

GENDER IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OSCE ACTIVITIES

Women are a powerful force for peace. They bridge divides between groups, have a unique understanding of societal needs, and access to information that men cannot have. Because of the influence they wield over their communities and families, they have the potential to increase the operational effectiveness of security forces and inspire a culture of inclusion for the next generation. Women's contributions are valuable not only for themselves but for the collective well-being of society. This was the wisdom behind UNSCR1325, which acknowledges that women are not just victims of conflicts and human rights violations, but agents of peace and justice.¹

In order to move from rhetoric to action, we want to strengthen the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national action plans and re-load the existing ones with the necessary integration of an economic focus for women, specifically as regards care work.²

The Women, Peace and Security agenda³ underlines the need for substantial changes in political commitments towards conflict, which are very well laid out in the logic of the *Global Study* from 2015⁴. Key elements include the creation of a gender sensitive environment. The structural criticism of patriarchal dominance and integration of gender issues should be taken into account throughout the whole conflict cycle. Conflict prevention should be based on a cross-dimensional approach; conflict management should include meaningful participation; and post-conflict situation has to consider the economic dimension of rehabilitation. A key element for security change should be raising public awareness of the benefits of increased inclusiveness.

In order to implement a holistic and transformative human rights approach, a progressive gender perspective towards preventing conflict and creating peace by bridging global and local efforts is needed.

Analysis of the root causes of conflicts requires increased use of a distinctive gender analysis and expanded grassroots NGO participation within human rights mechanisms. In 2017, recommendations for specific gendered approaches were made after two fact finding events were run in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Summaries and recommendations are at the conference of the CSP at <http://civicsolidarity.org/member/1451/working-group-women-and-gender-realities-osce-region>.

Transforming gendered power structures requires states not only to move away from militarism and war but to create and develop economies of peace (including particularly the care economy) by prioritising gender equality and socio-economic justice to achieve economic prosperity and sustainable peace in conflict-affected societies. Experiences in the field (e.g. Balkans) have shown how economic reforms that do not take into account gender or conflict considerations simply sustain conditions which allow for a conflict relapse in the future.

Experience shows also that it is necessary to improve accountability on gendered violence, strengthen government's crisis response and recovery plan and create an enabling environment that addresses the militarised environment. Security issues are often erroneously perceived as requiring uniquely military responses whereas issues of human security include women's security and freedom from fear. Therefore, a

¹ <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/topic/national-action-plans/>

² http://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Media/Publications/Report_Women_Peace_Security_reloaded_EN_online.pdf

³ <http://peacewomen.org/why-WPS/solutions>

⁴ <http://wps.unwomen.org/>

priority goal across the OSCE region must be to develop concrete mechanisms which will increase women's participation at all levels of decision making and negotiation.

In many countries in the OSCE region, the prevalence of patriarchal values that institutionalise militarised masculinity, the proliferation of arms, the lack of accountability and an environment which enables exploitation, violence and other forms of (political) extremism directly or indirectly induce sexual, gender-based and other forms of violence that impact women disproportionately and prevent their effective and meaningful participation.

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda has become increasingly politically-loaded; states are less open to hearing civil society's recommendations and concerns, preferring to present women in the role of victims rather than seeing them as actors for change. This victimisation of women goes against the need for their protection and empowerment as important mediators central to societal transformation.

The obstacles to women's meaningful participation we observe in states across the OSCE region include reduced funding opportunities for local civil society; huge cuts in direct funding for women's organisations; increased military spending and measures of "securitisation", and criminalisation and restrictions of women human rights defenders and feminist peace activists.

Recent counter-terrorism financing (CTF) rules fail to take into account the specifics of organisations led by women and the environments in which they operate, and the potential of women to contribute positively to long term security solutions. In practice, legal and regulatory CTF frameworks often restrict transnational financial flows (e.g., from Western donors to grassroots groups); involve heavy compliance requirements; cause delays in, or block receipt of, funds; favour larger, more-established and often international organisations; require detailed information on civil society's activities, including in some cases about beneficiaries and decrease the appetite of donors and banks for risk - all of which severely impact women's capacity to work practically in conflict situations to achieve peace on the ground in the OSCE region.

In order to combat "shrinking spaces", women-led organisations must work together to push back against these restrictive policies and carry out a substantive dialogue between themselves. Such discussions must take place across borders and must include donors who see small grassroots women-led organisations not simply as "service providers" but who recognize their true transformative potential. Such organizations must be allowed to engage on their own terms with donors and can create supportive partnerships allowing them to carry out necessary and effective work on the ground. Equally, the "Friends of 1325"⁵ must recognise that they must not give with one hand while taking with the other, and take measures to ensure that any security action taken does not undermine women-led civil society. They should also substantially strengthen political, financial and other support for the important work that the women's peace movement does for accountability and action.

If we fail to provide adequate answers to the growth of fear in most of our societies, we will be increasingly occupied with debates centred on "securitisation" rather than focusing on justice, freedom and rights. Current trends lead to emerging nationalism, populism and exclusiveness where strong (male) leaders are seen as the solution. This way lies conflict and we must act in the name of prevention.

⁵ The Friends of 1325 is an informal or *ad hoc* group of UN member states who formed to advocate for the implementation of Resolution 1325. The group brings together like-minded states to discuss and coordinate positions on issues pertaining to women, peace and security and to keep pressure on the UN system to implement resolution 1325. The group also consults with relevant NGOs. See also <http://www.peacewomen.org/content/group-friends-1325>

Recommendations to OSCE institutions, political bodies and participating States:

- If the position of a Special Representative on civil society is established by the OSCE Chairmanship, preference in selection of candidates should be given to a woman, given the lack of gender balance in leading positions in the OSCE now.
- The OSCE should ensure equal representation of women in field representatives and liaison officers in institutions.
- In OSCE activities on providing protection and support to human rights defenders, special focus should be made on women human rights defenders and their multi-vulnerability and exposure to patriarchal discrimination and sexual violence.
- Strengthen local and international women's voices in media reporting and in meaningful decision making structures at all levels of negotiations.
- OSCE actors should ensure meaningful participation of women at all negotiation tables, including in conflict resolution activities.
- OSCE institutions and participating States should work with each other and with other international actors towards full Implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.