

Raising Awareness on Gender Inequalities and Corruption



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Raising Awareness on Gender Inequalities and Corruption

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Organized by

OSCE Presence in Albania,
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The views expressed within are those of the conference participants and do not necessarily represent the official position or views of the OSCE Presence in Albania.

Abstract

The OSCE Presence in Albania organized a conference on “Raising Awareness on Gender Inequalities and Corruption” on the International Day of Anti-Corruption to provide a forum to discuss the complex interplay between corrupt practices as a major obstacle for sustainable economic development and the many forms of gender inequality that are closely linked with it. The conference aimed to raise awareness on the plethora of opportunities that gender-specific approaches to fighting corruption offer as a contribution to boost socio-economic growth and security as well as to consolidate democratic practice. In recognition of the challenges that the nexus between corruption and gender inequalities pose to countries around the world, the OSCE Presence in Albania invited not only an in-depth single country analysis of corruption, but also comparative studies that explored various practices in dealing with gendered processes and how gender dynamics interact with accountability, transparency, economic development and power structures.

Comprehensive security requires a cross-dimensional approach to the prevention of conflict and building sustainable peace. Each of the OSCE’s three dimensions – politico-military, economic/environmental, and human – are all required in their own right, and in close relation to each other. In this framework, the OSCE recognizes¹ that corruption represents one of the major impediments to prosperity and sustainable development, undermining stability and security. OSCE participating States have called for further efforts to promote women’s equal and necessary participation in the development and implementation of relevant anti-corruption activities, with a view to achieving gender equality.²

In this context, the first panel of the conference sought to explore how issues of gender inequality impact overarching societal development in an international context. It recognized corruption as one of the greatest obstacles to poverty reduction and sustainable development, and framed discussion around the necessity of applying a gender perspective and whole of society approach to anti-corruption strategies. The second panel turned to the Albanian context, featuring findings of the OSCE Presence in Albania’s preliminary research³ on this subject, and began exploring practical, tangible approaches to gender and anti-corruption policy in specific sectors.



¹ The OSCE’s efforts to prevent and combat corruption are guided by the 2003 Maastricht OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, as well as several Ministerial Council Decisions (MC.DEC/11/04, MC.DEC/2/12, MC.DEC/5/14, MC.DEC/4/16, MC.DEC/8/17, MC.DEC/5/18, MC.DEC/6/2020).

² Ministerial Council Decision No. 6/20.

³ <https://www.osce.org/presence-in-albania/513448>

Key Conclusions

- Ample literature and evidence suggest that increasing inclusion, diversity and gender equality is one of the best ways to strengthen the prevention of conflict in a very realistic but also pragmatic way. In this framework, the OSCE recognizes⁴ that corruption represents one of the major impediments to the prosperity and sustainable development of its participating States, thereby undermining their stability and security. More recently, OSCE participating States have called, through Ministerial Council Decision No. 6/20, for further efforts to promote women's equal and necessary participation in the development and implementation of relevant anti-corruption activities, with a view to achieving gender equality.⁵
- Corruption is one of the biggest obstacles to poverty reduction and sustainable socioeconomic development. One of the most important, among multiple, factors that intensify gender inequality in corrupt environments is its correlation with material poverty. Women make up the majority of the world's economically deprived, and the COVID-19 crisis will dramatically increase the poverty rate for women, pushing 47 million more women and girls below the poverty line (UNWOMEN, 2020)⁶ as they are more likely to lose their source of income and less likely to be covered by social protection measures. A lack of transparency and mismanagement in public services creates a further obstacle for women to break intergenerational cycles of poverty. The situation represents a heavy burden for democracy and development with detrimental effects for the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.⁷
- Applying a gender perspective is necessary to find effective strategies to combat corruption and achieve sustainable socioeconomic development, as corruption and gender inequality are in many ways closely connected. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by corruption in many sectors such as health and education and especially in fragile contexts. Given traditionally unequal gender relations, women are often more exposed to corruption and its consequences. Corruption hits poor women and girls the hardest. Specific forms of corruption – like sextortion – can affect both genders and in different ways, but tend to impact women at far higher rates than men, and often with more severe consequence.
- Gender inequality breeds corruption, and corruption tends to exacerbate gender inequalities. But anti-corruption and gender equality efforts tend to be mutually

⁴ The OSCE's efforts to prevent and combat corruption are guided by the 2003 Maastricht OSCE Strategy Document for the Economic and Environmental Dimension, as well as several Ministerial Council Decisions (MC.DEC/11/04, MC.DEC/2/12, MC.DEC/5/14, MC.DEC/4/16, MC.DEC/8/17, MC.DEC/5/18, MC.DEC/6/2020).

⁵ Ministerial Council Decision No. 6/20 calls on participating States to, *inter alia*, promote “the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the development and implementation of relevant anti-corruption activities, with the view to achieving gender equality...”

⁶ <https://www.unwomen.org/>-

[/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5142)

⁷ Specifically: SDG 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”; SDG 8 “Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all” and SDG 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”

reinforcing and synergies between the two areas can strengthen results both in terms of improved gender equality and reduced corruption.

- Addressing this challenge requires a whole of government – across sectors and agencies – and whole of society approach, including government, civil society, media, business, academia, financial institutions, and individuals. This necessitates mainstreaming integrity policies throughout the government, and promoting shared ethical values, principles, and norms for upholding and prioritising public interest.

Recommendations

- Globally, and specifically in Albania, more work needs to be done to **enhance understandings** of gendered forms of corruption. In light of the absence of official statistical disaggregated data and in-depth qualitative research on the gendered impacts of corruption in Albania, policy reforms that allow for gender sensitive data collection should be coupled with new research to gather knowledge about drivers, causes and impacts of corruption on the different genders. An **analysis of local power dynamics** is also crucial to understanding men and women’s different exposure to corruption and respective impacts.
- Given the absence of data to illustrate the scope of the problem, further research and **gender-disaggregated data collection** and analysis should be supported within programmatic activities and policy interventions. This includes:
 - **Special reporting procedures** for women and girls seeking to lodge complaints should be taken into consideration.
 - **A data management system for official complaint mechanisms** should adopt an intersectional perspective, to disaggregate data by sex, socio-economic factors, geography, educational level, ethnicity, and other traits.
- **Anti-corruption strategies should continue to be integrated into sectors in Albania that affect women disproportionately more than men**, such as health and education, and into gender equality strategies and programming. Approaching this issue one sector at a time also makes tackling this large and complex problem more manageable.
- **Strengthen transparency**: Support the **continued digitalization of public services**, an area that Albania already leads in, as it reduces opportunities for bribes or extortion. Increasing transparency and oversight leads to lower levels of corruption in public services and to improvements in service delivery for both women and men.
- **Promote integrity**: Develop and **enforce code of conduct and/or integrity guidelines** for public sector staff, which includes the issue of sexual extortion.
- **Encourage information exchange**: Develop and strengthen platforms to exchange good practice around the region on gender-specific approaches to anti-corruption.

- **Enhance inclusion and increase participation:** Women, as political actors, activists, and engaged citizens must be aided to increase their capacity in anti-corruption work. When considering the specific role women can play in anti-corruption efforts, it is essential to look beyond merely increasing the numbers of women involved and to consider ways that to support women's networks and organizations, which will have a greater impact on anti-corruption efforts.
- **Finally, this responsibility falls not just on women but to all genders.** Incorporating a gender lens into the fight against corruption will help to ensure that strategic and policy discussions in the fight against corruption are oriented to the experience of citizens – women and men – with corruption, and ensure that responses reflect their needs, creating more inclusive, prosperous, and secure communities.

The OSCE Presence in Albania's Conference was organized as part of the third annual Week of Integrity, which is led by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Albania, with the support of the Embassy of Netherlands.

Opening Remarks⁸

Moderator: Ms. Clarisse Pasztory, Deputy Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania

Speakers:

- **SG Helga Maria Schmid**, OSCE Secretary General
- **Ambassador Vincenzo Del Monaco**, Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania
- **Ambassador Elsa Håstad**, Ambassador of Sweden in Albania
- **Ambassador Reinout Vos**, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Albania
- **Ms. Adea Pirdeni**, Deputy Minister of Justice of Albania
- **Prof. Paola Severino**, Vice President of Luiss University
- **Ms. Bilgen Aldan**, Chairwoman of International Chamber of Commerce in Albania

OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid opened the conference via teleconference, stating: *“Despite all the progress we have made, too many security domains are still largely treated as gender neutral, including the fight against corruption. I think this is a notion that we need to challenge to develop better policies and to shape stronger interventions.”*



The Secretary General highlighted three, overarching reasons to explore this field, noting that women and men have different levels of exposure to corruption in different sectors. She pointed to research by Transparency International in other regions that has shown women to be more vulnerable to sexual extortion and expressed the need for targeted research in the OSCE

region because similar, dedicated data is missing. Some women are more vulnerable due to higher exposure to poverty. In this sense, corruption can mean outright social exclusion and denial of basic public services for women. Finally, she noted that corruption itself has gendered impacts. It limits women’s ability to participate fully in political life both as voters and as elected representatives. It presents obstacles to their economic empowerment, and it has a negative impact on society as such. She pointed to a 2020 McKinsey report, which says that if women had full and equal participation in the labour market as men have, as much as \$28 trillion, or 26 percent, could be added to global annual GDP by 2025. According to Secretary General Schmid, these are only some of the reasons why anti-corruption and gender equality efforts should be mutually reinforcing.

The Secretary General concluded: *“From my side, let me say that we need more support for gender-sensitive anti-corruption programs and reporting mechanisms. This will ensure that the specific needs of women and men are equitably addressed. We must also enhance our understanding of*

⁸ A recording of the opening remarks is available at:

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=502784024235040

gendered forms of corruption. This can be done by supporting research and gender-disaggregated data collection within program activities and within policy interventions. The OSCE has the mandate and the capacity to provide support on the application of a gender perspective on policy design and more importantly implementation. Ultimately, raising awareness on gender inequality and corruption will help to ensure that decision-makers' discussion and their subsequent policies and strategies are oriented to the experience of citizens, both women and men. Only in this way can we create more inclusive and more secure communities."

Ambassador Vincenzo Del Monaco, Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania, queried in his opening remarks, *"What do corruption and gender inequalities have in common? They are tightly connected to one another by a common denominator, namely abuse of entrusted power. Corruption takes advantage of women's inequality in society and reinforces it. And that is precisely why we use Integrity Week to focus our discussion on how fighting corruption inevitably has to address its roots in gender discrimination."*



He also informed the participants that the Conference took place on the International Day of Anti-Corruption as well as the International Day of Human Rights, which marks the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights

on 10 December 1948. This served as a timely reminder that corruption leads to human rights violations, thus endangering the security of countries and stability of societies.

Ambassador Del Monaco spoke of Albania's progress in bridging gender gaps in social and economic realms, calling for it to continue unabatedly. He reflected that, to date, the fight against corruption in Albania has been primarily focused on strengthening legal measures and the institutional set-up, but has not as of yet translated into addressing the tangible impacts of corruption on the population, including on different groups of society. Policy-making can be enriched, he said, if various differentiating criteria – socio-economic background, educational level, ethnicity, sex and gender identity – are engaged when exploring the root causes of corruption and its manifold social effects. *"Only then,"* he said, *"can we have a complete picture of the devastating effects of corruption in society. And thus, only then will we be able to craft and implement targeted solutions."*

To support this, Ambassador Del Monaco called for the production of gender-specific data on corruption as pivotal in the development of gender-specific approaches to fighting corruption that help to boost the economy, foster respect for human rights and consolidate democracy. *"These are key ingredients to reach stability and security. And they are fully in line with our OSCE whole-of-society approach to support projects."*

Ambassador Del Monaco concluded: *"Often times, strategic and policy discussions of the fight against corruption are detached from the direct experience of citizens, and this is why citizens – of all demographics – need to*

be at the center of responses to fighting corruption. With the priority the Government of Albania has given to both gender equality and the fight against corruption, we hope that by focusing on how a key and, in fact majority demographic – women are 50.2% of Albania’s population according to INSTAT in 2021 – are affected, may help to connect progress in the fight against corruption with citizens’ tangible experiences in this realm. That’s the conversation we hope to start today, building awareness of this important issue before looking at responses and next steps we can take together to tackle inequality.”

The Ambassador of Sweden in Albania, Elsa Håstad, spoke next, representing Sweden as the Chair of the OSCE in 2021 and reflecting with great passion on the prioritization her country has given to promoting gender equality. Ambassador Håstad stated that corruption will always hit the poor the hardest, and 45% of the Albanian population is at risk of poverty.



The Ambassador spoke of the over-representation of women in the informal economy in Albania. She also commended Albania as a world leader with high representation of women in government and recalled a World Bank study that higher levels of women’s participation in government reflect higher levels of transparency, openness, and democratic governance in a country.

She raised questions that have been asked in research studies over the years – does gender matter when it comes to who is corrupt? – and mused that it is still unclear in Albania, pointing to Albania’s fairly high ranking on UNDP’s Gender Development Index but also persistent, high perceptions of corruption in Albania (per Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index). She described her pride in Sweden’s “feminist government and foreign policy” and reiterated that Sweden is a long-term supporter of human rights and gender inequality, having committed to another seven-year strategy to support development in Albania, including gender equality, respect for human rights, accountability, and integrity in governance.

The Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Albania, Reinout Vos, opened his remarks by stating, *“The harm is double when corruption meets gender inequalities.”*



He described how women’s place in society often makes them more vulnerable to the impacts of corruption, such as in service delivery and especially in healthcare for reproductive/maternal care, and because of financial dependence. He described the Netherland’s commitment to fight for women to gain a fair share of decision-making power and economic power. Echoing Ambassador Del Monaco, he noted

that, typically, gender strategies and anti-corruption efforts have been considered separately. The Ambassador complimented the OSCE for taking the initiative to examine both, seek data, and build understanding of the interplay between the two issues. He expressed optimism in seeing actions by women themselves, who are part of the solution, and commended the impressive role of Albania's women ministers and deputy ministers for their role in decision-making to advance integrity measures in the government and ensure gender responsive and gender sensitive anti-corruption policies. He called on Albania to be an example for the world in this realm and for collective actions to continue beyond the Week of Integrity.

Deputy Minister of Justice of Albania, Adea Pirdeni, stated, *“While we strive to fight corruption, it is no less vital to recognize and work on the more complex and hidden dimensions of corruption, the gendered dimensions. The fight is always difficult, but we never cease to explore every aspect of it. Coming together and exploring new methods and approaches is the best tactic to minimize corruption in its entirety.”*



She declared that corruption, like every other phenomenon, has gendered dimensions, and women are disproportionately vulnerable to corruption. As such, she stated, *“Now is a great time for Albanians to talk the talk*

and walk the walk in gender mainstreaming our anti-corruption fight”, recognizing that there are increasing levels of awareness on gender equality in aspects of everyday life, and describing a ‘mind-shift’ in how corruption is viewed as a disease that needs constant care.

Deputy Minister Pirdeni described the Government's Inter-Sectoral Strategy Against Corruption, which was drafted in early 2015 without a gender approach, and since extended through 2023. Its related Action Plan, for 2020-2023, embraces a gender approach in terms of awareness-raising and collection of statistical data for monitoring implementation. She expressed that the National Coordinator Against Corruption (NCAC), with all involved stakeholders and international partners, will continue to place awareness-raising as part of its core efforts, and is cognizant that awareness-raising campaigns need to start with trust in order to be successful. Trust, in turn, begins with having concrete results. To this end, she said the NCAC is deeply committed to bringing concrete results in the fight against corruption to specific sectors, like health and education. She described new anti-corruption coordinators placed in all health institutions, and spoke of a pilot project in high schools to increase education on anti-corruption. She emphasized the need to invest in raising education of society overall, with a special focus on marginalized groups who face meaningful obstacles to having their rights guaranteed.

Deputy Minister Pirdeni spoke of the Ministry of Justice's stepped-up campaign against corruption, including new structures, more resources, and staff capacities to work on the government's three-pronged approach. She pledged that in the upcoming

months the Ministry would start an inclusive process for preparing a new anti-corruption strategy with a dedicated approach for increasing the involvement of women and girls in all dimensions. She expressed the need for more consultations with civil society, and especially those actors working to protect women and girls, especially at the grassroots level, to be involved in this process. *“We were very pleased to receive very recently a study commissioned by the OSCE, which backs our speech with proof on the need to dedicate specific attention to the gender approach to corruption,”* she said, noting that it would be pivotal in informing the new strategy.

Professor Paola Severino, who served as OSCE Special Representative on Combating Corruption from 2018 to 2020, joined by video conference. She commented: *“The OSCE has a unique role to play in the international struggle against corruption. The added value of the Organization lies first and foremost in the core mission of the OSCE that is to promote and strengthen security through a co-operative and holistic approach”.*



She continued that, within this conceptual frame, it is crucial to embrace a gender-sensitive approach to the fight against corruption. In her view, this is true now more than ever, when the pandemic is exacerbating economic and social imbalances. According to her vast professional experience, gender-sensitive

approaches in the fight against corruption appear to deliver better results than less gender-aware efforts, and she queried how academia could support and assist in this endeavour. First, in her view, research data on the implications of gender (in)equalities and anti-corruption dynamics, while increasingly available, do not allow us to draw conclusive inferences to be able to inform and challenge our approaches, and academics can support with more research. Second, gender-responsive curricula in legal studies, particularly in anti-corruption and public governance studies, could help shape the minds of future policymakers and business executives. Third, academics granted a seat at the table in national or international platforms should continue to promote gender responsive approaches in the anti-corruption agenda. She concluded that including a gender-specific approach in the fight against corruption should be fully developed within a participatory approach to anti-corruption among government, parliament, civil society, business, and the media, where the latter groups may be better placed to foster citizen trust and social consensus on non-tolerance of corruption.

The Chairwoman of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Albania, Ms. Bilgen Aldan, concluded the opening session, representing the perspective of the business community. The ICC Chairwoman spoke of increasing levels of participation of



women in the workforce, though the glass ceiling remains a major issue to progress in the business sector. She also spoke of a lack of equal rights for women as compared to their male counterparts in the business sector. In her view, and referencing a McKinsey report, she described the advancement of women in leadership roles in business as positive, leading to enhanced diversity, increased profitability, and lower risk. However, the Gender Equality Index shows that only 17% of executives in Albania are women, meaning that men are primarily

making decisions, despite women's increasing representation in business, not to mention as consumers. Ms. Aldan commented that this power discrepancy needs to be addressed in order to help in the fight against corruption, and, as a CEO herself, she championed a new initiative in Albania to empower women in the private sector and called on other businesses to do the same.

Technical Panel 1: The interlinkages between anti-corruption, women, peace and a comprehensive approach to security

Chair: Ambassador Melanne Verveer, Executive Director of Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security

Speakers:

- **Applying a gender lens to policy discussions on corruption**, Ms. Jennifer Sarvary Bradford, UNODC
- **How inclusive, gender-responsive institutions promote peace and security**, Ms. Giulia Sechi, OSCE Advisor on Gender Issues, Office of the Secretary General, Gender Issues Program
- **Following the “whole-of-society” approach: how to help communities break out of corruption inclusively**, Ms. Karolina Jozic, Thematic Advisor on Anti-corruption at Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

Ambassador Melanne Verveer opened the first technical panel of the conference. Ambassador Verveer served as Special Representative on Gender Issues to various Chairs of the OSCE for six years, including in 2020 when Albania was Chair in Office.

She commenced by reflecting on how the impact of corruption on populations, and particularly on women, has not received great attention. She expressed a critical need to adapt a gender-specific approach to fighting corruption in order to improve the



economy, promote respect for human rights, and strengthen democracy.

Ambassador Verveer described how the objectives of the conference correspond to the OSCE's Action Plan for Gender Equality, as well as to those

of OSCE Ministerial Decisions on women's participation. She stated, "*The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security cuts across the three dimensions including the economic and human dimensions, which foster and focus on the meaningful participation and protection of women in political arena as well as in human rights and freedom from violence. I believe that this comprehensive understanding of security is one of the greatest strengths of the OSCE.*"



Jennifer Sarvary Bradford of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) spoke of the intersection between the International Days on Anti-Corruption and on Human Rights, referencing the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders who said: "Women human rights defenders working against corruption are attacked not only for what they do but for who they are."

She highlighted key tools to support a gender-inclusive approach to anti-corruption, offering examples of gender mainstreaming and budget analysis within public procurement, whistleblowing protection systems, and auditing of policy implementation. She discussed how corruption reporting mechanisms must be gender-sensitized, noting that it will further

empower existing corruption networks if half of a population fears using reporting mechanisms.

She shared several UNODC publications, including [The Time is Now](#)⁹, which explores and offers recommendations on how to mainstream gender in anti-corruption programming, along with several resources focusing on specific country-contexts in Myanmar, Nigeria, and Fiji. She emphasized that more data is needed, recalling that "*Those who are invisible in data are also invisible in policies*", and spoke of strengthening judicial integrity and gender equality before the law, as well as empowering women as agents of change in the fight against corruption.

Giulia Sechi, OSCE Advisor on Gender Issues, spoke of the Organization's efforts to incorporate a gender perspective within its technical projects, outlining the recent efforts of the OSCE Secretariat, including publication of a [discussion paper on Gender and Corruption](#)¹⁰. The paper began by asking if women are less corrupted than men, but more importantly whether this is imperative. Many theories have sought to explain a linkage, asserting that women are generally considered in public opinion to be more honest and more risk adverse. Per the research, corrupt women tend to be punished more than men and feel greater pressure due to social norms.

This contributes to an image of women being less corrupt than men – but Ms. Sechi posited that this was not the right place to focus attention. Instead, the OSCE focused on whether and how corruption affects women in different

⁹https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/Publications/2020/THE_TIME_IS_NOW_2020_12_08.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/507569>

ways than men, concluding that it has profound and disproportionate effects on women due to an imbalance of powers, namely: fewer women have access to resources and corrupted networks, and women's societally defined roles expose them to specific forms of gender-based corruption.

For example, women face higher risks of corruption in informal employment and experience higher risks in access to services, such as in healthcare, where they have higher exposure due to maternal health and childcare responsibilities. Migrant women also face higher risks of exploitation, with clear links between poverty, gender, and corruption. Women, the research found, are also less likely to report cases to the police or judiciary because of limited financial means or high perceptions of corruption. Finally, the research looked at "sextortion" which is considered as "abuse of power to obtain a sexual favour" but is not well defined in policy or legislation. Other traits, like age, disability, or undocumented status, may make women more vulnerable to this specific form of corruption.

The discussion paper highlighted key recommendations, and Ms. Sechi spoke of the following:

1. We must enhance our understanding of gendered forms of corruption. There is an absence of data to illustrate the scope of the problem, and we must support further research and gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis within programmatic activities and policy interventions.
2. We need to support gender-sensitive anti-corruption programmes and reporting mechanisms to ensure that the differentiated needs of women and men are equitably considered. The

OSCE has the mandate and the capacity to mainstream gender in its anti-corruption programming, and by documenting this process, we can help provide guidance on how to apply a gender perspective in policy design and implementation.

3. Women, as political actors, activists, and engaged citizens must be aided to increase their capacity in anti-corruption work. When considering the specific role women can play in anti-corruption efforts, it is essential to look beyond merely increasing the numbers of women involved and to consider ways that we can all support women's networks and organizations, which will have a greater impact on anti-corruption efforts.

Karolina Jozic, Thematic Advisor on Anti-corruption at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, stated that corruption threatens sustainable development and is one of the biggest obstacles to poverty reduction, threatening the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Given unequal gender relations, women are more exposed to corruption and its consequences.

Gender inequality breeds corruption and vice versa, and for this reason, gender equality and anti-corruption efforts must be mutually reinforcing with synergies between the two to strengthen results' achievements.

Sida applies a "whole of society" and "whole of government" approach in its work, engaging government agencies, academia, financial institutions, civil society, individual citizens, businesses, and media. The approach is evidence-based, laying building blocks to understand corruption, and integrates

principles of transparency, integrity, and accountability into collective action on anti-corruption. She provided several examples, including digitalization of public services to reduce the interface between citizens and public servants, which can minimize opportunities for corruption. Codes of conduct, including issues of sextortion, and gender mainstreamed whistleblowing reporting, were two other examples offered. Gender-sensitive and –disaggregated data about corruption is necessary to better understand the scope of the problem. She concluded that corruption is complex, changing and adapting to opportunities, and therefore it is important to incorporate an anti-corruption power analysis on the underlying drivers, power relations, and effects to understand how to combat it.

In a concluding discussion, each panellist offered one, final recommendation to those implementing

anti-corruption initiatives. Ms. Bradford from UNODC commented that anti-corruption is an evolving practice, reflecting that the Sustainable Development Goals did not initially include it, but now it features there. She further suggested that instead of trying to introduce gender equality into anti-corruption work, practitioners may look the other way – placing anti-corruption efforts into a gender equality agenda. Ms. Sechi of the OSCE stated that if we do not understand the population’s needs, then we could aggravate the situation rather than alleviate it. From a project management perspective, we need evidence to understand a situation and how to build a solution. Ms. Jozic of Sida reminded participants that corruption and gender are about power relations and inequality, so we must find ways to strengthen the gender perspective in anti-corruption work.

Technical Panel 2: A window of opportunities for change in Albania: Overcoming gender biases and promoting gender equity through responsive policies

Chair: Prof. Anita Ramasastry, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office on Combating Corruption

Speakers:

- **“The Gender Equality Index of Albania”**, Mrs. Majlinda Nesturi, Director of Social Statistics, the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT)
- **“The gendered impact of corruption in the Albanian health care and tertiary education sectors”** - *Results of the preliminary research and needs assessment*, Mrs. Arianna Briganti, Head of Governance in Economic and Environmental Issues Department, OSCE Presence in Albania
- Ministry of Education and Sport, Directorate of Development Programs on Education, Sport and Youth, Mrs. Ermelinda Durmishi, Director
- Regional Anticorruption Initiative, Ms. Aneta Arnaudovska, Senior Anti- corruption Advisor

Professor Anita Ramasastry, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office on Combating Corruption, opened the second technical panel, which sought to understand the impact of corruption on women and girls in Albania in order to shape policy responses. However, she emphasized that the preceding panel demonstrated that the nexus of gender inequalities and corruption is still a nascent field of study, commending the initiative and its broader development implications. In her words, this offers an opportunity to create an *“inclusive, equitable society where women can participate in economic and political life, and engage with judicial institutions.”*



She provided thoughts on different aspects of the nexus between gender inequalities and anti-corruption, for example how migrants or refugee populations may be affected. In such cases, an intersectional approach needs to be applied to understand how different demographics are affected, understanding that women, for example, are not a homogenous group.

Professor Ramasastry also underscored the importance of looking at different forms of corruption and how they impact women, like sextortion or coercion, and examining different sectors and venues where women are engaging to understand different opportunities for corruption. Professor Ramasastry congratulated Albania and

the OSCE for addressing the gendered aspects of corruption, reflecting that good practices and observations raised in the course of discussion would be shared with other OSCE participating States.

Ms. Majlinda Nesturi from the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) set the stage on the status of gender equality in Albania, providing an overview of the [Gender Equality Index \(GEI\)](#) and the methodology INSTAT has followed to document the situation of women in Albania in key domains (work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health). The Index was first published in January 2020, and INSTAT is working on a second iteration to be published in the first half of 2022. Overall, the GEI captures 31 indicators, with data collected from 2015 to 2018. In 2017, the overall GEI reached a score of 60.4, indicating a substantial gender gap according to INSTAT. By point of comparison, Albania’s score fell seven (7) points below the EU-28 average of 67.4. Albania performed well in the domain of power, and poorer in domains of time (family responsibilities) and money.

INSTAT also collects and analyses statistics for a publication on “Men and Women in Albania”, looking at key issues in the labour market, social inclusion, health, human rights, and education, among other areas. INSTAT has also created a dashboard of gender statistics to facilitate research and data analysis, with Google analytics showing that the numbers of searches have increased since the dashboard was created. INSTAT intends to launch a new dedicated section of its website on gender statistics¹¹, with data related to health and social protection, economic empowerment, education, women in

¹¹ The new section was launched since the conference and is available at: <http://databaza.instat.gov.al/pxweb/sq/DST>

decision-making, and gender, with data collected through social household surveys.

Ms. Arianna Briganti from the OSCE Presence in Albania presented results of preliminary research, available as Annex III¹², into the gendered impact of corruption in the Albanian healthcare and tertiary education sectors. The OSCE Department of Governance in Economic and Environmental Issues began exploring this topic in 2020 to support the Government of Albania to pursue sustainable, socioeconomic development and improve the investment climate by fostering institutional transparency and accountability from a whole-of-society approach.



The Presence's preliminary outreach and exploratory interviews with activists and development practitioners helped to define the scope of the research to fields of tertiary education and healthcare. The methodology consisted of desk research, primary data collection, and 22 in-depth interviews with women and men service users and providers in the targeted sectors, which were conducted from November 2020 to January 2021.

Health Care sector: The research focused on health care as women have specific health needs, and social

factors make Albanian women more dependent on health care services, which could increase their exposure to corruption that may exist at this service point. The in-depth interviews revealed that currently there are no institutional barriers against petty bribery in the service delivery of health care where informal cash payments in response to a direct or indirect request by doctors are widespread. The Albanian health care system suffers from a serious lack of capacities, which is fertile ground for the request of informal payments in exchange for services and the willingness of citizens to resort to unfair means to get the service they need. While the desk research indicated a possible disproportionate impact of corruption on women in health care, interviewees did not identify gender related aspects to corruption in this sector, though one female patient and one female caregiver reported that informal payments were usually negotiated with men of the family.

Higher Education sector: The research focused on higher education as a significant body of international evidence (U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2019)¹³ points out that that corruption in higher education has alarming implications for women, as it hinders future opportunities for building a prosperous democracy. Interviews with Albanian university students and professors indicated that nepotism in student admissions and staff appointments impacts gender, in the sense that women tend to have reduced opportunities to access sources of influence. How far these practices impact the careers and life opportunities of women staff at universities needs to be explored further in the Albanian context. Even

¹² <https://www.osce.org/presence-in-albania/513448>

¹³ <https://www.u4.no/publications/corruption-in-universities-paths-to-integrity-in-the-higher-education-subsector.pdf>

though representative data was lacking, this initial qualitative research also indicated that sexual extortion or sextortion is prevalent in the higher education sector Albania.

Taken together, the initial research revealed that there is indeed a correlation between gender inequalities and corrupt practices. However, nationwide expansive research and comprehensive data collection, including from official sources, is required for more conclusive findings. So far, data collection done by state institutions on corruption is not disaggregated at a sufficient level, systematized, nor analysed. It is pivotal to build a data management system of official complaint mechanisms that adopt an intersectional perspective, namely, to disaggregate data by sex, socio-economic factors, geography, educational level, ethnicity, gender identity, and other traits.

Finally, the study suggested that some people are not used to identifying gender specific aspects in the health care or higher education contexts, which might be explained by cultural norms about gender equality and equity that impede the identification of certain gendered processes. It is therefore fundamental to explore ways of educating the public to get at the core of gender (in)equality issues as key to strengthening a democratic and peaceful society.



Mrs. Ermelinda Durmishi, Director of Development Programs on Education, Sport and Youth, from the Ministry of Education (MoE)

reflected on the relevance of this subject to education policy in Albania. Eighty (80) percent of teachers in Albania are women; approximately half of the student population at all levels are girls, though nearly 60 percent of students in higher education are women. This rate is increasing in Albania, with more women participating in higher education programs, including two-year education masters. Women tend to study more in the fields of humanities, arts, and administration, while more men are found in scientific fields of engineering, agriculture, and information technology (IT). Accordingly, this division is reflected in different salary levels among the genders. The Ministry of Education has worked to increase the enrolment of women in such programs as IT and engineering, beginning with pre-university education programs and curricula reform to promote higher enrolment rates of students – both men and women – in technical and scientific education. Reforms in Albania are also focusing on reducing gender prejudice and orientation in textbooks and reducing gender biases in testing. Women in Albania, on average, have 1.5 more years of education than men, which is higher than the average for OECD countries.

The Ministry of Education underscored that it has considered gender equality and anti-corruption as two separate strategies until recently. Within its gender equality strategy, it works to create a safe environment in schools, including emotional wellbeing, and improve education on gender-based violence. It also focuses on transparency and integrity, including endorsement of a code of ethics and code of conduct, and increasing the

publication of information. Within its anti-corruption strategy, the Ministry highlighted reporting of corruption cases and disciplining code of conduct infringements. She noted that higher education institutions are independent from the MoE, which have autonomy to recruit their own staff and safeguard employment contracts, and as such posited that disciplinary measures are higher in pre-university education due to inspections conducted by the Ministry. The Ministry is working to draft an integrity plan, which could take up this issue as well as to ensure equal treatment of its staff – 70% of the MoE workforce are women. In conclusion, she reflected that tackling inequality within education and improving transparency are critical, and she expressed the Ministry's commitment to engaging in these areas.



Ms. Aneta Arnaudovska of the Regional Anticorruption Initiative described her organization's efforts for gender mainstreaming in all of its project activities and efforts to more systematically detect vulnerabilities of women. From a judicial perspective, she commented that the Council of Europe has recommended increasing the number of women in police bodies

to prevent corruption. As with other speakers, she commented on the overlapping impact of corruption on women and their economic empowerment, noting reductions and gaps in the labour market, and low levels of women represented in business leadership. Coming from North Macedonia, she noted that the national legal framework does not include gender or reflect their specific vulnerability to corruption, let alone other intersectional demographics. She reflected on a recent OSCE Mission to Skopje paper¹⁴ that recognizes sextortion as a specific form of corruption, and in further polling, found that 31.9% of citizens said it occurred in state administration and 64% said those in positions of power seek it in exchange for employment. As a judge, she noted that women are both victims and generators of corruption. According to her, where women are the main providers in the family, they are exposed to greater risks in public services.

She recommended that gender and corruption should be introduced into the national strategy; gender disaggregated data should be produced in sectors most vulnerable to corruption; more women should be brought into policymaking; more resources should be allocated to research in this area; sextortion should be recognized as a crime; and education should be improved for the general public and for investigative journalists on the gendered aspects of corruption.

¹⁴ "Gender aspects of the corruption with reference to the Republic of North Macedonia". Available at: <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-skopje/480877>

Closing Remarks

Conference discussions concluded that corruption and gender inequality are in many ways closely connected, with women and girls disproportionately affected by corrupt practices in many sectors, such as health and education, especially in fragile contexts. Given often unequal gender relations and traditionally lower status of women and girl in many societies, they are often more exposed to corruption and its consequences, with poor people hit the hardest. Specific forms of corruption – like sextortion – can affect both genders and in different ways, but tend to impact women at far higher rates than men, and often with more severe consequence. However, anti-corruption and gender equality efforts tend to be mutually reinforcing and synergies between the two – to increase transparency, enhance inclusive participation and representation, and improve accountability – can strengthen results toward both. Addressing this challenge requires a whole of society approach, including all sectors and branches of government, civil society, media, business, academia, financial institutions and individual citizens. This necessitates mainstreaming integrity policies throughout the government as well as public and private sectors, and promoting shared ethical values, principles, and norms for upholding and prioritising the interests of all citizens.

Key recommendations focused on the need to enhance understandings of gendered forms of corruption, including through increasing research and gender-sensitive data collection to inform analysis of drivers, causes, and impacts of corruption on the different genders. Special corruption reporting procedures for women and girls should be taken into consideration, while data management systems for official complaint mechanisms should disaggregate demographic data by gender, socio-economic factors, age, and geography, among other elements. The national gender equality strategy and sectoral-specific strategies, especially in areas where women are believed to be disproportionately affected by corruption, should be well integrated with anti-corruption strategies. Approaching this issue one sector at a time makes tackling a large, complex problem more manageable.

Particular anti-corruption mechanisms can also be strengthened to improve responsiveness toward gender-specific corruption concerns. This includes efforts aimed at strengthening transparency and reducing opportunities for petty bribery in public administration – like supporting the continued digitalization of public services, an area the Government of Albania has advanced – and promoting integrity through the development and enforcement of codes of conduct or integrity guidelines for the public sector. Conference participants also emphasized the need to encourage information exchange on good practice for gender-specific approaches to anti-corruption, as well as to enhance inclusion and participation of women as advocates and decision-makers on anti-corruption. Both women and men should be engaged in gender-mainstreamed and gender-sensitive efforts to fight corruption to ensure strategic and policy interventions in the fight against corruption are oriented to the experience of all citizens – women and men – to reflect their needs and create more inclusive, prosperous, and secure communities.

List of Annexes

Annex I: Conference Agenda



AGENDA

“Raising Awareness on Gender Inequalities and Corruption”

CONFERENCE

December 10th, 2021

Hybrid

(Venue: Rogner Hotel, Antigonea 2
or connect via [Zoom](#))

- 13:30 – 14:00 **Registration of participants**
- 14:00 – 14:45 **Opening Remarks**
Moderator: Ms. Clarisse Pasztory, Deputy Head of OSCE Presence in Albania
- **SG Helga Maria Schmid**, OSCE Secretary General
 - **Ambassador Vincenzo Del Monaco**, Head of OSCE Presence in Albania
 - **Ambassador Elsa Håstad**, Ambassador of Sweden in Albania
 - **Ambassador Reinout Vos**, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Albania
 - **Ms. Adea Pirdeni**, Deputy Minister of Justice of Albania
 - **Prof. Paola Severino**, Vice President of Luiss University
 - **Ms. Bilgen Aldan**, Chairwoman of International Chamber of Commerce in Albania
- 14:45 – 15:45 **The interlinkages between anti-corruption, women, peace and a comprehensive approach to security**
Chair: Ambassador Melanne Vermeer, Executive Director of Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security
- **Applying a gender lens to policy discussions on corruption**
Ms. Jennifer Sarvary Bradford, UNODC
 - **How inclusive, gender-responsive institutions promote peace and security**, Ms. Giulia Sechi, OSCE Advisor on Gender Issues, Office of the Secretary General, Gender Issues Program
 - **Following the “whole-of-society” approach: how to help communities break out of corruption inclusively**, Ms. Karolina Jozic,

Thematic Advisor on Anti-corruption at Swedish International
Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

Discussion

15:45 – 16:00

Coffee Break

16:00 – 17:00

A window of opportunities for change in Albania: Overcoming gender biases and promoting gender equity through responsive policies

Chair: Prof. Anita Ramasastry, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office on Combating Corruption

- **“The Gender Equality Index of Albania”**, Mrs. Elsa Dhuli, General Director of the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT)
- **“The gendered impact of corruption in the Albanian health care and tertiary education sectors”** - *Results of the preliminary investigation and needs assessment*, Mrs. Arianna Briganti, Head of Governance in Economic and Environmental Issues Department, OSCE Presence in Albania
- Ministry of Education and Sport, Directorate of Development Programs on Education, Sport and Youth, Mrs. Ermelinda Durmishi, Director
- Regional Anticorruption Initiative, Ms. Aneta Arnaudovska, Senior Anti-corruption Advisor

Discussion

17:00 – 17:15

Closing remarks and the way forward

- Ms. Arianna Briganti, Head of Governance in Economic and Environmental Issues Department, OSCE Presence in Albania

17:15 – 18:30

Cocktail

Annex II: Press Release and Social Media

[Press Release Gender inequalities and corruption focus of high-level conference organized by OSCE Presence in Albania, 14 December 2021](#)

Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/OSCE.Albania/posts/276320364541676>

Tweet in English (thread of two):

<https://twitter.com/OSCEinAlbania/status/1468998442013929473>

Tweet in Albanian (thread of two):

<https://twitter.com/OSCEinAlbania/status/1469000247389130762>

Annex III: [“The gendered impact of corruption in the Albanian health care and tertiary education sectors” - Results of preliminary research and needs assessment, commissioned by the OSCE Presence in Albania](#)