional culture and practices within the security sector

The UN Security Council resolutions on WPS highlight the importance of women's participation in peace processes, in security decision-making at international and national levels, and in security sector institutions. Within the OSCE, the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality emphasizes that gender mainstreaming of activities, policies, projects and programmes in the politico-military dimension shall take into account Security Council Resolution 1325's call for increased participation of women in, *inter alia*, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction processes.⁶ On a national level, many WPS NAPs include commitments to increase the number of women in the security sector, in particular in police, militaries and peacekeeping operations. Many police and armed forces have adopted gender policies and stepped up efforts to recruit women by adapting recruitment criteria and processes and enacting family-friendly policies and targeted recruitment campaigns. UN and bilateral programmes to support gender-responsive SSR or WPS implementation at times include support to women's recruitment or capacity building for female personnel.

However, the numbers of women in the security sector remain far from equal with the numbers of men.* In many countries, while more women are entering police and armed forces, the structural conditions that discourage them from staying persist. Women are often disproportionately overrepresented in low-ranking positions, and end up leaving as a result of the underutilization of their skills, discriminatory attitudes and policies, sexual harassment and difficulties combining working practices with family responsibilities.⁷ Applying a security sector governance lens to these challenges suggests approaches that can translate the WPS Agenda's focus on women's participation into the transformation of institutional culture and practices needed to realize the WPS Agenda's broader goals.

Institutional values and culture together with control and oversight mechanisms to hold personnel and institutions accountable for high standards of personal and professional integrity are core concerns of SSR and good security sector governance. A security sector governance approach to increasing women's participation in the security sector would suggest the importance of the following in WPS implementation.

Challenging masculine institutional cultures to increase women's participation and overall diversity. Security sector institutions, as well as being overwhelmingly male in staffing, are symbolically associated with and cultivate narrow forms of manhood. Retaining women requires actions to reveal and transform institutional structures, practices and cultures that actively and passively discriminate against and marginalize women. This means transforming masculine institutional cultures within the security sector. Moreover, achieving gender equality in the security sector goes hand in hand with more holistically promoting institutional culture and work practices that are inclusive, non-discriminatory and open to diversity. It is important not only to have balance between male and female staff but also to ensure that men and women are diverse in terms of ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation and other factors, in a manner that reflects broader society.

Internal control and accountability mechanisms within the security sector. Strengthened control mechanisms within security sector institutions have the potential to prevent and address gender bias and discrimination, and implement new ideals of institutional culture. These mechanisms include:

- ◆ background checks and vetting for prior offences of gender-based violence;
- ◆ performance evaluations that recognize and value the particular skills that women and different groups of people might bring to the security sector, and assess leaders on how well they foster inclusion;
- ◆ robust policies and well-functioning complaint systems, reporting and disciplinary mechanisms concerning abuse, bullying, harassment or discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, as well as on the basis of factors such as race, ethno-religious background, age and disability;
- ◆ regular collection and analysis of statistics and evaluation of policies regarding workforce diversity, and periodic gender audits and assessments.⁸

* See data presented in Tools 2, 3, 4, 6 and 14 of the *Gender and Security Toolkit*.

All these processes should be subject to external monitoring and oversight, as described below in relation to WPS NAP implementation.

Institutional structures, processes and practices of control and accountability, grounded in the principles of good security sector governance, can bridge the gaps between women's recruitment, retention and advancement and the sustained institutional transformation to which the WPS Agenda aspires.

Oversight to ensure institutional and financial accountability for implementing the WPS Agenda

More than 80 countries now have a WPS NAP. While many of these plans identify the processes and activities for implementation, few feature the clear indicators, timelines, lines of responsibility and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms needed to ensure transparency and accountability in their implementation.⁹ As of January 2019, of the 79 WPS NAPS adopted only 34 (43 per cent) include specific budget allocations.¹⁰ Accountability mechanisms in the security and justice sector also remain weak in terms of the WPS Agenda's more specific goal of ending impunity for sexual violence and crimes against women.

Accountability failings are not limited to WPS policy or to sexual violence crimes: lack of accountability is pervasive where security sector governance is poor. Thus, overcoming these challenges to the realization of the WPS Agenda requires a broader engagement with fostering a culture of accountability in the security and justice sector, and building the associated knowledge, skills and mechanisms.

Strengthening transparency and accountability in the security and justice sector is a core concern of SSR and good security sector governance. Measures to promote accountability often focus upon making information available and accessible to allow public scrutiny, instituting auditing mechanisms, and making security sector institutions subject to robust independent inspection and oversight, including by parliament and civil society. Accountability means that people are held responsible for their actions and how they perform their duties. Day-to-day management practices should ensure this, with mechanisms in place to ensure that any misconduct or mishandling of public resources is sanctioned, through criminal prosecution if necessary.

A security sector governance approach to building accountability around WPS promotes *internal and external oversight* of the security and justice sector's responsibilities in WPS implementation, including through monitoring and reporting mechanisms. It suggests the importance of internal co-ordination and monitoring structures and external oversight in WPS implementation, as outlined below.

Internal co-ordination and monitoring structures. A mechanism that brings together all key government and ideally civil society agencies involved in implementing a WPS NAP is of critical importance. A range of possible co-ordination models exists.¹¹ The co-ordination process should include regular meetings requiring standardized reporting against NAP targets. Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, has a WPS NAP Co-ordination Board with clear terms of reference. It is composed of representatives of ministries and security sector agencies, and a civil society representative. The Co-ordination Board is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of WPS NAP-related activities, and submits an annual report on the implementation of the WPS NAP to the Parliamentary Assembly.¹²

External oversight by state bodies. A range of state bodies is, or can be, formally mandated to monitor implementation of commitments concerning gender equality and WPS, including WPS NAPs. The bodies include parliamentary committees, financial oversight bodies, ombuds institutions and national human rights institutions (NHRIs). This is "external oversight", because these bodies are outside the security sector agencies and line ministries with direct responsibilities for implementation.

Parliaments are increasingly playing an active role in monitoring implementation of WPS NAPs. For example, 68 per cent of the parliaments that participate in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly are doing so.¹³ In Sri Lanka, the Parliament's Committee on Public Finance held a public hearing on WPS, questioning ministries on their budgets and plans related to gender equality and the advancement of the WPS Agenda.¹⁴ Parliamentary security and defence committees, too, should actively monitor whether security sector institutions are meeting their commitments to WPS.

Parliamentary monitoring and oversight of implementation of WPS commitments can be conducted through parliamentary debates, committee meetings and hearings, as well as questions to governmental officials and the publication of reports. See Tool 7 on "Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector and Gender" for further guidance.

Parliamentary oversight of WPS implementation should be complemented by oversight by **NHRIs** and **ombuds institutions**. NHRIs are independent bodies established by a constitutional or legislative act, funded by the state and specifically mandated to protect and promote human rights (also known as human rights commissions or equal opportunities commissions). All NHRIs, by virtue of their human rights mandate, are mandated to protect and promote women's rights and gender equality. In many countries a specialized NHRI has been established to address discrimination, equality and/or women's rights, such as an equal opportunities commission or sex discrimination commissioner. Ombuds institutions are official bodies headed by an ombudsperson (who may have another title, such as "public defender" or "protector of citizens"). The ombudsperson is usually appointed by the government or parliament, but has a significant degree of independence. Ombuds institutions are charged with representing the interests of the public by investigating and addressing complaints of maladministration or the violation of rights. In a number of countries ombuds institutions have been established to oversee security sector institutions, including police and armed forces.

NHRIs and ombuds institutions are well placed to monitor the security and justice sector's implementation of WPS commitments. They generally have special powers to access information and the ability to receive and investigate complaints, make special investigations, consult civil society groups and issue reports and recommendations.¹⁵ In Georgia, for example, the Public Defender issues an annual monitoring report on the implementation of the WPS NAP, assessing the activities of the institutions responsible for implementation and their impact. Their 2017 report drew upon focus group meetings with staff in the institutions, focus group discussions with internally displaced women and discussions with non-governmental organizations in the capital.¹⁶

External oversight by civil society. Non-state bodies can also, if appropriately empowered through access to information and political space, contribute to development and independently monitor implementation of commitments concerning gender equality and WPS by security and justice sector institutions. The involvement of civil society – civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, think-tanks and the media – in democratic oversight of the security and justice sector is a key mechanism in providing the transparency and accountability that are at the heart of good security sector governance, as well as for the participation and protection pillars of the WPS Agenda. It is important to ensure the inclusion of women's organizations, including those representing women with disabilities, women refugees and migrants, women of colour, women who suffer intolerance or discrimination on the basis of their religion or belief, and women who suffer harassment or discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression; as well as other organizations representing women members of minority groups.¹⁷

In many countries, CSOs and academics join efforts and expertise to monitor and oversee the implementation of WPS commitments. The 1325 Network Finland, for example, is a platform uniting 12 CSOs and researchers. It was involved in drafting Finland's first WPS NAP, and conducts independent monitoring of WPS NAP implementation, organizes public discussions and trains other non-governmental actors.¹⁸

Conclusions

Security sector reform is key to sustaining peace. Security actors have many powerful tools at their disposal. This goes beyond guns and handcuffs. Instead, they hold the tools which can pull societies back from the brink of conflict.

H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the UN General Assembly, High-Level Roundtable on Security Sector Reform and Sustaining Peace, 23 April 2018; 2019 OSCE Chairperson-in-Office

The 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals recognize that the rule of law, good governance and development are necessary foundations for peace and security. Indeed, good security sector governance and SSR play critical roles as drivers of peace.

Good security sector governance is thus at the heart of achieving the WPS Agenda and increasing women's agency and involvement, including protecting women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence and achieving women's full and equal participation in security and justice institutions and decision-making processes. It thus plays an essential role in achieving the goals of preventing conflict and achieving enduring peace. Accordingly, the international community and national decision-makers should pursue mutually reinforcing approaches to WPS and security sector governance: in policy and strategy, in implementation processes and structures, and in monitoring and oversight.

This Policy Brief illustrates how applying principles and good practice from a security sector governance perspective offers fresh approaches to achieving WPS goals. Focusing on institutional mandates, values and culture, and on internal and external oversight and accountability mechanisms, as well as looking beyond physical protection to advancing human rights can move WPS efforts to a more transformative level.

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Written by Marta Ghittoni, Léa Lehouck and Megan Bastick.

Acknowledgements

DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR and UN Women thank Fairlie Chappuis, Aiko Holvikivi and Awino Okech for reviewing drafts of this Policy Brief. The authors moreover thank Graziella Pavone (OSCE/ODIHR), Brad Orchard (UN Women) and Lorraine Serrano and Anna-Lena Schluchter (DCAF) for their input.

DCAF acknowledge the support of the Swiss Confederation and UK DfID to the production of this Policy Brief.

ISBN: 92-9222-470-0

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Cite as: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women (2019), "A Security Sector Governance Approach to Women, Peace and Security", in *Gender and Security Toolkit*. Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women.

This Toolkit was published with the support of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR). Its content does not necessarily reflect the policy and position of OSCE/ODIHR.