



OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE  
NETWORK WOMEN'S PROGRAM

### **For Immediate Release**

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## **Your Sex Matters! : Report Finds Widespread Gender Inequality in Central and Eastern Europe**

*Brussels / Budapest, 4 May 2005* — Gender equality is still far from being a reality in Central and Eastern Europe, says a new Open Society Institute report presented today. As many countries throughout the region mark their first anniversary as members of the European Union, the report *Equal Opportunities for Women and Men: Monitoring Law and Practice in New Member States and Accession Countries of the European Union* was presented today at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The report reveals the disparities women face in employment opportunities, wages, and political representation. In Bulgaria, Estonia, and Slovakia, women receive salaries that are 25 to 30 per cent less than those of men. Significant gender pay gaps such as these are widespread and increasing throughout the region.

Women are also dramatically underrepresented in government. While women are slightly more than 50 per cent of the population in Hungary—as in all the region—they make up only 9 per cent of Hungary's parliament. In Lithuania there are only two women cabinet ministers. In Poland there is one, and in Slovakia there are none.

“These findings show us that we need to drastically increase our efforts to get legally binding EU instruments addressing gender equality in decision-making,” said Zita Gurmai, a Hungarian Member of the European Parliament and vice-chairperson of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, who hosted the event. “This report's findings also show us that more work is needed if we are to translate the EU commitment to gender mainstreaming in all policies into reality”, Gurmai added.

An initiative of the Open Society Institute's Network Women's Program, the report was presented by experts and local NGO representatives who called upon national governments and the EU to immediately address gender inequality issues in the region.

Roxana Tesiu, executive president of the Bucharest based Centre for Partnership and Equality and co-author of the OSI report, called on the government of EU candidate Romania “to offer women real chances to contribute to economic and social changes in the country”.

The findings and recommendations in *Equal Opportunities for Women and Men* are based on monitoring conducted by national gender equality experts and local NGO representatives in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Turkey.

The report describes existing national institutional mechanisms, policies, and programs on gender equality, and highlights several shortcomings. The research identified a general lack of awareness among men and women

about how gender inequality affects their daily lives as well as a lack of political will to enforce existing national and EU gender equality policies.

The report's key recommendations include a call for governments to establish regular monitoring of how equal pay principles are practiced in both the public and private sectors and making these monitoring results public; they urge the governments in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland to adopt official gender equality strategies; and appeal to all governments to collect gender disaggregated statistical data, without which gender equality policies can hardly be successful.

The report can be found online. Please see [www.soros.org/women](http://www.soros.org/women).

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The Open Society Institute aims to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights and economic, legal and social reform. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to support the rule of law, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI works to build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as combating corruption and rights abuses.

A private operating and grantmaking foundation based in New York City, OSI was created in 1993 by investor and philanthropist George Soros to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Those foundations were established, starting in 1984, to help countries make the transition from communism. OSI has expanded the activities of the Soros foundations network to other areas of the world where the transition to democracy is of particular concern. The Soros foundations network encompasses more than 60 countries, including the United States.

The Network Women's Program promotes the advancement of women's human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment as integral to fostering open societies. It seeks to raise public awareness of gender issues, influence policymakers to develop gender-sensitive policies, and eradicate violations of women's rights. The Women's Program supports the development of women's movements through capacity building of women's NGOs.